EPIC-UP paves the way for local integration of migrants

- **The 12 partner organisations gathered in Barcelona for the project's kick-off meeting, hosted by ALDA in the framework of Local Democracy for Global Impact festival.**
- **EPIC-UP aims to develop migrant integration strategies by improving collaboration between stakeholders, such as migrants and migrants-led organisations, public authorities, and civil society organisations.**

Barcelona, 16 May 2024. The EU-funded EPIC-UP project has just kicked off with the aim of developing and testing **integration strategies** for the inclusion of migrants at local level. From the 14 to the 15 of May 2024, the partner organisations gathered in Barcelona, Spain, for the launch meeting, hosted by the **European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA),** in the framework of their General Assembly.

The ALDA Festival and General Assembly 2024 – "Local Democracy for Global Impact" was a three-day event aimed to foster connections between citizens, local authorities and the broader European context, and discuss key topics related to citizens engagement, migration, gender equality, human rights and youth engagement. The EPIC-UP partners participated in this event to explore synergies with other migration initiatives.

The general objective of EPIC-UP is to validate a **multi-stakeholder methodology** for local integration of migrants and refugees, capable of improving collaboration between stakeholders, such as migrants and migrants-led organisations, public authorities, and civil society organisations, so that the integration strategies are user-centred, and thus more effective.

The project's approach includes involving stakeholders throughout the design and implementation cycle, tapping into the potential of existing best practices that other peers can share and test it in small-scale environments. The integration strategies will be socially innovative in their ends,

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because they track an unmet societal challenge, but also in their means, as the migrants and refugees will be put at the centre of the design.

EPIC-UP will establish **Community of Practices (CoPs)** in six EU countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain) where good practices and strategies will be leveraged. The CoPs will test and consolidate six new integration services through a social experimentation process that involves co-creation steps carried out jointly by the diverse stakeholders engaged.

Benefits for both urban and rural areas

The integration of migrants benefits both urban and rural areas in the EU in various ways. **Urban areas**, where most migrants reside, stand to gain from the diverse cultural perspectives and economic contributions migrants bring. While many national strategies still are designed without proper consultation of the local level stakeholders, cities have a wealth of experience in implementing evidence-based integration policies. By tapping into this experience through peer learning and better coordination among stakeholders, urban centres can enhance their integration efforts and promote social cohesion. Moreover, involving migrants directly in the democratic process and public life can strengthen political participation, addressing one of the weakest areas of integration policy and fostering a more inclusive society.

Meanwhile, in **rural areas**, the integration of migrants offers opportunities for economic revitalization and demographic rejuvenation. Their settlement can counteract population decline and ageing demographics, providing a workforce and injecting energy into local industries. Additionally, by dispersing the population, the integration of migrants helps alleviate the strain on urban areas facing issues of overpopulation, resource depletion, and social exclusion.

Thus, fostering integration initiatives in both urban and rural settings does not only enrich communities culturally but also promotes economic sustainability and social cohesion across the EU.

Project's expected impact

The EPIC-UP project will have the following main expected results:

- An inclusive participatory methodology to foster the social inclusion of migrants more efficiently will be developed and tested in six EU countries.
- The taxonomy, mapping and benchmarking of good practices on local migrant integration strategies will be disseminated.
- Migrants and refugees in the six territories will be empowered to engage and participate in the process and ultimately in the different public spheres of their new society. As a result, their voices and experiences will be better heard and considered.
- A capacity building programme on how to promote migrants' participation in the design and implementation of integration policies will be implemented.
- A series of policy recommendations will be produced to make migration policies and initiatives better future proofed.
- Ultimately, six new integration services will have been tested locally.

About EPIC-UP

EPIC-UP is an initiative funded by the **AMIF programme of the European Union (EU)** and coordinated by ALDA. It brings together 12 partner organisations and 13 associated partners from 8 different EU countries. The project will capitalise on the existing knowledge and know-how of the consortium

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working on migrant integration and inclusion to design an enhanced model of multi-actor collaboration to develop, test and implement local integration strategies.

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