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## Maximising Migrants' Contribution to Society

### Diversity Dialogue Fora: Contribution to diversity of migrants in rural areas

The Diputación de Teruel wants to highlight the contribution of migrants to Teruel society and its concern for improving their public image, surrounded by distorted or directly false narratives. As partners of the European project MAX, and coinciding with the Dialogue on Diversity Day, the area of European Programs of the provincial institution organised a conference on November 24 with the aim of highlighting experiences in which migration benefits the economic development of societies in general, and rural areas in particular, knowing or defining what social challenges can be tackled at the local level thanks to grassroots initiatives that support diversity and discuss how to cooperate to remove the still existing barriers towards a fully inclusive society that makes the most of its diversity.

The deputy delegate for European Programs and Territorial Development, María Ariño, opened the day by assuring that “the MAX project is one of the most participative and enriching initiatives we work within the framework of the European Union.” Regarding migrants, she added that **“there is no doubt that for rural areas, immigration is essential, and thus we must guarantee integration under equal conditions.”**

The technician of the Diputación de Teruel and Project Manager of the MAX Project, Bárbara Cerdán, then pointed out that the objective of the project was “to try to convince rationally on the basis of facts and statistics, acting directly on opinion-makers (journalists) and citizens”. For this reason, she added, the intention was to share arguments that would encourage the creation of positive messages from the media and meetings for dialogue between locals and migrants.

In a first thematic block, the conference described the migration panorama in Spain, trends, challenges and opportunities. Chabier Gimeno, professor at the Department of Psychology

and Sociology at the University of Zaragoza, pointed out that human mobility “has shaped us as societies for centuries” and emphasised that “host societies are now multicultural”. In fact, he said, “the globe is mostly multicultural.”

Gimeno pointed out that the causes of migration are “multiple and cumulative: global markets, cross-border migration, cultural society, migration chains.” He explained that Spain is a transit country for people heading north and that there are as many causes as there are multiple routes. In addition, she pointed to migration as a solution for depopulation and claimed a “clean look at these multicultural societies, looking first at ourselves, knowing that in Aragon there were already several cultures in contact for more than 1,000. Multiculturalism supposes pluralism.”

Alejandro García, job tutor and head of the INAEM Business Creation Support Service, broke the false myth that migrants receive the most aid by revealing that 70% of the people served by INAEM are of national origin and 30% foreigners and that the companies established in their service are 73% of people of national origin and 17% of migrants. He pointed out that the sectors in which migrants tend to work are hotels, commerce and food, and construction. The most common nationalities served among non-nationals are Romanian (28%), Venezuelan (18%), Moroccan (10%) and Colombian (10%).

The general vision of the migration panorama concluded with a presentation by José Luis Hernández, director of the Pierres Vedel school in Teruel, who explained how they had gone from 3 children from foreign countries enrolled in the school in the 99/00 course to 78 students from 10 different countries in 2020. He explained that in their educational project they bet on languages and that students come out knowing four different languages well or very well.

## **Local support initiatives**

During the MAX program day, two local initiatives to support the integration of migrants were presented. The Secretary-General of Cáritas Teruel Loles Esteban explained the comprehensive integration itineraries that include reception, orientation, training, mediation and awareness, and that in 2020 it has reached 297 people. He assured that Caritas does not make a distinction between migrants or nationals and only attend according to needs.

For her side, the Aragon coordinator of the Consortium of Entities for Integral Action with Migrants (CEPAIM), Pilar Bernadó, explained the asylum and refugee programs and humanitarian aid. She said that in 2019 more than 116,000 people applied for asylum and that

only 1.5% were recognised as refugees. “The rest of the people,” she said, “have to leave Spanish territory in 15 days, they lose their documentation or their work permit. But many have already woven their social networks here and do not leave Spain, so they become irregular. And irregular migration is the real drama of migration”.

## **The role of the Public Administration**

Different representatives of the Public Administration presented their projects for the integration of migrants. The Social Services coordinator of the Cuencas Mineras Region pointed to the cultural mediator program (CAREI) as a possibility of a rapprochement between people of different cultures through an impartial third person. He also highlighted different actions from the Government of Aragon in this same sense, such as the Trotamundos Project, meetings with women, traveling toy libraries on customs, food ...

The deputy for Social Welfare and Equality of the Diputación de Teruel, Susana Traver, explained that although the provincial institution does not have competences on migration policies, there are lines of subsidies to associations and non-profit organisations that do deal with migrants. She announced a new line in the 2021 budget with CEPAIM for the integration of women. She also pointed out the funding for Adult Education, where many migrants learn Spanish.

Traver wanted, as a representative of the local administration, to highlight the role of mayors as the first level of reception for migrants who arrive in the towns, helping them to find housing, work, or school.

This chapter was closed by the Director-General for Development Cooperation and Immigration of the Government of Aragon, Natalia Salvo, who pointed out the fundamental ideas of her policy: starting from new positive narratives about migration, such as maintaining basic services in depopulated areas, disdaining xenophobic discourses, and valuing diverse and multicultural societies, always highlighting the importance of maintaining social cohesion.

In these lines of work, Salvo cited the program "Aragón sin hoaxes" that wants to dismantle false news about migrants with real data and statistics, an anti-rumor and anti-discrimination campaign, the Aragonese Network for intercultural coexistence with the FAMCP or the called MATILDE network, a European project to reverse the perspective of immigration and learn about its contribution to local development.

## **Media in Teruel**

Finally, the day featured representatives of the province's media who detailed the treatment that the migration phenomenon received. The director of the newspaper "La Comarca" Eva Defior explained her recommendations when writing news on this subject, from eliminating reference to the ethnic origin of the people in the events, as long as it is not essential for understanding the news, to including migrants in generic information related to other areas that do not expressly refer to inequality or social exclusion.

Defior pointed out that journalists must often "work against their own prejudices" by training the newsroom on a day-to-day basis "for their own awareness and expansion of knowledge regarding realities that are alien to us." She said that an intercultural vision had to be promoted, making an effort against hate speech, especially in social networks, and showed her opinion saying "we still have a long way from knocking down prejudices, although the new generations educated in the territory are managing to break down some cultural walls".

The director of "Diario de Teruel", Chema López Juderías, stated that "the debate on narratives is overcome in almost all aspects because migrants in the province have a predominant role as a brake on their biggest problem: depopulation." He pointed out that in the first decade of this century the population of Teruel had 14% migrants and that now it is at 10.9%, adding that the migrant student body exceeds the national in 15.7% of the municipalities from the province.

"This translates," said López Juderías, "in addition to cultural diversity, on improving the registers of the towns, opening schools or having enough workforce. The future of the population depends on migration". Although he mentioned that there are still significant integration problems, for example in the workplace, where a foreign person earns on average 11,000 euros less per year than one born in Spain.



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