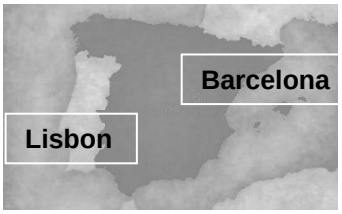
CONFERENCE OF INGOs
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Committee on Migration Issues

Integration of migrants: Complementarity between civil society and institutions

Study visit to Barcelona – Catalonia - Spain

Carried out by Mr Daniel Guéry (Vice-Chair) - Mr Marc Van den Reeck (Bureau member)

Wednesday 14 - Friday 16 October 2026

From 12 to 16 October 2026, the Committee on Migration Issues of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe travelled to Lisbon (Portugal) and Barcelona (Spain).

The "field visit" to Barcelona made it possible to explore several aspects of migration issues:

1. Findings / Catalonia:

- ✓ Half of Catalonia's actually working population is foreign
- ✓ Under the extraordinary regularisation decided in spring 2026, 250,000 applications were filed, of which 83,000 were successful.
- ✓ Nationalities of migrants in the Barcelona metropolitan area:
  - three quarters are from outside the European Union (most are Latin Americans – Colombia and Peru first)
  - 55% are in an irregular situation
  - 80% are unemployed or work informally
  - one third are Peruvian, Colombian or Venezuelan
- ✓ In Catalonia, 2 million people were born abroad, twice as many as 10 years ago.

In such a situation, given the weight of multiculturalism in this region, the priority of migrant integration must be recognised even more than elsewhere (cf. the official meetings held at city and Catalan level).

In the words of the President of the Parliament of Catalonia, we must reach the point where migrants individually feel that their country is the one where their children live... and not the country where their parents lived.

2. Public opinion and civil society

Growing public distrust of civil society is the result of a toxic narrative that is currently widespread. These narratives even affect the judgement of some members of NGOs such as the Red Cross, for example.

3. Links between civil society and the authorities:

- ✓ While the reception of migrants by the **municipality** of Barcelona is positive in Barcelona, this is not the case everywhere in Catalonia! Some municipalities go as far as refusing to apply the law
  As a result, the regional institution, the Generalitat, is adopting legislation to ensure that all municipalities actually apply the law; this anticipates a future situation in which the far right is likely to grow and increase its hold on municipal government.
- ✓ Generalitat de Catalunya:
  It has developed the concept of the participation council: the basis for structured meetings with civil society, where seats are reserved for small NGOs to ensure that all those working with migrants are represented.
  This concept was recently developed further through the creation of 8 territorial tables, to better understand the realities of the territory in terms of migration and ensure a local perspective.
  The development of a cross-cutting strategy is far from perfect: some departments, such as education, work well, while in the department for children and youth it is not effective, notably because of policies that unintentionally have a negative effect on integration.

4. The business and private sector / Sant Joan de Déu

Businesses partly fund several foundations and take part in civil society projects, working with NGOs to set up accredited training leading to a job in the company (the "Sant Joan de Déu" organisation we met during the visit is a good example)

5. Role of religions

Integration projects initiated and carried out by bodies of the Catholic Church are regarded as serious and are supported to a greater or lesser extent by the various political authorities. Religious NGOs are present in almost every initiative.

As it was not possible to meet representatives of the Muslim community during the stay in Barcelona, an online meeting with the Islamic Federation of Catalonia was organised in the following days.

The many associations and extensive networks within the large Muslim community of Barcelona and Catalonia support their members on a more informal and ad hoc basis; in this way they guide newly arrived migrants (as well as those already settled) towards employment, vocational training and language learning, and accompany them in administrative procedures, such as the extraordinary regularisation process currently under way.

The existence, at the different levels of government administration, of bodies with specific competence in religious affairs is seen by the Islamic Federation of Catalonia as a constructive catalyst for intercultural and interreligious dialogue, notably in the increasingly difficult fight against Islamophobia.

6. Civil society and its networks

They are recognised as playing an important role, illustrating the need for synergy between NGOs, for example by setting up platforms that guarantee a holistic approach to the reception of migrants.

7. Housing and the opportunities it opens up

40% of migrants share the same room with others. Their housing problem turns out to be more difficult than for the local population.

The Santa Anna association is an example of support for migrants on their path to integration: 78% of the people it receives are migrants, most of them undocumented; this NGO

- fights against refusals of registration on invalid grounds, against some municipalities' disregard for the law, and against unfair exclusion from the relevant services
- offers a space where people are safe,
- provides medical assistance as well as balanced meals
- offers the opportunity to benefit from existing social networks or even build their own
- provides preparation for entering the labour market

In short, the people accommodated there regain their dignity, which greatly helps their inclusion.

8. Integration through work

These spaces offered by NGOs are safe spaces; like the creation of social networks, they help restore migrants' dignity. This makes inclusion in society possible, notably through work.

According to the "Generalitat" de Catalunya:

- the extraordinary regularisation is a positive development because it offers the possibility of working formally, which:
  - facilitates the integration of the migrants themselves
  - removes the scope for exploiting employees
  - contributes to the social security budget
- the two-year wait before being allowed to work after registration is an obstacle that serves no particular purpose in the integration process.

9. Language learning

Language learning is very important because it facilitates an efficient and effective integration process and dynamic. It should be stressed that children's use of the language particularly promotes the integration of the family into the society in which it lives. This learning can be formal or informal (in social structures and/or in NGOs).

In this case, it can be noted that the Catalan language probably brings people closer to local realities, even though Spanish-speaking migrants from Latin America are not entirely free from language barriers.

Remarks :

1. *Barcelona is considered exemplary in terms of the reception of migrants (a long-standing policy, in which NGOs have a real place in effective collaboration). However, this image cannot be generalised, neither to Catalonia nor even to the immediate surroundings. Barcelona offers good practices worth studying and following.*
2. *Job offers from employers (in agriculture, for example) and certain high demands lead to irregular employment in order to meet production targets: society therefore accepts both regular and irregular migration.*

3. *We are witnessing here an actual instrumentalisation of migrants, as is the case with the defence of Europe's borders.*
4. *The importance of offering places, bodies and platforms to discuss migration, in order to better coordinate action and combat toxic rhetoric*

Where and when can migration issues be discussed?
Integration is also linked to border issues… this is frightening…
The question of Europe's borders.

<u>This report was made possible thanks to</u>

The host INGO that prepared the visit:

- Pax Romana: Elisabet Rosell i Vives, the INGO's delegate to the Conference of INGOs

The institutions / NGOs we met:

- **Parliament of Catalonia:** Molt Honorable Josep Rull, President of the Parliament of Catalonia.
- **Generalitat de Catalunya**: meeting with the Director-General for Migration and Refugees, Department of Social Rights and Inclusion - Mr David Moya, Director-General for Migration and Asylum, Laia Roig, coordination
- **Barcelona City Council:** Maria Eugènia Gay, Second Deputy Mayor for International Relations, Education, Health and Human Rights, and Ms Ester Núñez, Chief of Staff to the Deputy Mayor.
- **Santa Anna field hospital** – Hanna Bori, director of the centre.
- Meeting with **Caritas** Barcelona - Mr Eduard Sala i Paixau (Director), **Elisabet Ureña Vila** and Mr Joseph Matias Aibar, Episcopal Delegate of Caritas
- **Platform of Christian organisations** working with migrants, with Mr Cabot, Director, and other INGOs
- **Sant Joan de Déu Hospital Foundation –** En Marxa project: Juanjo Ortéga
- **Fundació Roure**: Llum Delas, President, Carles Vilalonga, Vice-President, Jesus Ruiz, Director-General, Eva Morena and Luma Pascua
- **Consulate of Belgium** - meeting with consuls of several countries, organised by HE Pierre Brusselmans, Consul of Belgium (Poland, France, Germany, Canada)
- Mr Mohammed Halhoul Debboun – **Union of Muslim Communities of Catalonia**

Barcelona, 17 October 2026