



SOCIAL AFFAIRS IN EUROCITIES: **BUILDING UPON THE NETWORK**

About EUROCITIES

EUROCITIES, the network of major European cities, brings together the local governments of more than 130 large cities in over 30 European countries.

We work with the EU institutions to respond to common issues that impact the day-to-day lives of Europeans. Our aim is help city governments address the EU's strategic challenges at the local level.

One of the policy areas we work on is social affairs. This area is particularly relevant at present, as the European Union has dedicated the next ten years to bringing 20 million people out of poverty. EUROCITIES Social Affairs Forum works on issues such as education and inclusion; employment; the European Social Fund; health inequalities; homelessness and housing; migration and integration and Roma inclusion.

Cities can get involved with EUROCITIES work through the Social Affairs Forum and the working groups. Ramon Sanahuja Velez from Barcelona, chair of the working group migration and integration, shares his experiences of working with EUROCITIES.

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Interview with
RAMON SANAHUJA VELEZ
from Barcelona, chair of the working group migration and integration, sharing his experiences of working with EUROCITIES.

What type of work do you do through EUROCITIES?

I am the chairman of the EUROCITIES working group migration and integration. Barcelona has been chairing this working group since 2009. We meet two or three times a year. The working group is made up of representatives from more than 30 cities across Europe. We discuss how we welcome migrants and integrate them into life in our cities. We share experiences and work together on behalf of municipalities in order to raise awareness about the important work on integration being carried out in cities.

Why did you get involved with EUROCITIES?

We first got involved with the EUROCITIES working group migration and integration as we felt, in the city of Barcelona, that it would be very useful to exchange knowledge on managing diversity and integration with other cities across Europe. We thought that EUROCITIES was the right platform for this exchange.



“We have a shared vision of integration policies at urban level in Europe. We see that we are not alone.”

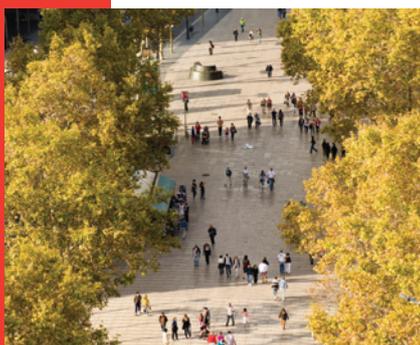
Ramon Sanahuja Velez
Director for immigration and integration in Barcelona and chair of the EUROCITIES working group migration & integration.



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For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>.

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Why is it useful to share views with others?

Sharing views with others is useful as we want to learn from their experiences and from other ways of approaching the policy of integration and immigration. Sometimes you are too immersed in your own work and need to get a fresh perspective.

What else has come from your collaborations with other cities?

It's not just a one-way process: we also share our experiences. We exchange information with other cities on different approaches, projects and policies. In the working group, we have a shared vision about integration policies at urban level in Europe. We see that we are not alone and we share many day-to-day problems with other cities across Europe.

What are the benefits of working through EUROCITIES for your work and for your city?

There are quite a lot of benefits. Mutual learning is one of them, as well as exchanging experiences and improving our approaches to migration integration at urban level. We try to share good ideas across Europe, through EUROCITIES, and try to influence and participate in EU policy making on migration integration, especially by bringing the urban dimension into the debate.

As part of the MIXITIES¹ project, Barcelona hosted a peer review on diversity policies during the autumn of 2011. This means that colleagues from ten other cities spent a week in our city, looking at what we are doing here and giving us feedback on what works well and what could be improved. Like other cities who hosted a MIXITIES peer review we received a feedback report with concrete recommendations from our colleagues which we can now use to develop our policies further. At the same time, the colleagues who came to Barcelona picked up some new ideas that they can use at home. That's a very productive exchange

Do you think that the EU has become more receptive to the needs and the voice of the local level?

Very, very slowly. Integration policies at European level are quite new. Everybody agrees today that integration takes place at local level, but from there it is a long way to convince member states that when policies are designed at EU level it is crucial to get cities and their experiences on board. Our Integrating Cities conferences² - the last one took place in Amsterdam in March 2012 - are one of the ways we get this message across. The working group migration & integration also writes policy papers to raise awareness on the importance of the local level in integration policies. One example is the work we are doing on the regulation for the future of the migration and asylum fund, to make sure that European financial resources will be available to support cities and other local stakeholders improve their integration policies. We will continue this important work and demonstrate that integration is something that happens at local level. We are raising awareness of the fact that the local level is the right level for effective integration to take place. Consequently, the migration trends at city level and the policies cities have developed in response to them should be the starting point for any EU integration policy initiative.

¹ 'Making integration work in Europe's cities' (MIXITIES) is a project of mutual learning between cities in the field of integration governance. It aims to deliver on the commitments set out in the Integrating Cities Charter through which cities promise to provide equal opportunities for all residents, integrate migrants and embrace the diversity of their cities' population.

² The Integrating Cities conference series serves as a platform where key experts and decision makers in migration policy cities can meet.