

Estonian Local Days – Workshop on inclusion and integration 12 April 2023, Tallinn (Estonia) Report

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The Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM) is a voluntary union established to represent the common interests of cities and rural municipalities and to structure their co-operation. The main goal of the AECM is ensuring development of local governments through joint activities.¹

On 12 and 13 April 2023, the AECM organised the Estonian Local Days, an annual opportunity for member cities to meet and discuss about a variety of topics related to local administration. The event included a series of parallel workshops focused on questions such as inclusion and integration, but also resources, care services, digital transformation, green economy, etc. Further, the event featured a workshop with Finnish municipalities participating in twinning initiatives with Estonian ones, as well as a general discussion on the impact of Ukrainian crisis in Estonia. The working language of the event was Estonian, with the exception of the workshop on inclusion and integration which was held in English.²

At the same time, a business fair was installed within the venue of the event, allowing companies and firms to present their services and products targeting municipalities, from urban furniture to digital innovations and so on.



As mentioned, the two-day event offered a series of workshops held in parallel. At the invitation of the AECM, on 12 April ICC expert Gemma Pinyol-Jimenez led a workshop on inclusion and integration as the topic is of growing relevance for participating cities and municipalities, especially as they are welcoming tens of thousands of refugees from Ukraine following the Russian aggression. Around 15 representatives participated in the workshop which presented a great opportunity to introduce the intercultural integration approach

and its principles, but also the Intercultural Cities programme and its tools, and to mention the relevance of multilevel governance of intercultural integration.

The presentation introduced the ICC programme as a capacity building initiative to assist local and regional authorities worldwide in managing diversity as a collective advantage. It recalled that it started in 2008 as a pilot initiative funded by the European Union with 11 pioneer cities, and that it now has more than 160 members worldwide and is part of the institutional structure

¹ More information is available at: <https://elvl.ee/web/eng>

² The programme of the event is available at: <https://lvp.elvl.ee/12-04/> (12 April) & <https://lvp.elvl.ee/13-04/> (13 April).



of the Council of Europe funded by its ordinary budget. Relevant Council of Europe standard-setting documents were highlighted, such as the [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on multilevel policies and governance for intercultural integration](#) and the [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2015\)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on intercultural integration](#).

Introducing the different tools that the ICC programme could offer Estonian cities led to exchanges on identifying the challenges that municipalities are currently facing. In particular, the growing attention and concerns of local authorities about hosting refugees following the Russian aggression in Ukraine, which also could be perceived as an opportunity to initiate discussions about diversity and the need to reinforce peaceful coexistence. The role of local authorities in welcoming migrants, in promoting links with local populations or in facilitating access to public services were issues raised by the audience. Similarly, specific questions about the importance of language in bilingual/multilingual communities or the importance of multilevel and multistakeholders coordination when it comes to integration and inclusion were also discussed. In that sense, the contributions by the Ministry of Culture and civil society organisations participating in the meeting were particularly enriching.

As there are currently no Estonian member cities in the ICC programme, several questions raised were related to the modalities of participating in the network and benefitting from its tools. The workshop concluded with an invitation for Estonian cities to join the ICC programme. In addition, the ICC expert participated in an interview for the local radio broadcasted at the event and reiterated, this time on air, the invitation for Estonian cities to participate in the ICC programme.