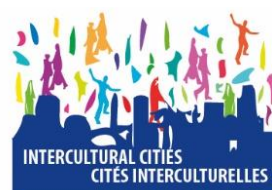


Council of Europe Intercultural Cities Programme

PONTEDERA: INTERCULTURAL PROFILE

Diversity, Equality, Interaction, Participation

**BUILDING BRIDGES,
BREAKING WALLS**



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Pontedera

INTERCULTURAL PROFILE

Following the Expert Visit of the Council of Europe from 5-6 September 2025

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Intercultural Inclusion Unit

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Executive Summary

Pontedera has shown a strong and consistent commitment to the intercultural approach over time, both locally and within the **Italian Network of Intercultural Cities** and the **Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme**. Its active participation in these frameworks reflects a clear political will to promote equality, recognition of diversity, and positive interaction among all residents – backed up with policy and practice.

Over the past years, the municipality has progressively developed an **intercultural governance structure** through the creation of the **Intercultural Office**, the preparation of a new **Intercultural Plan (2024)**, and the establishment of the **Intercultural Roundtable (Tavolo Intercultura)**. These instruments provide a coordinated and participatory framework for engaging civil society, migrant associations, schools, and community actors in the design and implementation of inclusive policies.

Pontedera has also stood out for its involvement in European projects such as *Diversitycities*, *NET-IDEA*, and *DiversaMente*, which have promoted youth participation, anti-discrimination initiatives, and cooperation between municipal departments and local organisations. Together with cultural and social programmes (including those from *Sete Sois Sete Luas* and the *Centro Ricreativo e Culturale Piaggio*) these initiatives show how the city has been able to combine its industrial and cultural heritage with innovative practices that foster dialogue, creativity, and belonging.

The expert visit confirmed Pontedera's strong results in education, cultural and social life, international cooperation and welcoming newcomers: all areas that illustrate the city's capacity to translate intercultural principles into concrete action. Remaining challenges include ensuring more systematic participation and coordination, improving data collection and evaluation, and enhancing representation within the municipal administration.

Main recommendations emerging from the visit include:

1. **Consolidate and implement the Intercultural Plan**, with a clear budget, timeline, and monitoring system.
2. **Broaden participation** by strengthening the *Tavolo Intercultura* as a cross-sectoral and strategic space for co-design.
3. **Reinforce belonging and recognition**, including through inter-religious dialogue and by linking the Piaggio legacy to an inclusive city narrative.
4. **Develop an intercultural communication strategy** to highlight diversity as part of Pontedera's shared identity.
5. **Improve data systems and workforce diversity**, capitalising on the experience of EU projects to build sustainable training.

Pontedera's trajectory shows a long-standing engagement with intercultural values, a strong participation in the ICC networks, and a clear potential to consolidate its role as a reference point for small cities promoting inclusion and equality through local policy innovation.

PONTEDERA

Intercultural Profile

September 2025

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This report is based upon the visit of the Council of Europe on Pontedera including Council of Europe staff and Intercultural Cities (ICC) expert Marta Pérez Ramírez. It should be read in parallel with the most recent [index report for Pontedera](#), 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.

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>

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.

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.

These four principles should also follow two key transversal approaches – a **whole of society** and **whole of government** approach. For the former, that means working with all sectors of society for inclusion – not just migrants or those of a migration background. It means that everyone has a responsibility to promote inclusion and develop intercultural competences which means that society as a whole is strengthened. For the latter, a whole of government approach, it means that cities need to break down institutional silos which often act as a barrier to a holistic approach to inclusion – too often separated off in an office dealing with equality or migration. Instead, every part of the administration should aim to see its activities through an intercultural lens – whether that's human resources or urban planning, education or city strategy. Whatever the sector, applying an intercultural lens will help ensure that public policy works for everyone.

1. Introduction to Pontedera

Pontedera is a city located in the province of Pisa, in the region of Tuscany. The town is located 20 km from Pisa and 50 km from Florence. It is located in a strategic position in the Arno valley, at the confluence of the river Era and the river Arno. Administratively, the city is divided into eight 'frazioni' or districts: Gello, Il Romito, La Borra, La Rotta, Montecastello, Pardossi, Santa Lucia, Treggiaia.

According to the last census, the workforce employed by industrial activities represented the 43% while the services sector workforce employed the 15% of the total workers. Pontedera represents an international symbol of 'Made in Italy', the Vespa, as it is the birthplace of Piaggio - the brand that produced the Vespa.

At the time of the index questionnaire, Pontedera had a population of 29 670 (ISTAT, 2023). A population growth can be seen starting in the 1960s, coinciding with Piaggio's economic growth, and, conversely, a decline starting in the 1990s, with the downsizing and crisis of the company itself. Since 2001, the population has grown by 19%.

Pontedera is a diverse city, with a population which has changed significantly over the past years. The official figure of non-nationals provided in the questionnaire is taken from the ISTAT 2011. **As of 31 December 2023, the foreign resident population was 4 800 or 15.94% of the population.** The largest migrant groups as of 1 January 2023 were the Senegalese (1,386

or 29.8% of foreigners), Albanian (688 or 14.8%), Romanian (524 or 11.2%) and Moroccan (459 or 9.9%) (ISTAT, 2023).

According to data from Eurostat (2025), Italy has the oldest population in the European Union, with an average median age of above 48 and almost one in four residents is older than 65. Pontedera is in the same trend as the rest of the country, with figures that show an average age of its population at 45.6.

2. National policy context

Historic and long-term context

Italy has undergone a profound transition from being a country of emigration during much of the 20th century to becoming a significant destination for immigration since the late 1980s. This change is closely linked to Italy's geographical position in the Mediterranean, making it one of the primary entry points into the European Union for people arriving by sea.

At the national level, the largest foreign communities in Italy are Romanian, Albanian, Moroccan, Chinese, Ukrainian, Filipino, Indian, Bangladeshi, Egyptian, and Pakistani residents, which together account for more than half of the migrant population. Migration flows have been diverse, initially dominated by arrivals from North Africa and Albania, followed by Eastern Europe, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Today, **foreign residents represent nearly 9% of the national population** (ISTAT, 2023). Migration has thus become a permanent structural feature of Italian society, though public debate continues to be polarised, often framed through the lens of security, identity, and national sovereignty (ECRI, 2022).

Regional differences remain a defining feature of Italy's migration landscape. The northern and central regions, with stronger industrial and service economies, attract the majority of migrant workers and host the largest migrant communities. By contrast, southern regions face persistent unemployment and outward migration, making them both points of first arrival and of onward transit rather than long-term settlement. Tuscany, where Pontedera is located, reflects this broader pattern: migrants are largely integrated into the industrial and service sectors, especially in manufacturing, logistics, and care work, where economic opportunities are more stable.

Italy's economic structure has made certain sectors highly reliant on migrant labour. Agriculture, domestic and care services, construction, and hospitality are among the most important areas of employment for foreign workers. This has created both opportunities and vulnerabilities: while migrants are vital to Italy's demographic and economic sustainability in an ageing society, they are also more likely to experience irregular or precarious contracts and

limited career progression (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance [ECRI], [2024](#)).³

National migration policy and political context

The current migration framework is grounded in the *Testo Unico sull'Immigrazione* (Legislative Decree 286/1998) and the Bossi-Fini Law (Law 189/2002), which linked residence permits to formal work contracts. In 2018, the so-called Salvini Decrees introduced more restrictive measures, including the abolition of the humanitarian residence permit and tighter asylum procedures. These reforms significantly reduced access to protection and limited local authorities' capacity to promote social inclusion.

According to the Migration Policy Centre, these changes represented a turning point in Italy's asylum framework, moving away from the constitutional principle enshrined in Article 10(3), which guarantees asylum to individuals unable to exercise democratic freedoms in their country of origin. The 2018 reform was adopted in a political climate marked by growing securitisation and urgency to "control migration flows," while subsequent amendments in 2020 reinstated some safeguards and broadened protection categories, though challenges remain in implementation (Migration Policy Centre. (2019).

Italy's reception system is divided between first-arrival emergency centres (*Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* - CAS) managed by the Prefectures, and the SAI (*Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione*) network coordinated by municipalities. Funding issues and disagreements between national and local levels continue to affect its effectiveness. During and after the 2015 - 2016 migration surge, the predominance of CAS over the community-based SAI system often came at the expense of quality and integration outcomes, despite SAI being widely recognised as a promising model for long-term inclusion.

While the SAI network has been recognised as a promising model for inclusion, research by the University of Padua has shown its limited capacity and persistent underfunding have prevented it from counterbalancing the predominance of emergency-based reception. In recent years, the Italian reception system has increasingly shifted towards short-term and emergency management, with limited planning and inadequate funding for long-term integration initiatives (Centro Diritti Umani, University of Padua, 2024).

At the political level, **migration remains one of the most polarising issues in Italian society**. The current government has adopted a more restrictive approach, emphasising border control and limiting disembarkation of NGO rescue ships, and supporting measures that international observers have criticised as criminalising humanitarian action in the central Mediterranean (Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020). Opposition parties and civil society actors argue for a more rights-based and pragmatic approach to integration. This sharp divide between security-focused and inclusive narratives underscores the broader polarisation in Italian politics, where migration policy often becomes a symbolic battleground reflecting tensions over identity, sovereignty, and European solidarity (ECRI, [2024](#)).

³ ECRI report, together with the comments of the government, is also available in Italian at this link: <https://rm.coe.int/sixth-report-on-italy-translation-in-italian-/1680b205f7>.

Minorities and equality policies

Italy recognises twelve historical national minorities (including Albanian, German, Greek, Ladin, Sardinian, and Slovene groups) under Law 482/1999. However, the situation of Roma, Sinti, and Camminanti communities remains highly precarious, characterised by social exclusion, segregated housing, and barriers in education and employment. Both ECRI (2024) and the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) have emphasised the need for stronger inclusion policies and measures against antigypsyism (FCNM, 2019).

Recent data confirm persistent patterns of discrimination. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2022), 32% of people with an immigrant or ethnic minority background in Italy reported experiencing discrimination in the previous 12 months, a rate above the EU average. The FRA survey on people of African descent (2018) further highlighted Italy as one of the EU countries where Black residents most frequently reported discrimination: 39% experienced racial harassment in the past five years, and 11% in the past 12 months. Discrimination was particularly acute in employment and housing, with younger respondents reporting higher levels of exclusion (FRA, 2018). Although people of African descent represent a minority of the overall population, their presence is more visible in northern and central regions, especially among established communities from Senegal and Nigeria.

Religious diversity is another important dimension. While approximately 67–80% of the population identifies as Catholic, only a portion are regular churchgoers, with stronger religious adherence in the South than in the North (Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, 2020). Minority faiths (including Islam (around 4% of the population), Orthodox Christianity, Protestant churches, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism) have grown in visibility due to migration (Minority Rights Group International, 2023). However, recognition by the state remains uneven: only some religious groups have signed agreements (*intese*) granting them legal and fiscal privileges, while others, notably the large Muslim community, continue to operate without such recognition and thus face structural inequalities in access to rights and visibility in public life.

These national-level dynamics directly shape the local context. In Pontedera, the municipality has responded by prioritising education, intercultural dialogue, and anti-discrimination initiatives, working to compensate for limited national support and to create inclusive spaces for residents from migrant and minority backgrounds.

3. Local diversity and policy context

Italy has a complex system of multilevel governance, with powers divided between the central state, twenty regions, metropolitan cities/provinces, and municipalities. The national government retains exclusive competences in immigration, asylum, and citizenship law, which limits the scope of action of local authorities in these areas. However, regions and municipalities play a significant role in integration, social policies, education, health, and housing.

- Regions such as Tuscany have developed their own frameworks to support linguistic mediation, intercultural education, and social cohesion, often co-financed through EU and national funds.
- Municipalities are responsible for frontline services, community programmes, and initiatives that directly affect residents' daily lives, which gives them a crucial role in addressing diversity at the local level despite the constraints of national law.

Pontedera, located in Tuscany, reflects these dynamics. The municipality does not have competences in determining migration flows or legal status, but it has progressively built-up local policies for intercultural dialogue, youth engagement, and anti-discrimination. Compared to larger Italian cities such as Milan, Bologna, or Turin, which have longer traditions of structured diversity policies, Pontedera is a smaller city yet has demonstrated strong commitment by creating an Intercultural Office, supporting migrant associations, and developing a local intercultural strategy.

Pontedera's demographic profile also highlights its distinctive position: **foreign residents make up around 16% of the local population, compared to a national average of about 9%** (ISTAT, 2023). This means that, despite its relatively small size, Pontedera manages a level of diversity that is proportionally much higher than the Italian average. As a result, issues of integration, coexistence, and equal opportunities are particularly visible in local governance and have encouraged the municipality to invest in intercultural policies.

In this respect, Pontedera can be considered more advanced than many municipalities of similar scale, aligning itself with the group of smaller Italian cities that have embraced the intercultural approach and made diversity governance a visible part of their local agenda. Its active participation in the **Italian Network of Intercultural Cities** and in the **Council of Europe's ICC Programme** further reinforces this positioning. Through these platforms, Pontedera has not only benchmarked its progress but has also contributed to peer learning, shared methodologies, and joint initiatives. The city has also taken an active role in European projects, which has enhanced its visibility, attracted resources, and strengthened its reputation as a committed intercultural city. This multilevel engagement (local, national, and international) provides Pontedera with greater projection and legitimacy, positioning it as a reference point within Italy and beyond.

4. Commitment & Index Summary

Summary of the ICC Index results for Pontedera

The ICC Index provides a snapshot of Pontedera's intercultural policies, highlighting both consolidated strengths and areas where further development is possible. The results can be best understood through the four intercultural principles.

Equality of rights, duties and opportunities

Pontedera has built solid foundations in this field. The **Welcome Desk**, supported by ARCI, is a key reference point that guides newcomers through their first months in the city, contributing to equal access to rights and services. Anti-discrimination work is another strong area, with local NGOs and youth projects (such as *DiversaMente* and *NET-IDEA*) providing support and awareness-raising initiatives. The Index suggested the need for a more formalised municipal role in this area — for instance, adopting a **Citizen Rights Charter** or establishing a small anti-discrimination office — to complement existing NGO work and systematise data collection on discrimination.

Recognition of diversity

This is one of Pontedera's strongest dimensions. The education system plays a central role, with intercultural mediation, twinning projects, and teacher training ensuring inclusive schools (score 75). Cultural and social life (81) is particularly vibrant, with initiatives such as *Sete Sois Sete Luas* making interculturalism visible in public spaces. The city also integrates intercultural criteria in the allocation of cultural funding. Communication is another highlight (75), with proactive efforts to present diversity as a positive asset and to counter negative narratives. While the Index flagged languages (20) and inter-religious dialogue (49) as areas needing further attention, there are already promising practices (such as the "Mother Tongue" project at the library) that can be expanded.

Interaction

Pontedera offers many opportunities for residents to meet and connect across differences, reflected in its outstanding score of 100%. Neighbourhood events, local associations, and cultural festivals provide frequent spaces for exchange, while mediation services (49) help resolve tensions and build trust in everyday life. Libraries and community centres are important hubs for interaction, and international cooperation (73), including diaspora involvement, strengthens the city's outward-looking approach.

Participation

The Index assigned a low score in this field (4%), but the expert visit revealed that participation is in fact one of Pontedera's emerging strengths. The city has established innovative structures, such as the **Intercultural Assembly** and the **Youth Council**, which give residents with migrant and minority backgrounds a voice in decision-making. These mechanisms, combined with the experience of the *Divercities* project, show that Pontedera is actively experimenting with participatory models, even if these were not fully captured in the Index questionnaire. Strengthening monitoring and ensuring these processes are systematic across departments would further consolidate this dimension.

Governance

Although not a principle in itself, governance is critical for coherence and mainstreaming the intercultural approach. Pontedera has recently adopted an Intercultural Plan and created an Intercultural Office, both of which represent significant progress and political commitment. These tools are already fostering stronger interdepartmental collaboration and visibility for the intercultural approach. The recommendation is to consolidate these advances: ensuring a

dedicated budget, setting up a regular monitoring and evaluation system, and establishing cross-departmental coordination mechanisms, so that interculturalism becomes a consistent lens across all municipal policies.

Overall assessment

Pontedera demonstrates solid achievements in cultural life, education, communication, and interaction, alongside innovative participatory practices that were not fully reflected in the Index but became evident during the expert visit. The new Intercultural Plan and Intercultural Office confirm political commitment, though consolidation is still needed. Strengthening anti-discrimination measures and giving more visibility to minority and migrant languages and inter-religious dialogue will further enhance its profile as a leading medium-sized intercultural city.

5. Introduction to Pontedera by mayor and deputy mayor

Vice Mayor Carla Cocilova presented Pontedera's intercultural policy by emphasising that diversity is not a challenge to be managed, but a structural reality that enriches the city and must be embraced through intercultural governance. She explained that pluralism in Pontedera, with residents of different national, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, requires active policies that ensure equality of rights, mutual recognition, and opportunities for participation. She stressed that new generations with migrant backgrounds are no longer only "beneficiaries" but increasingly actors of political, social and cultural life, whose engagement is essential for the city's future.

She highlighted the three intercultural principles that guide the municipality's action: Equality of rights, duties, and opportunities; Recognition of diversity as a resource; Interaction and participation as a driver of social cohesion.

Building on these principles, the Vice Mayor described the process leading to Pontedera's Intercultural Plan (2024). This plan was developed after a comprehensive mapping of existing resources and practices in the city. Among the initiatives identified were the two Migration Desks managed by ARCI, intercultural programmes within schools, the presence of the Islamic Cultural Centre, support structures for women caregivers, the *Mother Tongue - Mama Lingua* programme at the public library, anti-rumours actions, and the use of sport as a tool of cohesion. A practical example she mentioned was the distribution of a leaflet on coexistence, addressing everyday issues such as waste management, housing density, and neighbourhood relations: small but significant steps to improve daily life in a diverse community.

The Vice Mayor also underlined the importance of projects co-funded by the Council of Europe and the ICC programme, such as the *New Generations on the Wave Festival*, which promoted youth leadership and creativity. She referred to the Divercities project as a turning point: more than 30 associations participated in assemblies to discuss culture, participation, public space, and institutional dialogue. This process not only produced valuable proposals but also directly inspired the Intercultural Plan, the creation of an intercultural logo to symbolise the city's identity, and a stronger sense of shared ownership. Some initiatives that emerged from

Diversity, she noted, have continued independently, showing the sustainability of the participatory process.

She explained that the municipality has also created spaces for dialogue and critical reflection, such as the “Conversazioni” debates, and supported new associations through projects like NET-IDEA and DiversaMente, both focused on youth empowerment and anti-discrimination. These initiatives have reinforced Pontedera’s image as a city that not only responds to diversity but actively celebrates and channels it into new forms of civic engagement.

Looking forward, the Vice Mayor stressed several next steps: consolidating Pontedera’s involvement in the Italian Network of Intercultural Cities (Rete Città del Dialogo) and the wider Council of Europe ICC Programme; increasing communication to make intercultural initiatives more visible; supporting diaspora organisations as key actors in development and cooperation; and ensuring that the intercultural approach is mainstreamed across all municipal departments. She also noted the creation of a dedicated municipal intercultural website and highlighted that the Intercultural Roundtable (Tavolo Intercultura) meets monthly, bringing together a wide range of associations and communities to co-create initiatives.

In conclusion, Mayor Matteo Franconi reaffirmed the municipality’s strong political commitment. He underlined that interculturality is not treated as a temporary policy experiment but as a long-term vision for the governance of Pontedera. Guided by the principles of equality, recognition, and participation, he stressed that the city will continue advancing step by step, consolidating its role as a medium-sized Italian city that leads by example in intercultural governance.





6. Education

Context

Education is a central dimension of Pontedera's intercultural agenda. The city has a particularly high proportion of students with migrant backgrounds, especially in some schools and professional institutes. This demographic reality makes diversity a structural feature of the education system, requiring innovative approaches to pedagogy, extracurricular support, and community involvement. The session brought together teachers, associations, social services, and parents to reflect on the role of education in building pluralism and inclusion.

Current situation

Pontedera's schools already operate in highly multilingual and multicultural environments. Interculturality is often practiced as a matter of daily life rather than through formal models, as classrooms are naturally diverse. Associations such as ARCI, CREC, Poliedro, and local youth and sports groups provide important complementary activities, from after-school programmes to cultural laboratories, youth labs, and open libraries. Extracurricular activities not only address academic support but also promote interaction, creativity, and civic engagement. However, much of this work depends on project-based funding (FAMI, FSE, Tuscany Region), which creates instability and limits long-term planning.

Challenges

Participants identified several pressing issues:

- **School segregation and urban context:** certain schools (such as Paccinoti, “Scuola della Stazione”) concentrate very high percentages of migrant students, reflecting patterns of residential segregation linked to housing and socio-economic factors. This creates risks of stigmatisation and drop-out.
- **Second generations:** while many families are well integrated, second-generation youth face barriers in accessing higher education, with too few progressing to university. There is a need for mentoring, role models, and opportunities that broaden their horizons.
- **Parental involvement:** families with migrant backgrounds, particularly non-Italian-speaking mothers, often face linguistic and economic barriers that limit their participation in school life. Strengthening their involvement is seen as essential to support students’ success.
- **Coordination of resources:** despite many valuable initiatives, support is fragmented. There is no city-wide or regional platform bringing all schools together, nor a “community education pact” that aligns schools, associations, and institutions.
- **Narratives and recognition:** there is a need to move beyond a purely assimilationist model (“everyone must speak Italian”) towards recognising languages, religions, and cultural identities as resources. Bullying and tensions outside classrooms underline the importance of addressing identity and belonging.

Objectives and priorities

The group agreed on several priorities for the future:

- Establish a **coordination table for extracurricular activities**, to improve quality, share practices, and strengthen dialogue between schools, families, and associations.
- Invest in **second-generation youth**, especially at adolescence, through mentoring programmes, role models, and civic engagement opportunities.
- Reinforce **parental participation**, particularly of migrant mothers, with linguistic, psycho-pedagogical, and community support.
- Promote **mixing and balance** in schools, while acknowledging the structural link between education and housing policies.
- Develop a **community education pact** at the Valdera level, involving all municipalities and schools, to provide a systemic response to educational inequalities.
- Use **sports and public spaces** as tools for integration, complementing classroom learning with informal interaction.
- Provide teachers with continuous **training on diversity management** and recognition, equipping them with innovative methodologies.

Conclusion

The focus group highlighted both the strengths and fragilities of Pontedera’s educational system. While schools and associations already operate with high levels of intercultural practice, structural challenges linked to segregation, socio-economic inequalities, and unstable funding remain. Participants emphasised that education cannot be addressed in isolation from

the broader social and urban context. Nonetheless, Pontedera's relatively small size and strong local networks offer an advantage: it is easier to bring actors together, build trust, and create inclusive spaces where diversity is treated as an asset for the whole community.

7. Recognition of diversity: Culture

Context

Culture plays a central role in building inclusive and intercultural communities, yet in Pontedera, as in many other cities, cultural participation does not always reflect the diversity of its population. The focus group explored how cultural policies can become more inclusive, representative, and accessible, while also addressing barriers of recognition, communication, and workforce diversity.

Current situation

Participants highlighted that cultural life in Pontedera is vibrant, with festivals such as *Notte Bianca* or *Fermata Pontedera* offering opportunities for community interaction. The municipality is planning to improve visibility through an online **cultural calendar** (*Pontedera della Cultura*) and a new logo to brand the city as intercultural. However, initiatives often reach the same audiences and do not yet engage the full spectrum of communities living in the city.

Challenges

Several challenges were identified:

- **Recognition:** Individuals with migrant backgrounds are often not fully recognised as cultural actors, with events reproducing a “we/they” dynamic.
- **Limited outreach:** Cultural initiatives tend to involve the same groups and lack strategies to engage wider or more diverse audiences. Communication channels are insufficient, and even the existence of the Intercultural Roundtable is not widely known.
- **Workforce diversity:** The cultural sector's staff and decision-makers are not very diverse, which limits perspectives when designing cultural policies.
- **Event design:** One-off events are less effective in building inclusion compared to continuous programmes or cycles.
- **Spatial centralisation:** Many cultural events take place in the city centre, excluding residents of peripheral neighbourhoods.

Objectives and priorities

The group proposed several directions for future action:

- Use existing large events (for instance, *Notte Bianca*) as opportunities to highlight intercultural themes and showcase diverse cultural expressions.

- Improve **communication strategies**, ensuring broader outreach and visibility for both cultural events and intercultural governance structures (namely the Intercultural Roundtable).
- Promote **continuity in cultural programming**, moving towards cycles or series of activities that build long-term engagement.
- Ensure **greater diversity in the cultural workforce**, possibly through mentorship and support programmes for artists with migrant or minority backgrounds.
- **Decentralise cultural events**, bringing activities to different neighbourhoods to increase accessibility and participation.
- Recognise culture not only as identity but also as a **shared common good**, fostering proximity and belonging through inclusive spaces and events.

Conclusion

The focus group highlighted the need to shift from symbolic to **structural intercultural cultural policies**, ensuring that diversity is visible in programming, audiences, and cultural institutions themselves. By decentralising events, diversifying cultural staff, and improving communication, Pontedera can strengthen its cultural identity as an intercultural city and ensure that cultural participation truly reflects its plural population.



8. Interaction: public space

Context

Public space is a crucial arena for intercultural inclusion, as it reflects how different groups share, interact, and build a sense of belonging. In Pontedera, the municipality has experimented with innovative tools for community participation in managing and regenerating public areas, while at the same time facing challenges of accessibility, intergenerational use, and recognition of diversity in urban planning.

Current situation

Several mechanisms already encourage civic participation in the governance of public spaces. Neighbourhood consultations are held, where the Senegalese community has played an active role, and the Regulation on the Commons allows formal and informal associations to co-manage or regenerate public spaces such as parks and squares. Schools are also engaged, treating children as actors in the management of common goods. However, public space is still often perceived as a place to pass through rather than to live in, and participation remains uneven across social groups.

Challenges

The discussion emphasised a shared need to redefine what is meant by “public space.” Four elements were highlighted: multiplicity (acknowledging diverse actors and interests), proximity (building local connections), collaboration (transforming interests into shared projects), and inclusivity (ensuring all voices are heard). Specific issues include:

- **Intergenerational use:** older residents — especially women over 60 — are the most frequent users, while children and youth (including those with migrant backgrounds) have fewer spaces for interaction and voice. A new phenomenon is the presence of elderly migrants, who face additional barriers in accessibility and participation.
- **Urban design:** while the city hosts significant contemporary art in public areas, some spaces are not fully functional or inclusive. Elements like benches, signage, and naming practices (for example, the recognition of women in toponymy) could be extended to reflect cultural diversity.
- **Mobility:** limited public transport makes it difficult for residents, particularly youth, to access different neighbourhood spaces without a car.
- **Global view of space:** communities relate to space differently. For example, the Senegalese community highlighted that in their tradition, most social life takes place outdoors, pointing to the potential of plazas and open areas.
- **Governance:** transversal coordination is still limited. Schools, associations, and municipal departments often work in parallel rather than through an integrated approach.

Objectives and priorities

Participants suggested several ways forward:

- Make **neighbourhood consultations** structurally inclusive, ensuring regular participation of diverse communities.
- Expand the use of the **Regulation on the Commons** as a tool for shared management, while promoting culture and art (murals, festivals) as universal languages for the common good.
- Strengthen the **sense of belonging** among youth and second generations by involving them in co-design and care of public spaces, including summer camps and creative activities.
- Address **intergenerational needs** by balancing accessibility for the elderly with spaces of expression and freedom for young people.
- Promote a **community-based vision of space**, moving from transit-only use to spaces where interaction, conflict management, and coexistence are possible.
- Foster **multilevel governance**, linking municipal efforts with Valdera-wide coordination and school networks, to overcome fragmentation and ensure inclusivity in planning.

Conclusion

The focus group showed that Pontedera already has valuable instruments to involve citizens in the governance of public spaces, but there is a need to broaden participation, particularly of young people and minority groups, and to ensure that diversity is reflected in urban design. By treating public space as a shared good, managed collaboratively and inclusively, the city can reinforce both social cohesion and a stronger sense of belonging for all residents.

Case Study: Villaggio Piaggio

The Villaggio Piaggio neighbourhood embodies both the history and the future of Pontedera's diversity. Originally designed as housing for factory workers of Piaggio, it long represented the city's industrial and working-class identity. The architecture itself reflects social divisions of the past, with the workers' area separated from the former employers' zone by walls and limited access points. Today, the neighbourhood is one of the most diverse in Pontedera, bringing together residents of multiple generations, origins, and religions. Yet it also carries negative stereotypes and faces challenges of segregation, as there is a high presence of migrant families compared to a lower presence of long-established Italian families.

The municipality has made Villaggio Piaggio a priority area for intercultural policies and regeneration initiatives. Several associations are based there, including the **Centro Ricreativo e Culturale Piaggio**, which hosts three organisations working with children, young people, and families. Activities range from Italian language courses and after-school support to bike repair workshops, a children's play centre, and cultural programmes. Residents have co-created innovative projects such as book exchanges, the development of a neighbourhood library, intergenerational walking tours, and podcasts connecting the industrial past with contemporary diversity. Cultural initiatives like murals and the **Accademia dell'Incompiuto** have also helped animate public spaces.

One challenge, however, has been the difficulty of sustaining **inter-religious dialogue**, despite efforts to bring together different faith communities. Another priority is ensuring that young people feel a sense of **belonging to the neighbourhood** and are motivated to participate in cultural and civic initiatives. Stakeholders stressed that Piaggio's continued

presence and **corporate social responsibility** play a vital role in this area, not only through local projects but also by linking the Vespa's global identity with the neighbourhood's historical and social fabric.

Villaggio Piaggio is therefore more than just a district: it is a **laboratory of intercultural coexistence**, where industrial heritage, community activism, and cultural diversity intersect. By investing in participatory initiatives and youth engagement, and by building on the symbolic value of its history, Pontedera is turning a space once associated with division into a potential **driver of intercultural belonging and civic pride**.



9. Participation

Participation is one of the guiding principles of the intercultural approach, and Pontedera has made significant progress in this area through the establishment of the **Intercultural Roundtable (Tavolo Intercultura)**. Unlike a traditional consultative body, the Tavolo is conceived as a **space for co-creation**, where associations, institutions, and community representatives come together to develop initiatives and share responsibilities.

The roundtable brings together around **30 - 40 associations and groups**, covering a wide spectrum: organisations working in pedagogy and education, Caritas, Fair Trade networks, Catholic organisations, teachers leading intercultural initiatives in schools, and migrant associations representing communities such as Nigerians, Senegalese, and Moroccans. Its president is elected from among the members, and the Tavolo meets monthly to exchange views and design collaborative projects. Importantly, it provides migrant communities with a platform to actively shape the city's intercultural agenda, building on Pontedera's long tradition of participatory governance.

Key challenges and opportunities emerged during the discussion:

- **Education:** With very high percentages of foreign students in local schools, traditional teaching methods are insufficient. Schools called for community-based projects and stronger local support, especially for second-generation students.
- **Senegalese community:** The “Laboratory of Interculturality” and co-development initiatives with Senegal illustrate a long-standing best practice, including digitalisation projects supported by Tuscany Region. However, challenges remain in overcoming stereotypes and ensuring skills recognition for migrants.
- **Inclusion gaps:** While the Senegalese community is well established, newer groups such as Albanians participate less, partly due to racialised divisions between communities. There is a need to foster greater inter-community dialogue and overcome discrimination.
- **Youth and education:** Stakeholders highlighted high drop-out rates and the limited progression of foreign students into higher education, stressing the importance of prioritising education as an investment in the city’s future.
- **Structural issues:** Many initiatives (linguistic mediation, intercultural projects) rely on temporary project funding (FAMI, FSE, Tuscany Region) and remain precarious, lacking stable municipal or regional support.

Overall, the *Tavolo Intercultura* demonstrates Pontedera’s innovative approach to participation, creating a collaborative platform where civil society and migrant communities share responsibility for shaping intercultural policies. Participants underlined that its role should be not only to address problems but also to **transform narratives**, showing that migration is an opportunity for the city. The next steps include **broadening its scope beyond education to incorporate other fields** such as sport, environment, and LGBTIQ+ inclusion, ensuring a more comprehensive mainstreaming of diversity across local policies.



10. Governance and political commitment

Governance is a key dimension of the intercultural approach, as it determines whether diversity is addressed through isolated initiatives or as a consistent lens across all policies and services. In this respect, Pontedera has made significant progress since the ICC Index assessment. The municipality adopted its **first Intercultural Plan in 2024** and created an **Intercultural Office**, both of which represent important steps in institutionalising the intercultural approach. These advances build on Pontedera's long-standing involvement in the **Italian Network of Intercultural Cities** (Rete Città del Dialogo), which it joined in 2010, and more recent cooperation within the **ICC Programme**, including participation in an inter-city grant project in 2022.

The **Intercultural Plan** is structured around the three intercultural principles — equality of rights and opportunities, recognition of diversity as a resource, and interaction/participation — and was built on a comprehensive **mapping of local resources**. This mapping highlighted initiatives such as the **Migration Desks** (managed by ARCI), the **Islamic Cultural Centre**, intercultural mediation in schools, the *Mother Tongue* programme at the library, anti-rumours projects, and the use of sport as a tool for cohesion. It also drew from the results of participatory projects such as **DiverCities**, **NET-IDEA**, and **DiversaMente**, which mobilised schools, youth groups, cultural associations, and migrant communities to co-design proposals on culture, participation, and public space.

A wide range of **local actors and associations** actively contributed to the plan and continue to shape its implementation. These include ARCI Valdera, Caritas, ACLI, Fondazione Pontedera per la Cultura, CRED, and numerous schools and cooperatives, alongside migrant associations from the Senegalese, Moroccan, Nigerian, and Albanian communities. This broad coalition illustrates that intercultural governance in Pontedera is not only a municipal policy but a shared commitment across institutions, civil society, and migrant communities.

The Index results highlighted governance as a priority area for improvement, recommending the finalisation of an intercultural strategy, allocation of resources, and systematic monitoring. Since then, Pontedera has already responded by adopting the Intercultural Plan, and the next step will be to **consolidate this framework with a clear action plan, and a system for monitoring and evaluation** (for instance, through a biennial progress report and by repeating the **ICC Index assessment within 2–3 years**). This would allow the municipality to measure progress, identify new challenges, and demonstrate accountability to both residents and partners.

Political commitment has been clearly demonstrated at the highest level. Both the Mayor and Vice Mayor have emphasised that interculturality is not a temporary project but a **long-term vision for the city's governance**. This vision is also supported by concrete actions such as the development of a **dedicated intercultural webpage** to make policies more visible, and by public recognition of residents and organisations contributing to inclusion.

Another key challenge concerns **data and representation**. Investing in systems to collect indicators and residents' perceptions will enable more evidence-based policymaking. At the same time, increasing representation and diversity within the municipal workforce — through inclusive recruitment and intercultural training — remains a priority. Experiences from European projects such as **NET-IDEA** show that external funding can provide valuable resources and pilot actions, but long-term change requires embedding these practices into municipal structures.

Finally, Pontedera's governance is also shaped by **multilevel dynamics**. The city collaborates closely with the Tuscany Region, neighbouring municipalities in the Valdera area, and European networks. Its active role in intercultural city networks and projects not only provides access to innovative practices but also enhances Pontedera's **visibility and positioning** at national and European levels. Continuing to leverage these platforms (including the ICC inter-city grants) will be critical for sustaining progress and ensuring that Pontedera remains at the forefront of intercultural innovation.

11. Conclusions and Recommendations

The expert visit to Pontedera confirmed the city's strong political and technical commitment to the intercultural approach. Over recent years, Pontedera has made tangible progress in building an intercultural infrastructure through the establishment of the Intercultural Office, the preparation of a new Intercultural Plan, and the creation of the Intercultural Roundtable (Tavolo Intercultura). These initiatives represent good practices that show how a medium-sized city can embed the intercultural approach within its governance system by working closely with civil society, migrant associations, and other local actors.

The Vice Mayor played a key role throughout the visit, demonstrating the city's high-level political engagement with the intercultural perspective. Her active participation in the meetings and discussions exemplified the municipality's willingness to strengthen its intercultural policy and to ensure that diversity, equality, and participation remain cross-cutting priorities in local governance.

The visit added clear value to the Index report, allowing a more complete picture of Pontedera's achievements and ongoing efforts. Some areas that appeared weaker in the questionnaire, such as participation, proved to be more developed in practice, thanks in part to projects like *Divercities*, *NET-IDEA*, and *DiversaMente*, which have fostered collaboration between the municipality, schools, and local organisations. Work ongoing since the visit – for instance the Intercultural Strategy – also explains the discrepancy between the index results and the reality on the ground. The visit also highlighted the important role of cultural and educational institutions as spaces for dialogue and exchange.

Nevertheless, the discussions during the visit pointed to several areas where further progress is possible: ensuring continuity of initiatives beyond EU-funded projects, improving data collection and evaluation tools, strengthening coordination between departments, and increasing representation and diversity in the municipal workforce. These challenges are

common to many intercultural cities, but Pontedera's existing commitment and networks provide a solid basis for improvement.

The main recommendations for the report are to:

1. Highest-priority recommendation: Consolidate and implement the Intercultural Plan

Pontedera should move from planning to implementation by ensuring that the new Intercultural Plan includes a defined budget, timeline, and monitoring system. The introduction of a biennial progress report would help assess achievements, identify gaps, and maintain political visibility.

A cross-departmental coordination mechanism or task force should also be established to guarantee that intercultural principles are mainstreamed across all policy areas — education, culture, housing, social services, and sport.

2. Broaden participation and strengthen the Tavolo Intercultura

The Intercultural Roundtable is one of Pontedera's most promising mechanisms for inclusion. It could be further strengthened by expanding its thematic focus beyond education to include areas such as culture, environment, sport, and equality.

Ensuring stronger links between the Tavolo and municipal decision-making processes (for instance, involving it in annual planning or budget discussions) would enhance its strategic role. Representation of under-represented communities (in particular Albanian residents) and second-generation youth should also be reinforced.

3. Strengthen recognition, belonging, and sense of community

Pontedera could reinforce its work on belonging and social cohesion by developing new spaces and initiatives that foster mutual understanding between residents of different cultural and religious backgrounds.

The creation of a space or mechanism for inter-religious dialogue (for example, a roundtable or regular meeting supported by the municipality) would provide a structured way to promote dialogue, mutual respect, and cooperation among faith communities. Such an initiative would also contribute to building a stronger sense of shared identity and collective responsibility across the city.

In discussions about developing a more inclusive city narrative, it became clear that connecting Pontedera's industrial and cultural history (particularly the legacy of Piaggio) to the city's sense of belonging could be a powerful way to link past and present, and to represent the diversity that now shapes the community's identity.

4. Develop an intercultural communication strategy



Pontedera could further strengthen its intercultural identity by developing a communication strategy that highlights diversity as part of the city's shared narrative. This could include a dedicated webpage, storytelling initiatives, and public recognition of organisations or residents contributing to inclusion.

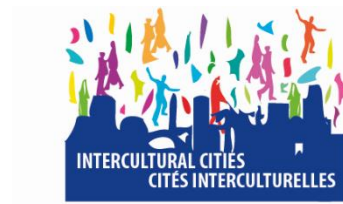
Visibility plays a key role in shaping positive public narratives, and by showcasing its intercultural work more systematically, Pontedera can help reinforce pride of belonging and the image of an open, inclusive city.

5. Strengthen data collection, evaluation, and workforce diversity

The city should invest in data systems and indicators on diversity, discrimination, and residents' perceptions to inform evidence-based policymaking. This effort should be linked to actions promoting diversity within the municipal workforce and to the design of a permanent training programme on intercultural competences for public employees.

Pontedera can build on the experience of the NET-IDEA project, which generated valuable materials and momentum. EU projects provide excellent frameworks and resources to test ideas, but their impact depends on how well results are integrated into long-term municipal structures and HR policies.

The Intercultural Cities programme would like to thank the municipality of Pontedera for an 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.



Council of Europe Intercultural Cities Programme Expert visit to Pontedera

Agenda

Friday, 5 September 2025, Municipality of Pontedera, Corso Matteotti 37	
9.00-9.30	Registration, coffee
9.30-10.30	<p>Meeting with the Staff of Intercultural Office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brief Presentation of ICC Programme by Ben Freeman, Senior Project Officer, Council of Europe ▪ Presentation of Pontedera Index Results by Marta Perez Ramirez, ICC expert. ▪ Discussion/Q&A
10.30-13.00	<p>Meeting with policy makers and public managers (Mayor, Vice mayor, Councillors and all the municipality managers of every sector)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Welcome greetings from the Mayor Matteo Franconi ▪ Brief Introduction about intercultural policy of the Municipality by the Vice mayor Carla Cocilova - Brief Presentation of ICC Programme by Ben Freeman, Senior Project Officer, Council of Europe ▪ Presentation of Pontedera Index Results by Marta Perez Ramirez, ICC expert. ▪ Discussion/Q&A
13.00-14.30	Lunch
14.00-17.30	<p>Visit to some local experiences opened following intercultural approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sartoria sociale ▪ Centro Ricreativo e Culturale Piaggio ▪ Accademia dell'Incompiuto ex Lavatoi ▪ Ludobus and Murales in the squares ▪ Centro Sète Sois Sète Luas ▪ Spazio NU
17.30-19.30	Meeting with the associations and representatives of the "Tavolo Intercultura" established by the Municipality
19.30	Dinner
Saturday, 6 September 2025, Centrum Sète Sois Sète Luas, viale Rinaldo Piaggio 82	
9.00-10.30	Cultural Pluralism and Education – Focus Group (moderator Fondazione Pescioli)
10.30-12.00	Public Space and Inclusive Participation – Focus Group (moderator ARCI Valdera)

12.00-13.30	Lunch
13:30-15.00	Cultural policies for diversity – Focus Group (moderator Fondazione Pontedera per la Cultura)
15.00-16.00	Debrief and next steps
16.00-17.00	Examples of experiences of the last year
17.00-17.30	Coffee break
17.30-22.00	Cultural activities

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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.

