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Building structures for Intercultural Integration in Cyprus Anti-rumours Strategy

Paphos Region Intercultural Network

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Overview

The Anti-Rumours Strategy (ARS) for Paphos aims to address the growing challenges of prejudice, stereotypes, and misinformation related to migration, diversity, and intercultural interactions. This strategy is rooted in the recognition that while the internet and social media offer new opportunities for connection, they also facilitate the spread of false rumours and hate speech. The ARS seeks to counter these harmful narratives by promoting critical thinking, awareness of the negative consequences of stereotypes, and encouraging constructive actions to prevent discrimination.

Acknowledge the issue

The **Index analysis** for Paphos found that there are urban areas with a high concentration of migrants, which has led to frequent incidents between foreign nationals and local residents, contributing to a general feeling of insecurity among both groups. This suggests that rumours and negative perceptions related to migration and cultural diversity may be circulating in these areas, exacerbating tensions. Addressing these issues through an anti-rumour strategy is essential to improving social cohesion and ensuring a more inclusive environment for all residents.

Build on existing efforts

Members of the **Intercultural Network for the Paphos District** have already participated in two training courses on the anti-rumour methodology, where they gained insights into effective strategies for tackling stereotypes and prejudice. As a result, a draft strategy has already been created, and the next step is to involve the wider city in implementing this strategy, involving local authorities, community organizations, schools, and businesses to ensure its success.

Draw inspiration from successful examples

The ARS for Paphos draws inspiration from successful anti-rumour initiatives implemented in other cities around Europe, as part of the **Intercultural Cities Program**. Initiatives include:

- **Botkyrka, Sweden:** Anti-rumour cafes were set up in public libraries, offering a platform for residents to openly discuss and debunk specific rumours and prejudices.
- **Erlangen, Germany:** The "Anti-Rumour Picnic Banquet" brought together 1,000 residents and asylum-seekers for a giant picnic, featuring a "Living Library" and placemats with facts designed to challenge and debunk common rumours.

These initiatives illustrate the importance of creating interactive, community-driven platforms where people from diverse backgrounds can engage in dialogue and mutual understanding, dismantling harmful stereotypes in the process.

Address specific needs and context

The ARS for Paphos will be specifically tailored to address the unique needs and challenges of the region, drawing on local insights and reports on social cohesion. For instance:

- **Trust in local authorities:** The social cohesion report for Limassol and Famagusta highlighted the need to improve trust in local leadership and law enforcement. In Paphos, anti-rumour efforts should also address concerns related to the role of authorities in managing migration and diversity. Public dialogue should seek to increase transparency and foster a sense of shared responsibility in managing the city's multicultural landscape.
- **Perceptions of inclusivity:** The report also noted a difference in perceptions of inclusivity between Cypriot and non-Cypriot residents. Tackling this gap in understanding will be a key component of the anti-rumour strategy, ensuring that both Cypriot and migrant communities feel valued and heard.

Focus on interaction and dialogue

One of the core principles of the ARS is the importance of fostering interaction and dialogue between diverse groups to combat negative stereotypes and promote understanding. Several testimonials and feedback from the Paphos Intercultural Networking emphasize the need for creating spaces where individuals from different backgrounds can meet, discuss, and learn from one another. The **Index Analysis** specifically recommends increasing the use of social networks and community-driven initiatives to facilitate these interactions. By

creating platforms for dialogue and cross-cultural engagement, the ARS will work to break down the walls of misunderstanding and promote a more cohesive society.

Use community spaces

Community spaces such as **libraries, parks, and public squares** will play a vital role in promoting intercultural dialogue. These venues provide informal settings where people can come together, engage in activities, and discuss common concerns in a relaxed environment. Organizing events and activities in these spaces, such as cultural festivals, workshops, and social gatherings, will help to build bridges between locals and migrants, providing opportunities for positive interaction.

By leveraging community spaces, the ARS will foster a more inclusive atmosphere, ensuring that residents from different ethnic backgrounds feel comfortable sharing their experiences and learning about one another.

Strategic objectives

The key objectives of the ARS in Paphos are:

- **Engagement and empowerment**

Identify and involve a wide range of local stakeholders—including migrants, locals, and community groups—to actively participate in addressing prejudice and misinformation.

- **Promote critical thinking**

Raise awareness about the damaging effects of stereotypes and misinformation, while encouraging residents to critically assess and challenge narratives surrounding diversity.

- **Influence the political and social agenda**

Advocate for policies that promote social cohesion, reduce prejudice, and protect the rights of all community members.

Approach for ARS

The ARS for Paphos will follow a clear, phased approach, focusing on long-term social change, with the ultimate goal of:

- **Dismantling prejudices and rumours**

Challenge and deconstruct harmful stereotypes about migrants and diverse communities through collective and individual actions.

- **Promote inclusion**

Foster positive intercultural interactions by creating spaces where different communities can meet and engage.

- **Harness diversity**

Leverage the rich cultural diversity of Paphos to create a more resilient and harmonious community.

Key actions will include:

- Developing a **vision** and **mission** for the strategy.
- Setting long-term goals, including addressing discrimination, promoting social cohesion, and creating platforms for diverse groups to interact.
- Establishing a **core team** to drive the strategy forward and ensure it aligns with the needs of the community.
- Organizing **capacity building workshops** to train community members to become "anti-rumour agents" who can amplify the strategy's impact.
- Building a **network** of local stakeholders from civil society, institutions, schools, businesses, and other sectors to implement the strategy collaboratively.

Communication strategy

The communication strategy will focus on effectively disseminating anti-rumour messages and fostering a city-wide culture of awareness and inclusion. Key actions will include:

- **Dismantling false rumours**

Use media, social networks, and community channels to counteract misinformation and promote accurate, positive narratives about migration and diversity.

- **Key message videos**

Produce short (50-second) videos with clear, impactful messages aimed at debunking common myths and stereotypes.

- **Real-life stories**

Share the personal success stories of migrants who have thrived in Paphos, particularly in fields like digital design, marketing, or freelance business.

- **Common artworks**

Create shared art projects involving the community to explore themes of diversity, inclusion, and intercultural understanding.

- **Social media campaigns**

Launch a comprehensive social media campaign to raise awareness about the anti-rumour movement and engage younger audiences in fighting misinformation.

Evaluation and sustainability

The strategy's impact will be assessed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Key performance indicators will focus on:

- The effectiveness of the training programs and community workshops.
- The level of engagement and participation in anti-rumour activities.
- The long-term shift in attitudes and perceptions towards migrants and diverse groups.

The evaluation process will also identify critical factors that contribute to the sustainability of the ARS, ensuring that anti-rumour efforts continue beyond the initial implementation phase.

Designing Anti-Rumour actions in Paphos

A set of actions will be prioritized to challenge rumours and stereotypes in Paphos, with a focus on creating opportunities for interaction between diverse groups:

1. Participation in the Kataklimos festival

Involve national groups in cultural displays, including traditional music, dance workshops, and ethnic food stalls. A mixed children's choir will sing in multiple languages to highlight cultural diversity.

2. Antirumours poster competition and exhibition

Organize a poster contest for students of various age groups, with winning designs shared through social media and local exhibitions.

3. Anti-rumours photography exhibition

Collaborate with local photographers to create a photography series focused on challenging rumours and stereotypes about diversity.

4. Training for educators

Provide anti-rumour workshops for teachers, enabling them to integrate anti-rumour practices into their teaching and spread awareness among students.

5. Volunteering at the Paphos marathon

Encourage participation from youth of different backgrounds, with volunteers from diverse communities helping at the event and presenting prizes during the awards ceremony.

6. Mixed sports teams tournament

Organize sports tournaments where teams consist of locals and migrants, fostering teamwork, cooperation, and mutual respect.

7. Public artwork by children

Engage children from different ethnic groups to create a public artwork with anti-rumour messages, symbolizing community unity.

8. Antirumours social media campaign

Establish a social media presence to amplify anti-rumour messages, featuring posts, videos, and key messages on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

Conclusion

The ARS for Paphos represents a comprehensive approach to combating prejudice, misinformation, and stereotypes. By leveraging existing community efforts, learning from successful examples in other cities, and tailoring the strategy to local needs, Paphos can create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all residents. Through continued dialogue, collaboration, and engagement, the city can dismantle harmful narratives and promote a shared vision of diversity and social cohesion.

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