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Report on capacity building activities on intercultural integration in Cyprus

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Introduction

In an increasingly mobile and diverse Europe, the training of public servants on intercultural competences is key to fostering intercultural inclusion, social cohesion, equity, and trust within societies. When left unmanaged or misrepresented, migration, cultural diversity, and the need to ensure inclusivity in public policy and service delivery, can pose complex challenges to governments. Addressing these challenges requires not only legislative frameworks but also a skilled, culturally aware public service equipped to act as a bridge between diverse communities and the state.

The Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities (ICC) approach and the European Commission's priorities on diversity and integration provide a framework to guide this effort. The ICC approach emphasises the value of diversity as a resource for innovation and progress, encouraging cities and national authorities to adopt policies that go beyond simple coexistence, promoting meaningful interaction, equality, and participation. Similarly, the European Commission's priorities to promote diversity and integration stress the importance of empowering public institutions to lead by example in embracing inclusivity, combating discrimination, and fostering mutual understanding.

Training national public servants on intercultural integration based on these frameworks is important as it can:

Enhance efficiency and fairness in public service delivery: for those public servants who interact daily with individuals from varied cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds, intercultural training equips them to understand and address the needs of diverse populations effectively, ensuring fair and inclusive access to public services.

Prevent discrimination and unconscious bias: bias and cultural misunderstandings can lead to exclusion and mistrust. By developing intercultural competencies, public servants can identify and mitigate such risks, promoting equal treatment and fostering trust in public institutions.

Strengthen social cohesion: public servants play a vital role in shaping the relationship between communities and the state. By adopting intercultural approaches, they contribute to building cohesive societies where diversity is celebrated as a strength rather than perceived as a challenge.

Increase alignment with European standards and values: training can align national administrations with European standards and values, ensuring that public institutions are well-prepared to implement policies that support diversity, inclusion, and social integration in line with the Council of Europe and European Commission's guidelines.

In summary, investing in intercultural competences training for public servants can strengthen democratic governance, support social equity, foster trust in public institutions, and contribute to sustainable, inclusive and prosperous development for all of society.

Background

The project "[Enhancing structures and policies for intercultural integration in Cyprus](#)" is the second project co-funded by the European Union through the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) and implemented by the Council of Europe in cooperation with the European Commission, in partnership with the Department of Migration, Deputy Ministry for Migration and International Protection. It reflects Cyprus's commitment to fostering inclusivity and addressing challenges posed by migration.

One of the key objectives of the project was strengthening the capacity of national and local representatives identified as focal points for integration to contribute to the drafting of a future national strategy for intercultural integration.

The Council of Europe [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)10 on multilevel policies and governance for intercultural integration](#) states that "institutions and organisations should develop intercultural competences and attitudes among their staff, encouraging them to acquire the skills to enable constructive exchanges, dialogue and co-design based on shared values and goals". While intercultural competence is developed on an individual basis, organising intercultural competence training for decision makers, public officials and other relevant stakeholders enables the application of an intercultural lens to public policies and activities, promoting a more inclusive organisational culture.

This report documents the capacity building activities organised by the project following the [needs assessment](#). This report can serve as a blueprint for future training courses and will provide recommendations for additional capacity building initiatives. The project placed a strong emphasis on peer learning and capacity building, with the aim of creating a foundation for sustainable action beyond the duration of the project.

In this regard, various capacity building activities were planned, including intercultural competences training, and workshops on European anti-discrimination standards and alternative narratives. These activities were delivered in different formats, such as online and face-to-face sessions, and involved representatives of national and local level bodies, as well as civil society organisations which work with migrants.

Overview of the capacity building activities

Date	Activity	Location	Participants
15-16 January 2024	Intercultural competences and training needs assessment session	Nicosia	Representatives of national level bodies, experts from the pool, and migrant CSOs
10 June 2024	Webinar on the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)	Online	Representatives of the national level bodies only
19-20 June 2024	Study visit	Madrid	Representatives of the national level bodies only
27 September 2024	Anti-rumours training	Nicosia	Representatives of national level bodies, experts from the pool, and migrant CSOs
11, 18, 25 October 2024 (mornings)	Intercultural competences training in Greek	Online	Representatives of the national level and experts from the pool

Intercultural competences and training needs assessment session

Nicosia, 15-16 January 2024



A training session and needs assessment on intercultural competences was held in Nicosia on 15-16 January 2024. Invitation letters were sent to ministries and other national bodies asking them to nominate a representative to be their organisation’s integration focal point and to participate in the needs assessment and training.

A pre-training needs assessment survey was sent to the nominated focal points which included representatives from: Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance; Deputy Ministry of Culture; Deputy Ministry of Tourism; Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights; Social Welfare Service, Union of Cyprus Communities; Pancyprian Federation of Labour; and the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry; as well as two expert consultants from Cypriot Universities.

The results of the survey were presented and discussed with the representatives during the training course who then split into working groups to discuss the results, the current challenges to intercultural integration in Cyprus and to propose possible training and policy solutions.

Feedback from participants (list of participants is appended) showed that the training was considered a success.

- Overall satisfaction: **4.5 out of 5**
- Perceived usefulness for daily work: **4.3 out of 5**
- Trainers’ expertise: **4.8 out of 5**
- Clarity of communication: **4.6 out of 5**

- Content organisation : **4.6 out of 5**

The majority of participants expressed a preference for face-to-face training, emphasising the importance of direct interaction in learning intercultural competences. Suggestions were also made to include more practical examples and specific best practices in future sessions.

The needs assessment report was shared with all participants for their comments before being published online: [Assessment of needs for the implementation of intercultural integration policies in Cyprus by representatives of national institutions](#)

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)

Online, 10 June 2024



As part of the institutional capacity building activities, a webinar was organised on 10 June, to present the [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance \(ECRI\)](#), and its recommendations from the sixth monitoring report on Cyprus which was published in March 2023.

The webinar was held in Greek and highlighted a number of significant advances observed in the country. These included the strengthening of the institution of the Ombudsman, which was authorised in 2019 to organise its own recruitment, as well as the adoption of a code of ethics for parliamentarians prohibiting hate speech and incitement to violence. Furthermore, the implementation of a national strategy for the prevention of violence in schools (2018-2022) and the simplification of administrative procedures for transgender persons were highlighted.

Despite this progress, ECRI made several recommendations. In particular, it suggested that Cyprus develop a specific national strategy for LGBTI persons and strengthen of the legal framework aimed at combating hate speech. ECRI also underlined the importance of providing more support to child

asylum seekers and other migrant children to enable them to integrate into school and providing targeted support to the Roma community.

Participants in the webinar reported a high level of satisfaction, scoring the relevance and usefulness of the information presented at **4.4 out of 5**. Most attendees found the session duration to be appropriate and indicated they would recommend this training to their colleagues. Additionally, the perceived usefulness for daily work was rated at **4.5 out of 5**.

In summary, the webinar provided for a deeper understanding of the issues related to the fight against racism and intolerance in Cyprus, highlighting both the progress made and the challenges that remain, with one participant remarking that *“it was very insightful”*.

Study visit to Madrid to increase knowledge on intercultural integration

Madrid, 19-20 June 2024



Representatives from various national bodies in Cyprus visited Madrid, Spain on 19-20 June 2024, to gain insights and practical knowledge on implementing effective intercultural inclusion policies. This study visit was organised in co-operation with the Spanish Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia (OBERAXE).

The visit provided the Cypriot representatives with first-hand experience of Spain's approach to improving inclusion and social cohesion through coordination between national, regional, and local entities, as well as NGOs. It aimed to increase awareness, improve knowledge, and deepen the understanding of Cypriot representatives about the positive impacts of intercultural inclusion policies. In particular, the group learnt about the process of the elaboration and implementation of the Spanish Strategic Framework for Citizenship and Inclusion, against Racism and Xenophobia

2023-2027. Additionally, they gained valuable insights into Spain's approach to anti-discrimination and diversity training for civil servants.

The delegation heard presentations on Spain's migratory situation and the various policies implemented by the State Secretariat for Migration and the Permanent Immigration Observatory.

The group visited the Vallecas Refugee Reception Centre to learn about Spain's reception system for asylum seekers and refugees, speaking with the centre's staff and gaining insights into the daily operations and support provided to migrants.

On the second day the delegation met at the National Institute of Public Administration (INAP), where they learnt about INAP's role in training civil servants on diversity, inclusion, equality, and non-discrimination.

The Cypriot representatives also learnt about the Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants, whose objective is to promote the participation and integration of immigrants in Spanish society and exchanged with NGOs who participate in the forum such as the Asociación de Mujeres Empresarias Iberoamericanas, Ibn Battuta Foundation and the CEPAIM Foundation.

Feedback from the participants confirms the success of the visit.

“Everything was meticulously organized, giving us the opportunity to observe how Spain manages migrant issues and how we can incorporate some of these elements in Cyprus It also highlighted the importance of recognizing and eliminating prejudices we may unconsciously hold.”

One participant said they had learnt during the study visit about *“Cooperation with NGOs, structure of a reception centre, cooperation of the observatory with other governmental entities.”*

“Interesting how the Spanish organised their inclusion strategies to cover all levels of governance and their approach to training public administration officials on inclusion matters.”

“I intend to use the knowledge I acquired in order to design integration structures at the national level.”

One participant would have preferred more contact with migrants, *“I believe everything was very well planned. It would have been even more insightful if we had the opportunity to hear more success stories from migrants and learn about the factors that helped them overcome their challenges.”*

This initiative is part of a wider effort to promote a more inclusive and cohesive society in Cyprus. As one participant pointed out, they learnt about *“good practices could [be] implemented in Cyprus”*. As a result of this visit, the delegates returned with concrete ideas for the design of integration structures at national level, which all participants said would be useful in their day-to-day work, as well as how to draft a national integration strategy.

Anti-rumours training for local and national levels in Cyprus

Cyprus, 25-27 September 2024



At the end of September 2024, a series of workshops focusing on the anti-rumours methodology took place across Cyprus, specifically in Paphos, Famagusta, and Nicosia. These sessions aimed to address stereotypes and prejudices that can harm social integration. Participants included civil servants, members of intercultural networks, migrants, and representatives of civil society organisations.

The session in Nicosia on 27 September was particularly targeted to the integration focal points from the national level as well as migrant civil society organisations.

Feedback from participants in Nicosia was overwhelmingly positive. Many participants rated their overall satisfaction with the training as **4 out of 5**, highlighting the informative and engaging nature of the sessions. They expressed that the training would be useful in their daily work (**3,6 out of 5**), with some noting its applicability to various sectors, including public service, education, and the media. One participant said that *“the training was very informative and interesting”*.

Several participants suggested that the training could be improved by involving more CSOs that have direct contact with migrant communities. This input reflects a desire for deeper community engagement and practical insights from those who work closely with diverse groups. In addition, some participants recommended incorporating more best practices and academic evidence into the content to further enrich the learning experience.

A notable theme in the feedback was the request for practical strategies to tackle rumours and stereotypes in everyday situations. Participants indicated that discussions on personal approaches to addressing these issues—whether within the family or among colleagues—would be valuable. They also suggested the inclusion of experiential exercises aimed at identifying individual beliefs and stereotypes within the group, thus promoting a more interactive learning environment.

As well as providing theoretical knowledge, the workshops emphasised practical strategies for building anti-rumour networks and creating effective counter-narratives. At the end of the event, participants reflected on the potential for integrating these methodologies into their ongoing work to improve intercultural understanding in Cyprus, with a proposal from the Ombudsperson’s office and the Department of Migration to jointly draft a national anti-rumours strategy as has been done in Malta.

Online training in intercultural competences in Greek

Online, 11, 18, 25 October 2024



Συγχρηματοδοτούμενη από την Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση



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Συγχρηματοδοτούμενη με οικονομία από το Συμβούλιο της Ευρώπης

Διαπολιτισμικές ικανότητες

Συμβίωση - Σχολή Πολιτικών Σπουδών του Συμβουλίου της Ευρώπης στην Ελλάδα

This training was prepared for the "Enhancing Structures and Policies for Intercultural Integration in Cyprus" project co-funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, and implemented by the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the European Commission. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the Council of Europe or the European Union.



A series of online training sessions on intercultural competences took place in October 2024, bringing together representatives from Cypriot national institutions. These sessions addressed essential themes related to intercultural integration, with particular attention paid to diversity and equality.

1. The first module explored intercultural competences and the tools necessary for promoting an intercultural approach. Participants were sensitised to the fundamental principles of integration, such as valuing diversity and the need for authentic interactions between different cultures. This module also highlighted systemic discrimination mechanisms at the local level and provided strategies to identify and prevent them.

2. The second module was dedicated to intercultural communication, emphasising the development of positive and alternative narratives. Participants learned to construct inclusive narratives that combat stereotypes and misinformation, whilst exploring the dynamic relationship between migration and integration. Practical tools were provided to facilitate constructive dialogues and combat rumours.
3. The third module offered practical training on designing intercultural strategies and participation without exclusion. Participants acquired skills to develop effective integration strategies, with an emphasis on creating participatory frameworks ensuring equitable representation of all community members in decision-making processes. Case studies allowed examination of how authorities can manage migrant population integration, particularly in emergency situations.

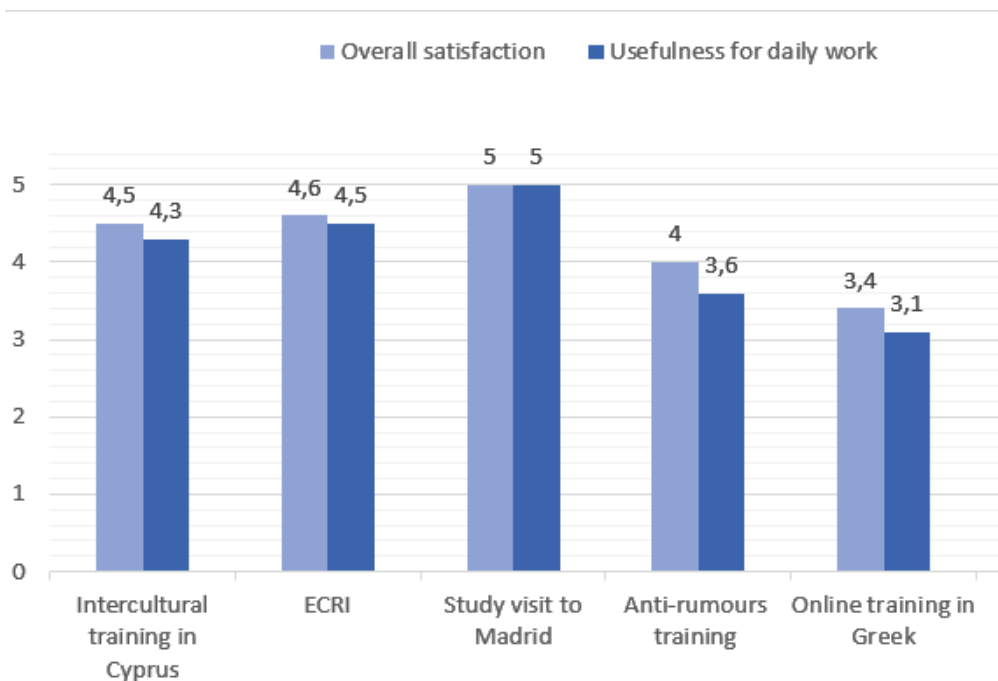
Participant feedback was generally positive, with an average satisfaction rating of **3.4 out of 5**. One criticism was that the training was too “dense” with too much information and that they would have preferred if it could have been held in-person as it would have encouraged more exchanges. Nevertheless, it was appreciated that the training had been split over four weeks which made it more manageable to fit around their work and in particular, the Greek trainer and the examples that they provided from Greece were found to be particularly relevant and interesting. Overall they considered that the training would be useful in their daily work, attributing an average utility score of **3.1 out of 5**. One participant said that it was “*very interesting material and a very good presenter*”.

This training not only raised representatives’ awareness of crucial intercultural integration challenges but also provided practical tools to enhance their effectiveness in their respective roles.

All the training materials in Greek were shared with the Department of Migration, as well as the manual for the design of a training course on intercultural competence: [Part 1 - The core principles of the Council of Europe intercultural integration model](#) & [Part 2 - Concepts related to the Council of Europe intercultural integration model](#); with the expectation that further intercultural training courses would be organised in the future.

Overall evaluation

Analysing the feedback from all participants from all the capacity building activities, it is clear that the training courses were well-received and were considered relevant to the participants.



Overall the participants were very satisfied with a high satisfaction score of **4.3 out of 5** and they felt that the training they had received would be very useful to them in their everyday lives, especially at work, giving a final score of **4.1 out of 5** for the usefulness of the training.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the participants' feedback, the following recommendations and next steps can be proposed for future training sessions:

1. Practical application

- Incorporate more practical examples and specific best practices relevant to the Cypriot context.
- Include experiential exercises to help participants identify their beliefs and stereotypes.
- Provide strategies for addressing rumours and stereotypes in everyday situations.
- Develop comprehensive training programmes tailored for public officials, educators, healthcare professionals, and other key stakeholders.
- Try to ensure that participants hear more stories of successful migrants and learn about the factors that helped them overcome the obstacles they encountered along the way, so that they can better understand the issues.
- Examine how existing ICC tools could be utilised to develop the national intercultural strategy and identify which tools would be most beneficial.

2. Strengthening intercultural competences

- The inclusion of formal training on intercultural competences for public staff (and other professionals working in public services) should be integrated into the intercultural strategy.
- The promotion of training on intercultural competences for NGOs working in integration, living together and anti-racism issues.
- Develop tailored training programmes: collaborate with intercultural experts or training providers to design and develop customised training programmes focused on key intercultural competences, tailored to the specific needs of public policy professionals.
- Allocate funding and resources to enable professionals to access specialised intercultural competency training programmes tailored to their specific roles and responsibilities.
- Implement mentorship programmes: establish mentorship programmes within the organisation or in partnership with external organisations to pair individuals with experienced mentors who can provide guidance and support in navigating intercultural challenges effectively.
- Engage with public and private universities to offer intercultural competence training to their student community.

3. Communication and outreach

- Develop a communication plan to strengthen links with stakeholders involved in the intercultural strategy.
- Translate key policy documents into multiple languages to ensure accessibility.
- Use Intercultural Competence training materials prepared in Greek for those with limited English proficiency.
- Create targeted outreach campaigns to engage underrepresented communities.

4. Participants

- Involve a wider range of professionals, including police officers, teachers, journalists, and social workers in future training sessions.
- Increase participation of CSOs that have direct contact with migrant communities for deeper insights.

5. Research and evaluation

- Support research initiatives to gather data on intercultural dynamics, challenges, and opportunities in Cyprus.
- Establish mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of intercultural integration initiatives.
- Collect stakeholder feedback and key performance indicators to refine strategies and implement additional recommendations.
- Advocate for clear political commitment to prioritise intercultural integration within governmental agendas.

By implementing these recommendations, future training initiatives can effectively enhance intercultural integration efforts in Cyprus while addressing the needs of diverse populations.

Appendix - participants

TITLE	ORGANISATION
Intercultural competences and training needs assessment session - 15-16 January 2024	
Labour Officer	Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
European Affairs Officer	Union of Cyprus Communities
Senior Medical Officer	Ministry of Health
Officer	Social Welfare Services
Professor	University of Nicosia
Officer	Pancyprian Federation of Labour
Officer	Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
Tourism Officer	Deputy Ministry of Tourism
Laboratory Scientist Administration	Ministry of Health
Training Officer	Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth
Professor of Social and Developmental Psychology	University of Cyprus
Public Health Officer	Ministry of Health
European and International Affairs Officer	Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth
Officer	Social Welfare Services
Officer	Ministry of Health
Administrative Officer	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Officer	Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman)
Webinar - European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) – 10 June 2024	
Project Manager	CARDET
Head, In service Teachers' Training Department	Cyprus Pedagogical Institute – Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth
Professor	University of Nicosia
Officer	Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
Educational Planning Officer	Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth
Educational Planning Officer	Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth
Laboratory Scientist Administration	Medical and Public Health Services
Officer/Teacher Trainer	Cyprus Pedagogical Institute
Professor of Social and Developmental Psychology	University of Cyprus
Public Health Officer	Ministry of Health
Officer	Ministry of Health
Administrative Officer	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Officer in the Office of the Director of Secondary General Education	Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth
Migration Officer	Migration Department - Deputy Ministry of Interior
Officer	Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman)

Study visit in Madrid (Spain) – 19-20 June 2024	
Head, In service Teachers' Training Department	Cyprus Pedagogical Institute – Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth
Officer	Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
Administrative Officer	Migration Department - Deputy Ministry of Interior
Officer	Ministry of Health
Migration Officer	Migration Department - Deputy Ministry of Interior
Officer	Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman)
Anti-rumours training course – 27 September	
Labour Officer	Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance
Administrative Officer	Department of Migration
Social Worker	Hope for Children
Migration Officer	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection/ Migration department/ EMN Cyprus
Project Manager	CIP
Case work coordinator	Caritas Cyprus
Social Worker	“Hope for Children” CRC Policy Center
Migration Officer	Migration Department, Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Migration Officer	EMN CY-Migration Department
Professor	University of Nicosia
Project manager	Citizens in Power (CIP)
Teachers' Trainer	Cyprus Pedagogical Institute
Press Officer	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Tourism Officer	Deputy Ministry of Tourism
Officer	Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman)
Migration Officer	Migration Department, Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Online training on intercultural competences - 11, 18, 25 October 2024 (mornings)	
Legal Officer	Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry
European Affairs Officer	Union of Cyprus Communities
Administrative Officer	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Social Inclusion Officer	Department of social inclusion of persons with disabilities
Welfare Officer	Social Welfare Services
Administrative Officer	Migration Department - Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Officer	Department of social inclusion of persons with disabilities
Senior Medical Officer	Ministry of Health
Professor	University of Nicosia
Migration Officer	Migration Department - Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Officer	Office of the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights
Asylum Officer	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Administrative Officer	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Asylum Officer	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection

Training Officer	Ministry of Education
Officer	Office of the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights
Tourism Officer	Deputy Ministry of Tourism
Support Officer	Migration Department - Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Migration Officer	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Asylum Officer	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
European and International Affairs Officer	Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth
Asylum Service Officer	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Migration Officer	Migration Department - Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Coordinator of procedures	Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection
Migration Officer	Migration Department - Deputy Ministry of Interior