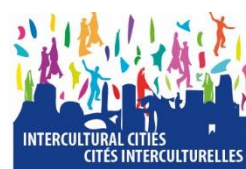


Council of Europe Intercultural Cities Programme

MANLLEU: INTERCULTURAL PROFILE

Diversity, Equality, Interaction, Participation

**BUILDING BRIDGES,
BREAKING WALLS**



Manlleu

INTERCULTURAL PROFILE

Following the Expert Visit of the Council of Europe from 8-9 July 2025

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Manlleu Intercultural Profile

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Preface

This report is based upon the visit of the Council of Europe on 8-9 July 2025 including Council of Europe staff and Intercultural Cities (ICC) expert Robin Wilson. It should be read in parallel with the most recent index report for Manlleu, which contains many more recommendations and examples of good practice (see Annex 2 of this report for the recommendations).

The Council of Europe has defined the intercultural city as encompassing people with different nationality, origin, language or religion/ belief, where:

- political leaders and most citizens regard diversity positively, as a resource;
- the city actively combats discrimination and adapts its governance, institutions and services to the needs of a diverse population;
- the city has a strategy and tools to deal with diversity and cultural conflict and to enhance participation, and
- the city encourages greater mixing and meaningful interaction between diverse groups in public spaces.¹

Real equality, diversity, meaningful intercultural interaction and participation and active citizenship are four inter-linked values that underpin the development and sustenance of an intercultural city.²

Equality refers to the state of being treated equally, whether before the law, in policy or in practice. This includes equal enjoyment of human dignity and fundamental human rights, and equal access to services and opportunities. More broadly, equality of life chances (or ‘access’) can be distinguished from equality of outcomes, with different political and economic philosophies putting differing emphases on each end of this spectrum. Within interculturalism, equality is most closely linked to the principles of non-discrimination and inclusion, and there is particular attention paid to equity: that is, allocating resources and opportunities to each person, according to their circumstances and needs, in order to obtain a more equal outcome.

Diversity is the condition of a group or entity within which individuals differ from one another in various ways, some but not all of which are characteristics protected by human-rights law. Aspects of identity such as age, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, mental and physical abilities, social class, education, economic background, religion, work experience, language, geographic location, political opinion, or family status, are among the sources of diversity.

Meaningful intercultural interaction is any constructive encounter in a social setting between individuals or groups from different cultures and lifestyles in an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and cooperation. Intercultural policy speaks of ‘meaningful interactions’ between different cultural or ethnic groups, which recognise both the differences and similarities between such groups/individuals, promote the atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and co-operation, and counter the tendency towards self-segregation. Meaningful interactions are those that take place on

¹ The Intercultural City Step by Step: Practical guide for applying the urban model of urban integration, Council of Europe, 2019, page 14, available at <https://edoc.coe.int/en/living-together-diversity-and-freedom-in-europe/7982-the-intercultural-city-step-by-step-revised-edition.html>

² Council of Europe, Model Framework for an Intercultural Integration Strategy at the National Level, Intercultural integration strategies: managing diversity as an opportunity, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-093421-gbr-2555-intercultural-integration-strategies-cdadi-web-a/1680a476bd>

equal terms, be they challenging or positive, and which should ultimately be fulfilling for all involved, advancing common goals.

Participation and active citizenship occur when stakeholders (all citizens, including foreign residents where appropriate) have the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and the support to freely express their opinions and influence decision-making on matters that affect them. In some situations, participation may mean those who are directly affected taking the lead and driving the process. Intercultural participation requires an equal and respectful basis, in which everyone feels heard, and involves tackling obstacles that may hinder certain stakeholders' active participation.

This report provides the first intercultural profile of Manlleu following its first Index Report completed in 2025.³

1. Introduction to Manlleu

Manlleu, the capital of the Ter river, is a town located in the central part of the Osona region. Close to Barcelona and Girona, this thousand-year-old city with its own identity and exceptional industrial past has become a diverse, intercultural host city that seeks a balance between economic activity and natural heritage, between the residential and social dimensions, and that values services and facilities in a sustainable way.

The River Ter has defined the city's boundaries and is part of its landscape and urban development. The past, present, and future of Manlleu have a direct relationship with the river, which has been—and continues to be—a witness to the town's technological and social advances and transformations.

A member of the Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities (RECI) since 2022, Manlleu is close to fellow Catalan members Barcelona and Sabadell. It is one of the smallest cities participating in the ICC programme, with a population of only 21,291 in 2024.⁴ However, it has one of the largest proportions of residents of foreign birth—over a quarter (25.07 per cent)—with more than 60 nationalities living together, and 77 per cent of foreign-born residents are of African descent. The arrival of foreigners and their integration into Manlleu society is both a challenge and a driver of change for the city. The municipality works with an eye on the social cohesion of the city and its surroundings, and also strives to create a society where equal opportunities are a reality—so that this social mix can be lived as an opportunity. It is to the municipality's credit that, despite modest resources and competences, it has addressed the diversity challenge positively.

The municipality seeks to turn its diversity—including the relative youth of its ethnic-minority population—into an advantage. Indeed, it was an early mover in this regard with its Diversity Management Plan of 2004. In 2018, the council decided to introduce a successor and, following substantial consultation, unanimously agreed on the Plan for Living Together in Diversity in Manlleu 2019–2023, led by the mayor's office. A further iteration of the plan, covering 2024–2028, is now in operation.⁵

³ Report available at <http://rm.coe.int/2024-manlleu-index-report/1680b6b1d6>

⁴Data from the Statistical Institute of Catalonia, available at https://www.idescat.cat/cercador/?q=manlleu&lang=en&utm_campaign=home&utm_medium=cercador&utm_source=general#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=manlleu&gsc.page=1

⁵ Available (in Catalan) at <https://www.manlleu.cat/convivencia/plans-i-programes>

This intercultural profile for Manlleu was prepared following the visit of the Council of Europe on 8–9 July 2025, which included Council of Europe staff and Intercultural Cities (ICC) expert Robin Wilson. During the visit, they met the mayor, Arnau Rovira Martinez, and councillors from a range of political parties. They heard from staff of various municipal departments and public agencies: the police, the library, the museum and a school. They also engaged with civil-society organisations, variously representing youth, women, and religious denominations.

The programme of the visit (see Annex 1 of this report) focused on key themes including education, neighbourhood cohesion, public services, social and cultural life, welcoming newcomers, participation and intercultural competence. Stakeholders—both civic and political—demonstrated a strong commitment to intercultural values and presented several promising practices, particularly relating to social cohesion and wellbeing at neighbourhood level.

Organised by a local planning committee in co-ordination with the Council of Europe, the expert visit aimed to follow up on Manlleu's ICC Index Report. This was done with a view to assessing existing policies and identifying further areas for development, in line with the intercultural inclusion model. Refreshed policies and additional initiatives, as reflected in this profile, updated the material submitted by the municipality for its index report.

The visit also allowed the ICC representatives to share relevant tools and examples from other member cities, as indicated below. This profile concludes with tailored recommendations to help guide the city's future intercultural programmes and projects.

2. National migration context

After flatlining during the eurozone crisis of the first half of the 2010s, the number of foreign-born individuals in Spain has surged over the last decade by over a third, to more than nine million currently—30 per cent of the total population. Most are from those Latin American countries with the commonality of Spanish. But the largest single group—over a million—are from Morocco, reflecting Spain's historical colonial presence there too. Around a third have Spanish nationality.⁶

Spain's gross domestic product per capita is growing much more rapidly than is the case for the European Union as a whole. The labour driving that growth has overwhelmingly been foreign-born—filling three-quarters of all vacancies created in the years 2020-24 inclusive, with significant overrepresentation in hospitality and construction.

Indeed, Spain's dependence on migrant labour—including women (principally) working in social care—is such that in November 2024 the government announced that it would aim to regularise 300,000 undocumented immigrants per year for three years. The migration minister, Elma Saiz, said Spain needed these tax-paying foreign workers to sustain its welfare state.⁷

⁶ Data from the Spanish Statistical Office, as collated by *El País* at <https://elpais.com/espana/2025-07-11/datos-para-entender-la-inmigracion-cuantos-son-donde-viven-y-en-que-trabajan.html>

⁷ As reported by Reuters, at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spain-regularise-about-300000-undocumented-migrants-per-year-2024-11-19/>

3. Local migration context

There are more than 5,000 residents of foreign origin in Manlleu. The bulk of its ethnic diversity stems from migration from Morocco: more than 3,000 residents are Moroccan nationals, with only a small minority becoming Spanish citizens as naturalisation requires a minimum of ten years' legal residence in Spain. Ghanaian nationals are the only other group exceeding 500 (followed by Romanian, Colombian and Chinese nationals). More than 1,000 residents of Manlleu are in an irregular administrative situation.⁸

In the context of a segregated housing market, including due to discrimination by landlords, that ethnic-minority presence is heavily concentrated in the central Erm neighbourhood of the city, where nearly 30 per cent of the population of Manlleu live. Disadvantage in the labour market, particularly for women, compounds the lack of educational credentials compared with the 'host' community, the digital divide and high illiteracy.

These socio-economic inequalities are associated with stigmatisation and rumours that the Moroccan population pockets social aids. Survey evidence collected by the municipality shows deep distrust linked to social segregation and language barriers.

The mayor, Mr Martinez, addressing the ICC visitors and his key staff, said there were 60 nationalities represented in Manlleu today, presenting the 'challenge' of managing that diversity. The municipality was able to learn how to address that challenge through its association with the ICC network, he said. Doing so involved linking democracy and equality—voice and living together.

4. National Policy Context

Since the aftermath of the fall of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco in the late 1970s, Spain has been a state characterised by asymmetric devolution of powers to its autonomous communities of regions and small nations. There is greatest devolution to Catalonia and the Basque country, whose administrations have sought singular gains in autonomy, whereas other communities have tended to insist on a 'coffee for all' consistency.

Under its current government, presided over by the socialist party (PSOE) leader, Pedro Sánchez, Spain has maintained a distinctively open stance on in-migration. This has been despite political tensions over the unregulated arrivals of west-African asylum-seekers at the Canary Islands and their redistribution among the 'autonomous communities' across Spain and, in July 2025, a 'hunt'⁹ for immigrants by far-right gangs in a town in southern Spain.

In October 2024, Sánchez told the Spanish parliament: 'We Spaniards are the children of immigration. We are not going to be the fathers of xenophobia.' Like Europe as a whole, he said, 'Spain has to choose between being an open and prosperous country or a closed and poor one.'¹⁰

Referring to the tensions associated with integration in parts of Spain, the president announced that his government would put in operation a new 'plan for integration and intercultural living together'.

⁸ Data from the Catalonia Statistical Office, collated in the Plan for Living Together, 2024-2028.

⁹ Explainer available at <https://elpais.com/expres/2025-07-14/que-esta-pasando-en-torre-pacheco-o-como-un-municipio-murciano-se-ha-convertido-en-una-caceria-xenofoba.html>

¹⁰ As reported by *El País* at <https://elpais.com/espana/2024-10-09/sanchez-los-espanoles-somos-hijos-de-la-inmigracion-no-vamos-a-ser-padres-de-la-xenofobia.html>

This would, however, have to be cognisant of the specificities of Spain's multi-level governance, for example in the way language policy in Catalonia is dominated by the issue of acquisition of Catalan by newcomers.

5. Local Policy Context

The Plan for Living Together in Diversity in Manlleu operates against the backdrop of Barcelona Provincial Council, which brings together representatives of more than 300 municipalities in the greater Barcelona area.¹¹ The provincial council's Service for Living Together, Diversity, Children and the Elderly provides technical support related to the design of organisational strategies and actions in the areas of diversity, non-discrimination and inclusive coexistence.

The plan is understood as a cross-cutting tool: even for a small municipality such as Manlleu the challenge of living together as equals requires a holistic, whole-of-government approach. The municipal Department of Services for People and Economic Promotion leads, with technical support from the Department of Social and Personal Promotion and Equality. This social orientation of intercultural work in Manlleu reflects a city where one in five live in poverty, compared with one in eight in Catalonia as a whole, with half the foreign population below the poverty line.

The 2024-2028 plan was put together following group consultation sessions horizontally and vertically—across departments within the municipality and between the municipality and civil-society organisations and local residents. It incorporated evidence from municipal documents and databases.

Through this process, objectives were set and associated with actions to affect them. The fundamental objective of the plan is to promote social inclusion and ensure that the experience of living together in diversity in Manlleu is respectful and enriching. To that end, 'public policies aimed at promoting conviviality must contribute to the construction of a "we" that **socially and culturally links people to each other and to the city as a whole**, its spaces, its heritage, its history and its legacy, reinforcing the bond and sense of belonging of all the people in the municipality, **promoting and strengthening neighbourly relations based on care, reciprocity and solidarity, as well as social inclusion**'.

The plan has five axes. Each has numerous actions associated, of which just some are highlighted here:

- internal organisation: training and sensitisation of staff, an inter-departmental committee, addressing the challenge of the undocumented;
- communications: the municipality developing its own intercultural narrative, a project with schools on stories in native languages;
- participation/empowerment: promoting diverse cultural events in the calendar;
- intercultural dialogue: informal education project with 16-18 year-olds to encourage interethnic friendships, roundtable for inter-religious dialogue, and
- social cohesion: improving access by all to municipal services.

Already progress on these actions in 2024 has been evaluated.

¹¹ More information available at <https://www.diba.cat/en/>

6. Local Economy

In line with the wider trend across Spain, unemployment has declined in Manlleu from the dark days of the austerity crisis in the eurozone—falling between 2014 and 2022 from 10.5 per cent to 6.1 per cent, although this remained one and a half percentage points above the average for Catalonia.¹²

As retailed during the visit by the head of the Ter Museum, Manlleu was historically the hub of the regional textiles revolution along the river. After 1840, its population quickly exploded from around 1,000 to five times that number. Employees of the factories were mainly women (and girls), but they were still paid less than men. The square in front of the museum (itself a converted factory with still functioning hydro-power generation and machinery) has been renamed The Women's Square.

Since 1980, most of the textile factories have closed, amid global competition including from China; some have converted to other products. The museum is now running a related memory project. The current Plan for Living Together envisages the museum emphasising more the intercultural dimension of Manlleu's history, for example in terms of migration flows. As it is, the museum has a guide, captured by QR code, which includes translation into Amazigh—a language spoken by Berber communities indigenous to north Africa and so by many Moroccans in Manlleu—in writing and orally.

7. Education and Training

The Puig-Agut primary school in Erm is attended overwhelmingly by children of foreign-born individuals (although schools across Catalonia are meant to avoid such concentrations by each taking a minimum of migrant pupils). Its principal told the visitors its goals were to improve results, be aware of diversity, reduce absenteeism and improve cohesion (for instance, helping where pupils' households cannot afford excursions). The first language of 58 per cent is Amazigh, which the children are also likely speak at home (even where they are second-generation). Three quarters have extreme economic and social needs.

The head set out ten projects the school had developed to engage the pupils and address their needs—including a school garden, a school radio, a 'green' school, art in English and 'Music for Everyone'. This last (run with a partner school) emerged from a dialogue among teachers, parents and pupils. It includes supporting access to training which the children could not otherwise afford. Evaluations by pupils, families and teachers were very positive. There had been singing performances in the neighbourhood square and the municipal market and (with other diverse schools) annually in Barcelona.

Puig-Agut has a 'social educator' working with parents. She meets them once a month, with an interpreter, encouraging them to take part in school festivities—including cooking events to exchange cuisines—and the parents' association, as well as a wider association for families in Manlleu, *Xarxampa*. There are weekly sessions specifically for women, including on Catalan society, gender-violence prevention, HIV-AIDS and nutrition. There are visits to the town hall and the municipal library. And Catalan lessons are organised in school hours, especially for women who have never worked, have recently arrived or are at social risk.

While the vast majority of children in Manlleu complete secondary education, those who do not include a significant minority of the foreign population—and more than half of Moroccan adults have

¹² Data from the Catalonia Statistical Office, collated in the Plan for Living Together, 2024-2028.

not done so. The municipality supports ‘Pygmalion effect’ workshops to counter the self-fulfilling prophecies by which low expectations of children associated with their ethnic (or class) background appear to be ‘confirmed’ by the internalisation of such expectations and by subsequent performance. The foreign population is also under-represented when it comes to participation in further-education programmes.

8. Employment and Business

The backdrop to the intercultural work of the municipality is the more general activity of the Department of Services for People and Economic Promotion, which takes the lead, in the economic, social and cultural development of Manlleu. It seeks to consolidate an array of services which are personalised and cross-cutting—all officials involved are in the same building, committed to working together—and delivered in collaboration with a range of external organisations, co-ordinated by the municipality.

The department sees its role as supporting the personal and professional development of individuals from age 12: reducing school drop-out, encouraging re-engagement with education, providing careers guidance and promoting lifelong learning. The Network of New Opportunities for 16+ youth supports accredited training courses, courses in Catalan, work experience and internships, and so on.

These social supports are all of particular relevance to Manlleu’s foreign-born population and equal opportunities is an underlying ethos—in line with the intercultural recognition that the talents of every individual must be developed to the full to capture the ‘diversity advantage’ in aggregate. For example, the New Opportunities Network helps young people prepare for intermediate vocational training, where migrant youngsters are under-represented. Its involvement with the Catalonia-wide Consortium for Linguistic Normalisation connects it to the main vehicle for promotion of the language to those for whom it is not the mother tongue.

Or take the issue of individuals in administrative irregularity. The fact that the municipality seeks to bring care workers out of the informal economy, via access to supported training and contracts of employment, is of particular appeal to them.

In addition, Manlleu supports [migrant entrepreneurship](#). It recognises the role of migrants as entrepreneurs and highlights their contribution to the local economy, inviting entrepreneurs to business events, facilitating their inclusion in business and professional networks, removing barriers to their participation in bidding for contracts and so on.

9. Housing and Neighbourhoods

A number of activities by municipal agencies endeavour to provide for a more ‘liveable’ experience on the ground for all in Manlleu. In 2024 a police mediation and conflict-resolution unit was established, with support from social services, because officers were finding themselves the first responders to conflicts. Mediation depends on the voluntary co-operation of the parties involved. There has been a rapid increase in cases taken on by the unit, three-quarters associated with neighbourhood conflicts. Some Arabic-speaking officers can be drawn on where conflicts involve Moroccans.

Recognising the extent of social exclusion in Manlleu, the municipality runs a food-vouchers / food bank project (funded by the Catalan government) for individuals who have been in Manlleu for more

than a year but have yet to reach a threshold income. Run in partnership with the Catholic charity Caritas and Creu Roja, it draws on the latter's knowledge of the households concerned—84 families were funded in 2024. Such anti-poverty work disproportionately services migrants. Help is also offered to prevent electricity cut-offs through unpaid bills, via discounts and energy-efficiency advice. The municipality also runs three social gardens, with a preference for elderly, disabled or otherwise vulnerable allotment holders and help from a social educator.

Erm is the focus for much of the neighbourhood work in Manlleu. One inherent difficulty, however, in generating identification with the neighbourhood, and so the [collective efficacy](#) of its associational life, is the turnover of population. The leader of the local association said young people were less inclined to become involved and, with residents first attracted by the low cost of accommodation in Erm, they tended to move elsewhere in Manlleu once they had become established. The new version of the Plan for Living Together does promise to reactivate the Erm Neighbourhood Council, in collaboration with the association.

Erm benefits from the presence of a Civic Centre, managed (with funding) by the Catalan government, by agreement with Manlleu. There is space for workshops, training and programmes for children. Digital assistance is available for individuals (including the elderly and non-Catalan speakers) to ease access to services.

The Civic Centre contains a Community Attention Point. It works with newcomers, addressing issues of language, labour and life in Catalonia. There are meetings every Monday, for initial attention—with referrals from public agencies as well as communication by word of mouth—to address issues such as school enrolment. These lead to four 'accompaniment' group sessions at the centre, where individuals can get help with access to work, housing, regularisation of papers and so on (90 people have taken part in the past year), leading to certification and a report, which provides a platform for occupational insertion.

The expressed needs of individuals also stimulate activities, such as a women's information-technology course at the centre. The municipality provides an interpretation service.

The Department of Services for People and Economic Promotion supports social enterprises in Manlleu. An example in Erm is Sambucus, a co-operative of six with more than 20 staff. It has run a restaurant for 14 years and provides lunches in schools and pre-schools, as well as growing and selling herbal infusions. Workers recruited include the socially vulnerable, women long out of the labour market and new arrivals from Morocco. These being not yet 'job ready', Sambucus prepares them, on the basis of a referral from the municipality, during a three-year transition.

10. Governance and Democratic Participation

The Plan for Living Together in Diversity in Manlleu designates a cross-departmental monitoring committee of officials and a parallel political committee of elected representatives to meet annually (the first before the second) to keep track of progress. It is critical to involve these actors but—as the vertical as well as horizontal consultation on the preparation of the plan reflected—involving civil society matters too.

[Barcelona](#)¹³ and [Bilbao](#)¹⁴ offer examples, with their Immigration Councils, from which Manlleu might learn in this regard. Such structures, common across Europe, bring together representatives of the municipality and the associations of migrants and refugees. Ideally, they are chaired by the mayor or other senior elected representative, to convey the seriousness of the political commitment.

Rather than having separate monitoring and political committees for the Manlleu plan, it might thus make more sense to make its monitoring—and the preparation of the next iteration—the focus of a single body, as in the best-practice examples. These also indicate that having working groups within the structure ensures that practical activity goes on between the plenary meetings.

11. Civil Society and Culture

One advantage of Manlleu's small scale is it does make it relatively easy for the municipality to connect with the associational sphere on the ground, including organisations representing women and the religious.



Mares Món (Mothers Around the World), which collaborates with the municipal women's centre, uses art as a tool for integration, including producing a rug embodying diversity which is now hung in the municipality (left). An information and empowerment project called *Forja* (Forge), using Catalan and Amazigh, provides basic information for women on the education system, the health service and so on, for instance

through role-play.

One issue of particular concern to women is female genital mutilation. An association of Malians in Manlleu works with the municipal Service of Information and Attention to the Women of Manlleu (SIAD), and schools and medical centres, with a view to preventing girls being taken to Africa to be cut.

As for the religious denominations, the Catholic Church has sought to accommodate the influx of Latin Americans (including Colombians) into Manlleu via weekly youth meetings and trips. The mosque meanwhile organises Arabic classes (bear in mind the complexifying factor here of Amazigh) and these events are open. Roundtables of the religious representatives take place and actions follow. The leaders detect no inter-religious tensions. The religious associations work with the town hall and each other vis-à-vis the food bank (mentioned above) and associated dietary sensitivities.

¹³ See https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/barcelona-municipal-immigration-council?p_l_back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Finterculturalcities%2Fgood-practice%3Fq%3Dintegration%2Bcouncil%26delta%3D20%26start%3D2

¹⁴ See https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/local-council-of-immigration?p_l_back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Finterculturalcities%2Fgood-practice%3Fq%3Dintegration%2Bcouncil

Moving to the cultural arena, the public library in Manlleu is a hub of civic life. With an activity room available for outside groups for events, there were more than 300 sessions there during 2024. Thirty per cent of almost 60,000 users that year were non-Spanish (20 per cent Moroccan alone). Many visitors avail themselves of the library's internet access. The library head highlighted the difficulty however of finding *physical* resources for those Moroccan users speaking Amazigh rather than Arabic.

The library manages projects to stimulate reading among young people, reading clubs for the elderly and a multilingual story-telling project, run by volunteers. It works with the Catalan Consortium for Linguistic Normalisation, with volunteers and students forming groups meeting weekly for five weeks in the library to reinforce their competence in Catalan.

The new Plan for Living Together envisages the drawing up of a municipal calendar of festivals in Manlleu. It also pledges to continue giving greater visibility to individuals who emerged from the city before becoming personalities in the artistic, scientific and sporting worlds, allowing role models from minority backgrounds to be highlighted.

12. Media

The media, and particularly 'social media', are main vehicles for the maintenance and reproduction in Manlleu of the stereotypes directed primarily at the Moroccan population in the city. This can take place, for example, when in crime reporting the nationality of the person involved is only referenced when s/he is an immigrant.

But since 2022 a mainly-female teenagers' group of 'anti-rumours' agents has been battling such prejudices, learning from similar activity in Murcia. It has made a programme for Radio Manlleu and it has a presence on Instagram. It has engaged in lots of merchandising, including a striking T-shirt. And it has conducted public surveys to test awareness.

The group meets weekly to consider activities to challenge rumours, including periodic dinners to engage youth peers. It carries out awareness-raising in secondary schools. It takes part in the annual summit of anti-rumours groups across Spain. Indeed, with colleagues in the Basque country it ran a project, 'Where am I from?', which suggested Manlleu had a relatively welcoming popular culture. And it works in conjunction with an older group called 'Connections', which carries out some of this work with more elderly people.

Relevant in this context are pro-social projects oriented to youth run by the municipality. There is a street-education project, *Territori Jove*, which supports children and young people. There is also a sports project (involving around 20 cities in all), aiming to involve the marginalised, including by going to the neighbourhoods where they live, via after-school extra-curricular activities using school facilities.

The anti-rumours group is not alone in seeking to break down barriers to genuine communication in Manlleu. A Peruvian individual who said how she found it odd that on the street her smile was not reciprocated was the stimulus for a 'Good day' project to encourage people to greet one another. It is run by a group of civic volunteers, who developed the idea, but with the support of the municipality. Its promotional materials can be seen widely in shop and office windows, carrying the slogan: '*Bon dia*: Manlleu people greet each other'.

13. Review of the Intercultural Cities Index for Manlleu

Manlleu's score on the ICC Index is 32, below the average for cities with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants and those with more than 20 per cent of their population foreign-born. The index, however, is arguably already dated by subsequent developments, such as the new iteration of the Plan for Living Together, which are likely to raise Manlleu's registered performance next time around.

Manlleu over-performs when it comes to the key aspect of commitment, which is a positive pointer for the future. Without political will—as reflected in the mayor's direct participation in much of the expert visit—progress along every other dimension will always be retarded.

Areas where Manlleu does not currently perform so well include participation and competence. On the first, raising performance will be about enhancing the involvement of NGOs and committed individuals on the ground. The governance section above suggested a way to make NGO participation with the municipality's intercultural work more comprehensive and structured.

On the second, it will be important to ensure *all* staff in *all* public agencies are trained in the fundamentals of intercultural awareness and sensibility. The new Plan for Living Together envisages more training of civic, associational and municipal actors via the 'Links for Diversity' project, but this [appears](#) to have fallen into desuetude since the pandemic.

Manlleu might find it instructive to collaborate with the fellow RECI member [Valladolid](#),¹⁵ which also has a four-year plan for encouraging conviviality. Within its context, the municipality has organised a series of courses and events to promote intercultural competence among different staff groups and the police in the city. The Council of Europe has produced a helpful [manual](#) on intercultural-competence training.¹⁶

In the domains covered by the intercultural lens, that of business and the labour market is evidently one where improvement could be made. Manlleu has lacked an economic dynamo since the atrophy of its textiles agglomeration, leaving it a small-enterprise economy.

Seeking to capture [the link](#) between diversity and innovation,¹⁷ it might learn from [Reggio-Emilia](#) in Italy, which established a Diversity Lab to promote the management and marketing of diversity as a competitive advantage, including through awareness-raising events and collaborative initiatives.¹⁸ Manlleu might also follow [Santa Maria da Feira](#) in Portugal in exploiting its connections through migration with Morocco—Santa Maria da Feira has partnered with Kenitra there.¹⁹

¹⁵ See https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/valladolid-fosters-diversity-management-in-various-sectors?p_i_back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Finterculturalcities%2Fgood-practice%3Fq%3Dcompetence%26delta%3D20%26start%3D2

¹⁶ Available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/new-tool-to-support-intercultural-competence-training>

¹⁷ See, for example, https://theconversation.com/us-and-european-economies-depend-heavily-on-immigrants-decades-of-data-reveal-just-how-much-261508?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=The%20Conversation%20Europe%2023072025&utm_content=The%20Conversation%20Europe%2023072025+CID_6af1be32b7c13807f417ca4f4f0ebbc&utm_source=campaign_monitor_europe&utm_term=US%20and%20European%20economies%20depend%20heavily%20on%20immigrants%20%20decades%20of%20data%20reveal%20just%20how%20much

¹⁸ See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/the-diversity-lab>

¹⁹ See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/bilateral-overseas-business-development>

14. Conclusions and Recommendations

The municipality created a dynamic, interesting and comprehensive programme for the visit (see Annex 1). It showcased much of the excellent work Manlleu is doing in terms of interculturalism. This reflects the strong commitment of political leaders, public servants and civic actors, many of whom addressed the visitors.

There is much in this on which to build. At the end of the [ICC index report](#), a number of detailed recommendations are offered to do so (see Annex 2). Some of these are bracketed together here.

In terms of the bigger picture, the Plan for Living Together recognises that what should drive the intercultural work of Manlleu is a drive to replace the ‘us’ and ‘them’ of segregation and stigmatisation with an inclusive, civic sense of ‘we’. Building on the municipality’s social orientation, this can present interculturalism as a ‘win-win’ for all the inhabitants of the city—with every individual able fully to utilise their talents and willing to contribute to a good life for all, in a vibrant and cohesive urban milieu.

- **Leadership and citizenship:** It would be useful if there could be cross-party agreement on the city council behind a strong, positive statement of Manlleu’s intercultural destiny, making more real to residents the Plan for Living Together with its ‘axes’ and plethora of actions. It would be valuable if the monitoring of the plan could be carried out by a more unified structure, as suggested above, with political and civic representation. Indeed, such an immigration/integration council/committee could be responsible for the evaluation and renewal of the plan in future.
- **Commitment:** To express its clear commitment, Manlleu might wish to follow [Braga](#) in Portugal in developing a specific section of its website as a repository of everything about the city’s intercultural strategy and its associated activities.²⁰ And recognising as it does the need for interdepartmental co-operation, it might pursue the practice developed by [Botyrka](#) in Sweden of agreeing goals across the departments of the council, on which officers can then be held to account in annual evaluations of performance.²¹
- **Public space:** To foster ‘we’ feeling on the ground, [Barcelona](#) may offer a model in its approaches to neighbourhood regeneration and public space.²² The Catalan capital integrates its neighbourhood and intercultural plans, while foregrounding public participation in placemaking and the promotion of social mixing through planning. [Reggio Emilia](#) has more specifically developed neighbourhood pacts for regeneration with local residents.²³
- **Cultural and social life:** To intervene in the ‘lifeworld’ on the street, Manlleu might look at the annual Intercultural Week in the Portuguese city of [Portimão](#), which promotes social networks across neighbourhoods by diverse means, from music and food to storytelling and debate.²⁴ It might follow [Limassol](#) in Cyprus, which uses interculturalism as a criterion when funding

²⁰ See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/diversidade-an-intercultural-trip>

²¹ See https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/equality-planning?p_l_back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Finterculturalcities%2Fgood-practice%3Fq%3Dbotkyrka

²² See https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/intercultural-public-space?p_l_back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Finterculturalcities%2Fgood-practice%3Fq%3Dpublic%2Bspace

²³ See https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/neighbourhood-pacts?p_l_back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Finterculturalcities%2Fgood-practice%3Fq%3DReggio%2BEmilia

²⁴ See https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/the-intercultural-week-of-portimao?p_l_back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Finterculturalcities%2Fgood-practice%3FTopic%3D25535992%26delta%3D20%26start%3D3

cultural organisations and supports a programme of free events, encouraging minority organisations to come forward with proposals.²⁵

- **Intercultural intelligence and competence:** Manlleu could learn from the developed arrangements for inter-religious dialogue in [Sabadell](#).²⁶ But every citizen needs to develop intercultural capacities—and not just members of minorities. Manlleu could also consider a programme in [Sabadell](#), The City and the School, offering schools a menu of non-formal-education intercultural projects from which to choose.²⁷



There are of course limits to what a small city such as Manlleu can do. But the expert visit revealed a deep reservoir of commitment among municipal staff and civic actors. None more so than in the youth group of anti-rumours agents (left)—a model for the emerging ‘we’ who can make Manlleu’s future a solidaristic one beyond the stereotypes.

The Intercultural Cities programme would like to thank

the municipality of Manlleu for an interesting visit and congratulate the municipality for its continued engagement and commitment. The work done to date is inspiring and several areas were identified as good practices to share with other cities.

²⁵ See https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/boosting-the-citizens-social-life-with-art-and-festivities?p%20back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Finterculturalcities%2Fgood-practice%3FTopic%3D25535989%26q%3Dperforming%2Barts

²⁶ See https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/ensuring-intercultural-mediation-and-interfaith-dialogue?p%20back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Finterculturalcities%2Fgood-practice%3FTopic%3D33651793

²⁷ See https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/education-projects-for-interculturality?p%20back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Finterculturalcities%2Fgood-practice%3FTopic%3D24981713

Annex 1: Agenda of the Index visit

Intercultural Cities Network Council of Europe visit to Manlleu, 8-9 July 2025

FIRST DAY, 8 July 2025	
9.00 - 9.30	Welcome by the Mayor and other members of the municipal government.
9.30 – 10.30	<p>Introduction of Intercultural approach and the Intercultural Cities programme by Aytek Çingitaş, Intercultural Inclusion Unit, Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe</p> <p>Presentation of the Intercultural Cities Index results of Manlleu and examples of good practices from other member cities, by Robin Wilson, Expert of the Intercultural Cities programme</p>
10.30 – 11.00	Manlleu's Coexistence Plan by Àgata Gelpí, Social Services director
11.00 – 11.30	Coffee Break
11.30 – 13.00	<p>Meeting with professionals from different sectors working on interculturality in a cross-cutting way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic Promotion - Education: Prometheus, Stories in Mother Tongue, P3 Assistants, Guidance on Education Procedures, New Opportunities Network - Sports: JESA - Social Services: Food poverty - Intercultural Management: Welcome sessions and training modules, Pygmalion workshop and workshops in schools - Police: Mediation service and community policing
13.00 – 13.15	Transfer to the Erm neighbourhood
– 14.00	<p>Visit to neighbourhood facilities: Puig Agut</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education: explain the case of Puig Agut. Viladomat Project - Women's Group from Puig Agut (Manoli)
14.00 – 15.30	LUNCH at Toubkal
15.30 – 15.45	Transfer to the municipal library
15.45 – 16.30	<p>Visit to the municipal library to see the building and know 2 projects</p> <p>The books snake</p> <p>Lexcit</p>
	END OF THE FIRST DAY

SECOND DAY, 9 July 2025	
9.30 – 10.15	Meeting with *Territori Jove* (youth territory) - Community street educators project - Anti-rumour group
10.15 – 10.30	Transfer to the Ter Museum
10.30 – 11.15	Visit to the museum and presentation of its intercultural projects
11.15 – 11.30	Coffee Break
11.30 – 13.00	Meeting with organisations at the museum: - Mares Món - Antoni Pous - Mosque - Evangelicals - Orthodox - Catholics - Senegalese Association - PEC Steering Team (Pla Educatiu de Ciutat)
13.00 – 13.15	Transfer to the Civic Center
13.15 – 14.00	Visit to the Erm neighbourhood and the Civic Centre - Social Services: community help point
14.00 – 15.30	LUNCH at Sambucus (mercat municipal)
15.30 – 16.00	Presentation of Sambucus, an integration cooperative for vulnerable groups
	END OF THE SECOND DAY

Annex 2: Recommendations of the 2024 Index Report

When it comes to its intercultural efforts, Manlleu could enhance its work in the sectors below by introducing various initiatives:

Commitment: Manlleu might wish to follow [Braga](#) in Portugal in developing a specific section of its website as a repository of everything about the city's intercultural strategy and its associated activities. In terms of a potential 'transversal' structure for this work, it might pursue the practice of [Botyrka](#) in Sweden of agreeing goals across the departments of the council, on which officers can then be held to account in annual evaluations of performance.

Education: Manlleu could learn from the programme in neighbouring [Sabadell](#) called The City and the School. Sabadell has developed a menu of non-formal education projects offered to schools seeking to pursue intercultural projects. Manlleu might also benefit from exploring the transformation in [Neukölln](#) in Germany of a school with in excess of 80% of pupils of foreign origin, including through developing its relationships with parents.

Neighbourhoods: Manlleu might look to the annual Todos (everyone) festival in [Lisbon](#), Portugal, rotated around the city's neighbourhoods to convey that interculturalism involves everyone. It could explore the [Barcelona](#) Neighbourhoods Plan, which addresses social segregation by improving the most vulnerable neighbourhoods. As part of the Spanish Intercultural Cities network, it could also draw on the wide usage there of 'anti-rumours' work.

Public services: Manlleu might consider [Patras](#) in Greece, which provides a range of basic services to individuals from vulnerable groups, on a foundation of equality and human rights, to foster social inclusion and integration. The Municipal Library in Manlleu could be turned into an intercultural resource, following [Bergen](#) in Norway, where the library seeks to use its books and courses to foster multilingualism and intercultural understanding.

Business and the labour market: Manlleu might learn from an initiative by [Reggio-Emilia](#) in Italy, a Diversity Lab to promote the management and marketing of diversity as a competitive advantage, including through awareness-raising events and collaborative initiatives. Manlleu might also follow [Santa Maria da Feira](#) in Portugal in exploiting its connections through migration with Morocco -- Santa Maria da Feira has partnered with Kenitra there.

Cultural and social life: Manlleu might follow [Limassol](#) in Cyprus, which uses interculturalism as a criterion when funding cultural organisations and supports a programme of free events, encouraging minority organisations to come forward with proposals. Bearing in mind the universality of football, Manlleu could consider promoting intercultural football tournaments with wrap-around messaging against racism and all forms of intolerance, based on some experiences in [Bradford](#), UK.

Public space: [Barcelona](#) may offer a model for Manlleu in its overall approach to public spaces. It foregrounds public participation in placemaking and the promotion of social mixing through planning. Practice learned from Placemaking Europe, [Reggio Emilia's](#) neighbourhood pacts and [Lisbon's](#) revitalisation of Moniz Square could also provide inspiration for future action in regenerating public space sustainably and with a participatory approach.

Mediation and conflict resolution: Manlleu could draw on the experience of mediation services in [Barcelona](#) to give the Neighbourhood Community Support Service a clearer intercultural focus while building a team of trained voluntary mediators. And it could engage local police officers on the ICCs' intercultural, community-policing [manual](#). Manlleu could learn too from the developed arrangements for inter-religious dialogue in [Sabadell](#).

Language: [Sabadell](#) has experience here from which Manlleu might learn. Its 'Women's Space Programme' addresses a wide range of issues touching on women's health and wellbeing, linked to language acquisition, in a variety of non-formal milieux. [Reggio-Emilia](#) in Italy is also of interest. The Mondinsieme intercultural centre there provides classes in Arabic, above all to foster knowledge of the language among health-service personnel.

Media and communication: Manlleu could consider engaging a journalist(s) to conduct a project akin to 'Faces of Lublin', which through images and interviews sought to portray the diversity of contemporary [Lublin](#), in Poland. It might also consider organising one or more round-table discussions with local media employers and journalists' trade-union organisations to raise awareness of the importance of diversity among journalists and their contacts.

International outlook: The city could learn from the experience of [Reggio-Emilia](#) in Italy, which has an agreement with the ministry in Morocco responsible for the diaspora. It promotes experience of Morocco for young people of all origins in the city, plus opportunities for young Moroccans in Reggio. Manlleu could also learn more broadly from the English city of [Leeds](#), which has a dedicated international-relations team and budget.

Intercultural intelligence and competence: Manlleu might find it instructive to collaborate with the fellow member of the Spanish Intercultural Cities network [Valladolid](#), which also has a four-year plan for encouraging living together. Within its context, the municipality has organised a series of courses and events to promote intercultural competence among different staff groups and the police in the city.

Welcoming newcomers: Manlleu might find helpful the approach of [Reggio-Emilia](#) in Italy, which recognises that each newcomer has a unique mix of needs and establishes a personalised pathway with them. The municipality might also benefit from exploring the EMPO Multicultural Resource Centre in [Bergen](#) in Norway, which mobilises the tacit knowledge of settled migrants and refugees alongside municipal engagement.

Leadership and citizenship: [Barcelona](#) and [Bilbao](#) offer examples, with their Immigration Councils, from which Manlleu might learn. Such structures, common across Europe, bring together representatives of the municipality and the associations of migrants and refugees. While it is valuable that Manlleu's plan institutionalises political engagement, the inputs from the various parties could be greatly enriched by those of voices closer to the communities concerned.

Anti-discrimination: Manlleu might make a public statement of its hostility to racism, like [Maribyrnong](#) in Australia, which also invites individuals who feel they have been victims of discrimination to report incidents. The municipality could also look to [Bergen](#) in Norway, which developed its Action Plan for Inclusion and Diversity to affirm that all its inhabitants should be seen as individuals rather than collapsed into a specific ethnic group.

Participation: Manlleu might draw insights from how [Reggio-Emilia](#) in Italy organises an iterative dialogue with migrant and refugee associations, including in the co-design of its intercultural strategy. [Valladolid](#), which launched its first integration plan in 2005, provides a model for its renewal, through evaluation and dialogue. A structure in Manlleu similar to the Immigration Councils in Barcelona and Bilbao would provide a vehicle for such dialogue.

Interaction: Manlleu might look at the annual Intercultural Week in the Portuguese city of [Portimão](#), which promotes social networks across neighbourhoods by diverse means, from music and food to storytelling and debate. [Setúbal](#), also in Portugal, makes May a month of intercultural dialogue. While this began with minority associations, the city expanded involvement the 'host' community precisely to maximise the scope for interaction.

Manlleu may wish to consider further examples implemented by other Intercultural Cities as a source of learning and inspiration to guide future initiatives. Such examples are provided above for each sector as well as in the Intercultural cities [database](#).