

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

(To be filled in and uploaded as deliverable in the Portal Grant Management System, at the due date foreseen in the system.

! *Please provide one sheet per event (one event = one workpackage = one lump sum).*

PROJECT	
Participant:	1-1.ALDA - ASSOCIATION EUROPEENNE POUR LA DEMOCRATIE LOCALE (ALDA)
PIC number:	963194384
Project name and acronym:	Bridging Beliefs: Advancing Peace, Democracy, and Inclusion through Interfaith Dialogue in Europe— Bridging Beliefs

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	1
Event name:	Bridging Beliefs: Strengthening Interfaith and Interconvictional Dialogue for Democratic Europe
Type:	Conference
In situ/online:	Hybrid format: In situ for participants, online for some speakers
Location:	Italy, Milan
Date(s):	22/04/2026
Website(s) (if any):	https://www.alda-europe.eu/bridging-beliefs/#:~:text=Bridging%20Beliefs%20brings%20together%20local,structured%20interfaith%20and%20interconvictional%20dialogue.
Participants	
Female:	29
Male:	24
Non-binary:	0
From country 1 Italy:	40
From country 2 Portugal:	1
From country 3 Croatia:	3
From country 4 Austria:	1
From country 5 France:	3

From country 6 North Macedonia	2		
From country 7 Greece:	1		
From country 8 Bosnia Herzegovina:	1		
From country 9 Belgium:	1		
...			
Total number of participants:	53	From total number of countries:	9
Description			
<i>Provide a short description of the event and its activities.</i>			
Introduction			
<p>The international conference “<i>Bridging Beliefs: Strengthening Interfaith and Interconvictional Dialogue for Democratic Europe</i>” was coordinated by ALDA, with the support of COREIS, which contributed in particular to the identification of speakers and participants. Project partners also played a key role in outreach activities, especially in Italy, supporting the engagement of a diverse group of stakeholders from civil society, institutions, and local communities. All key information about the event, including its objectives and framework, can be found in the conference concept note, which outlines the rationale and expected outcomes of the initiative. The agenda itself was co-created with the active involvement of project partners, ensuring a balanced and inclusive programme that reflects different perspectives and areas of expertise. The following sections provide a more detailed overview of the main components of the conference, as well as the key discussions and results that emerged from the various sessions and thematic groups.</p>			
Institutional opening			
<p>The institutional opening set the tone for the conference by reaffirming the political and civic relevance of interfaith and interconvictional dialogue in today’s Europe. Contributions from Elena Buscemi (Chair of the Milan City Council), Antonella Sberna (-Vice President of EP, Regional policy and cohesion, Territorial development Institutional relations between the EU and local/regional authorities), and Mustafa Roma (Secretary General COREIS) highlighted the importance of cooperation between local authorities, European institutions, and faith-based organizations in fostering inclusive and participatory democratic processes. The speakers emphasized the need to strengthen dialogue across communities as a response to social fragmentation, underlining the role of cities and grassroots initiatives as key spaces for building trust, mutual understanding, and active citizenship. The session also provided an overview of the Bridging Beliefs project, framing the conference as part of a broader effort to promote social cohesion and democratic resilience across Europe.</p>			



Keynote speech “Interfaith and interconvictional dialogue in Europe: where do we stand?”

The keynote session set the stage for the conference by offering a high-level reflection on the state of interfaith and interconvictional dialogue in Europe. Delivered by Vincent Depaigne (Coordinator for the Article 17 dialogue with churches, religious, philosophical and non-confessional organisations, European Commission) and Teresa Albano (Senior Programme Manager, The International Dialogue Centre -KAICIID), the discussion brought together institutional and programmatic expertise to explore how dialogue between religious, philosophical, and non-confessional actors has been evolving within both European policy frameworks and on-the-ground practices. Drawing on their extensive experience, the speakers highlighted key progress achieved as well as persistent challenges, emphasizing the crucial role of dialogue in promoting fundamental rights, social cohesion, and democratic resilience across increasingly diverse societies.

Interactive Roundtable 1: The role of Interfaith and Interconvictional Dialogue and cooperation in fostering peace education and democracy

The first roundtable brought together diverse religious perspectives to reflect on how interfaith dialogue can foster peace education and strengthen democratic societies. Carlo Luyckx (EBU Vice President and manager of a Tibetan Buddhist temple in Brussels) emphasized the importance of education and contemplative practices in cultivating self-awareness, reducing ego-driven conflict, and promoting values such as respect and diversity. Imam Yahya Pallavicini (Vice President of COREIS) highlighted key challenges, including widespread ignorance about religions and the manipulation of faith in polarized contexts, while stressing the need for both institutional cooperation and grassroots engagement to counter divisive narratives. Rabbi Bruno Fiszon (Chief Rabbi of Metz (France),) called for a shift in perspective to recognize religions as sources of peace rather than conflict, underlining their role in fostering ethical values, fraternity, and openness to diversity. From a Buddhist academic standpoint, Bhikkhunī Dhammadinā (visiting professor for Buddhist studies at the University of California at Berkeley) pointed to the value of contemplative practices in helping individuals understand the subjective nature of perception and develop more reflective approaches to reality. Finally, Don Pietro Lorenzo Maggioni (Professor of Theology of Religions and Ecumenism at the Seminary of Milan) proposed the need for a renewed societal model in Europe, one that balances rationality with pluralism, highlighting democracy as a system that must actively protect minorities and encourage shared narratives. Together, the speakers underscored dialogue as both a personal and

structural process, essential for building more inclusive and resilient democratic communities.



Interactive Roundtable 2: Interfaith and Interconvictional Governance challenges and opportunities: From a global to a local perspective

The second roundtable explored governance challenges and opportunities for interfaith and interconvictional dialogue, highlighting the importance of connecting global frameworks with local realities. Amina Croce (Youth Ambassador at Muslim Jewish Leadership Council) emphasized the role of younger generations, noting both the potential of dialogue as a tool for mutual understanding and the risks posed by digital echo chambers that limit exposure to diverse perspectives. Benedetto Zacchioli (President of European Coalition of Cities Against Racism) stressed the need for structured, multi-level approaches to dialogue, spanning institutions, local communities, and grassroots actors, while underlining that inclusive governance must involve both religious and non-religious voices and can be fostered through innovative tools such as art. From a civil society perspective, Eirini Mastora (Project Manager at Equal Society) highlighted how interfaith dialogue can strengthen social inclusion by building cooperation pathways and networks that translate lived experiences into policy influence. Complementing this view, Mirela Despotović (Founder ZAMAH Foundation) pointed to the crucial role of grassroots initiatives in reaching communities, addressing gaps left by institutions, and contributing practical models that can be scaled at the European level. Together, the speakers underscored that effective dialogue requires coordinated action across sectors, combining policy, community engagement, and inclusive participation to drive meaningful societal change.

Interactive Roundtable 3: Interfaith and Interconvictional Governance for democratic decision-making and inclusive civil spaces: good practices and policies



The third roundtable focused on interfaith and interconvictional governance in relation to democratic decision-making and the creation of inclusive civil spaces, highlighting concrete practices and policy approaches. Bringing together diverse perspectives, speakers such as Fatima Zahra Dahir, Nejra Kadic Meskic, and Carlo Luyckx shared experiences on how inclusive governance can be implemented at local and European levels. The discussion emphasized the importance of participatory processes, community engagement, and cross-sector collaboration in strengthening democratic resilience, while showcasing practical examples of how dialogue can translate into more inclusive policies and civic spaces.

Parallel thematic groups: Building Sustainable Dialogue in Europe



The thematic group discussions were designed as interactive spaces where participants could engage more directly with the topics explored during the conference. Working in a World Café format, small groups brought together people with different backgrounds and experiences to reflect on concrete challenges and share practical ideas. The sessions focused on key areas such as schools, work environments, citizens engagement and community wellbeing, with the aim of connecting dialogue to real-life contexts. Rather than remaining at a theoretical level, these discussions encouraged participants to identify workable approaches that can support inclusion, strengthen social cohesion, and promote more participatory communities. Besides the output of the thematic hubs will be used also for the capacity building event.

[The thematic group on school](#) highlighted the crucial role of educational environments as spaces for fostering active citizenship, dialogue, and mutual understanding across diverse backgrounds. In the group facilitated by David Rycroft ([Teach Peace project](#)), participants emphasized the need to revise school curricula to better reflect a plurality of worldviews and equip students with the tools to engage in meaningful interfaith and intercultural dialogue. A key insight was the importance of nurturing curiosity, emotional intelligence, and empathy from an early age, enabling students to explore both their own values and those of others. Practical approaches, such as encouraging discussions within families and using symbolic “learning tools” to connect school and home, were identified as effective in extending dialogue beyond the classroom. The discussion also underscored the distinction between religion and cultural context, as well as the value of integrating a spiritual dimension to strengthen ethical awareness and a sense of shared humanity. Overall, the group stressed that schools can act as powerful catalysts for social cohesion when they promote respect, listening, and inclusive participation.

[The thematic group on work environments](#) highlighted how interfaith dialogue and respect for diversity can become concrete drivers of organisational wellbeing and effectiveness. Facilitated by [Antonio Rossi](#), the discussion brought together participants’ experiences to explore both structural challenges and practical solutions. A key issue identified was the gap between formal inclusion policies and everyday workplace realities, often compounded by uncertainty in managing religious differences and a lack of mediation skills. At the same time, participants emphasized important opportunities, such as fostering trust through team-building across differences, recognising religious practices in a balanced way, and focusing on shared values like respect and solidarity. The group stressed that leadership and HR play a crucial role in translating diversity into fair processes and effective communication, while inclusion must move beyond principles to become embedded in daily practices. A notable contribution by Teresa Albano during the plenary session reinforced the need for a pragmatic approach, highlighting that diversity should be framed not only as a value but as an organisational capability that enhances flexibility, cooperation, and resilience. Overall, the discussion underscored that inclusive workplaces are built through intentional action, dialogue, and the ability to turn diversity into a shared resource rather than a challenge.

[The thematic group on wellbeing](#) explored how interfaith dialogue can support both individual fulfilment and collective social cohesion, highlighting the strong interconnection between the two. Facilitated by [Elena Galli](#), the discussion emphasized that wellbeing is a multidimensional concept, encompassing inner balance, self-expression, identity exploration, and the ability to build meaningful relationships with others. Participants stressed that these dimensions can only be fully achieved within supportive communities, where openness, curiosity, and mutual respect are actively encouraged. Interfaith dialogue was identified as a key enabler of this process, helping individuals overcome isolation, build trust, and develop a deeper understanding of diversity through shared experiences. Practical approaches included creating inclusive community spaces and cultural events, such as festivals, arts initiatives, and school-based activities, that foster interaction and a sense of belonging. The group also highlighted the importance of safe environments, especially for younger generations, and the need for structured, facilitated spaces where dialogue can take place on equal terms. Overall, the discussion underlined that wellbeing and social cohesion are mutually reinforcing, and that investing in inclusive, community-based dialogue is essential for building more connected, resilient societies.

The discussion on citizen engagement, facilitated by Teresa Albano, highlighted how interfaith dialogue can play a concrete role in strengthening participation and local democracy. Participants identified the need to build alliances that go beyond identity, focusing on shared goals rather than differences. At the same time, challenges such as fear and religious differences were acknowledged as barriers that can limit open interaction and trust. However, these were balanced by clear opportunities: creating spaces, especially through schools and community initiatives, where people can meet, learn from one another, and better understand the different social layers that shape their perspectives. Overall, the exchange pointed to dialogue as a practical tool to bridge divides and encourage more active, inclusive citizenship.

Evaluation Summary – Bridging Beliefs Conference (22 April 2026)

The evaluation data collected from participants of the Bridging Beliefs Conference indicate a consistently high level of satisfaction and perceived relevance. All respondents reported a positive overall experience and expressed willingness to participate in similar events in the future. This unanimity suggests that the conference successfully aligned with participants’ expectations and addressed issues of substantive importance to their respective fields of interest.

With regard to the quality of the programme, all sessions received favourable evaluations, with average ratings exceeding 4 on a 5-point scale. Both plenary and interactive formats were well regarded; however, slightly higher evaluations for roundtable discussions point to the particular effectiveness of participatory and dialogical approaches. The parallel thematic groups were also positively assessed, indicating that the conference succeeded in balancing broad, conceptual discussions with more focused and specialized exchanges.

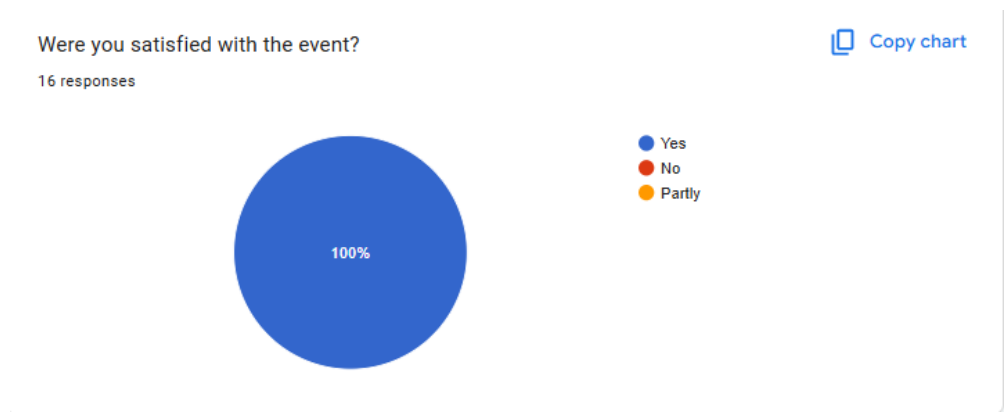
In terms of its stated objectives, the conference appears to have achieved its intended outcomes to a considerable extent. Respondents reported that the event contributed meaningfully to enhancing their understanding of interfaith dialogue within democratic contexts, as well as to examining governance-related challenges and identifying examples of good practice. These findings suggest that the conference not only engaged participants but also provided substantive analytical and practical insights.

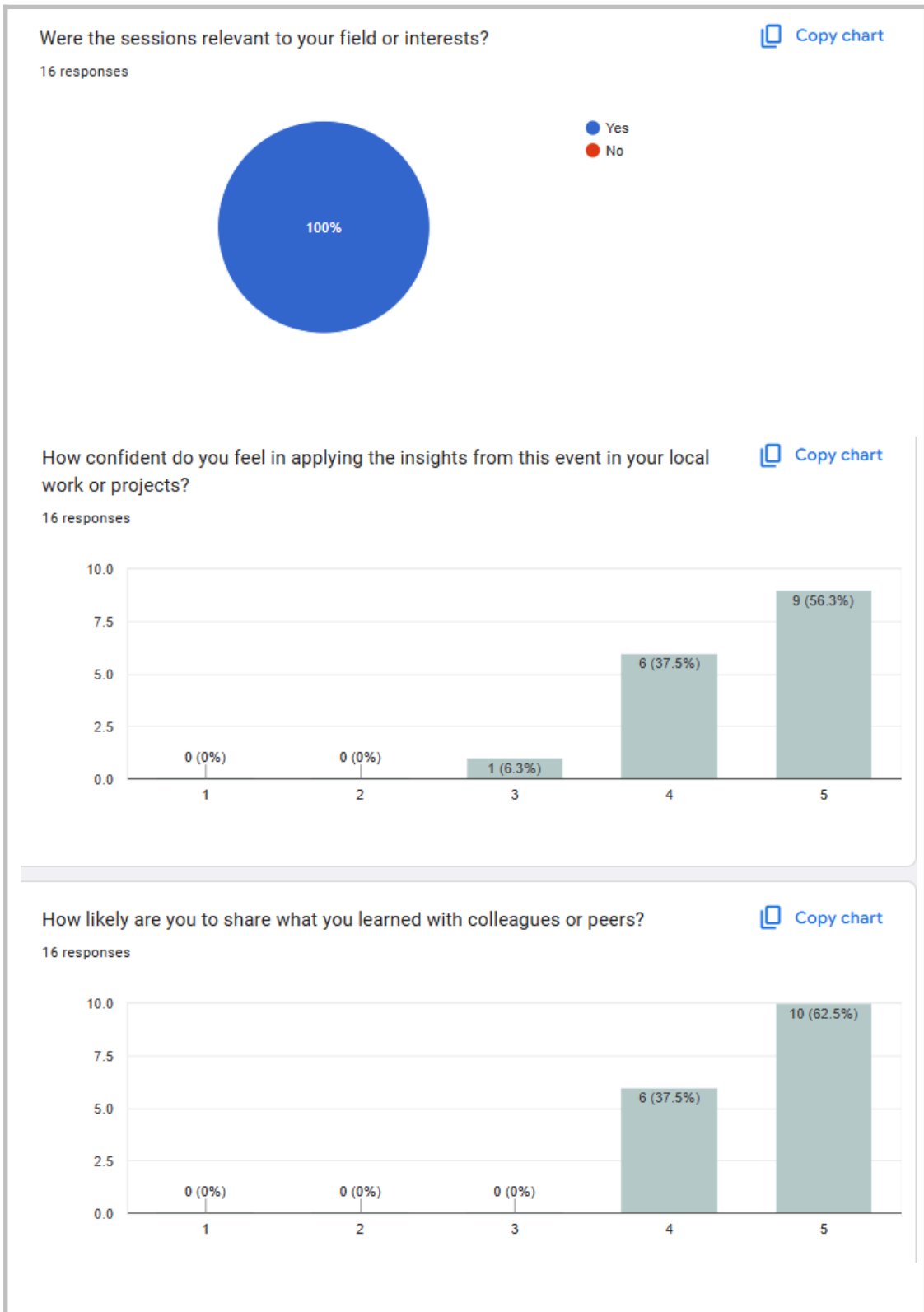
A prominent theme emerging from the qualitative responses concerns the centrality of interaction and participant engagement. Formats such as roundtables, group discussions, and the “world café” were frequently identified as particularly valuable. These findings underscore the importance of deliberative and participatory methodologies in facilitating knowledge exchange and fostering mutual understanding in complex thematic areas such as interfaith relations.

From an organizational perspective, the logistical aspects of the conference were evaluated positively. Catering and supporting materials received strong ratings, and respondents generally found the resources provided to be useful and appropriate. While minor suggestions for improvement were noted, these were limited in scope and did not significantly affect the overall assessment of the event.

Participants reported a high degree of confidence in their ability to apply the knowledge acquired during the conference, as well as a strong intention to disseminate these insights within their professional and social networks. This indicates that the conference may generate effects beyond its immediate context, contributing to broader processes of knowledge transfer and capacity building.

In conclusion, the Bridging Beliefs Conference can be characterized as a highly successful initiative. The combination of high-quality content, effective facilitation, and strong participant engagement resulted in an event that was both intellectually rigorous and practically relevant. The emphasis on interactive and participatory formats emerged as a key strength, offering important implications for the design of future events in this domain.





HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	29.04.2026	First Draft
2.0	6.05.2026	Final Version