



European  
Philanthropic  
Initiative for  
Migration

# Annual Report

2024





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Cover Photo Credits

From top: The Learning Convening in Brussels, May 2024

The EPIM Forum in Brussels, November 2024

The Learning Convening in Brussels, May 2024

Chico Mendes





# Belonging

## as the Antidote to Polarisation

While 2023 was a year of transformation, 2024 for EPIM was about turning intent into action and enacting our pivot to belonging as an antidote to the polarisation we saw all around us. Elections in Europe and globally have entrenched far-right ideologies and exacerbated societal polarisation. Political agendas are increasingly scapegoating migrants and promoting anti-immigration policies, as evidenced by the actions of the new European Parliament and European Commission. In response, we double-downed on our approach and focused on strengthening the social fabric and creating spaces for meaningful dialogue, as our partners innovated, acted, and led from the frontlines. Read on below and in the report for more insight into what that entailed.

### Creating and Sustaining Spaces for Visioning, Imagination, and Reflection

Working on migration and observing political agendas can be overwhelming. As a result, we created spaces for collective imagination and tried to foster a sense of possibility, despite a constant feeling of urgency. We envisioned and thought deeply about how to build inclusive societies in Central and Eastern Europe in Bratislava in May 2024 with our partner Mareena. Concurrently, in the Spring, we brought along several of our partners – old and new, on an enriching learning journey, which gave them an opportunity to pause, and reflect, and build resources for the future.



EPIM's Learning Convening in Brussels, May 2024

### Convening with Purpose to Gain Clarity

Over the course of the year, we brought together diverse individuals with varied experiences to deepen our understanding of change and rethink what impact looked like. We created safe and inclusive environments where folks felt comfortable, safe enough to be vulnerable, and were able to practice bridging. Our intention was to foster connections and leverage collective intelligence. The inaugural gathering of the EPIM Forum in November and the co-created Migration Governance systems mapping process that ran through the year exemplified this approach.

### Cultivating Belonging Locally and Globally

Building belonging requires relentless, on-the-ground action and perseverance. In 2024, we partnered with individuals and organisations that exemplified our shared humanity, transcending national identities and the migrant/non-migrant divide. For example, Communities of the Future uses public libraries as inclusive spaces to build stronger communities in Romania and Moldova, and MigAct works on civic empowerment for both migrants and locals in Prague. And while place-based work remains key, the polycrisis requires a global response. We needed to nurture a mycelial network to reimagine and dismantle structures of exclusion, and thus we co-created Belonging Beyond Borders, a network to facilitate the development of and to disperse new narratives, strategies, collaborations, and bolder visions among those working for migrant and racial justice and pluralistic democracies.



The EPIM Forum in Brussels, November 2024

# Belonging

## as the Antidote to Polarisation

### Investing Boldly into Strengthening Our Social Fabric

EPIM's Migration Governance map also highlights a critical issue about how, where, and why funding in migration is directed. It is clear that substantial resources are directed towards building structures of othering and securitisation and exclusionary practices dominate funding priorities. Thus, it is crucial that we channel resources into efforts that foster a more expansive 'we'. That means investing in initiatives that unite us through shared possibilities and interrelated identities. These initiatives, abundant in areas like regenerative agriculture, anti-poverty work, jobs and upskilling, education, and co-living and housing, resonate with our common aspirations for a dignified future. As a result, in 2024, we supported Chico Mendes and NO CAP, who work with the agrifood sector to create fairer job opportunities and promote a regenerative agriculture in Italy. And similarly, we worked with Hands Across Romania, ACOF, and Karibu in Spain premised on an economic inclusion pillar.



EPIM's Systems Mapping Workshop in Brussels, June 2024

### Acting Together

EPIM's transformation and pivot to belonging shows that philanthropy can be reimagined to foster a more legitimate, collaborative, and impactful long-term approach. By investing in a shared decision and sensemaking model, flexible and bottom-up clusters, and an ecosystem lens, EPIM balances innovation, experimentation, and pragmatic decisions. This evolution was possible thanks to the protective umbrella of collaborative philanthropy, allowing partner foundations to distribute risk and gain equally from innovative approaches and encouraged new partners, including the Fred Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation, to join us in 2024. We hope this model of collaborative and transformative philanthropy will inspire others to join us at a time when migration and democracy are more contested than ever, and we welcome more allies in this cause.

### A Word of Gratitude

Finally, none of what we did in 2024, would have been possible without the efforts of our partners. Our sincere thanks to all these we work in community with – our partners on the ground, the Network of European Foundations (NEF) team, all our new EPIM Forum members, and finally to Raphaëla Schweiger and Job Rijnveld, who stepped down from the Executive Committee, after successfully guiding EPIM through its transformation.

Sophie Ngo-Diep and Hrishabh Sandilya  
February 2025

2024 in Figures

€2.2 M

spent, of which 71%  
were grants  
disbursed

€2.4 M

of new income  
confirmed in 2024

113

primary and  
secondary partners  
across 22 countries

43

ongoing grants,  
including 12 approved  
in 2024

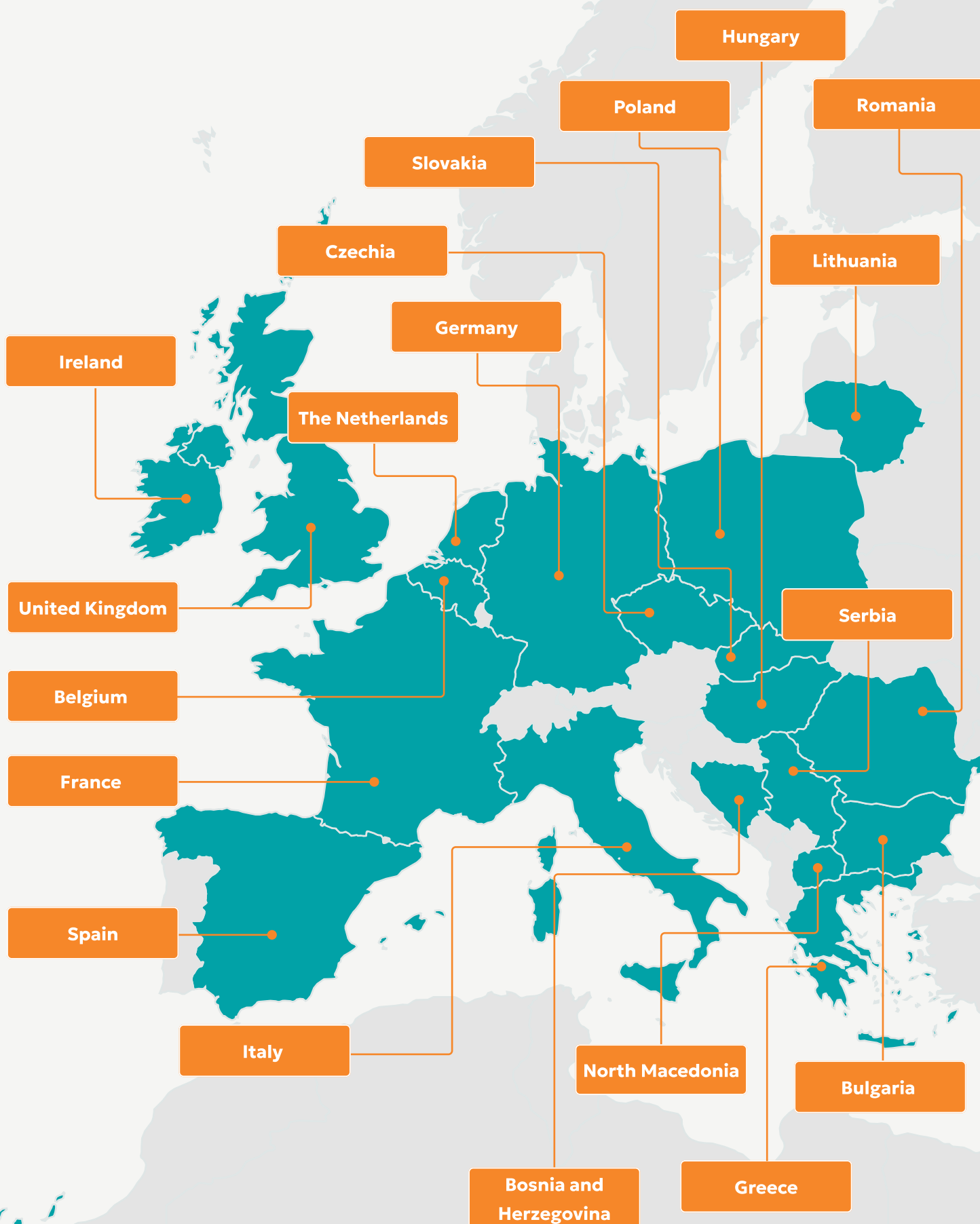
Primary and Secondary Partners and Programmatic Areas	
Clusters, Action Pillars and Thematic Funds	Number of Organisations
Building Inclusive Societies in CEE – Ukraine	50
Migration Governance	25
Dignified Work and Housing	15
Strategic Communications (Ending Thematic Fund)	10
Children on the Move (Ending Thematic Fund)	6
Changing Perspectives and Narratives (Action Pillar)	4
Intra-EU Mobility (Ending Thematic Fund)	2
Centring Lived Experience (Action Pillar)	1
Total	113

Grants by Clusters, Action Pillars and Thematic Funds	
Clusters, Action Pillars and Thematic Funds	% of Total
Building Inclusive Societies in CEE – Ukraine	55
Migration Governance	15
Strategic Communications (Previous Thematic Fund)	9
Children on the Move (Previous Thematic Fund)	8
Dignified Work and Housing	7
Intra-EU Mobility (Previous Thematic Fund)	4
Centring Lived Experience (Action Pillar)	1
Changing Perspectives and Narratives (Action Pillar)	1
Total	100



# EPIM's

## Partner Network



# EPIM's

## Partner Network

Primary Partners	Country	Secondary Partners (Regrants, Coalition and Project Partners)	Country
Agency for Migration and Adaptation (AMIGA)	Czechia	Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organisations	Czechia
		MigAct	Czechia
		National Association of Patient Organisations	Czechia
		Prague City Administration Metropolitan Healthcare Service	Czechia
Association Communities of the Future (ACV)	Romania		
Association Commission Training of the Language Coordinator (ACOF)	Spain	Eicascantic	Spain
		Escola de Vida	Spain
		Camins Foundation	Spain
		La Troca Permanent Community Training school	Spain
Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities Association (AIPG)	Romania	"Together" Community Development Agency Foundation	Romania
		9Foundation	Romania
		Oral History Institute, Babeş-Bolyai University	Romania
Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria (CLA)	Bulgaria		
Chico Mendes	Italy	NO CAP Association	Italy
CISV Italy	Italy	Diaspora Coordination by International Cooperation (CODIASCO)	Italy
		National Coordination of New Italian Generations (CONNGI)	Italy
		Secondo Welfare	Italy
Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights (CILD)	Italy	Progetto Diritti	Italy
Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organisations	Czechia	Caritas Czech Republic	Czechia
		Inbáze	Czechia
		Kalyna	Czechia
		Kroky dobra	Czechia
		META	Czechia
		Most pro	Czechia
		Multicultural Center Prague	Czechia
		Nesehnuti	Czechia
		Organisation for Aid to Refugees (OPU)	Czechia
		Association for Integration and Migration (SIMI)	Czechia
Danish Refugee Council Italy (DRC Italy)	Across Europe	Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration (ASGI)	Italy
		Human Constanta International Association	Lithuania
		Association for Legal Intervention (SIP)	Poland
		Diaconia Valdese (CSD)	Italy
		Diversity Development Group	Lithuania
		DRC Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnia and Herzegovina
		DRC Brussels	Belgium
		DRC Greece	Greece
		Greek Council for Refugees	Greece
		Humanitarian Center for Integration and Tolerance (HCIT)	Serbia
E.Liberare Association	Romania	Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA)	North Macedonia
European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)	Belgium		
European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)	Belgium		
European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)	Belgium		
European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO)	Across Europe	Foundation Jaw Dikh	Poland
		Nevo Parudimos	Romania

# EPIM's

## Partner Network

Primary Partners	Country	Secondary Partners (Regrants, Coalition and Project Partners)	Country
European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO)	Across Europe	Roma Advocacy and Research Center	Slovakia
		Roma Women's Platform "Romni"	Moldova
		Romaversitas Foundation	Hungary
		Slovo 21	Czechia
European Sex Workers Rights Alliance (ESWA-ICRSE)	Across Europe	SWIPE Association	Italy
		SAVE Sex Workers Rights	The Netherlands
		Sex Workers Alliance Ireland (SWAI)	Ireland
Fonds de Dotation Merci	France		
From Streets to Homes Association	Hungary	Taléta ("Encounter for Life")	Hungary
Hands Across Romania	Romania	Bucharest General Directorate of Social Assistance	Romania
		JW Marriott Bucharest Grand Hotel	Romania
		The Patisserie of Youth	Romania
HumanRights360	Greece		
Hungarian Helsinki Committee	Across Europe	European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)	Belgium
		Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR)	Poland
IMIX	United Kingdom	Migrant Voice	United Kingdom
		Show Racism the Red Card	United Kingdom
International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI)	Across Europe		
International Detention Coalition (IDC)	Global		
Jobs4Refugees	Germany		
Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI)	United Kingdom		
Karibu Association	Spain	Laboratory for the Study of African Migration	Spain
Mareena	Slovakia	Centre for Research on Ethnicity and Culture	Slovakia
		Human Rights League	Slovakia
		Milan Šimečka Foundation	Slovakia
		People in Need Slovakia	Slovakia
		Slovak Catholic Charity	Slovakia
		Slovak Humanitarian Council	Slovakia
Mental Health Europe	Across Europe	Artemisszió Foundation	Hungary
		Madly Human	Poland
		Mental Health Perspectives	Lithuania
		Romanian League for Mental Health	Romania
Next Step (former MigHelp)	Hungary		
ORBIT	Belgium		
Oxfam Italy	Italy	Agevolando	Italy
PICUM	Belgium		
Rigardu (BVMN)	Across Europe	Blindspots	Germany
		Collective Aid	Serbia
		Infokolpa	Slovenia
		No Name Kitchen	Spain
Union of Exiled Students (UEE)	France		
Utopia 56	France	Association for Access to Youth Rights and Support towards Majority (AADJAM)	France
Velos Youth	Greece		
Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen (VWV)	Belgium	Other Talk	Belgium
		LEVL	Belgium
With Wings and Roots	Germany		



# How EPIM Makes a Difference

This section highlights the impact of EPIM's work in 2024 through a series of reflective learning conversations with partners across Europe and thematic areas.

## Claudia Șerbănuță

**on Reimagining Libraries for Democracy & Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe**

Claudia Șerbănuță is a community developer leveraging public libraries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) as platforms for civic engagement, systemic solutions, democracy, and belonging. She was a 2023 Marshall Memorial Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the US and holds a master's and doctoral degree in Library and Information Science. In 2022, Claudia co-founded Asociația Comunitățile Viitorului (ACV) / Communities of the Future in Romania to foster stronger communities, and as part of the response to the war in Ukraine, to contribute to a culture of welcome for the incoming migrants and refugees.

Since May 2024, EPIM has supported ACV in launching LibHub (Library Integration Hubs) – a network of 10 libraries across Romania and Moldova delivering programs tailored to its newest non-Romanian-speaking community members. Sen Zhan spoke with Claudia about building long-term, holistic, and inclusive societies and reimagining existing public spaces as community and learning hubs. An excerpt is published below.



***Why have you chosen to work with public libraries as service delivery points for newcomers in Romania and Moldova?***

ACV wanted to help larger NGOs see libraries not only as places of study and research but also as existing infrastructure that could be reimagined as seats of community and belonging for everyone in the community. Libraries already have the space, equipment, and trained personnel who can be further upskilled to deliver tailored programs for newcomers. Instead of NGOs using their funds to create their own spaces for this work and then needing to find another space once their funding is concluded, they can host their programs directly at libraries. This new programming can then feed back into the libraries' regular offerings, for which further funding can be applied.

It took a war and a loss of funding for some big NGOs to consider working with libraries. We cannot afford to jump from crisis to crisis without learning some lessons to make the support systems work better. I think an opportunity is missed when we don't look at what resources already exist to build stronger and sustainable solutions because no problem comes one day and leaves the second day. Everything that happens in society leaves traces.

# How EPIM Makes a Difference

## *What impact will this project model have on democracy and belonging if it spreads across Central and Eastern Europe?*

For context, I want to underline that we in this region came from a totalitarian regime. Our parents are still afraid to speak in normal voices about issues that they think can be controversial, politically speaking. It's heartbreaking to see adults who lived in democracy for 30 years not being confident enough to talk to their mayor about the issues they face in their community. We don't have this open democratic participatory culture in our blood yet, so we have to learn it, and what better place to do that than at the public library, because all ages and backgrounds are welcome there, all religions, and all kinds of diversity that might separate us on the street. At the library, you are welcome to explore and learn how we can all work together to build stronger communities and stronger democracies.

Participatory democracy is not an easy solution. We in CEE chose democracy over totalitarian regimes, but we didn't know what it meant – only that it was better than what we had before. But we recognise that we need to do more than just vote, which takes time and energy. And as we learn, there's a great chance for us to build an inclusive and open society because we know our own history and what it means to be isolated and locked away for thinking differently from others. So, we should put that remembrance into our public institutions and turn them into learning moments.

***“We in CEE chose democracy over totalitarian regimes, but we didn't know what it meant – only that it was better than what we had before. But we recognize that we need to do more than just vote.”***

[Read the entire interview here.](#)



ACV supported the Marin Preda Library to offer Romanian language classes. Photo: ACV



# How EPIM Makes a Difference



## Christina Antonakos Wallace

on Building Belonging Beyond Borders

Christina Antonakos-Wallace is a filmmaker, cultural organiser, facilitator and life-long activist. She is the founder of the transnational initiative With Wings and Roots and on the leadership team of the Building Belonging collaborative. Her work has centred around challenging exclusionary narratives of migration, race, and nationality; telling stories that illuminate our inherent belonging. Her films and interactive work have won numerous awards, sparked campaigns, and been exhibited in over twenty countries through festivals, schools, galleries, NGOs, and corporations, often accompanied by workshops.

**EPIM is supporting With Wings and Roots to launch the Belonging Beyond Borders: A Global Network for new visions of migration in 2025.**

*Can you tell us more about **Belonging Beyond Borders**: A network for new visions of migration, the project you are working on with EPIM, Building Belonging and the Democracy and Belonging Forum?*

Belonging Beyond Borders is a network designed to advance new narratives and strategies for migrant justice. We aim to develop a belonging framework for global migration, connecting to fields including democracy, and climate resilience and fostering collaboration among activists, scholars, and cultural workers. What sets this project apart is its transnational approach: migration is inherently global, and addressing its root causes requires collaboration across borders. By linking movements and sharing strategies from diverse contexts, we aim to co-create solutions that reflect the interconnected nature of these challenges.

This work is urgent. Authoritarian movements have weaponised migration as a wedge issue, undermining democracies around the world and making migrants scapegoats for broader societal anxieties. While these narratives harm migrant and racialised communities most directly, they are weakening the fabric of pluralistic democracies, and every progressive cause is impacted, with dire consequences.

We will start with thought leaders and community organisers, developing pilot projects that demonstrate how belonging can drive systemic change. Our goal is to accelerate the transformative change needed right now by grounding our efforts in principles that transcend political cycles. By nurturing connections among movements and equipping leaders with narrative tools and strategies, we aim to create a robust, cross-sector framework for justice that endures. Unlike traditional networks, we prioritise relationship-building and narrative shifts as foundational, believing these are prerequisites for the systemic change we aim for.

If we focus on our current political reality and stick with what seems pragmatic, it is easy to feel discouraged.



# How EPIM Makes a Difference

But I believe that we can attract many people to our vision and transform our systems in far more exponential ways if our work is grounded in deeper principles that are based on all of our well-being.

***What does bringing a belonging lens to global migration entail? As a framing, how is it different from multiculturalism, integration, inclusion, etc.?***

Belonging offers a fundamental shift by identifying the root of the problem as systemic othering—therefore being a shared framework that applies not only to race or migration but all forms of social exclusion and supremacy.

Unlike multiculturalism, which often celebrates diversity without addressing power imbalances, or inclusion and integration, which implies joining existing dominant systems, belonging demands the transformation—of systems, cultures, and power structures—so that every individual's inherent value is reflected in tangible ways.

A belonging lens also bridges issue silos. For example, understanding immigrant justice as a fight to honour inherent belonging reveals parallels with struggles for racial equity, gender justice, and even environmental sustainability.

When applied to climate resilience, belonging reframes humans and the planet as interconnected, rejecting both human supremacy and apocalyptic narratives that devalue humanity's role in the ecosystem.

For the network, we are lucky to be working with thought leaders on belonging—namely the Democracy and Belonging Forum of the Othering and Belonging Institute led by UC Berkeley professor John A. Powell and Building Belonging. Visionaries like Powell have begun articulating this framework of belonging without othering, and our work builds on this foundation to offer practical examples and tools for applying this vision across sectors.



*Christina brainstorming the network in Berlin with EPIM and the Democracy and Belonging Forum, September 2024*

***The project is a moonshot—where would you like it to be two years down-the-line?***

In two years, I hope Belonging Beyond Borders will be well-established as a hub for new narratives and strategies on migration and belonging. This means seeing the belonging framework actively shaping the work of organisations and leaders across sectors, breaking down silos between migration and other movements, and driving new collaborations.

Our initial focus is on narrative change, which is a necessarily long-term effort, but essential to counter the right-wing dominance in migration discourse. We aim to provide concrete tools such as a published framework, examples and shared language to strengthen this framework and protect it from dilution as it gains mainstream traction. For example, we aim to support and document case studies of successful collaborations between migrant organisers, climate activists, and democracy advocates, providing a model for cross-sectoral work.

One long-term measure of success will be when we see not just movement leaders, but also political leaders, educators, journalists and other practitioners adopting a belonging-based migration framework, with visible shifts in public discourse and policy approaches. We plan to launch practitioner labs that explore how this lens can be implemented, equipping leaders to amplify this perspective in their respective sectors.

By cultivating deep relationships and building belonging within the network, we hope to model the change we seek to create in the world. Ultimately, we aspire to generate momentum for a longer-term network that can address the foundational challenges migration raises about the nation-state, human rights, and the natural movement of people.

**[Read the entire interview here.](#)**

# How EPIM Makes a Difference



## Natallia Allen

### on How Civic Participation Helps Build a Stronger Democratic Society and What Strategies Can Work To Achieve This

Natallia Allen has over a decade of experience in CSO management in the Czech Republic and internationally, with particular expertise in civic participation and education. Driven by her own migration journey, Natallia is dedicated to advancing civil society development and enabling meaningful civic participation, especially for marginalised communities. Natallia co-founded MigAct in 2023, a community-driven organisation based in Prague. MigAct is committed to fostering an inclusive environment where residents—whether of migration backgrounds or Czech-born—can actively participate in civic life. Guided by the values of cooperation, equity, responsibility, and active participation, MigAct strives to reduce barriers to full civic participation. Natallia spoke to Masha Volynsky and an excerpt is published below.

**EPIM has supported MigAct's development since 2024 in collaboration with AMIGA.**

### *Why is civic participation important?*

Civic participation is vital for amplifying diverse opinions in public debates and ensuring that those who might otherwise remain unheard are given a voice. This is especially important in the context of migration. In cities like Prague, where many residents with migration backgrounds lack political representation or voting rights, civic engagement becomes an indispensable resource. It offers a possibility to actively contribute to the development of the local community and shape the decisions that impact all residents.

By participating in volunteering, advocacy groups, or NGO-led initiatives, people with lived migration experience can demonstrate their commitment to society while fostering mutual understanding with other residents. Such involvement enriches the community by incorporating diverse perspectives, leading to more inclusive decision-making and nurturing a shared responsibility for the collective future.

Early opportunities for civic engagement are especially impactful, as they help counteract feelings of rejection, promote a shared sense of belonging, and strengthen bonds between individuals and their communities. When people see that their voices matter, they feel more connected and valued.

### *What role does civic participation play in your own life and how did you get involved in this work?*

In my case it is deeply woven into my personal journey and development, also in the context of my own lived migration experience. I didn't encounter the concept of civic participation until I moved to Prague almost 20 years ago. Growing up in a non-democratic society, I had no idea what it truly meant. In my youth, civic engagement wasn't something you could openly practice. It was often hidden, dangerous, and misunderstood. It wasn't until I moved to Prague that I encountered civic engagement in its various forms.



# How EPIM Makes a Difference

It fascinated me to the point that I got a degree in Civil society studies and have been working for over a decade in the non-profit sector.

What drives me the most in my work is the question: How can we make civil society accessible to those who struggle to reach it? How do we make it stronger and more present in the everyday lives of people? I am convinced that, in the right conditions, civil society has the power to amplify the voices of the powerless. It's not always easy, and the path can be filled with obstacles, but I firmly believe that it's worth every effort.

***What strategies does MigAct utilise in supporting Praguers with lived migration experience to become more active citizens of your city? How does it work, in brief?***

MigAct is a community-driven organisation, committed to fostering an inclusive environment where residents—whether of migration backgrounds or Czech-born—can actively participate in civic life. We create collaborative spaces, provide educational activities, and offer multilingual resources to meet the practical needs of individuals and organisations.

We engage in reducing barriers to full civic participation, guided by the values of cooperation, equity, responsibility, and active participation. As a diverse community of individuals, organisations, and institutions, we believe in co-creating and actively involving our supporters in our development and programs.

In brief, MigAct works to bring people together by creating opportunities for mutual support, dialogue, and information exchange. We foster spaces where individuals from different backgrounds can connect, share experiences, and collaborate on local issues. Our approach goes beyond simply providing resources – we aim to build the capacity of local NGOs, emerging community leaders, and organisations to ensure that they can effectively engage with and support diverse communities. We actively promote the values of partnership and collaboration, striving to unite a range of stakeholders, including local authorities, civil society organisations, and individuals.

[Read the entire interview here.](#)



MigAct at Work



# How EPIM Makes a Difference



## Ahmad Wali Ahmad Yar

### on Systems Mapping as a Cognitive Tool for Engaging with European Migration Governance

Ahmad Wali Ahmad Yar is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, he serves as the president of the Umbrella Refugee Committee in Belgium and is the secretary-general of the Network of Afghan Diaspora Organisations in Europe (NADOE).

Since March 2024, he has been part of the Core Team for EPIM's systems mapping process aimed at analysing the migration governance systems in Europe and identifying leverage directions to inform EPIM's migration governance cluster strategy.

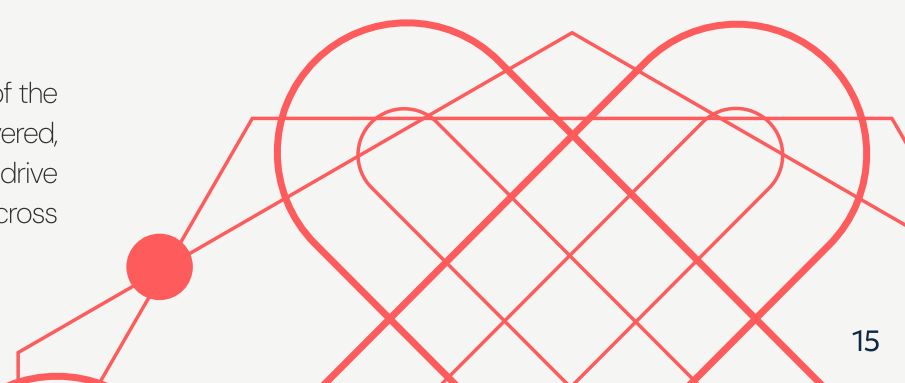
Michela Bramardi spoke with Wali about the value of the systems mapping process, the insights it uncovered, and how the map can serve as a powerful tool to drive transformative change in migration governance across Europe. An excerpt is published below.

### *What were the most surprising or unexpected connections or insights that emerged from the systems mapping process?*

Throughout my career as an academic and a member of civil society, I have consistently engaged with the concepts of migration governance, analysing policies, frameworks, and their impacts. However, the systems mapping process introduced a new layer of complexity and curiosity. One of the most striking aspects was the need to present and examine issues from a variety of perspectives, often simultaneously. This multiplicity of viewpoints was both intellectually stimulating and, at times, quite challenging, as it required stepping outside familiar analytical frameworks.

Another unexpected insight emerged in relation to my initial outlook on tackling migration-related challenges. Before engaging in the systems mapping process, I held a relatively pessimistic view of the prospects for achieving consensus and implementing effective solutions, particularly within the European context, where migration governance often seems gridlocked by competing national interests and political rhetoric. However, as the process unfolded, I began to see the potential for meaningful progress when diverse expertise, experiences, and innovative thinking are brought together in a structured way.

The systems mapping process revealed not only the interconnectedness of various actors and factors but also highlighted entry points where collaborative efforts could yield tangible improvements. It demonstrated that while the issues are deeply entrenched and multifaceted, they are not insurmountable..



# How EPIM Makes a Difference

*In what ways do you think the systems map can serve as a practical tool for different actors in the migration governance ecosystem?*

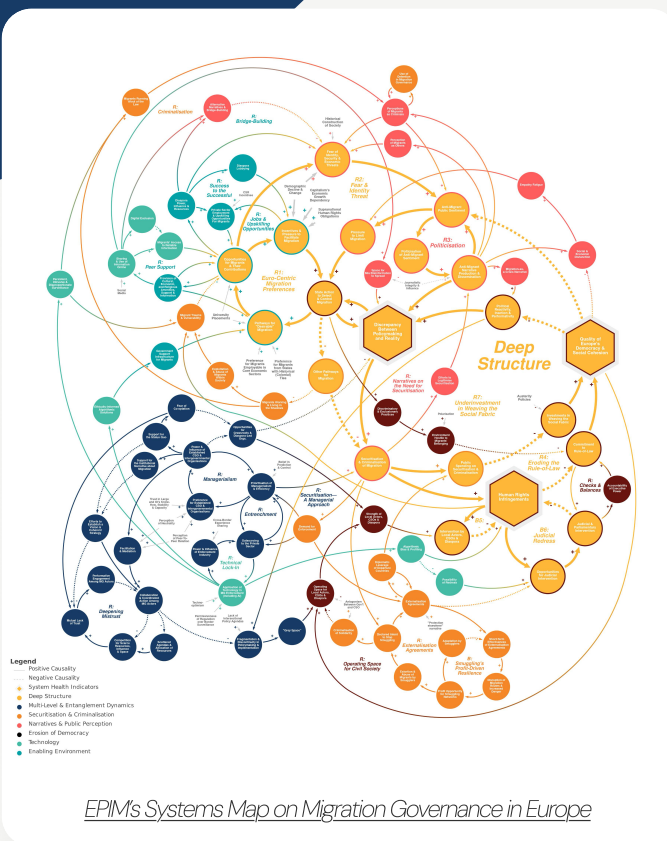
The systems map has the potential to be a powerful and versatile tool for stakeholders across the migration governance ecosystem. Policymakers and government officials can use it to design evidence-based and forward-looking policies by identifying systemic bottlenecks, understanding past successes and failures, and anticipating future trends. For civil society organisations, the map can help pinpoint priority areas and allocate resources more effectively, addressing underlying causes rather than superficial symptoms.

Additionally, the map fosters cross-sector collaboration by illustrating the interdependencies among various actors, such as governments, NGOs, international organisations, and local authorities. This shared understanding can reduce duplication of efforts and enhance synergies. Researchers and academics may find it valuable as an analytical framework to identify gaps in knowledge, explore emerging trends, and assess the broader impacts of policies or events. Meanwhile, NGOs and advocacy groups can use it as a strategic planning tool to position themselves within the ecosystem, align objectives with systemic goals, and develop targeted campaigns.

Beyond its immediate applications, the map can also serve as an educational resource, helping grasp the complexity of the migration governance system. Its effectiveness depends on the quality of data, inclusivity of perspectives, and adaptability to changing contexts.

*How did your initial assumptions about migration governance shift as you engaged deeper with the complexities of the system?*

My initial assumption was largely shaped by a belief in the necessity of a top-down approach to bring about



systemic change in migration governance, an approach where high-level policy reforms and institutional frameworks drive transformation. However, engaging with the systems mapping process has shown me that bottom-up approaches also play a pivotal role in enacting change. Incremental yet impactful transformations can occur when organisations, institutions, and stakeholders are provided with practical guidelines, concrete examples, and evidence-based strategies for action. This realisation has made me more confident in the potential of grassroots and community-level initiatives to influence broader policy landscapes.

Another critical shift in my perspective relates to the role of people with a migratory background in governance processes. I have long believed that meaningful engagement and inclusion of people with a migratory background in decision-making is paramount. This assumption was not only validated but significantly reinforced through the mapping process. It became clear that supporting platforms for migrants' participation are not supplementary measures; they are essential components of effective migration governance.

[Read the entire interview here.](#)

# How EPIM Makes a Difference



## Yvan Sagnet and Gianantonio Ricci

**on Combatting Exploitation, Creating Fair Jobs and Fostering a Regenerative Agrifood System for all.**

Yvan Sagnet is the Co-Founder of NO CAP in Italy and Gianantonio Ricci is Projects Director at Chico Mendes. Over the past few years, NO CAP and Chico Mendes have implemented the Spartacus project to reduce the endemic exploitation of migrant workers in the Italian agricultural sector. They do so by providing direct support to migrant workers while also testing and scaling a sustainable and effective alternative to the existing agrifood chain. EPIM has been supporting the Spartacus project since January 2023.

Michela Bramardi spoke with Yvan and Gianantonio about their work in Italian. A DeepL translated excerpt is published below.

*Your work addresses the interconnected issues of labour exploitation among migrants and the current state of the Italian agrifood system. Could you elaborate on how these two topics are linked and what it entails to tackle both simultaneously?*

The Italian agri-food system relies heavily on migrant labour, which is essential for its survival. Without the contributions of migrant workers, many agricultural enterprises would struggle to function. However, this workforce is often exploited, as numerous emblematic cases demonstrate, such as that of Satnam Singh, an Indian migrant worker who died in the Agro Pontino countryside. Singh was abandoned outside his home by his employer, who feared legal repercussions due to his irregular employment. His case underscores the dire conditions faced by thousands of exploited migrant workers, many of whom are trapped in an 'agromafioso' system.

The sector is built on the systematic lowering of labour costs, generating profit through exploitation, particularly of migrant workers. Meanwhile, the institutional response is more ideological than pragmatic, failing to support migrant workers and instead exacerbating tensions. There is a striking lack of structured policies to address essential issues such as regular employment, housing, and worker training. This short-sighted approach not only harms workers but also puts farmers in a difficult position, forcing them to operate in an increasingly complex and dysfunctional system.

Our project seeks to bridge these gaps by helping workers secure legal and dignified employment, free from exploitation, while also supporting companies in addressing labour shortages and obtaining fair prices for their products from distribution chains. However, the absence of a supportive institutional ecosystem combined with dominant ideological narratives makes this work an uphill battle, further deepening an already critical situation.



# How EPIM Makes a Difference

***Part of your role involves engaging and collaborating with various stakeholders across the agrifood chain, such as agricultural cooperatives, retailers, and municipalities. Could you share more about these collaborations? What aspects give you hope, and what challenges do you encounter?***

Our project model is built on collaboration across the agri-food chain to address the root causes of exploitation, which often stem from unequal power dynamics, lack of cooperation, and the absence of mutual respect. Our vision fosters alliances among workers, producers, retailers, and consumers, while also involving external actors such as institutions, civil society, and the Church. In some cases, the Church has provided unused real estate to offer dignified housing solutions.

One of the key challenges we face is an unsustainable economic model that enables large multinational corporations in food distribution to impose unfairly low prices on producers. This pressure forces cost-cutting measures that often result in labour exploitation and the rise of illegal practices like 'caporalato' (NB: informal and exploitative labour brokerage). By establishing agreements with retailers committed to fair pricing, we ensure that producers take responsibility for guaranteeing legal wages and decent working conditions for labourers. This approach helps rebuild the agri-food chain as it should be, ensuring both economic and social sustainability.

Consumer awareness also plays a crucial role in transforming the system. The No Cap label is a key tool in this effort, offering a clear certification for ethically sourced products and allowing consumers to make informed choices that support fair labour practices. This allows us to involve all actors in the food chain.

Collaboration also extends to local and national authorities to tackle urgent issues such as housing and transport for seasonal workers. The lack of adequate solutions has led to the emergence of informal settlements, so-called ghettos, where living conditions are precarious and unsafe. While the responsibility to ensure legal frameworks and basic services lies with the state, Chico Mendes and No Cap have initiated temporary solutions, such as dedicated transportation services for workers.

Our project strongly emphasises supply chain collaboration to develop a new model that is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable. Climate change also exacerbates existing challenges, disrupting production cycles, reducing available workdays, and intensifying precarity for labourers.

However, the greatest challenge remains shifting the prevailing mindset. A balanced agri-food supply chain, one that ensures sustainability for all, requires a reform of the European market to combat unfair competition driven by exploitative practices. Collaboration is the cornerstone of creating a positive and inclusive transformation across the entire system.

[Read the entire interview here \(in Italian\).](#)



Photo: Chico Mendes

# Key Developments

## Across EPIM

### → Executive Council and Co-Chair Appointments

The Executive Council, EPIM's core governing unit, was appointed at the inaugural Forum, with [Audrey Guichon](#) and [Elizabeth V. Kassinis](#), acting as Co-Chairs, supported by [Eunice Romero](#), [Hannes Einsporn](#), [Ilaria Caramia](#), [Janina Stürner-Siovit](#) and [Letícia Ishibashi](#), serving for the council's first three-year term.

### → Cluster – Building Inclusive Societies in Central and Eastern Europe (BISC)

In 2024, EPIM actioned the transformation of its Ukraine Response Fund into the BISC Cluster, leveraging strong regional partnerships to foster inclusive societies for newcomers. EPIM supported 16 projects in 2024, involving over fifty partners across Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, as well as umbrella organisations in Belgium and Italy. Notably, we expanded our presence in Romania and Moldova, welcoming two new partners: one focused on livelihoods and employment with the private sector, and another reimagining libraries as community-building spaces.

Partner organisations across Central and Eastern Europe addressed topics such as inclusive and fair employment, intercultural learning, civic engagement, diversity awareness in healthcare, access to housing, and legal aid. They also tackled various advocacy issues to protect migrants' rights. A key pillar of EPIM's BISC strategy has been the initiation and support of national and regional networks to drive collaboration, strengthen advocacy, exchange good practices, and enhance democratic resilience. We continued supporting the [Czech Migration Consortium](#) and [Mareena's](#) efforts to create a new Slovak network.

EPIM also continued to invest its energies in curating a community of influential individuals across civil society, academia, the private sector, and various levels of government in the region. These individuals gathered in Bratislava for the inaugural meeting of the CEE Network for Migration and Inclusion in May, building on the previous Prague convening. Finally, in 2024, EPIM emphasised the importance of lived migration experiences, with several new partners reflecting this focus in their leadership.



EPIM's CEE Network Convening in Bratislava, May 2024



# Key Developments

## Across EPIM

### → Cluster – Migration Governance

Over the course of 2024, EPIM undertook a groundbreaking mapping exercise – to provide a picture into the complex dynamics that underpin the European migration governance system and to identify leverage opportunities for systemic change. A core team and an extended team, composed of EPIM's foundation partners and other ecosystem actors with diverse geographical, lived, and professional experiences, collaboratively built the map.

The iterative process balanced biases and integrated insights from broader consultations, including a June workshop in Brussels with different ecosystem actors, and bilateral conversations to include as many viewpoints as possible. The resulting first-ever systems map on the topic guided EPIM's identification of leverage directions of the cluster, leading two to priorities, Reimagining Migration Governance Processes and Reimagining Funding, two directions that will shape our EPIM's 2025 grantmaking and future programmatic agendas.

### → Cluster – Dignified Work and Housing

EPIM built on its grantmaking pilot on the deskilling of migrants in 2024. Following the late 2023 sensemaking process, the Pilot's Council of Practitioners – comprising individuals with professional and personal experience in the area – recommended several organisations to be considered for funding. Three organisations were eventually selected, including ACOF — Associació Comissió de Formació de la Coordinadora de la Llengua, Karibu and Jobs4Refugees. In 2025, EPIM will kick off a comprehensive sensemaking process to define the cluster's priorities, with a focus on a future of dignified work, and ultimately the creation of long-term economic and social conditions for belonging.



*EPIM's Systems Mapping Workshop in Brussels, June 2024*

### → Action Pillar – Building Bridges and Ecosystems

See the Section on the Forum (page 22)

### → Action Pillar – Changing Narratives

EPIM supported With Wings and Roots to establish the Belonging Beyond Borders network, aimed at developing and disseminating new narratives, strategies, and bold visions among those working for migrant and racial justice, pluralistic democracies, and related fields. The network will be launched in 2025 with a compact, multidisciplinary group of leaders to develop, amplify, and test narratives within their communities, constituencies, and networks. The network will focus on applying a belonging lens to global migration, with the goal of disseminating this perspective globally. Additionally, it aims to build enduring relationships that can support leaders in their long-term work, despite increasingly hostile political contexts.

### → Action Pillar – Centring Lived Experience

EPIM supported the Union of Exiled Students (UEE) in the face of a difficult political climate in France in its aim of breaking down barriers (linguistic, financial, social, administrative) to higher education for exiled people in France. EPIM's funding was used to improve and strengthen UEE's Advice Centre and its capacities to support students in their administrative and academic processes, as well as ensure the long-term financial stability of the organisation.



# Key Developments

## Across EPIM

### → Action Pillar – Reimagining Funding

EPIM continued its support to the Greek Forum of Migrants and Equinox's scoping project to advocate for a political shift towards using resources, legislation, and policy to protect people's lives rather than perpetuate systems of containment, punishment, and control. Their work examined how the ecosystem of actors influencing EU funding is resourced and looked at the type of influencing work currently being supported. Their analysis revealed that most funded work is reactive, addressing an ongoing agenda of securitisation and criminalisation, rather than supporting alternative political visions. Their findings also align with the findings of EPIM's Migration Governance mapping process, which highlights the insufficient funding for grassroots community work and migrant-led organisations. As a follow-up to the scoping project, Equinox will explore strategies to refocus the redistribution of resources towards protection and social provision for all in 2025.

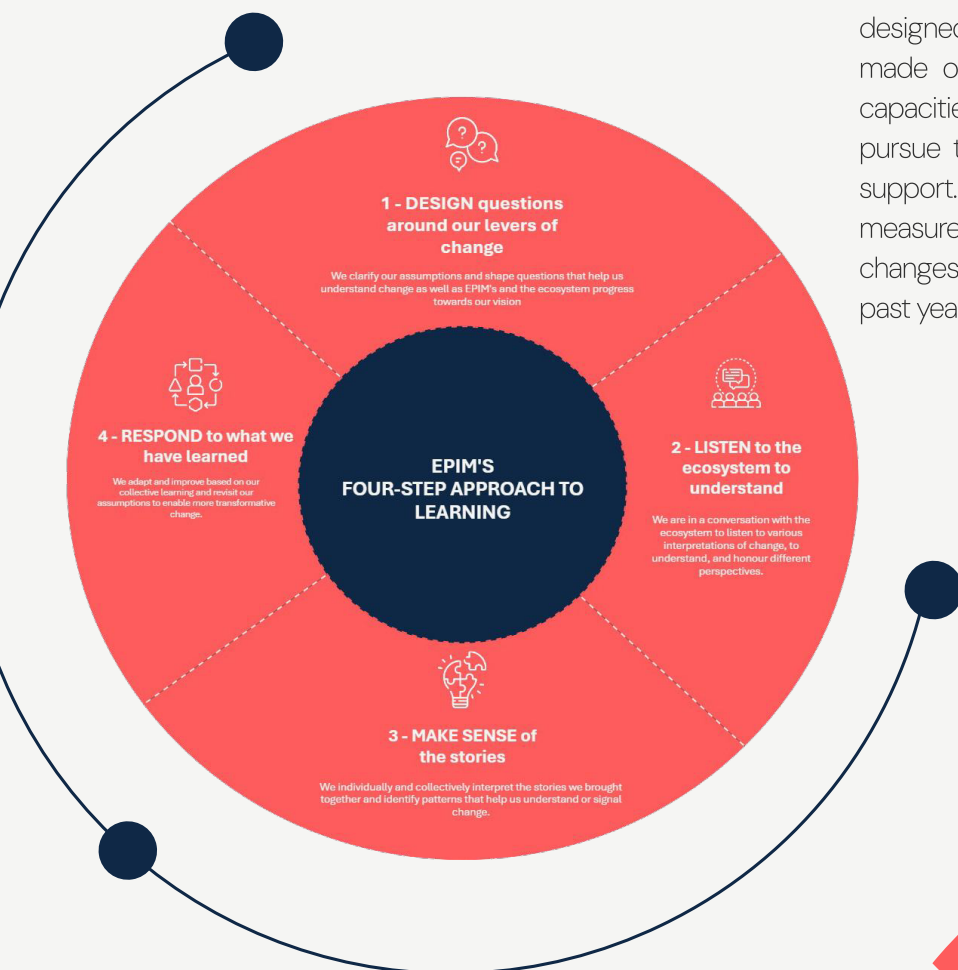
### → From a Reporting-focused Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to an Ecosystem-centred Learning Agenda

Learning is the backbone of EPIM's vision and approach, and our new ecosystem approach requires constant testing, reflecting, listening and adapting. In addition to the Learning Journey that culminated in Brussels (see Section 7), in 2024 the team also developed a new Learning Framework consisting of a 4-step approach through which EPIM measures progress towards its Vision and the systemic shifts identified in the Pathway to Change. This new Learning Agenda will be deployed in 2025.

[See more here.](#)

### → Transition Grants

EPIM provided 17 partners with transition grants between 20 and 30K EUR in 2024. The grants were designed with the aim to consolidate the progress made over the past years, strengthen organisational capacities, and support partners in identifying ways to pursue their vision and goals after the end of EPIM's support. We expect that these grants will provide some measure of sustainability and/or funding for scaling changes partner organisations have initiated over the past years.



# The Forum

EPIM hosted its inaugural Forum on the 13th and 14th of November 2024, bringing together 38 actors from across the migration ecosystem in Europe, in Brussels. Forum members bring diverse lived experiences and expertise from civil society, government, private sector, social entrepreneurship, migrant activism, academia, journalism and philanthropy.



*"One thing I've enjoyed the most about being at the EPIM Forum is being surrounded by people from many different parts of the ecosystem. All working towards actually challenging the ecosystem and the way migration is approached in Europe, which has been really proving the fire that all of us have towards being part of the change that we want to see."*

**Sarah Diedro Jordão**

## A Reminder – What is the Forum?

The EPIM Forum is a unique Social Lab for the migration ecosystem to catalyse and cultivate other ways of working and relating to one another. It is a dynamic space for connections, collective sensemaking, learning, and visioning. With the Forum, we hope to simultaneously build:

- ➔ a relational infrastructure for new social connections to emerge and collective intelligence to flourish,
- ➔ an imagination infrastructure to envision a future where everyone belongs,
- ➔ a sensemaking and learning body to check in on EPIM's strategy and directions and on the ecosystem's progress towards the vision.

At the heart of EPIM's vision is the belief that to improve migration in Europe, we need a shared purpose and better collaboration across the ecosystem. This requires rethinking our relationships, understanding power dynamics, and reimagining resource flows. We see the Forum as a centre of gravity for the ecosystem where we can plant new seeds to flourish in the future.





# The Forum

## What the First Forum Was About

Framed from a trust-building perspective, the inaugural Forum offered participants a chance to reflect upon the current state of the migration ecosystem and envision the transformation needed towards a regenerative, resilient, and forward-thinking ecosystem. We also had a chance to prototype some of these ambitions and put them into action, co-shaping the directions of EPIM's Reimagining European Migration Governance cluster, guided by insights from the first-ever systems map on migration governance.

Finally, the Executive Council – EPIM's core governing unit – was appointed, with Audrey Guichon, Carolina Gottardo, Elizabeth V. Kassinis, Eunice Romero, Hannes Einsporn, Ilaria Caramia, Janina Stürner-Siovit and Leticia Ishibashi, serving on the council for its first term.

## Takeaways

***From EPIM to the world:*** The Forum is a venue for sensemaking and learning for both EPIM and the broader ecosystem. It is more than just shaping EPIM's future direction – its theory of change is based on the idea of a ripple effect –

when Forum members and their organisations amplify the visions, learnings and work of the Forum through the ecosystem. Tellingly, many participants left with new ideas, energy and purpose – eager to incorporate these in their own contexts – to experiment and bridge across divides in the ecosystem.

***The power of co-creation:*** The migration governance systems map harnessed the diversity and collective intelligence in the room to crowdsource actions and initiatives for the future of EPIM's strategy – through concrete ideas, exciting examples and connections to other key actors. In addition, the map will also shape the work of other actors in the ecosystem, through Forum members who intended to employ it in their strategies.

***A space collective and bold visioning:*** We spoke of a time of despair and frustration, and the need for spaces that sustain – providing much-needed hope and reassurance. Members agreed that the Forum should remain a hope-based space that supports actors in the ecosystem and provides both a retreat to discuss openly and safely, and a springboard for bolder visions.



*The Three-Horizons Model in Action at the Forum, Image: Carlotta Cataldi*



# The Forum

**From “What?” to How?”:** Most conversations on migration in Europe are thematic and topical – focussed on current issues, hard facts, doctrines and narratives. Using the Three Horizons Framework, in a session led by the International Alumni Center we focused on how to be in relationship with others in the ecosystem to achieve a positive vision for migration in Europe. While we all agree that relationships and working together are crucial, we rarely discuss how these are formed, enacted and made stronger. At times, this exercise felt abstract and one of the goals for the next Forum is to action these learnings and embody them in our daily practices.

## What’s Next

Future editions of the annual Forum will offer the opportunity to deep-dive into EPIM’s learning approach, sense and evaluate the overall programmatic strategy, sensemake thematic clusters and further and enact conversations on the future of the ecosystem.



*“The Forum is really an opportunity to talk to and build bridges between different actors or stakeholders within the migration ecosystem. So, donors such as myself, CSOs and organisations working on the ground, representatives from think tanks and from administrative structures, come together to really think about a common cause and common approaches for addressing what is a highly contested and politicised issue, migration in Europe.”*

**Tim Parritt**

THE OAK FOUNDATION



The EPIM Forum in Brussels, November 2024

# Reflections and Learnings

from Our Work This Year

## Reflecting on EPIM's First Learning Journey

Over the spring and early summer 2024, EPIM invited 15 civil society and one foundation partners to participate in an innovative and heartfelt learning journey. The goal was to cultivate trust between these key actors of the migration ecosystem in Europe, sensemake about their respective roles in driving systemic change, and empower both the collective and the individuals to amplify their impact. [Sophie Ngo-Diep](#) reflected on EPIM's learning journey and an excerpt is published below.

*'We need more spaces like the one we co-created. We need more civil spaces to exist, because they are shrinking and so is active participation and such spaces are very important for us to heal, reflect, re-strategise, learn, gain allies, share the burden, learn of new opportunities, become and feel the sense of community and of belonging especially in this short-term project-based work environment with basically no stability.'*

**Robert Ian Kibet Ouko Babu**

JULY 2024

## What it Looked Like

### A co-created process

The journey was co-designed with our partners from the outset. The idea of creating a different space to make sense of how EPIM's partners and the ecosystem contributed to change emerged as a logical result of EPIM's transformation. Thus, the intention was to shift from top-down, reported descriptions of change by partners, to participatory and shared reflections and conversations that centred partners and their stories of ecosystem and social transformation.

### A transformative journey that took an unexpected route

The journey began by grounding the collective in the reality of the systems and mental models we operate in, revealing how identities and the quality of relationships shape policies, narratives, and mindsets, as well as our own approaches to change. An invitation to explore our understanding of systemic change, challenging us to seek and harness power to achieve this, followed. And resultingly we discovered the profound impact of how we convene, invite conversations and connect, has on the relationships we build.



Image: Carlotta Cataldi



# Reflections and Learnings

from Our Work This Year

## What EPIM has Learned

### *The journey is the destination*

The outcome is ultimately also the process we create and the path we embark upon for the changes we want to see. The relationships we build, bridges we create, seeds we plant, and roles we play, are fundamental and without them, we will be unable to collaborate and draw on collective intelligence, to advance change.

### *Different questions lead to different conversations (and hopefully, a better understanding of change)*

The questions we ask each other and the way they are asked can help foster trust, create connections, and result in new possibilities. These are three ways this happened:

- ➔ Asking each other to share the story behind our name at the beginning of the journey allowed for a deeper level of connection compared to standard professional introductions, setting the tone for the entire journey.
- ➔ Openly discussing power dynamics led to insightful conversations about different types of power and how they can be harnessed for social change rather than just challenged.
- ➔ Asking participants how we might gain more power to create systemic change sparked conversations on building a larger 'we' to positively reshape approaches to migration, on building trust, and developing more self-awareness about our own power and roles.

Our takeaway is that creating space and time for these conversations is essential, and we will endeavour to incorporate this in our future work.



*The Learning Convening in Brussels, May 2024*

### *Trust and connection are the ultimate goals*

What we saw was that without trust, there is no collaboration and without collaboration, there is no meaningful and sustainable change. Building trust, forging connections, and breaking down siloes are pre-requisites for collective power and nudging systems change. We also honoured the role personal histories and experiences play in creating the changemakers on the journey, and sought to see them as individuals, underlining our shared humanity and commitment to the cause, rather than being seen (only) with institutional hats and boundaries.

### *Embrace the Unknown*

In designing, we shied away from a rigid script and overthinking our outcomes, which allowed the space for much-needed emergence. Something we are grateful to our facilitators for doing so deftly. This was made clear to us as the goal of the learning journey organically moved from "offering a space for reflection on the roles played by EPIM, its partners, and the successes (and failures) of different advocacy approaches" to "nurturing trust relationships and deepening our collective understanding of change to advance change better". This shift was crucial in creating a truly meaningful experience and actually learning what was relevant about our impact.

### *Practice what you Preach*

Showing up differently and embracing vulnerability offers an invitation to others to do the same.



# Reflections and Learnings

from Our Work This Year

EPIM attempted to foster an inclusive environment where everyone could authentically participate, to enhance the depth and quality of our conversations. To do so as a philanthropic intermediary and funder, we needed to talk about power in an open and transparent manner and actively share it. We believe that this allowed the group to break free from sectoral, organisational and dogmatic bubbles and allowed us to build the much-needed relational connective tissue for hope-based collective visioning and imagining that is so essential for any meaningful change.

## What's Next

This journey will inspire the spaces EPIM creates in the future. As we design a learning framework for the post-transformation EPIM, collaborative environments and moments like this one, in which we capture insights and patterns that lead to the shifts in the system, will be at the core of our approach. Spaces for collective reflection and sensemaking, where partners craft their own narratives about how they have influenced change, are clearly the way forward.

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

## Reporting back from EPIM's Deskillng Pilot

In Fall 2023, EPIM kicked off its prototype sensemaking and grantmaking pilot to address the deskilling and under-skilling of migrants. We specifically focused on the situation of people coming into Europe being pushed or guided into work and jobs beneath their level of skills and qualifications, as a result impacting their capacity to belong in European societies. Alongside this, EPIM tested a more inclusive, democratic and accountable sensemaking and grantmaking approach, premised on the idea that collective ideation leads to more pragmatic and impactful actions that culminated in 2024. [Sophie Ngo-Diep](#) reported back on its learnings. An excerpt is published below.

## The Cohort

The organisations selected by the [Council of Practitioners](#) focuses upon three leverage pathways identified in the sensemaking process:

- ➔ Building alliances and strengthening levels of trust within the migrant jobs ecosystem to address skills and qualification recognition
- ➔ Enhancing coordination between support services for newly arrived migrants
- ➔ Providing reliable information or better utilising information to navigate bureaucracy.

The pathways were identified based on needs, influence, potential impact, relevance of the size of the EPIM grant and existence of previous cross-sectoral alliances or an inclination for change. Our new partners include:

### *ACOF (Spain) – 50,000 EUR*

[ACOF](#) – [Associació Comissió de Formació de la Coordinadora de la Llengua](#), is an entity that thrives on collaboration. The organisation consists of four entities: [Escola de Vida](#), [La Troca](#), [Fundació Camins](#) and [Eicascantic](#). Together, they tackle the complexity of the deskilling issue in Catalonia where affordable language classes are scarce, language certificates are pre-requisites for residence and work permit, and skill recognition is impossible without regular status. The entities take a holistic approach focused on accreditation and equivalence of studies, job training, language teaching, professional experience accreditation, and community socialisation for new arrivals. They also promote dialogue and alliances with actors within the departments of education and migration as well as the Institute of Educational Sciences and the Barcelona City Council.

# Reflections and Learnings

from Our Work This Year

## *Karibu (Spain) – 49,090 EUR*

An ACCEM report in 2024 found 58% of migrants in Spain are overqualified for their jobs. Karibu attributes this to bureaucratic hurdles in qualification recognition, language barriers, and structural prejudices, particularly against African migrants. In response, Karibu aims to tackle deskilling on multiple fronts. It organises workshops with businesses and other organisations to address the structural and social issues that cause deskilling. It also offers direct support to people with a migration background, through job orientation, social and digital skills workshops, and language classes. The grant will support Karibu's decade-long efforts in this area.

## *Jobs4Refugees (Germany) – 50,000 EUR*

A 2023 ifo Institute survey shows that 43% of German companies face a skilled worker shortage. The grant will help expand Jobs4Refugees' work on SMEs which often face labour shortages but lack the budget and knowledge to recruit and train new arrivals. In supporting refugees to secure long-term positions with SMEs and enhancing diversity-sensitive recruitment, Jobs4Refugees addresses these challenges. Amidst a rise of exclusionary narratives, Jobs4Refugees fosters new conversations among civil society organisations, companies, and chambers of commerce, reducing skill shortages while combating structural discriminations on the labour market.



Photo: Jobs4Refugees

# Reflections and Learnings

from Our Work This Year

## What EPIM has Learned

Over the past year, we learned that:

- ➔ Sharing the power of interpretation enriches our collective understanding of the world: Using the Griffith Centre for Systems Innovation's Problem Framing Canvas, we moved away from traditional consultations and top-down research to an iterative and collective sensemaking model. This approach allowed for diverse perspectives and ideation, providing a more complex, bottom-up and shared understanding of the drivers and barriers of deskilling.
- ➔ The core benefit of our collective sensemaking was the connections that emerged and the resulting meaningful interaction: None of the Council of Practitioners knew each other before the Pilot, despite working in the same space, and the time spent on trust-building and addressing potential power dynamics allowed for a more authentic interaction. Also, the Pilot's value lay as much in the process as in the final outputs, allowing for a deep dive into the systemic forces maintaining the status quo and an emergent shared understanding of the problem.
- ➔ Surfacing the reality of informality practices: Thanks to the diverse insights from the group given their proximity to the realities on the ground, we were collectively able to surface insights on the widespread use of informal practices, that both hinder and support the existing system. For example, the role of local and sectoral gatekeepers like unscrupulous employment agents who hinder access to professionals and impede skills recognition, holding both businesses and prospective applicants' hostage. Understanding these dynamics and mindsets encouraged us to move away one-size-fits-all approaches.
- ➔ Embracing and understanding complexity and interconnectedness is paramount: Throughout the process, we grasped the multifaceted nature of deskilling and its causes – from data inaccuracies and individual survival strategies to deeper issues like racism and patriarchal norms. While this pilot can't address all issues, building a collective understanding helps us see where our efforts can make a difference and how we can collaborate more effectively.

**[Read the entire piece here.](#)**



# Reflections and Learnings

from Our Work This Year

## Co-Leadership at EPIM: A Philanthropic Model for Growth, Collaborative Innovation and Organisational Success

Co-Directors Sophie and Hrishabh interviewed each other for Philea, reflecting on highs and lows, and what it takes to make the model work. To them co-leadership is a mutually reinforcing growth loop that enhances both personal and organisational capacities, with transformative potential in philanthropy. It has significantly bolstered EPIM's credibility and innovative capacity, particularly through their shared personal and profession experiences of migration in Europe. They emphasise the importance of open communication, a shared vision, and the need for implicit trust in navigating differences and making decisions. Overall, co-leadership has fostered a collaborative culture, continuous learning, and a supportive environment, making leadership less isolating and more effective. An excerpt is published below

**Sophie:** A year into EPIM's co-leadership model, what has been your experience so far?

**Hrishabh:** For the lack of a better word, I think it has been brilliant. A rewarding experience, in which I've learned a lot, grown a fair bit, and supported someone else grow into their own power and come into their own. This is what leadership should be about – a reinforcing mutual growth loop, unlike most of the other models out there.

**Sophie:** What have been the benefits for EPIM and for you personally?

**Hrishabh:** Purely from a capacity and capability, standpoint, I think dual leadership has provided a huge boost to EPIM, especially at the dawn of this period of organisational reinvention. And I think the fact that both of us have personal and professional experience of migration in Europe, gives EPIM real credibility – a duality it has rarely had before at the helm. All this results in better decisions, more innovation and a culture at EPIM that values collaboration across the board – ultimately, that is a huge win.



*Hrishabh, Sophie, and Michela at the Executive Council Team Retreat in Brussels, July 2024.*

Leadership can be a terribly lonely affair. Personally, the sense of comfort knowing that someone else out there is dealing with the same sets of issues you are, makes a huge difference in terms of feeling supported. And then there is the constant learning of new skills, emergence of new ideas and even the adoption of new tech, that one of us discovers. As someone who is perpetually in search of novelty, co-leadership has been great for my brain.

**Hrishabh:** What is your approach to differences in opinion, conflict (if-ever) and feedback?

**Sophie:** Let's start with what we have in common. Hrishabh and I are fundamentally aligned in our vision for EPIM and the deeper purpose behind it, even if we might at times differ on the path.

We've navigated disagreements and exchanged feedback long before stepping into this co-leadership model. We have learned to communicate openly, listen deeply to each other, provide feedback, and apologise. We know when to agree to disagree and try to laugh things off before they become frustrations. Our feedback loops are constant, and we understand when and where to express differences. This reflects our ongoing work with our egos and on balancing personal and shared ambitions.

## from Our Work This Year

**Hrishabh:** I've honestly been far more surprised by (and grateful for) how well this has worked out. There have been no major challenges in that sense.

Some context: As senior programme managers, both Sophie and I initially tiptoed around each other and then had a full year to figure out working styles, areas of competence and how to prototype collaboration before taking on this role. That initiation period allowed us to build this implicit trust.

A more practical issue though is how much work we're taking on and how ambitious we both are for EPIM and where we want it to go with us at the helm (and for the years beyond), making full use of the dual capacities this structure creates. I think this often translates into us setting some pretty lofty goals and sacrificing downtime and a work-life balance, and that too is a challenge.

**Hrishabh:** How do you/we address the division of power and responsibility between two co-leaders, both in terms in practical delivery of work and public positioning?

**Sophie:** Things have been happening organically. Besides defined roles in communications and finance, everything else happens with fluidity, based on our capacity and energy. It is like reaching a state of flow. With our vision and goals clear, we've freed ourselves from rigid structures and pre-assigned responsibilities, allowing for creativity and growth. We share power by co-designing, feeding each other's work, and coaching one another. When it comes to public positioning, Hrishabh and I speak to different audiences. While our ideas may be the same, the way we convey them may differ, resonating differently with different people. We leverage our strengths and complementarity to share responsibility.

**Sophie:** What recommendation would you offer to organisations considering a shift to a co-leadership model?

**Hrishabh:** There are two questions here, the first, do you as an institution considering this model, have the organisational culture and environment in place to foster a shared leadership structure. By this I mean, is there already some sort of shared, distributed and decentralised leadership structure and collaborative culture in place, where this will not be a novelty or seen as too much of a gimmick and be actually implementable?

And second, are you going to be able to find the right combination of two or three individuals to do this together. It's not impossible, but if you bring in folks from more traditional hierarchical structures and schools of leadership, it is probably not going to work out.

So, ideally, what you want is a distributed leadership in an environment already in place, and second, leaders who are familiar with it, or have worked in co-leadership before (or are willing to view leadership differently).

[Read the entire interview here](#)



# Finances

INCOME (EUR) *	
Source	Amount
Adessium Foundation	300,000
Aga Khan Foundation	35,000
Barrow Cadbury Trust	40,273
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	363,775
Fondation Abbé Pierre	50,000
Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo	250,000
Fondation de France	50,000
Fred Foundation	50,000
Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian	50,000
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust	33,750
Kahane Foundation**	
King Baudouin Foundation	200,000
Oak Foundation	350,000
Open Society Foundations	112,444
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	46,926
Porticus	300,000
Robert Bosch Stiftung	550,000
Funds Received from NEF Investments	25,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,807,168</b>

\*Amounts pledged to EPIM in 2024. These amounts were not necessarily spent during the year and are not reflective of the total contribution of individual foundations on a multiannual basis. All figures are provisional.

\*\*contributions made across different years

EXPENDITURE (EUR) *	
Expense	Amount
Grants	1,578,306
Staff Costs	352,599
Administration	117,349
Consultancy & Research	117,245
Communications, Travel and Meetings	67,104
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,232,602</b>

\* All figures are provisional.