Migrants

EPIC kicks off in Vicenza

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European Platform for Integrating Cities (EPIC) is a three-year project funded by the EU's Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). It addresses the challenge of integrating migrants, engaging medium-sized cities to strengthen their housing practices, and workplace and social integration policies. Targeted cities will be those that are able to share their expertise and support other local authorities (LAs).

EPIC partners at the public event in Santorso.

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The partnership

The project brings together **16 organisations** with ALDA, the European Association for Local Democracy, as the lead partner. These comprise seven NGOs (Associazione ADL Zaidovici, Cooperazione Studio e Progetto 2, Symbiosis, Jesuit Refugee Service Portugal, Jesuit Refugee Service Croatia, Kitev, Solidaridad sin Fronteras (officially representing an additional municipality)) and six LAs (the municipalities of Brescia, Ioannina, Lisbon, Oberhausen, Gdansk, and Sisak). In addition, the project will involve the University College London and the European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL) as cross-cutting partners.

This consortium organised a two-and-a-half day meeting in Vicenza, Italy, at the end of January, to kick off the project.

EPIC goal and main activities

To achieve its goal, EPIC will create a tight-knit network of local authorities and NGOs that will foster the transfer of knowledge, know-how and direct peer-to-peer practical learning, including the exchange of personnel on migrant integration to help develop local pilots that will improve the integration and/or reception services of those cities.

This aim will be achieved by the following activities:

- RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION about migrants' integration in each LA through the development of surveys and focus groups to understand common trends and challenges;
- CAPACITY BUILDING comprising an international meeting to identify the priorities for a successful migrants' integration service, an international training session on media and narratives on migration, and eight transnational job-shadowing arrangements that allows partners to acquire practical knowledge from their LA counterparts in order to replicate it within their own territories;
- EIGHT PILOTS PROJECTS that test on the ground the lessons learned through the research and capacity building for the development of new integration services addressing the LAs' needs;
- NETWORKING AND POLICY HARMONISATION events to foster dialogue with key stakeholders on migrants' integration at local and EU level, and to support the development of joint policies and initiatives; and
- COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION activities along with informative counter-narrative campaigns that counterbalance negative migration perceptions, four webinars and a final conference with European and national key stakeholders working in the field of migrant integration.

During the **kick-off meeting**, organisation delegates held several plenary sessions and workshops to establish the **best working methods and revise the whole project work plan and strategy.**

Public launch in the municipality of Santorso

The first and second day presented the different work packages, introduced the communication aspects of the project and jointly reviewed the financial and administrative processes.

The final day the EPIC consortium took place in the Villa Miari, where the neighbouring municipality of Santorso hosted the public launch of the project. After a warm welcome by Franco Balzi, the Mayor of the Comune di Santorso, Dolinda Cavallo, EPIC project manager at ALDA, presented the key objectives of the project and the main activities. The event continued with a panel discussion among LA and NGOs representatives on the creation of inclusive communities through 'welcome' practices, digitalisation and narrative shaping. Marta Siciarek, EPIC partner representing the metropolitan city of Gdansk, and Ron Salaj, multidisciplinary activist and one of the authors of the Council of Europe Manual, *We CAN! Taking action against hate speech through counter and alternative narratives*, presented some good practices while emphasising that there is no 'magic formula' for tackling such a complex phenomenon. Good practice is based on political will, strong inter-sectorial collaboration and stakeholder engagement, and understanding the concerns of the local population concerns. It also offers a chance for migrant voices to be heard and raises awareness of the positive impact of well-managed diverse societies.

What's next?

EPIC will start analysing the perceptions of the local and non-native born populations on migration and its impact on existing services. This will create the basis for drawing up a communication campaign and a pilot project to better address the needs and concerns on a local level.

The event concluded with a 'World-café' workshop where participants reflected on four main areas of the EPIC project:

1) Access to public services for migrants: the role of cities and NGOs
2) Responding to hate speech
3) Social innovative practices in the field of housing, education and labour market integration
4) Improving active participation of newcomers in our communities

The project website, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube channel will be available in the upcoming months.

More information here

Partner presentation during the consortium meeting in Vicenza.

The Major of the Comune of Santorso, Franco Balzi, opening the EPIC public event.

EPIC Project Coordinator Dolinda Cavallo introducing the panel discussion.

Maddalena Alberti facilitating the World-café session on Social innovative practices in the field of housing, education and labour market integration.

Participants sharing practices on how to improve active participation of newcomers.

Audience during the public event in Santorso.