



European
Philanthropic
Initiative for
Migration

Annual Report

2025





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Cover Photo Credits
From top: Velos Youth activity
PLACE Workshop
Joint sense-making at the inaugural EPIM Forum
PLACE opening co-creation spaces for community building

A Hope for Migration

In 2025, EPIM marked twenty years of bringing philanthropy together around a shared conviction: Europe as a place of belonging for all, including migrants. Over these two decades, we strengthened civil society, shaped migration governance, and directed substantial resources toward those reinforcing Europe's institutions and infrastructures to make them more democratic, more inclusive, and more humane. This anniversary is not simply a moment of reflection. It is a moment to take stock of what kind of Europe is emerging and what kind of Europe we are prepared to build.

Today, the political landscape across Europe remains volatile. Democratic norms are under pressure. Public discourse on migration is increasingly shaped by fear and short-term electoral calculations. And funding decisions at national and European levels are tilting toward defence and competitiveness, often at the expense of social cohesion. In this context, migration work is frequently forced into reactive postures, responding to crises as they unfold rather than shaping long-term direction.



Talking about Hope at the EPIM Forum II in Berlin

Different Kinds of Hope

For EPIM, twenty years in, the questions are strategic. How do we hold urgency without surrendering to it? How do we resist being defined by the speed of political cycles and instead invest in long-term change?

Our response is to slow down deliberately, to listen carefully, and to invest in hope with clarity.

Hope, in this context, is discipline and a practice. It is the refusal to allow fear to dictate our institutional design or resource allocation:

- **Hope for a world where migration is embraced** as part of our shared past, present, and future and where everyone can belong. A world where policies are no longer built on fears and othering, but on the possibility of a shared tomorrow.
- **Hope for migration governance systems** that uphold fundamental rights and are grounded in the lived experiences of migrants and those who support them.
- **Hope for a different kind of migration ecosystem:** one where relationships are built on trust and shared purpose, so we can rely on each other across identities, issues, job titles, and funding portfolios, to achieve it all.

This orientation shapes how we work. We see migration as a structural feature of European societies. Our task is therefore to build systems, labour markets, and public institutions that reflect dignity and shared futures. That requires sustained trust across civil society, cities, employers, and funders. It requires coordinated capital. And it requires spaces where strategy can be shaped beyond immediate headlines.

A Hope for Migration

Practicing Hope

Over the past year, this commitment has taken concrete form. For example, our partnership with the [Horizon project](#), an initiative of [Fonds de Dotation Grazie](#), has reimagined rural areas as spaces of shared futures for newcomers and long-time residents, linking migration to territorial renewal and economic resilience. Horizon seeks to breathe new life into areas affected by depopulation by revitalising vacant housing, reopening shops that struggle to find buyers, sustaining school classes at risk of closure, and restoring vibrancy to deserted town centres.

At the European level, as negotiations around the next Multiannual Financial Framework intensify, we are supporting collaborative advocacy led by [PICUM](#) to ensure that cohesion, fairness, and rights remain central to EU spending priorities. While the next budget could entrench harmful spending patterns, it also offers the opportunity to reimagine public funding in ways that strengthen social cohesion and advocate for a Europe that prioritises fairness and inclusion, reflecting the Europe we aspire to build.

With narratives of fear and exclusion filling the vacuum, we need to respond with visions, courage, and strategies that foster belonging and collective power. This presupposes spaces where diverse voices can come together to reimagine visions for migration, in philanthropy and beyond. Consequently, we are choosing to invest in relational infrastructure. In partnership with [Philea](#), we launched the [Migration and Belonging Network](#) to align foundations working across migration and adjacent fields. And together with [With Wings and Roots](#) and the [Democracy and Belonging Forum](#) at the [Othering and Belonging Institute](#), we launched [Belonging Beyond Borders](#) – a transnational network space for organisers, artists, policymakers, and funders to deepen collaboration and co-create narratives that reinforce belonging.



The Belonging Beyond Borders Convening in Cyprus, October 2025

A Future of Hope

This work is backed by financial commitment and action. The majority of EPIM's resources continue to flow directly to civil society organisations (CSOs) across Europe. Our clusters on Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), labour mobility and housing, and migration governance are structured as multi-year portfolios designed to shift leverage points rather than fund isolated projects. And internally, we strengthened our operational discipline through new Lead roles in Budget and Operations, Learning, Sensemaking, and CEE coordination, ensuring that ambition is matched by accountability and diversity.

Twenty years on, we understand that structural change unfolds over time. The work of building democratic, inclusive societies is incremental, relational, and at times contested. Yet it remains necessary.

In the pages that follow, we reflect on what we funded, what we learned, and how we are positioning EPIM for the years ahead. Our commitment remains clear: to align capital, relationships, and strategy in service of a Europe where belonging is institutional, durable, and shared. And with a hope-based future in mind, we will keep planting seeds, no matter how far away the harvest may seem.

SOPHIE NGO-DIEP AND
HRISHABH SANDILYA
CO-DIRECTORS

The Year in Figures

2025 in Figures

€2.1 M

spent, of which 74% were grants disbursed

€2.5 M

of new income confirmed in 2025

79

primary and secondary partners across 19 countries

32

grants during 2025, including 9 starting that year

Primary and Secondary Partners and Programmatic Areas

Clusters, Action Pillars and Thematic Funds	Number of Organisations
Building Inclusive Societies in CEE - Ukraine	38
Dignified Work and Housing	13
Migration Governance	13
Changing Perspectives and Narratives	5
Children on the Move (Ending Thematic Fund)	4
Strategic Communications (Ending Thematic Fund)	3
Intra-EU Mobility (Ending Thematic Fund)	2
Political Response, Opportunity and Innovation	1
Total	79

Grants by Clusters, Action Pillars and Thematic Funds

Clusters, Action Pillars and Thematic Funds	% of Grant Amounts
Building Inclusive Societies in CEE - Ukraine	40%
Migration Governance	18%
Strategic Communications (Ending Thematic Fund)	15%
Children on the Move (Ending Thematic Fund)	11%
Dignified Work and Housing	7%
Intra-EU Mobility (Ending Thematic Fund)	6%
Changing Perspectives and Narratives	2%
Political Response, Opportunity and Innovation	1%
Total	100

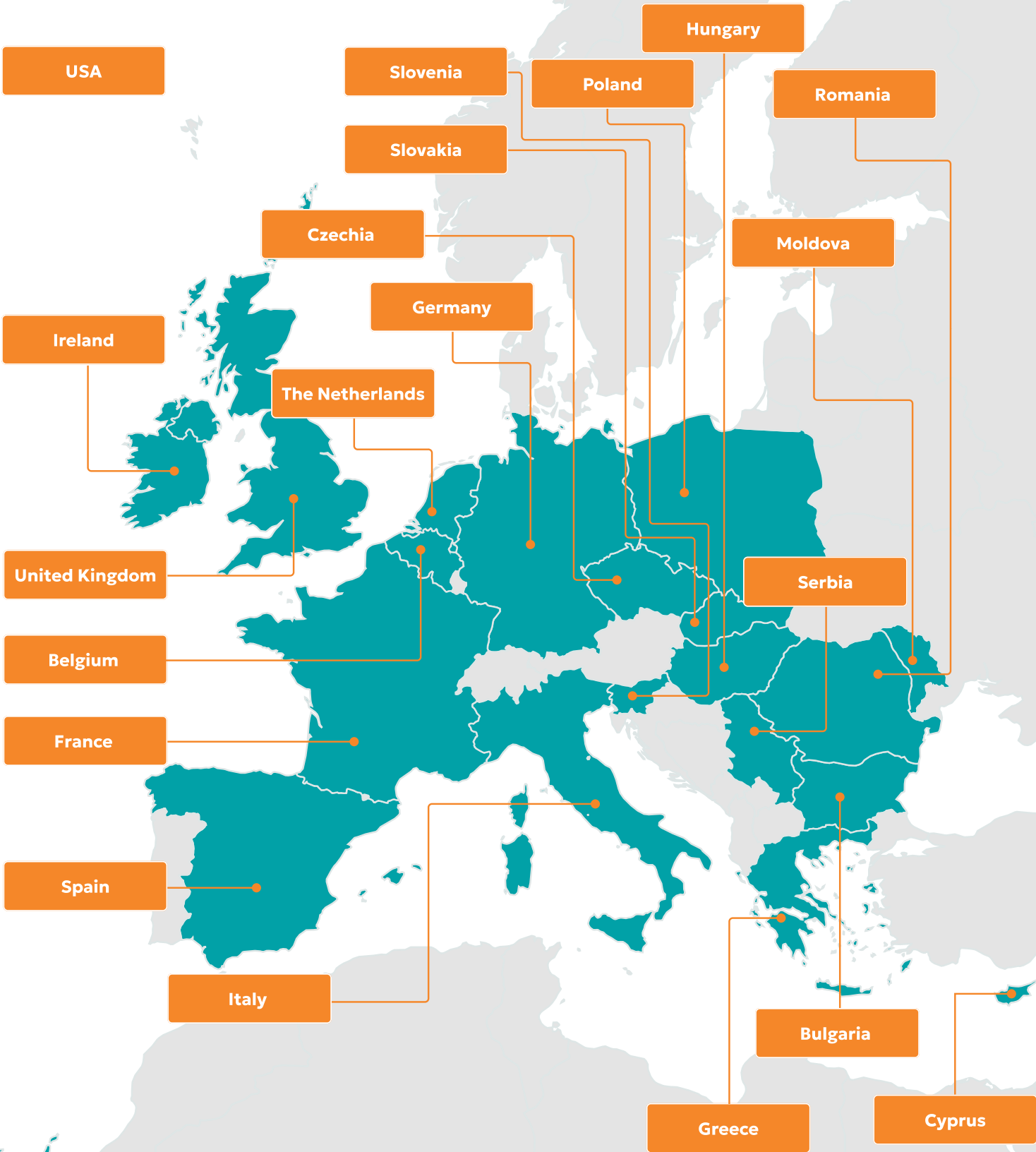
Partner Network and Projects

Project Description	Primary Partners	Country	Secondary Partners (Regrants, Coalition and Project Partners)	Country Secondary Partners
Strengthening free-movement rights by helping authorities and citizens apply EU rules and remove administrative barriers	European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)	Belgium/EU		
Demonstrating how protecting displaced persons' rights reinforces rule-of-law safeguards and democratic resilience	European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)	Belgium/EU		
Improving protections and support for destitute mobile EU citizens through advocacy, evidence, and training	European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)	Belgium/EU		
Supporting undocumented migrant youth transitioning into adulthood	Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)	Belgium/EU		
Developing community-based narratives to engage conflicted-middle voters on migration ahead of elections in Flanders	Flemish Refugee Action (VWV)	Belgium		
Strengthening migrant civic participation through peer support, grassroots organising, and links to public institutions in Prague	MigAct	Czech Republic		
Strengthening mental health support whilst embedding migrant-inclusive mental-health support within the Czech healthcare system	Agency for Migration and Adaptation (AMIGA)	Czech Republic	Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organisations MigAct National Association of Patient Organisations Prague City Administration Metropolitan Healthcare Service	Czech Republic
Creating dialogue spaces to improve services for migrants, strengthening civic space and national coordination in Czechia	Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organisations	Czech Republic	Association for Integration and Migration (SIMI) Caritas Czech Republic Inbáze Kalyna Kroky dobra META Most pro Multicultural Centre Prague (MKC) Nesehnuti Organisation for Aid to Refugees (OPU)	Czech Republic
Advancing collaborative migration governance with leadership support and cross-sector policy dialogue, for the Cyprus EU Presidency	Mediterranean Migration and Asylum Policy Hub (MedMA)	Cyprus		
Inclusive rural community spaces, housing and placebased collaboration	Fonds de Dotation Grazie	France		
Co-creating digital civic tools that enable migrants to participate in local governance	Place Network	France	European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) National Association for Welcoming Cities and Territories (ANVITA)	France
Strengthening protection and social inclusion for unaccompanied and undocumented minors	Utopia 56	France		
Documenting the use of artificial intelligence in border control to inform human-rights debates	Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN)	Germany	Blindspots No name Kitchen Infokolpa Collective Aid	Germany Spain Slovenia Serbia
Connecting research, migrant voices, and policymaking to support evidence-based governance	Migration Matters	Germany	German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM)	Germany
Improving refugee employability through skills development, job placement, and inclusive workplaces	Jobs4Refugees	Germany		

Partner Network and Projects

Launching the Building Belonging Beyond Borders Network and creating a framework for migration, democracy and belonging	With Wings and Roots	Germany	Othering and Belonging Institute Democracy & Belonging Forum	USA Germany
Supporting displaced young people through safe transitions, skills development, and amplifying their voices for inclusion	Velos Youth	Greece		
Advancing youth and refugee participation through civic education and dialogue with municipalities	Hungarian Helsinki Committee	Hungary	European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights	Belgium Poland
Providing housing and integration support for vulnerable people and refugee families	From Streets to Homes Association	Hungary	Taléta (Encounter for Life)	Hungary
Expanding coordinated support for displaced Ukrainian families across education, housing, and employment	Next Step	Hungary		
Promoting housing inclusion for young migrants through advocacy, research, and youth participation	Oxfam Italy	Italy	Agevolando Association	Italy
Strengthening migration narrative change efforts by building a national community of practice and coordinating a shared strategic campaign	CISV	Italy		
Retooling libraries as civic, learning, and intercultural hubs preparing communities for migration, demographic and economic change	Association Communities of the Future (ACV)	Romania & Moldova		
Narrative change for belonging by connecting migrant stories with nuanced, trust based exchange.	Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities Association (AIPG)	Romania	9Foundation Oral History Institute, Babeş-Bolyai University Together Community Development Agency Foundation	Romania
Expanding employment pathways, skills development, and labour-market inclusion for displaced people across Romania	Hands across Romania (HAR)	Romania	Bucharest General Directorate of Social Assistance Marriott Bucharest Grand Hotel Youth Pastry Shop	Romania
Ensuring a coordinated NGO consortium to strengthen advocacy, capacity building, and public engagement for migrant inclusion in Slovakia	Mareena	Slovakia	Centre for Research on Ethnicity and Culture Human Rights League Milan Šimečka Foundation People in Need Slovakia Slovak Catholic Charity Slovak Humanitarian Council	Slovakia
Supporting migrants' social and labour inclusion through language learning, digital skills, and guidance	Karibu Association	Spain	Laboratory for the Study of African Migration	Spain
Enhancing migrant education and labour inclusion through coordinated language training, policy advocacy, and digital literacy tools	Association Commission Training of the Language Coordinator (ACOF)	Spain	Camins Foundation Eicascantic Escola de Vida La Troca Permanent Community Training school	Spain
Strengthening migrant sex workers' safety and housing access by fostering multistakeholder dialogues and advancing inclusive local policy design	European Sex Workers Rights Alliance (ESWA-ICRSE)	The Netherlands	SAVE sex workers rights SWIPE Association Sex Workers Alliance Ireland (SWAI)	The Netherlands Italy Ireland
Fostering inclusive communities by combining creative practice with local organising to build participatory civic spaces	Polish Migrants Organise for Change (POMOC)	United Kingdom		
Shifting public perceptions of refugees through sport-based campaigns and narrative change strategies	IMIX	United Kingdom	Show Racism the Red Card Migrant Voice	United Kingdom

Partner Network and Projects



How EPIM Makes a Difference

In 2025, we celebrated EPIM's 20th anniversary and looked back on a journey that changed the ecosystem – and changed us. A key turning point came in 2022. We paused. We reflected. We asked hard questions about our purpose, impact, and direction. That introspection opened a door to reimagine EPIM beyond grantmaking, stepping into a catalytic role for systemic change, across four levers – areas with the power to create ripple effects across the migration ecosystem.



These levers became our Action Pillars: clear responses to structural challenges, the lenses through which we set thematic priorities and assess impact. They guide us in connecting migration to democracy and belonging and shape our ecosystem curation and collaborative grantmaking.

In the pages ahead, you'll find conversations with four of our partners, each driving change in a different action area. For the full arc of this collective impact journey, explore our 20th-anniversary publication:

Our Collective Journey toward Reimagining Migration, Democracy, and Belonging

BUILDING
BRIDGES &
STRENGTHENING
ECOSYSTEMS



Fostering relationships and trust to spark new connections and ways of relating to one another, creating a shared big picture, and a sense of collective purpose

Belonging through Place and Encounter

A Conversation with Chloé Freoa and Magalie D of Fonds de dotation Grazie



Since 2022, the Horizon Project has been working to breathe new life into rural communities by fostering meaningful encounters between long-time residents and newcomers with refugee backgrounds. Grounded in local realities and co-designed with community actors, the Horizon Project reimagines underused spaces – transforming them into homes, social hubs, and economic engines. From housing to cultural venues, each site becomes a node in a broader ecosystem of inclusion.

For Chloé Freoa, Director of Fonds de dotation Grazie and Magalie D, Coordinator of the Horizon Project, working in place begins with recognizing the human richness already present – and creating the conditions for trust, dialogue, and collective solutions to emerge. EPIM has supported the Horizon Project since 2022. See the French version [here](#).

Two years ago, we invited the Fonds de dotation Grazie to share early lessons from the Horizon Project’s work in Callac, amid a wave of far-right intimidation. At the time, you expressed a desire to build new partnerships with French municipalities. Where do things stand today?

Chloé: The decision to pause the Callac project in early 2023 was a turning point. In the face of intense media scrutiny, we chose not to retreat, but to reaffirm our commitment. With support from Vox Public, we took a hard look at the institutional dynamics and barriers we’d encountered and began again, this time on firmer ground.

We strengthened our team, especially on legal matters, and shifted our communication to focus more intentionally on local communities. This wasn’t about abstract intentions anymore, it was about concrete, costed, and grounded proposals. Through our network, including ANVITA, we connected with several municipalities. One commune stood out – its accessibility, political will, and welcoming local fabric made it a natural fit.

By January 2025, we had identified a former school building as the project’s anchor site. It already hosts educational and cultural activities and holds strong potential for expansion. Even without a formal agreement, a relationship of trust has taken root with the local government. We’ve hired a local coordinator to represent us, liaise with stakeholders, oversee renovations, and conduct a social needs assessment.

More recently, we began our sensemaking, meeting with key actors in housing, mobility, and health, with a specific focus on the needs and barriers faced by people in exile. Our goal is twofold: to strengthen existing efforts and identify what’s missing. This process raised important questions about governance. As a philanthropic fund, we’re often seen as distant financiers. To shift that perception, we created the Horizon Association with a shared governance model. And in parallel, we’re conducting a feasibility study, seeking funding, and exploring hybrid models that blend public and private capital.

Building Bridges and Strengthening Ecosystems

How have the lessons from Callac shaped your approach in this new community?

Chloé: Today, the Horizon Project has a local face – Magalie. She embodies the project on the ground. I now play a more strategic, supportive role, stepping back from day-to-day operations. That shift is significant: the real work is happening in place.

We've adopted a clear, pragmatic communication style for local actors, while remaining intentionally discreet with the broader public. The project is visible, but not geographically pinpointed. This discretion allows us to work deeply, without premature attention.

On the social side, we've launched small, locally rooted initiatives. These modest but tangible actions help the Horizon Project become part of the everyday fabric of the community. They build trust, spark connection, and position it as a legitimate local actor. It's about embedding ourselves gently, step by step, without disruption.

Magalie, you're trained in participatory leadership and skilled at creating spaces for collective intelligence. How do you apply these approaches in your work? How do they shape your relationships with stakeholders?

Magalie: For me, there's no other way to work than through collective intelligence. The people who live here are the real experts. My role is to create the conditions for their skills, knowledge, and agency to come alive.

Resistance always carries meaning. Even when it's not immediately clear, it's a signal. Ignoring it risks undermining the project. That's why I lead with active listening, so the project can adapt to local realities.

The arrival of a new actor inevitably shifts dynamics. It takes time and care for people to get to know us. I don't come with ready-made answers, but with a process. I offer a path and invite others to engage at their own pace and capacity. The long timeline we have is a gift. It allows everyone to recalibrate, to find their place. It's a human rhythm, and it can't be rushed. I'm also mindful of how a Paris-based structure might be perceived. That's why we rely on local expertise, acknowledge the fragility of grassroots organizations, and avoid disrupting what already works. It's our actions not our words that build trust.

We move with humility, without imposing objectives, and leave space for local actors to engage on their own terms. It's a delicate posture but essential for building something lasting, shared, and respectful.

Building Bridges and Strengthening Ecosystems

One of Horizon Project's goals is to renovate and repurpose a former school building for the benefit of the local community. It's an ambitious project—one that will require significant time and resources. What other concrete initiatives are you putting in place in the meantime? And what are your short-term hopes for the project?

Magalie: For us, the building is not the end goal, it's a means. A pretext, even. It's a vessel for building relationships. What matters most is creating spaces for encounter, exchange, openness, and mutual understanding. Every action we take is in service of that. We start from the ground up: what does the local landscape tell us? What kinds of actions can strengthen connections between actors? Many are stretched thin, some face real fragility, especially around coordination. The Horizon Project positions itself as a support structure – a lever to help deepen what already exists, without replacing it.

We also step in where there are gaps, especially around intercultural understanding. Education for interculturality is a key focus. Many organizations are welcoming people in exile without being fully prepared. There's a real need for training, for awareness-building.

Our approach is one of small steps. We try to bring people closer together, to weave a network of relationships through simple actions: a walk to explore the area, a shared cup of tea. These gestures may seem modest, but they're powerful. They create bonds between two, maybe three people. And it's through lived experience that the work of interculturality takes root. What we prioritize is storytelling. We share; we listen. And very quickly, we enter into the personal. That's where transformation happens. That's where trust begins.



Site of Renewal (Image Credit: Fonds de Dotation Grazie)



Convening the ecosystem to cultivate shared narratives and structures of belonging, ultimately **strengthening democratic resilience**

Building Narrative Change:

A Conversation with Gabriela Ghindea at the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities.

Gabriela Ghindea has spent many years working at the intersection of atrocity prevention, memory cultures, civic education, and narrative change. She is currently Director of Mediterranean Basin Programs at the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities (AIPG), where she coordinated 'Life Stories, Not Numbers', which EPIM supported from 2023 to 2025.

Through this project, AIPG and its partners worked with migrants in Romania to bring their personal stories into conversation with wider societal debates around healthcare, education, and access to the labour market. At a time of growing social polarisation and declining trust in institutions, the initiative set out to strengthen democratic resilience by reframing migration as a shared experience rather than a divisive issue. In this conversation, she shares reflections from that work and what she has learned about building trust-based narrative change in polarised societies.

How are people in Romania talking about migration today?

For a long time, there was no real public debate on migration in Romania. Security-focused narratives were largely imported from Western Europe, particularly after the arrival of refugees in 2014 and 2015. At the same time, there was genuine openness towards migrants among the so-called "movable middle", people who had not yet formed a firm opinion about the phenomenon. For instance, a 2023 poll found that 68% of Romanians saw migration as an economic opportunity, a view shaped by Romania's own history as a country of emigration. Migration was talked about, but the topic wasn't deeply politicised.



That changed dramatically in 2025. A prolonged electoral crisis, declining trust in institutions, and growing social anxiety created fertile ground for polarising, anti-system narratives. Migration re-entered the public conversation through fear-based frames, amplified by social media, and became an easy outlet for much broader frustrations.

In a very short time, this work has gone from feeling exploratory to feeling urgent and directly relevant for how we shape our society in the years to come. The pace of change in public debate and political discourse makes it clear why narrative work matters – as a proactive way to strengthen social cohesion and start rebuilding trust between state institutions and civil society.

What did the “Life Stories, Not Numbers” project do to shift narratives from polarisation towards common ground?

Before answering your question, let me share a short story that inspired this project. It is about an encounter that strengthened our conviction that narrative change is both possible and necessary to drive change on the ground. For some time now, AIPG has been collaborating with a training school of the Romanian border police. We deliver customized trainings for border police agents there, share migrants' stories, and discuss how respect for migrants' basic rights and mitigating risk factors for identity-based violence are an integral part of strengthening democratic resilience.

Changing Perspectives and Narratives

Six months after one of these trainings, I was travelling through the Bucharest airport. Out of thousands of faces, a border police officer picked me out and asked me politely to step aside. He said, “I do not know if you recognise me, but in March you came to our school and told us that human rights and our humanity are tested at the border. I want to tell you that I have not forgotten this.” Since then, we have received similar feedback from other participants – border police officers and law enforcement personnel, confirming that this work on narrative change, and the focus on migrants’ individual stories, really does make a difference at the borders themselves and in the communities these people are received.

So, in the ‘Life Stories, Not Numbers’ project we started with a simple question: “What moves someone facing hardship and their own challenges, to show empathy toward a stranger?” We firmly believe that moving the focus from personal differences towards overcoming common challenges can make a big difference. AIPG collaborated with oral history experts and journalists to create well-documented life-story portraits showcasing honest, personalised stories that connect migration to wider societal challenges affecting everyone. The aim was neither to overplay positive nor negative aspects of migration, but to de-dramatize it. To recognize that migration is embedded in broader societal issues and to open space for candid dialogue around shared structural problems.



AIPG at Border Police Trainings (Image Credit: AIPG)

A good example is the portrait of a highly qualified Indian doctor, trained to the same standards as his Romanian colleagues, who is nevertheless barred from working and being paid as a resident doctor because he comes from outside the EU. This story allows audiences to move beyond “migration” as an abstract issue and to reflect on very concrete questions: Romania’s acute shortage of medical staff due to emigration, the fear people have when their loved ones are treated in understaffed hospitals, and the institutional barriers that prevent competent professionals from contributing where they are most needed.

AIPG has longstanding experience in building trust, facilitating dialogue, and building coalitions including among actors who do not typically engage with one another. How is trust-building relevant to your work on narrative change?

Building narrative change is a long-term, holistic process. It is not enough to put together a professionally designed media campaign with posters, videos and hashtags on social media platforms. It doesn’t work. It needs a combined effort of stories that speak to specific audiences and of building trust between sometimes unusual allies. In Romania, there are longstanding structural gaps between public institutions and civil society actors, which can limit trust and regular interaction. Even in areas of shared concern, engagement often takes place in parallel rather than jointly.

Changing Perspectives and Narratives

However, meaningful narrative change requires broad-based support to introduce new perspectives and sustain them over time. That's why we invested a lot in trust and coalition-building. We brought together state institutions, civil society organisations, local NGOs, migrants and refugee-led organisations, research centres, and international actors in structured dialogues, training sessions, and consultation workshops. This combination of authentic storytelling and relational work shows that narrative change is possible, even in a sensitive and polarized environment, when it is rooted in lived experience and relationships of trust across actors and sectors.

AIPG is part of EPIM's CEE Network for Migration and Inclusion. What difference has this made to your own work in the region?

Being part of EPIM's Central and Eastern Europe Migration and Inclusion Network strongly reinforced my conviction that building a network in Romania around narrative change is the right way to go. What we are trying to develop is a coalition that brings together NGOs that do not necessarily label themselves as "migration organisations," but work with vulnerable groups more broadly, alongside smaller organisations that usually are never invited to these kinds of workshops, despite doing very strong field-based work. Just as important, the network will bring these civil society actors into direct dialogue with state institutions. Not just at a symbolic level, but, more importantly, at a working level, where relationships actually matter in times of crisis, when you need people who answer your emails, pick up the phone, and can sit together and think through difficult issues affecting border communities and society more broadly. That is something we can see works well in the CEE network, this focus on building communities of practice.

What truly inspires me about EPIM's approach, and what has shaped the way I think about this work, is that EPIM is not the type of grantor who speaks in clichés, instead it is interested in learning processes. At times, conversations with donors focus primarily on scaling up initiatives. While growth is important, my priority is often to consolidate and sustain small but meaningful victories. Bringing together 15 to 20 different stakeholders, considering who they are, the histories and tensions they carry, the different professional and personal backgrounds, and the effort required to build trust and mutual respect, is significant. When such groups choose to return and continue cooperating, that in itself represents a real and valuable success. EPIM understands that narrative change is not about flashy campaigns, but about trust-building and long-term engagement. I was also deeply encouraged by EPIM's framing, focusing on migration not as an isolated topic, but on democratic resilience, community building, and belonging. That perspective has reinforced my belief that migration must be embedded in wider societal conversations, and that investing in trust, dialogue, and shared understanding is the core of meaningful change.



AIPG shifting narratives around borders and migration (Image Credit: AIPG)



Grounding decisions and strategies in the diverse realities of migrants' lives and enhancing their **role and influence** across the migration ecosystem

Reimagining Local Governance:

How Lived Experience Strengthens Democratic Resilience. A Conversation with Shawgi Omer Nawai from PLACE



As a migrant-led organisation, PLACE works to accelerate and leverage the innovation that newcomers bring to Europe. Selected for EPIM's Migration Governance Cohort in 2025, their work contributes to translating insights from EPIM's Systems Map of European Migration Governance into impact across European cities. Shawgi Omer Nawai, PLACE's Managing Director, shares how the organisation brings migrant lived experience into local governance – creating practical links between migration and democracy to strengthen democratic resilience and inclusion.

What challenges do European municipalities face when it comes to inclusive participatory governance?

We see a pattern across many French cities and in Europe more broadly: political participation is still the weakest link in building inclusive societies. People with migrant stories have limited chances to inform or influence the policies shaping their daily lives. Many newcomers feel disconnected from civic spaces and unclear about their rights, while municipalities are under pressure to “deliver inclusion” without the tools, community cooperation partners, or on the ground expertise to create lasting impact. To make matters worse, conversations about migrants are still too often led by people who aren't migrants, and migrant-led organizations remain under-represented at local, national, and European levels.

How do you plan to tackle these challenges?

Our vision is to flip that script by bringing migrant voices directly into participatory governance. This way, we are actively creating those links between migration and democracy that should be groundwork for inclusive societies but are often missing in practice.

That means building easy access between local authorities and inhabitants with migration experience, co-defining priorities, and co-producing solutions that move from treating migration as a stand-alone issue to embedding it across core city agendas like healthcare, education, and employment. Trust is the hinge. City staff learn to value community expertise, and at the same time people who may come from contexts where relations between civil society and public institutions are fraught learn how to work with local authorities. As we say in Arabic, you can't clap with one hand. And bringing both hands together starts with trust. This approach broadens who gets to decide, strengthens legitimacy, counters exclusionary polarization, and builds democratic resilience from the bottom up, starting in cities.



PLACE Co-creating City Governance (Image Credit: Place)

Centring Lived Experience

Can you share further about the impact you hope to achieve by creating practical links between migration and democracy?

Sure, let me start with what this looks like in our Migrant Engage project, and then zoom out to the wider impact we're aiming for when we link migration and democracy in practical ways.

At the core, we're building a sustainable, hybrid infrastructure that makes real participation possible. That means a multilingual digital platform co-designed with the people who will use it: migrants, municipal staff, and other urban actors. It's meant to be a shared tool, something cities can rely on to make their governance more inclusive and more responsive.

We're developing this in close collaboration with migrant communities and organisations, and importantly, with city networks. Their involvement ensures the platform reflects real local needs and realities, not abstract assumptions. These partnerships also give us access to cities that are already innovating in participatory governance, which helps us test the platform properly, build long-term relationships, and set things up in a way that can be scaled and adapted beyond France.

But the reason this matters goes beyond the tool itself. The disconnect we often see between migrants and local authorities points to a broader democratic gap – one that affects many communities, not just newcomers. By creating a digital space that's multilingual, accessible, and collectively shaped, we're inviting people into a different kind of civic relationship. So yes, it will help improve services. But more importantly, it helps rebuild trust, restore agency, and show that governance can be something done with communities, rather than for them. And that's where the wider democratic impact comes in: when lived experience shapes local decision-making, cities become more legitimate, more resilient, and ultimately better at serving everyone who lives in them.



PLACE opening co-creation spaces for community building (Image Credit: Place)

What inspiration are you drawing for your work on centring lived experience from your own experience of leading PLACE?

Leading PLACE with a team that spans eight nationalities, four continents, and 14 languages keeps me grounded in what "lived experience" really means. It's our engine and our quality check. It's an asset because we know, from first-hand experience, what meaningful participation and leadership look like in practice, not just on paper. That shared commitment shapes how we build: co-design over consultation, practical tools over abstract frameworks, and real accountability to the communities we're part of.

At the same time, we're honest about the barriers. Organizations led by people of colour face gatekeeping in Europe – names, accents, expectations – so fewer doors open at times. Our response isn't to step back; it's to broaden our alliances, train leaders with lived experience, and keep making the case, knowing change takes time. Our goal for PLACE is clear: be a reliable reference for migration governance, newcomer leadership, and migrant-led innovation. The biggest inspiration we draw from our own experience for the "Migrant Engage" project is shifting the conversation from integration to belonging. Belonging, for us, is a force that reshapes institutions and cities, it reflects how societies choose to respond to change: with solidarity and imagination rather than fear. That's why centring lived experience is not only about meaningful participation; it's what allows local governance to become more inclusive, more participatory, and more resilient by design.



Rethinking resource flows
and origins and co-creating
collaborative funding
approaches around
a shared purpose

From Black Box to Purpose:

Reimagining EU Funding as a Tool for Inclusive Societies. A Conversation with Anaïs Faure Atger and Chiara Catelli of PICUM



As a network of organisations, *PICUM* advances social justice and human rights for undocumented migrants. Since 2018, EPIM has supported *PICUM*'s cross-sector coalition-building to reimagine EU funding as a tool for inclusion and rights. In this conversation, *Anaïs Faure Atger* (Deputy Director) and *Chiara Catelli* (Advocacy and Project Officer) share how collective action and pooled intelligence turn a technical black box into practical entry points for civil society to shape budget negotiations, implementation and monitoring, and to reopen space for more inclusive societies.

What has made your cross-sectoral engagement on the EU budget – beyond traditional advocacy – so critical in recent years?

Chiara: We chose a collaborative approach because the ground has shifted and keeps shifting. The EU budget debate has grown more hostile, not only to migration, but to social and inclusive policies more broadly. We're seeing proposals that channel more money into border management and deterrence, while support for inclusion shrinks. At the same time, NGOs are increasingly questioned as legitimate partners, and the EU budget negotiations happen often behind closed doors and appear very far away to civil society organisations doing the work of supporting inclusive communities on the ground.

Anaïs: So, we're joining forces beyond the migration field, working with partners on children's rights, disability, anti-poverty, and human rights, to keep the EU's social dimension at the centre of budget negotiations around migration, inclusion, and social affairs. Influencing the EU budget is not a short-term exercise, we have to think long-term, across entire budget cycles and levels of governance.

At the same time, the overall goal is very practical: It is about orienting EU funding toward inclusive policies, ensuring the budget supports human rights and helps making Europe a place where everyone feels they belong.

Your approach is centred around building cross-sectoral alliances, sourcing shared intelligence, and developing collective messaging. Can you explain how this combination makes a difference in shaping EU budget negotiations and in how funding is ultimately used on the ground?

Chiara: In short, alliance building gives us reach, shared intelligence keeps us accurate and timely, and collective messaging helps steer funding towards inclusion. The EU budget is huge and complex, touching actors at EU, national, regional, and local levels. That's why we work through cross-sector alliances to stay engaged across the whole budget cycle – proposal, negotiation, implementation, monitoring – so we know when and how to weigh in. In Brussels, we work with the Social Platform, a coalition of civil society coalitions, to bring perspective around migration and displacement into joint statements and briefings.

Reimagining Funding

Ahead of the latest EU budget cycle we also joined an informal group that brings together actors such as ActionAid, ECRE, and the Danish Refugee Council monthly to compare reads of the EU budget proposal, build a shared analysis and map leverage points. That gives us a 360° view and a common line – exactly what’s needed to keep inclusion and rights on the table.

Anais: The same approach changes how funding is used on the ground. We monitor and analyse the EU budget proposals, translate them into plain language, and equip our civil society members, who have very different capacities, with practical information, plus support to track the agenda and to identify national or even local points of influence. We also maintain regular exchanges with migrant-led organisations such as Voicify, aligning messages and keeping funding accessibility front and centre.

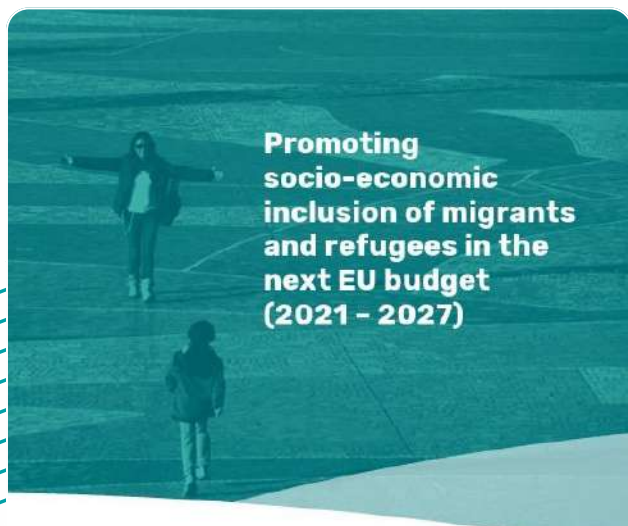
Can you share some concrete examples how you create entry points for civil society actors to influence EU funding discussion and monitoring?

Chiara: We create entry points by making a very technical file feel workable. A concrete example is conditionality, so making sure EU funds comply with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. When there were legislative changes for the current Multi-Annual Financial Framework, so the current EU budget, we sat down and asked: what exactly shifted, and where are the hooks for rights compliance? That was a shared priority between ECRE and PICUM, and it led to a policy paper that landed well with our members, including migrant-led organisations. It also broadened who gets involved: it’s not only about accessing EU funds; it’s about ensuring EU-funded actions respect rights, even if you never apply for a grant.



Conference on reframing EU Funding (Image Credit: PICUM)

Anais: On paper, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund now invites migrant-led organisations to join the national monitoring committees that review how EU budget is spent, which is a big win. I'll be honest, though: implementation is uneven. Joining a committee takes time, staff and resources, and for many groups it competes with more immediate priorities. But we take it a step at a time. In Hungary, Spain and Greece some of our members have joined national monitoring committees, and we support them to make that participation meaningful, even when it's hard. There is some good practice, that we like to share from Spain: there, organisations formed a coalition, agreed that one actor with a bit more capacity would apply for the seat, and the wider ecosystem now feeds that seat with analysis and inputs, so the workload and influence are shared. And finally, we also invite migrant-led organisations to speak openly when they have no EU funding experience, because explaining why access feels out of reach is the first step to fixing it. And we keep reminding everyone: this is your money and mandate, too. Entry points aren't only in Brussels, you can work through national authorities implementing the EU programmes or your MEP if you bring clear, grounded evidence and work with others to make it possible to cover the full cycle from negotiation to monitoring.



PICUM ECRE Policy Paper (Image Credit: PICUM and ECRE)

You mentioned that EU budget debates are shifting focus from inclusion towards securitization. What role do narratives play in your work on reimagining EU funding?

Anais: At PICUM, we have a lot of experience engaging with narratives around social justice and human rights for undocumented migrants. But for our work on the EU budget, we initially put most of our energy into the technical aspects – tracking changes, briefing members, making sure everyone knew what was at stake. When we saw that the EU budget is being more and more instrumentalised, we've made narrative change a top priority: when the story is about dignity, rights and community well-being, there's political space for investments that improve access to rights and services; when the story is fear, "crisis" and deterrence, funding shifts to border management and securitisation. Bringing the rights and community lens into every brief and conversation is already changing what's discussable: it keeps inclusion on the table, widens who feels invited into the debate, and helps decision-makers at EU, national and local levels see funding as a tool to strengthen the social fabric. We're realistic about the headwinds, but we're encouraged by how a consistent, rights-centred frame can reopen spaces for building inclusive societies.

Key Developments

Across EPIM

Building Inclusive Societies in CEE (BISC) Cluster

EPIM's work in CEE in 2025 focused on a continued implementation of our long-term strategy. Partners concentrated on embedding inclusive practices in institutions, public spaces, and civic life across the region. This work took place amid rising political pressure on civil society and increasingly hostile public discourse on migration. Our priority was to strengthen the relationships, capacities, and structures that allow inclusion to endure beyond political cycles.

Nineteen partner organisations worked across Czechia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, with activities extending into Moldova. Their work addressed three core areas: shifting public understanding of migration, strengthening migrant participation in civic life, and building networks capable of sustaining cooperation across sectors and borders.

Levers of Narrative Change

In Romania, AIPG brought experiences from border communities into national policy conversations, challenging abstract portrayals of migration with grounded local realities. Public debate shifted from distant crisis framing toward concrete social and economic conditions in specific regions.

Communities of the Future Association worked in Romania and Moldova to reposition libraries as civic spaces for inclusion. Librarians hosted dialogue programmes, cultural activities, and practical support for newcomers, turning familiar public institutions into places where residents and migrants meet, interact, and build shared understanding.

In Hungary, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee created structured engagement between refugee, migrant, and Hungarian teenagers and local schools and authorities. These sustained encounters built familiarity and reduced social distance, demonstrating inclusion as an ongoing social process rather than a policy outcome.

Migrant Leadership and Civic Engagement

Migrant leadership strengthened across civil society and public institutions. In Prague, MigAct worked directly with the city administration to expand migrant participation in local decision-making. Migrants moved from consultation to active civic engagement.

AMIGA worked with healthcare providers and municipal authorities to improve access to services. Migrant and refugee intercultural workers, mental health professionals, and medical practitioners jointly redesigned communication and service pathways. Providers adapted practice to real needs instead of administrative assumptions.

Within the Czech Migration Consortium, established organisations mentored newer migrant-led groups. Partners shared knowledge, built organisational capacity, and redistributed leadership across the network.

Networks and Broader Collaborations

The CEE Network for Migration and Inclusion brought civil society organisations, municipal representatives, and philanthropic actors together in Bucharest in May to plan joint responses to political pressure, strengthen cooperation with cities, and expand pathways to employment and entrepreneurship, deepening regional coordination.

At the national level coordination also advanced. The Czech Migration Consortium expanded work with local authorities beyond Prague. In Slovakia, Mareena strengthened an advocacy-focused civil society network. In Romania, partners began building a national inclusion network.

And across the region, institutions, civil society organisations, and migrant-led groups worked together more consistently. Local authorities were engaged more directly in Slovakia, meaning that in a restrictive political environment, partners focused on building systems and relationships that sustain inclusion over time.

Key Developments

Across EPIM

New Cluster Committee

As of Fall 2025, a new committee made up of [Lisa Veyhl](#) of the [Robert Bosch Stiftung](#), [Brigitte Stevkovski](#) from [Porticus](#), [Nataliya Novakova](#) from the [Civil Society Forum](#), and [Ivan Blazevic](#), [Solidarna/ the European Fund for the Balkans](#), was appointed to support the Cluster strategy and grantmaking.



Members of the CEE Network for Migration and Inclusion in Bucharest

Shaping European Migration Governance Cluster

Moving from Sensemaking to Strategic Implementation

In 2025, the Migration Governance cluster moved from analysis to action. After completing Europe's first [systems map of migration governance](#) in 2024, partners began using that analysis to guide funding and intervention. The focus shifted from understanding how the system works to changing how it operates in practice. Support targeted organisations testing alternative governance approaches and intervening where decisions, procedures, and institutional behaviour can shift.

Reimagining Governance Processes

Work in 2025 focused on governance processes themselves. Many migration systems rely on control, administrative complexity, and security-driven logic. Partners identified where these processes produce exclusion and where they can be redesigned.

Civil society organisations tested governance approaches grounded in lived experience, institutional responsiveness, and cross-actor cooperation. They worked to change how decisions are made, how policies are implemented, and how authorities engage with migrants and communities. This included testing collaborative governance models, building trust between institutions and affected populations, and introducing practical alternatives to rigid administrative procedures.

The aim ultimately, was operational change: shifting how migration governance functions in practice.

Reconfiguring the Cluster Committee

The cluster also changed how it makes strategic decisions. A newly configured committee now includes both foundation and non-foundation members, reflecting the broader composition of the EPIM Forum and Executive Council. Funders, practitioners, and ecosystem actors now share decision-making space.

This structure reshaped how priorities are set and how partners are selected. The committee introduced a criteria-driven process to identify organisations positioned to influence governance practice and capable of producing systemic effects. Strategic decisions now focus on interventions that shift institutional behaviour rather than fund isolated projects.

Key Developments

Across EPIM

Implementing Strategic Evolution in Grantmaking

The grant portfolio shifted to match the strategy. Funding now targets how migration governance works, not just the problems it produces. The cluster prioritised initiatives that intervene at structural pressure points, challenge institutional routines that drive exclusion, and test alternative ways of organising decisions and implementation. The focus moved from treating symptoms to changing the conditions that create them.

Partner Spotlights

➔ MigrantEngage: A Digital Path to Policy Influence — PLACE Network

MigrantEngage addresses migrants' exclusion from local governance by building direct participation into municipal decision-making. The initiative works with communities and local authorities to co-create policy processes that reflect lived experience. It combines multilingual digital participation tools with capacity-building for municipal staff and structured peer learning between cities. This approach strengthens institutional responsiveness while positioning municipalities as active drivers of inclusive governance.

➔ Enhancing Migration Governance in Cyprus — Mediterranean Migration and Asylum Policy Hub (MedMA)

MedMA works to develop a more coherent and rights-grounded migration governance model in Cyprus, with relevance beyond the national level. The initiative supports civil society coordination, strengthens institutional capacity, and helps national authorities prepare for Cyprus' 2026 EU Council Presidency. By doing so, it brings Mediterranean policy perspectives more directly into EU decision-making and supports practical governance approaches shaped by regional realities.

Looking Ahead: 2026 and Beyond

Additional partners will begin implementation in 2026. Together, these initiatives translate systems insight into practical intervention. While they operate across different contexts and use different methods, they share a clear focus: changing how migration governance works in practice. This includes reshaping decision-making processes, improving access to administrative systems, testing alternatives to securitisation-driven approaches, and grounding policy in lived experience.



PLACE Workshop (Image Credit: PLACE)

Key Developments

Across EPIM

Dignified Work and Housing Cluster

In 2025, the Dignified Work & Housing cluster launched a new initiative on holistic migration pathways. The work builds on the Migration Governance Systems Map, which identified labour mobility as one of the few areas where migration policy continues to move forward in practice. Governments, employers, and public services already engage with labour migration. This makes it a practical entry point for improving how migration works on the ground.

The initiative focuses on linking employment with housing, public services, and long-term inclusion. Many labour mobility programmes still treat recruitment and settlement as separate processes. This work aims to support pathways that connect them from the start.

During 2025, the focus was exploratory and preparatory. Partners helped us map the labour mobility field, clarified where change is possible, and identified actors positioned to influence how labour mobility operates in practice, how responsibilities are divided, and where coordination breaks down.

Early analysis showed strong activity but fragmented implementation, with recruitment often planned separately from long-term settlement and social participation, establishing the analytical and relational foundations for multi-year work.

The next phase combines structured convening, targeted grantmaking, and forward-looking scenario work. A major convening in June 2026 will bring key actors together to review emerging system dynamics and align priorities. Grantmaking will focus on organisations working at identified leverage points, particularly those linking labour mobility to housing, services, and long-term inclusion. The objective is practical: to support labour mobility pathways that function as integrated systems rather than disconnected programmes. Over time, this work aims to establish holistic pathways as a normal and durable feature of how European societies organise work, settlement, and belonging.



Session on Labour Mobility at the 2025 EPIM Forum

Key Developments

Across EPIM

The Action Pillars

Building Bridges and Ecosystems

In collaboration with With Wings and Roots and the Democracy and Belonging Forum, EPIM co-founded the Belonging Beyond Borders Network which convened in Cyprus in October. The convening brought together a small group of organisers, funders, civic and cultural leaders to co-design the network's direction. The meeting focused on building trust, clarifying shared principles, and shaping a transnational approach to migration grounded in belonging rather than control. Participants explored how narratives, power structures, and political responses to migration intersect across regions and movements. The gathering marked the start of a longer-term effort to build relational infrastructure, align strategies across borders, and develop coordinated responses.

Changing Narratives

In 2025, design work began on a second Community of Practice (CoP) on narrative change exploring labour mobility and popular culture as strategic entry points. Preparation focused on identifying how labour systems shape public meaning and how cultural circulation amplifies or distorts those realities. The CoP to be led by [Sophia Burton](#) of [Migration Matters](#) is being structured as a facilitated working space bringing together actors across labour, culture, policy, and philanthropy to examine how material conditions and narrative formation interact. The CoP will run through 2026 with an in-person convening in 2027.



Belonging Beyond Borders Network convening in Cyprus



Velos Youth activity (Image Credit: Velos Youth)

Centring Lived Experience

In addition to supporting the PLACE network and MigAct (mentioned previously), EPIM continued its support of [Velos Youth](#) with a transition grant to consolidate organisational capacities and to support them in identifying ways to continue pursuing its vision and goals. In addition, EPIM has provided a grant to the Starting New Coalition, via SINGA Global. Rooted in the lived experiences of migrant members who take an active part in their work, the coalition is working to reframe newcomer entrepreneurship as a cornerstone of Europe's economic strategy, rather than treating it solely as a social integration tool.

Reimagining Funding

In addition to its long-term support of PICUM and ECRE to rethink EU funding (mentioned previously), EPIM and [Philea](#), launched the [Migration and Belonging Network](#) – a light-touch, practice-informed community for European foundations, building on the legacy of the DMI network and aligning efforts to reimagine migration philanthropy.

Key Developments

Across EPIM

Learning

EPIM's ambition to drive systemic change across the migration ecosystem is anchored in our Impact & Learning Framework. This backbone helps us recognise early signals, trace impact, and turn learning into action – strengthening relationships, guiding ecosystem curation, and refining collaborative grantmaking. As systems change moves through relationships, the framework is EPIM-led and collectively held. Sensemaking happens across the EPIM Forum, Executive Council, Cluster Committees, the CEE Network, the Migration and Belonging Network, and in ongoing conversations with our partners. Based on EPIM's four Action Pillars – building bridges and strengthening ecosystems; changing narratives and perspectives; centring lived experience; reimagining funding – the framework focuses on surfacing and connecting practical ways to create impact across the migration ecosystem.

In 2025, we worked across EPIM's learning spaces to understand what works, what does not, and what we should do more of. Together, we explored how to form unusual alliances amid shrinking civic space and rising polarisation; what it takes to reimagine funding for inclusive societies; how to shift funding power, and where fresh entry points lie when narrative battles feel stalled. Using ripple-effect mapping, we traced direct and indirect effects across the ecosystem. More importantly, we surfaced shared patterns and practical strategies to create ripples – not merely document them – so that learning translates into coordinated action.

To carry this momentum forward, in 2026 we are designing impact indicators, an impact-story framework, and an EPIM impact toolbox to track both early signals and longer-term effects across the migration ecosystem. These tools will support shared interpretation, inform convening and grantmaking decisions, and help us and our partners turn collective wisdom into change.



Ripple-Effect Mapping at the EPIM Forum 2025

The EPIM Forum

By Sophie Ngo-Diep and
Janina Stürner-Siovit

In 2025, the Forum completed its first full year of activity. This period provided the first real opportunity to observe how the space functioned in practice, how participants engaged with one another, and how the Forum progressed toward its intended purpose. The year revealed both momentum and friction, and it clarified what it takes to build a shared space across diverse actors, experiences, and expectations.

EPIM Forum – Year One: Between Vision and Practice

The Forum began with ambitious objectives. Participants sought to strengthen connections across the migration ecosystem, shape shared narratives around democracy and belonging, and generate effects that extend beyond individual gatherings. Members entered the space with different expectations, levels of familiarity with EPIM, and forms of engagement with migration work. Some participants brought long-standing relationships within the EPIM community, while others joined for the first time. This diversity broadened perspective and enriched exchange, yet it also required time to establish shared language, expectations, and working rhythms.

Forum I in November 2024 surprised us. It prioritised trust-building over thematic discussion. Participants shared experiences openly, yet this approach also revealed the distance and tension between conceptual framing and daily practice for some members. Participants generated positive energy, but the limited time restricted deeper engagement with each other's work and perspectives.

The in-between was harder. 2025 Spring and Autumn calls, and monthly drop-ins, kept the thread alive but the relationships stayed fragile. These interactions preserved continuity, yet relationships developed gradually. Online spaces, even interactive ones, carry an awkwardness, and participants navigated competing demands on time and attention. Community care sessions provided space for reflection and emotional support, which members valued.

Yet many participants experienced the Forum as driven by the EPIM team rather than collectively directed. While members demonstrated a readiness to speak openly, especially in smaller, trust-based settings, building that openness into a durable community rhythm — one grounded in mutual accountability rather than dependence on EPIM as conveners, was still elusive as Forum II convened in Berlin in November 2025.

Forum II: Listening and Adjusting Course

Forum II responded directly to what participants expressed during the first year. Members asked for more time to understand each other's work and to draw on collective knowledge grounded in lived experience. The programme therefore prioritised structured opportunities for exchange, reflection, and joint problem-solving.

The Forum opened with members examining the contexts in which they worked and the pressures shaping their daily decisions. They analysed what enabled progress and what limited impact in practice. Participants exchanged strategies, tested ideas, and worked through concrete challenges together. In doing so, they clarified who could offer strategic insight, technical expertise, or solidarity across contexts. New connections emerged across fields including litigation, community care, arts practice, and technology-enabled legal support. These discussions anchored the Forum in operational reality and created clear pathways for collaboration beyond the gathering.



Collective Wisdom Labs in Action at the Forum II

The EPIM Forum

Growing Connection

Members also expressed an interest in extending these connections into practical cooperation. In response, EPIM introduced flexible connector grants to support joint work across sectors and countries. These grants will enable members to translate relationships formed in the Forum into collaborative activity.

Forum II also created space to address the political and emotional pressures participants faced. Members worked in contexts marked by shrinking civic space, polarised public discourse, and institutional uncertainty. Small-group sessions allowed participants to articulate these pressures openly and to recognise shared strain across contexts. Participants described these conversations as essential for restoring clarity, strengthening solidarity, and renewing motivation.

Sharing without Solutions

Many Forum members work in environments marked by shrinking civic space, rising populist politics, and narratives that frame migration as a threat. These pressures shape their daily work and weigh on people personally, generating fatigue and uncertainty. As a space grounded in hope, the Forum confronted a practical question: how to acknowledge these realities without allowing them to dominate the space.

The programme addressed this by creating a structured opportunity for participants to voice concerns without the expectation of solutions. In small groups, members — some long connected, others newly acquainted — took part in a ‘get it off your chest’ session and spoke openly about the pressures they faced. Participants described this hour as one of the most meaningful moments of the Forum, as it allowed them to release accumulated strain, regain clarity, and reconnect with a shared sense of purpose and renewed energy.

Sharing, Laughing, Singing: Becoming a Community

That renewed energy carried into the collective wisdom labs and joint learning sessions and culminated in EPIM’s 20th anniversary celebration at the close of the Forum. Forum members gathered with long-standing civil society and foundation partners, along with actors from Berlin’s local migration ecosystem, to mark two decades of EPIM’s work. The occasion provided a natural moment to conclude Forum II while reinforcing the relationships that had formed throughout the programme. Participants shared food and conversation, and the formal setting of the Robert Bosch Stiftung’s atrium gave way to informal interaction, including karaoke and dancing. The evening reflected a shift from structured exchange toward genuine community.



The EPIM Forum as a Learning Space

The EPIM Forum

To Summarise

The Forum relied on open and direct conversations about what worked, what created friction, and what required change. Members spoke candidly and addressed tensions as they arose rather than leaving them unresolved. This approach required the EPIM team to reflect back what they observed, including discomfort and disagreement, and to treat these observations as starting points for collective discussion. By naming realities and adjusting course in response to feedback, the Forum strengthened trust and accountability across the group.

So, at the end of the day, what is the EPIM Forum? It is a question many Forum members struggle to answer clearly.

But perhaps that difficulty points to something important: the Forum is less a defined series of event agendas and more an emerging space; where unexpected connections happen, where local practitioners find peers across borders, where members finally have time to think about questions that have been pushed aside. It is a space with renewed energy and perspective, even when one cannot fully explain why.

That energy matters, but it's not enough on its own. Sustaining this momentum requires more than positive experience alone. It will require continued experimentation, honest feedback loops, and patience whilst the messy process of becoming a community unravels and it grows beyond a series of convenings. As a team, we're learning to hold that tension: between what the Forum is and what it might become.



The EPIM Forum in Berlin, November 2025

Reflections and Learnings

The CEE Network for Migration & Inclusion: A Space for Collective Sensemaking and Resilience

BY MASHA VOLYNSKY

The third annual convening of the CEE Network for Migration and Inclusion took place in Bucharest in May 2025, co-hosted by our local partner AIPG. The convening created a structured space for collective sensemaking in a region where political pressure, fragmented ecosystems, and shrinking civic space shape migration and inclusion work. The gathering built on the Network's inaugural meeting in Bratislava and demonstrated how the Network now operates as a platform that actively influences how inclusion is understood, organised, and sustained across CEE.

Exemplifying the network's co-creative character, participants designed the agenda and led more than half of the sessions, with EPIM's mission to ensure that members shape the Network's direction and priorities. As Natalya Novakova, Executive Director of the Civil Society Forum, who is part of the BISC Cluster Committee, reflected, "building a sub-regional network allows context-specific discussions to take place in a community where everyone is familiar with each other's background, history and culture. This makes for deep conversations that foster trust and mutual support. Shared challenges make the network go beyond learning objectives, becoming a space for resilience."

Municipal actors played a central role in the convening and brought practical insight into how public institutions shape everyday experiences of belonging. City representatives described how policies, services, and public spaces influence participation, access, and recognition within communities. Their contributions highlighted cities as operational sites where inclusion takes concrete form, particularly in contexts where national political discourse produces division or restricts policy space.

The convening also demonstrated the Network's cross-sectoral structure. CSOs, municipal institutions, libraries, and private sector actors worked together on issues related to employment, entrepreneurship, and public infrastructure. Participants addressed concrete questions of responsibility, institutional authority, and the structural conditions required for dignified participation. These exchanges produced a shared understanding that belonging requires deliberate institutional design, that public institutions such as libraries and schools function as essential civic infrastructure, and that narrative change must centre migrant agency as a matter of social organisation rather than charitable response.

The CEE Network provides its members with a structured environment for sustained cooperation, strategic reflection, and coordinated action in a region where political conditions frequently constrain inclusion efforts. By connecting regional perspective with local practice and by strengthening relationships alongside technical knowledge, the Network reinforces the institutional and civic capacity required to sustain inclusive societies and strengthen democracy in the region.



The EPIM Forum as a Learning Space

Reflections and Learnings

Reflecting on Our Grantmaking Journey

BY ROSARIO ALIOTO

Grantmaking has defined EPIM since its creation, but the operating environment has changed radically. Across Europe, migration work now unfolds under a shrinking civic space, fragmented funding landscapes, and increasingly complex scrutiny of non-profits. In this context, distributing funds across disconnected projects produces limited structural effect. As part of its rethink, EPIM reassessed where its capital can shift conditions rather than simply support activity. This led to a repositioning of grantmaking as a strategic intervention tool.

Instead of operating primarily as a regranting mechanism, EPIM funds along leverage points to align actors, and to enable coordinated action across the ecosystem. The objective is to strengthen the infrastructure of belonging — the institutions, networks, and capacities that determine whether policies translate into real outcomes.

Cross-sectoral Collaborations and Lived Experience Leadership

Our grantmaking journey has evolved beyond funding projects. It is fundamentally about fostering relationships and strengthening the social fabric. From scouting and partner selection to due diligence and learning, every step is designed to prioritize cross-sector collaboration. We intentionally seek proposals that build trust, centre lived experience, amplify diverse voices, nurture new narratives, and drive systemic impact.

Support for national level coordination in the Czech Republic and Slovakia illustrates this approach. Nearly twenty organisations collaborated through structured platforms that enabled joint advocacy, pooled expertise, and coordinated responses to policy developments. This collective capacity allowed partners to operate at a scale and level of influence that individual organisations could not achieve alone.

Beyond Funding: Building Sustainable Organisations

Supporting partners extends far beyond financial contributions. We work alongside organisations to strengthen governance, develop safeguarding policies, and build financial resilience. These efforts promote sustainability and ethical practice while reducing administrative burdens—especially for smaller or emerging groups.

NEF, as our fiscal host, has played a vital role in this process, not only helping ensure we uphold our standards but also supporting continuous improvement in our practices. One example is our partnership with ACV in Romania, where joint work has supported progress toward financial sustainability and diversification of income sources.

This work has also highlighted the importance of assessing organisational capacity early. In some cases, minimum governance conditions could not be secured for effective implementation, requiring significant time and effort from both EPIM and partners. As a result, we are refining our due diligence processes to identify capacity gaps earlier and reduce the risk of resource-intensive engagements that cannot be sustained.

Innovating through Inclusive Grantmaking

Effective funding requires proximity to real conditions on the ground. EPIM's participatory approach journey that involves practitioners directly in shaping priorities and assessing proposals continues to strengthen. Building on our 2023 [Deskillling Pilot](#) focused on underemployment and the deskilling of migrants, which engaged migrants and experts to decide on grants, the composition of all our Cluster committees now includes external system actors with thematic expertise alongside funder representatives. The goal is to ensure that funding decisions reflect operational realities rather than institutional assumptions.

Reflections and Learnings

Learning

Grantmaking operates as a feedback loop rather than a one-way transfer of resources. EPIM gathers structured input from partners, reviews outcomes across clusters, and adjusts priorities accordingly. This learning process helps identify where funding generates systemic effect and where approaches require redesign. Partners have reported that flexible implementation arrangements and streamlined reporting requirements allow them to focus more on impact rather than administration. Some organisations have begun adapting these practices in their own grantmaking relationships, extending the approach beyond EPIM-funded work.

Also, because of this learning, internal systems at NEF have also evolved to support more strategic grantmaking. EPIM developed a customised finance and grants management system that consolidates real-time data on income, budgets, partners, grants, and expenditures. This allows faster decision-making, stronger oversight, and improved coordination across programmes.

And in parallel, EPIM and NEF have refined due diligence, monitoring, and reporting processes, introducing risk thresholds that make it possible to work with a wider range of organisations while maintaining necessary standards. Guidance materials now help emerging partners meet minimum financial and governance requirements, increasing transparency and reducing barriers to participation.

Positioning for Long-Term Impact

EPIM's grantmaking now focuses on building the conditions that allow inclusive migration systems to function: aligned actors, resilient organisations, and collaboration across sectors. This approach recognises that durable change emerges from coordinated effort rather than isolated interventions. Looking ahead, EPIM will continue to use its resources to catalyse collaboration, reduce fragmentation, and support actors positioned to influence structural outcomes. The goal is not to increase the number of projects funded, but to strengthen the ecosystem.



Grantmaking steps, presented on October 2025

Reflections and Learnings

Transforming a Legacy: From Co-Granting to Truly Collaborative Philanthropy

BY RAPHAELA SCHWEIGER,
SOPHIE NGO-DIEP,
AND HRISHABH SANDILYA

This piece was originally published by Center for Effective Philanthropy in July 2025. You can find the original article [here](#).

Hosted by the Network of European Foundations since 2005, EPIM – the European Philanthropic Initiative for Migration–, is one of Europe’s longest-standing philanthropic collaboratives. In 2021, it embarked on an open-ended process of change, reimagining its core structure, grantmaking lens, and leadership model.

The transformation was a bold step not without risk — particularly of donor retention — but it reflected our commitment to maximizing impact in a shifting migration landscape. On the other side of this transition, we identify some of our learnings and invite other collaboratives to look at how they can serve the needs of their ecosystems better.

Why Transform? A Changing Migration and Philanthropic Landscape

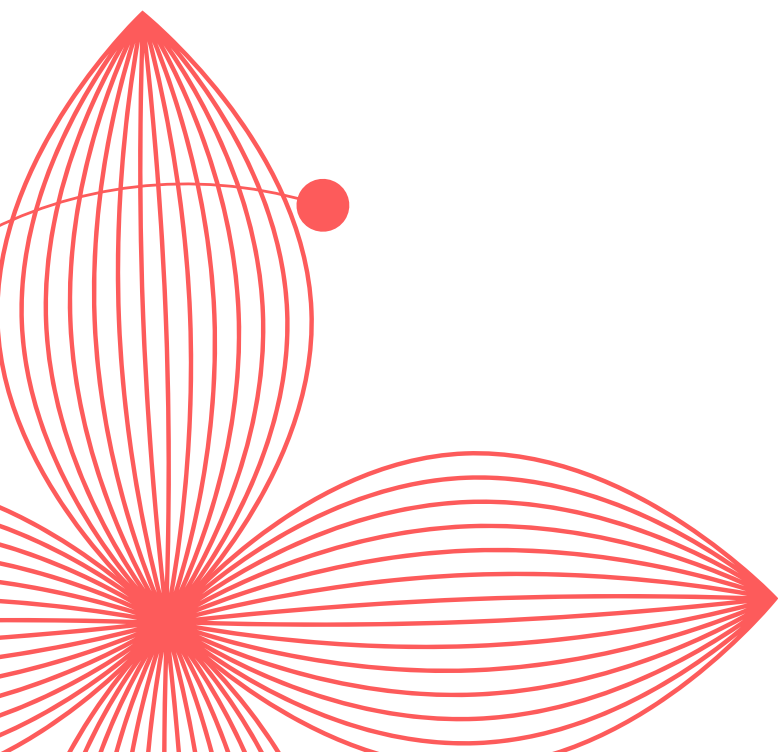
In 2021, after 16 years of relative success at the European level, but in an increasingly siloed and stuck migration landscape, it was clear that EPIM needed to evolve to remain an effective player.

Migration in Europe had become increasingly complex, requiring systemic and long-term interventions that would be difficult to achieve with conventional grantmaking frameworks and approaches. We needed to look at how, with whom, and why we made our strategic decisions and examine the role EPIM played in shaping and nourishing the migration ecosystem, and what role we could help play going forward.

We began with a deep look at the needs of the migration ecosystem and our role in it. After numerous conversations with partners, new and old, across the continent, we concluded that the ecosystem needs to think and act like one first, to move forward on migration. We found siloes, little foresight, mistrust, and a lack of legitimacy — with migrants not really having a say — as the main issues within the ecosystem. Also, migration is an inherently societal and transnational issue, and we needed to think beyond exclusively sectoral and national efforts, as seemed to be the norm.

Similarly, for philanthropy to genuinely support systemic change, EPIM and its partners also needed to re-evaluate our roles as funders acting from Brussels. Our ambition needed to shift from top-down processes to a sense-making and grantmaking model that was rooted in partnership and trust and created bottom-up. We needed to intentionally give up power to the ecosystem to increase impact and create an inclusive space to shape strategic directions, emphasising collaboration over control.

Transforming was an opportunity not only to reshape EPIM but also to set an example and a standard for collaborative philanthropy in Europe.



Reflections and Learnings

What is Different About EPIM Today?

At the heart of EPIM's transformation lies a new approach to sense-making, decision-making, financing, and organizational structure. Fundamentally, EPIM now sees itself as a catalyst and curator of the migration ecosystem with the intention of stimulating and nudging the ecosystem towards a new value proposition and greater resilience. In practice, this means a number of changes.

1. Shared Power and Decisions

EPIM's reimagined model requires that strategy development and funding decisions are made together and equally by our foundation and non-foundation members. This approach allows EPIM to leverage insights from the field and think together with a collective strategic outlook, ensuring that our programming and funding decisions align with practical, on-the-ground needs. In addition, by prioritizing longer-term, system-oriented goals, we give our decisions much-needed legitimacy and allow them to service the cause, rather than arbitrary timelines and cycles.

2. Creating the Forum

The Forum — a space for innovation and collaboration — has emerged as a defining element of EPIM's new structure. More than a general assembly, it is a convening space for selected actors across the migration ecosystem.

Forum members bring diverse lived experiences and expertise from civil society, government, private sector, social entrepreneurship, migrant activism, journalism and philanthropy into a unique social lab where members experiment, strategize, and innovate together.

3. Bottom-Up Clusters Reflect the Reality of Migration in Europe

EPIM's programming is both topical — focusing on migration governance, work and housing, and geographic — focusing Central and Eastern Europe across three clusters. The clusters approach migration intersectionally and holistically, through lenses like housing, jobs, healthcare and education, and strengthening the civic space and driving civic participation, amongst others — not in a siloed manner where migrants are seen as separate from other conditions of society.

These clusters allow EPIM to align its resources and expertise with needs that have been identified in a bottom-up manner. And they allow partners to engage deeply and learn, fostering a collaborative environment where they work with funders as equals toward systemic change.



Joint sense-making at the inaugural EPIM Forum



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What This Looks Like in Action

An example of this thinking in action is EPIM's fast-evolving Ukraine response. From the outset, following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, EPIM eschewed a rigid approach, funding place-based and community initiatives and prioritizing multi-stakeholder alliances. The goal was to empower local organizations to respond quickly and effectively while building long-term resilience in their communities.

While initially focused on short-term emergent needs of displaced Ukrainians, like shelter, food, education, and healthcare, the response organically transformed into a long-term cluster on 'Building Inclusive Societies in Central and Eastern Europe,' building upon the solidarity displayed by host populations and the collaboration established between civil society, government, and other actors including the private sector. This cluster focused on areas like jobs, migrant participation, the creative use of public spaces, civic engagement, job creation, and entrepreneurship.

In addition, EPIM doubled down on its commitment to strengthening civil society, supporting the creation and scaling of the first-ever pan-Central and Eastern European network on migration and inclusion, and national networks in the service of democracy and belonging in Czechia, Slovakia, and Romania.

Similarly, for its cluster on 'Shaping the Future of European Migration Governance,' EPIM co-created the first-ever systems map on the topic. The collaborative sense-making process shed light on the current state of the migration governance system, plotting key dynamics and causal relationships, and offering insight into potential leverage points to intervene upon and nudge the system into a different way of working.

Creating this map involved several iterative conversations and workshops with migration actors across the continent and across sectors, providing a holistic and legitimate view of how migration governance really works and addressing some of the obvious discrepancies between academic study, policy, and actual practices. Grantmaking is currently taking place along the identified leverage directions — reimagining public funding, seeding ethical tech-base pathways and the creation of innovative community-designed solutions.

A Call to Action: Collective Philanthropy as Risk and Innovation Capital

EPIM's transformation demonstrates that philanthropy can be reimagined to foster a more legitimate, collaborative, impactful, and long-term approach. By investing in a shared decision- and sense-making model, flexible and bottom-up processes, and by taking an ecosystem lens, EPIM's new structure balances innovation, experimentation, and pragmatism.

This evolution was only possible thanks to the protective umbrella collaborative philanthropy offers — one that allows for partner foundations to distribute risk and gain equally from the dividends of an innovative approach. We hope that this model of collaborative and transformative philanthropy will inspire others to join us, at a time in which migration and the very idea of democracy are more contested than ever.



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Noteworthy New Tool in the ToolBox: EPIM's Systems Map of Migration Governance in Europe

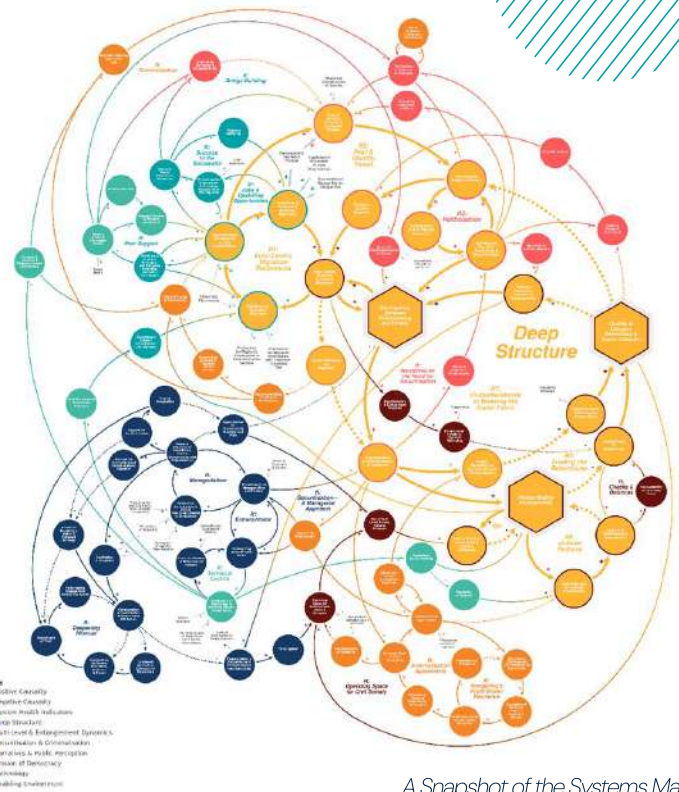
BY ELIZABETH V. KASSINIS

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As it does in much of the world, migration continues to shape Europe. At present, Europe is home to over 100 million immigrants one-third of the world's migrant population. At the same time, intentions to emigrate are also high, with one in five European adults currently considering leaving their home for another.

Spurred by income gaps, conflict and climate change, migration is expected to rise across Europe at a time of increased political and societal polarization. Anti-migrant sentiment and anti-immigration policies reflect (and reinforce) one another while increasingly multicultural European societies struggle with the existential challenges of integration and practical problems like critical skills shortages.

As this plays out, informed, coordinated and evidence-based policies are needed to promote safe and orderly cross-border movements that help realize the shared gains of migration for everyone—migrants, host communities and maybe even countries of origin. Managed well, any real or perceived 'disruptions' that migration might cause can be far outweighed by positive outcomes in terms of redressing growing demographic and socioeconomic imbalances or labour shortages across the EU, for example. Better and up-to-date information on the situation in countries of origin could improve the way returns are organized and supported. Returns can thereby aspire to being both dignified and fruitful rather than an unintended step towards re-migration.



A Snapshot of the Systems Map

In trying to contribute to sense making in the broader migration ecosystem—the European Philanthropic Initiative for Migration (EPIM), Europe's largest and longest-standing philanthropic collaborative working on issues of migration, belonging and democracy—recently developed an innovative policy tool that provides a strong, useful and replicable basis for better decision making. EPIM's Systems Map of Migration Governance in Europe attempts to capture the current migration governance system in Europe. It synthesizes many points of view and actively incorporates a diverse range of identities and contexts. To create the map, EPIM distilled published research, stakeholder interviews and input from in-person workshops into visual language that was in turn tested on a wide variety of stakeholders and subject-matter experts. The result is a potent tool to drive change that at once analyzes the migration governance system in Europe and, maybe more importantly, identifies leverage directions to inform not just EPIM's own strategy but potentially the efforts of any number of other actors.

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In curating the Map, EPIM used an inclusive definition of migration governance—that is, migration governance is the way the lives of migrants are governed by the intended and unintended consequences of regulations, policies and actions. Beyond laws, policies, institutions and practices, the Map strives to include the relationships, power dynamics and mindsets that contribute to shaping the way migrants are treated and the way migration is experienced. It is worth noting that before starting to map the reality of the system, the mapping team envisioned a desired future for it. It used a “guiding star” principle to represent the transformational intent of the exercise—and thus to influence the policies to be derived from it. The “guiding star” was (and remains) “an EU migration governance system that upholds and respects human rights and is grounded in the real experiences of migrants and those in the ecosystem.” The factors that can lead to (or obscure) this goal are what are illustrated in the map as variables, causal relationships and feedback loops. Intended as “a gift to the ecosystem,” the Map is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) and available interactively online.

EPIM's Systems Map of Migration Governance in Europe is especially important in three mutually reinforcing ways. First, it is significant in that it exists at all.



EPIM draws on the systems map to guide ecosystem curation and grantmaking strategies

Applying systems thinking to migration and bringing together multiple stakeholder perspectives through a co-creation methodology was a Herculean task. But like the resulting Map, EPIM proved that the process was complex but not impossible, complicated but not incomprehensible. However imperfect the Map may be (and all involved recognize its shortcomings), those working in migration policy and on the frontlines of response are better off for it. While the Map may look messy, it disentangles many of the forces at play and relevant to decision- and policy making. It's a rich basis for discussion, including on returns.

Related, the Map provides a useful entry point for examining migration issues from a variety of perspectives, even simultaneously. It can be used to pursue lines of thought and reasoning; to identify shared interest(s) and to find common purpose. All this can forge the type of multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral and cross-sectional alliances that are necessary to confront the ‘wicked’ challenge of migration. Additionally, the Map reveals the interconnectedness of actors and actions. It points to ways where collaboration can be brought to bear from difference directions; steps in the right direction need not be top down. In fact, the Map highlights the interdependencies that can and do exist between governments, NGOs, international organizations and local authorities. Ideally, these can stop working at cross purposes. Indeed, are there synergies to be had? Beyond this, the Map sheds light on ways that academics and researchers can contribute in complementary if not pivotal ways. Meanwhile, from the Map, advocacy groups can glean ways to hone their messages and to better position themselves to advance them. Lastly, the Map can be taken apart and put back together for Europe and replicated for other contexts. It is a resource that underscored the need for deep and purposeful analysis based on quality data and a multiplicity of perspectives. Most importantly, it is dynamic and can adjust to changing times.

Elizabeth V. Kassinis is one of EPIM's Co-Chairs, the Executive Manager of *Caritas Cyprus* and a former *Perry World House* Visiting Fellow.

Finances

INCOME (EUR) *	
Source	Amount
Adessium Foundation	200,000
Barrow Cadbury Trust	37,313
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	128,209
Compagnia Di San Paolo**	
Fondation de France	75,000
Fondation pour le Logement des Défavorisés	50,000
Fred Foundation	50,000
Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian	50,000
Generali Foundation – THSN	500,000
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust	33,750
Kahane Foundation	105,675
King Baudouin Foundation	50,000
Oak Foundation **	
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	46,414
Porticus **	
Robert Bosch Stiftung	450,000
Total	1,776,361

* Amounts pledged to EPIM in 2025. These amounts were not necessarily spent during the year and are not reflective of the total contribution of individual foundations on a multiannual basis.

** Contributions made across different years

EXPENDITURE (EUR) ***	
Expense	Amount
Grants	1,534,576
Staff Costs	358,400
Communications, Travel and Meetings	110,150
Consultancy & Research	60,688
Total	2,063,814

**** All figures are provisional.