

On 18 December, AER marked International Migrants Day in Barcelona. A source of inputs for the [AMiD project](#) (Access to Services for Migrants with Disabilities), the event was partially funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. We and our co-host, AER member region Catalonia, brought together representatives from regions from around Europe to **push forward the conversation on integration and diversity management.**

Participants came to exchange and learn, united in recognition of the **vital role played by local and regional authorities** in managing diversity and building cohesive societies, improving the lives and opportunities of citizens, and contributing to their social, economic and civic inclusion. The day-long event was held in the Petralbes Royal Palace, and simultaneous interpretation in English, Catalan and Spanish was offered throughout.

### ***Opening Session and Plenary Session***

The opening session was moderated by AER Secretary General Mathieu Mori. President of AER Magnus Berntsson and Oriol Amorós, Secretary of Equality, Migration and Citizenship for the Government of Catalonia set out the conference's mission of establishing an intercultural approach to integration based on **"equality, relationships and recognition"** and expressed hopes that it represented a **first step toward sustained collaboration** on the issue among the regions involved. Laura Corrado of the European Commission's DG Home spoke about the Commission's efforts to bring a **multi-level, multi-stakeholder approach to migration policy**, while Leen Verbeek of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe championed a less ideologically-charged, more pragmatic diversity management policy that focused on the **positive benefits of migration to European cultures, economies, and societies**. Albert Castellanos, Secretary General of Ministry of Vice Presidency and Economy, Government of Catalonia, gave a stirring contribution and argued for a common European approach to migration **"based not on fear, but on shared welfare, rights and duties."**

Carles Macian of the Catalan government and Dani de Torres, expert of the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme, then took the stage to discuss intercultural approach to diversity management in cities and regions. De Torres pointed to the potential of regions to **collaborate with cities and civil society** to bring about intercultural integration, while Manel advocated for a comprehensive approach to integration on the basis of **inclusion, diversity and interaction**, targeting a variety of sectors with specific strategies.

### ***Roundtables***

Following the opening session participants split into two rooms to hold more participative discussions on key topics. There were four sessions, two before a lunch break and two after, in which representatives of local and regional governments, civil society organisations and researchers shared knowledge and experience

**Roundtable 1** - was all about providing **Public policies and services for diversity and inclusion**. Participants promoted the **personalization of services** in producing positive outcomes for migrants. Fatmé Khalil-Hammoud of the Vienna (AT) touted the success of the city's tailored actions to young women, providing avenues to social inclusion on the basis of activities related to the beneficiaries' interests. Meanwhile, Silvija Ladić Fischer of Varaždin County (HR) argued that focusing on industries that where demand for labour was higher and providing individualised services to help migrants validate the skills they had gained before their arrival was key to the high impact of the region's low-budget project on labour market inclusion. In the discussion session, **Iñigo Magdaleno** of Murcia (ES) called for **investments in the creation of social capital**, understood as social networks and associated norms of reciprocity and trust, has been correlated with more effective conflict

management and gains in social justice. Contributions from Marzio Barbieri of Emilia Romagna (IT) and Çiçek Bacik of the German Children and Youth Foundation highlighted the **inclusion of migrants in mainstream services** and empowering young people through **sports participation and rights education**, respectively, as means of furthering this end.

**Roundtable 2 – Recognising Diversity and Combating Racism** was moderated by Director of Open Society Initiative for Europe Jordi Vaquer. Brussels-Capital Region (BE), the Government of the Basque Country (ES), the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (RS), Region Västtra Götaland (SE), and Barcelona City Council (ES) all made contributions, with a special focus on hate speech and discrimination. A particular highlight was the Brussels Action Plan Against Racism and Discrimination 2018-2020, presented by Katrien Lefever and Noémie Emmanuel. The comprehensive and multi-perspective plan incorporates 29 concrete measures **adapted to contemporary challenges, such as cyber hate-speech**. Amanda Rohde from Friends of Europe underlined the importance of **sharing the perspectives of newcomers to combat xenophobic narratives**, calling for “forward-looking, sustainable and inclusive solutions” to the problems we face.

**Roundtable 3 – Comprehensive approaches to inclusion and participation** was moderated by Professor Ricard Zapata. In this session, members of the Community Advisory Board for AMiD, Kenneth Johannesson (Värmland, SE) and Dr. Angela Unufe, presented the project’s work on bringing access to services to migrants with disabilities. They were joined by representatives of the regional governments of Valencia (ES), the Basque Country (ES) and Umbria (IT). Inmaculada Carda Isach presented Valencia’s plan for Inclusion and Social cohesion, with its PANGEA offices for education, information and intercultural mediation. Lide Amilibia discussed the Basque Country’s **comprehensive and multi-perspective plan** for the reception and integration of migrants, including the support to local entities, the areas of training and employment, sports, and health. Meanwhile, Anna Ascani highlighted the Urbagri4Women project, which provides migrant women with an opportunity to develop innovative and self-sufficient urban agricultural initiatives. Bruno António of Portugal’s DYPALL, focused on the youth network’s work on **boosting the participation of young migrants in decision-making processes** at local level.

**Roundtable 4 – Sense of belonging & Second-generation migrants** brought a focus on the initiatives and experiences young people with a migration background. Moderator Gemma Aubarell guided discussion, which saw Jana Zah of Sindelfigen (DE) present her work as Integration officer of the city, collaborating with the young population to **broaden the boundaries of civic and national identity**. Youcef Allaoui advocated for the empowerment of young people, presenting ongoing projects from Union of Catalan Muslim Communities in which young Muslims are the protagonists of research, stating, “We cannot leave to others the responsibility of answering questions about us on our behalf.” Komal Naz of the association PakMir and Students Aliu Diallo and Lisabeth Murga were particularly active in the discussion, wrestling with socially-defined ideals of immigrant success and the complexities of individual and collective identities. Speakers underlined that their senses of self were informed by a harmonious ensemble of values and traditions that entailed neither renunciation nor conformism, contending that the **idiosyncrasy of personal cultural identity defies categorisation**.

### ***Closing Session***

Participants from the roundtables reconvened at the end of the day for a session that brought the conference to its conclusion. **Kenneth Johannesson** spoke first, appealing to a social vision of Europe that would combat discrimination in order to ensure that all people have access to “a freedom not from society, but through society.” His contribution was followed by a summary of the conclusions

from the conference gathered by two rapporteurs: **Marlen Niubò** and **M'hamed Abdelouahed Allaoui**.

At conference's climax, Xantal Genovart, read aloud to the audience one of the main outputs of the event: **The International Migrants Day Manifesto**. Genovart, who also moderated the closing session, is Vice-President of the Association of Muslim Women in Catalonia. The manifesto proclaims the need for an outlook that defends respect for fundamental rights due to migrants but goes further. It proclaims that host societies have **obligations to foreign-born residents as citizens, members of the community**. Local and regional governments are called on to adopt a set of approaches that aim toward an **intercultural model of inclusion and diversity**, while combatting racism and discrimination. The full text of the manifesto can be found below.