

ONLINE HIGH-LEVEL POLICY INSIGHT - 29 October 2020

THE BENEFITS OF INTERCULTURAL INTEGRATION IN CITIES

Report

Cities in Europe act as vital hubs for intercultural exchange, providing a home to residents from many different communities. Yet these places can also foster inequality and discrimination, due to entrenched segregation. In a Friends of Europe and Anna Lindh Foundation policy debate on diversity management, held online on 29 October 2020, experts from several public and private institutions explored ways to break down these barriers, both physical and societal.

Urbanisation and diversity management are highly topical, underpinning the core operation of our societies. But they're often also linked to instability in the world, as well as to migration and refugees. It is particularly interesting to look at the role cities have in this regard. They offer unique intercultural opportunities and can provide lessons for promoting diversity and better integration, particularly in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Structural, inclusive and sustainable policies are key for social cohesion

[05:14](#) – “Our recent survey of Euro-Med cities and their practices for integrating migrants revealed that structural, inclusive and sustainable policies are key for social cohesion,” said **Katharina Bamberg**, Migration Policy Advisor at EUROCITIES. Bamberg highlighted four best practices applicable to all cities:

- 1) Develop structural and sustainable integration policies (citizens feel truly part of a city)
- 2) Mainstream integration across different policy areas (boosting social cohesion)
- 3) Focus on migrants' specific integration needs (e.g. tailored services for children and women)
- 4) Communicate widely on inclusiveness and equal opportunities (e.g. intercultural events)

The key issue is trust

[15:00](#) – “Intercultural integration is a structural process and now a comprehensive policy concept with a set of indicators to measure progress,” remarked **Irena Guidikova**, Head of Division for Cultural Policy, Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue at the Council of Europe.

She added that intercultural integration – which creates the conditions for accepting migration and enjoying its benefits – has been embraced by 140 cities. It has become a pan-European standard since 2015, and is being adapted for national and multi-level governments.

Moreover, Guidikova called for more community exchanges within cities, as this builds trust and a sense of belonging. Interaction should be society-wide and stand at the core of intercultural integration in education, employment and public spaces. While schools are not a panacea for society's integration and diversity challenges, there is ample evidence these institutions play a positive role through mixing and desegregation of different communities.

Intercultural dialogue is part of the solution

[34:20](#) – “Intercultural dialogue – which is ALF's mandate – isn't a luxury, even mid-pandemic. It's also part of the solution to the pressing issues faced by society, a tool for sustainability, and can empower civil society,” said **Eleonora Insalaco**, Head of Operations at the Anna Lindh Foundation.

She pointed to recent scientific research done by the ALF, mapping trends north and south of the Mediterranean in intercultural relations and working with civil society. Most respondents, whatever their country or origin, see cultural diversity as being key to society's economic prosperity. Education was also considered a common key priority.

Insalaco added that it was important to prevent societal conflict and radicalisation by working through dialogue in education programmes and youth initiatives. Municipalities can promote intercultural integration by supporting civil society, artists and educators. Multicultural and artistic events can also help, by encouraging further interaction – which is often in public spaces and increasingly on the Internet.

[52:12](#) – “Sustainability and resilience are key to reducing disparities and providing access to equal opportunities and non-discrimination,” noted **Wallis Goelen-Vandebroek**, Senior Expert to the Deputy Director-General for Implementation at the European Commission Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO).

She added that Cohesion Policy is the EU's biggest framework for supporting local and regional authorities, for instance by establishing sustainable development strategies adapted to their social inclusion needs. 5% of the European Regional Development Fund is earmarked for sustainable urban development – such as investment in social cohesion projects addressing inequality or fostering inclusion/integration of migrants, people with disabilities and people from marginalised communities.

Goelen-Vandebroek also highlighted how Cohesion Funds are used in projects to regenerate deprived urban areas, resulting in better access to services, schools and housing. She concluded that inclusive education is an EU priority, as demonstrated by the €7bn invested in the sector. In its 2021-27 budget, the EU will seek to reinforce Cohesion Policy measures to better tackle educational and spatial segregation.

Audience members highlighted their concerns and suggestions, such as the need to boost human interaction in cities through more engagement with host societies; getting migrants more involved in local decision-making; and including younger generations in the diversity and integration agenda.