

JOURNAL

PROJECT

MILMA Project -
Migrants Labour
Integration Model
based on Acculturation
Project

📍 Fuenlabrada, Spain

TOPIC

Integration of migrants
and refugees

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MILMA Final Journal !

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MILMA (Migrants Labour Integration based on Acculturation) was a project funded by the EU, through the Urban Innovative Action (UIA) that promoted integration among different cultures through an innovative programme based on the perspective of integration, promoting collaborative mechanisms between local inhabitants and migrants with the aim of increasing their employability. The City of Fuenlabrada formed a strong private-public partnership to test an experimental formative process, directly connected to the development of products and services demanded on the market. This was made possible through the identification of “Business Challenges” (BC's), created in specific areas

identified as potential generators of employment, which were then transformed into "Experimental Employment and Inclusion Teams" (ETEIs), which functioned in close partnership with small local businesses. The originality of the project, is that the trainings proposed in the labs, and the internships which were done, depended not only on the technical competences of the beneficiaries to be employed, but on their know-how about who they are, what they want, and what their vision of good work for them is! The project has been directly coordinated by the City of Fuenlabrada, under the auspices of the very dynamic Mayor Javier Ayala and Juan Carlos Hernandez, the technical director of city projects and the partner structures.

Inclusion, starts from contact, collaboration and coexistence between local people and migrants. This can be achieved through the deepened respect of all residents and access to all forms of collective life, work, leisure and culture. Fuenlabrada puts a lot of effort already into the cultural sphere, financing 7 theatres and the [Dance Centre](#), where [Maria Pages](#), a world known flamenco dancer has opened a space to develop dance in a contemporary way, using her talents to be proactive in the territory and give it an added value. She has just obtained the prized Princesa de Asturias award.

The **MILMA** project concentrated more on the delicate balance between competences and available jobs, trying to midwife both sides into success. It is important to underline, that this was done in the spirit of personal development of each person and her/his growth towards their goals and needs. This process, managed directly by the city, proposed trained personnel to small local companies, who had participated in defining and running the trainings. The Labs were original and included all parts of the population – residents (unemployed) and migrants who were searching for work. The principle that the individual person is to be respected allowed the project partners, whose roles were vital, to identify the real here and now needs of the beneficiaries, and to adapt the project accordingly. All these efforts of the project have received a lot of attention, from Spanish cities or abroad.



In this context, the municipal council has invested increasing efforts in promoting interculturality, launching, among other initiatives, the Municipal Service on Immigration (SEMI), now called the [Cultural Diversity Programme](#), and the Comprehensive Intercultural Living Together and Solidarity Plan ([Plan Convive](#)), and participating in setting up the [Anti-rumour Programme](#) based on the Anti-rumour strategy to prevent racism and the [Mesa por la Convivencia](#) (Board for Living Together in Harmony). These efforts have facilitated the consolidation of a more inclusive and diverse citizen participation network. Meeting the board was a strong moment during the visit and showed how far the city inhabitants are involved in the idea of living together.

As UIA expert, I have been asked to write this final Journal for MILMA, after just one visit, and several exchanges with the local actors. I hope I have done it justice, but the time scale was particularly short.

The project's progress

The capacity to adapt to the evolving and newly identified needs of the migrant and resident population and companies constituted the main progress and learning of the **MILMA** project. The initial hypothesis was severely put to the test by the reality: the migrants and unemployed persons were of a different level than initially presumed, the companies which it was planned to involve were not those with whom the project worked, (the new companies had real and urgent needs in employment) and the city changed its approach to the management

of the project, by internalising all its functions in order to make the project central to the management of the city and to gain the experience of directly managing such a large project.

What has happened with the project since its end date?



The Gardening Assistant Lab in full swing

The City of Fuenlabrada has financed several more **Business Challenge Laboratories** (BC Labs) which evolved into - "**Experimental Employment and Inclusion Teams**" (ETEIs) continuing with the methods developed during the **MILMA** project, as they were so successful. The **Gardening Assistant** lab took place in the first quarter of 2022, from 09/02/2022 to 20/05/2022. It lasted 390 hours with 15 participants of whom 2 were immigrants. The participants of a previous Gardening Assistants lab, who were employed by a gardening company, testified that the training gave them self-assurance, the capacity to see that they had competences and a strengthening of their social role in the group.



Apprentice hospital wardens during in house training

The **Health Institution Warden** Lab took place from 15/11/2021 to 08/03/2022 and lasted 405 hours. 15 participants got involved in the training of whom 6 were immigrants. A participant of an earlier Lab said, that he had spent some time in a hospital with a close member of his family and wanted to be able to work in that context. The Lab allowed him to gain the fundamental elements of assisting people in hospital. He said he has never been so satisfied to be at work.

The City of Fuenlabrada is financing 2 more Labs in the summer of 2022: **light floor installation** and **catering**. For both these labs the city training organisation CIFE has the close collaboration of small private companies who are willing to employ trained personnel, as well as the professional organisation of floor installations Asociaciones de Pavimentos.

The legacy of **MILMA** goes further. At the EU level **the experience in employment and integration of migrants** has provoked a lot of interest. Since October 2021 the city has been collaborating with [URBELAC](#), a network in the field of inclusion of migrants and refugees, concentrating on urban poverty and jobs and skills in the local urban economy. Fuenlabrada is also present since January 2022 in the [International City Partnership](#), which works on the integration of migrants and refugees.

In addition **MILMA** was presented in different forums:

- the [Forwork Project](#) – good practices in the economic inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers
- [URBACT](#) – urban transfer networks

- Migrations and interculturality – debate and discussion laboratories,
- RIVAS PLUS EMPLOYMENT – good practices in the field of social inclusion,
- FORMANDO FUTURO – the 1st international salon for employment,
- INCLUCITES – presentation of the **MILMA** project to Livadia, the mentee city of Fuenlabrada during a visit,
- **MILMA** was presented during a visit to Spain of Moroccan civil servants and media professionals,
- CEMR Project « EU dialogue, local solutions » Migration and inclusion guideline : Spanish and Italian actions.

In addition, the **MILMA** heritage has allowed Fuenlabrada to participate in 2 other EU projects:

The [INCLUCITIES](#) project (Oct 2020 – May 2023) aims at improving the integration of third-country nationals in middle-sized cities through city-to-city cooperation. Eight cities, with varying degrees of integration-related experience, and their national associations of local and regional government participate in the project, led by CEMR and funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the European Union.

The [MUST a Lab Project](#) (Jan. 2022 – Jan 2025) is co-financed through the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. The partners involved are: Stad Mechelen, Comune di Modena, Livadia, Viena, Pont-de-Claix and Fuenlabrada. The Project introduces a new way of developing public policies. The objective is to encourage the participation of the different social agents, ensuring the participation of the immigrant population in the review, renewal and maintenance of the city's integration strategies and policies.

MILMA has done a very solid piece of work on **the life stories of the participants**. Many of them have been registered and some are published. They show the force developed by the migrants to survive very difficult moments, and how they have become users and actors of the city Fuenlabrada, convincingly showing that they have not come to profit from the social system, but to work and assume their own futures.

Los Arcos & CIFE investments



The kitchen training area

The **MILMA** project also financed the improvement and adaptation of the Los Arcos & CIFE buildings, used to train the participants. The new source of financing allowed the development of several specialised areas; hospital wardens, catering and restaurant service etc. At present the buildings have evolved and are still used for trainings activities, but also for courses for immigrants to obtain Spanish nationality, Spanish courses for immigrants and refugees, conciliation space for working women (during the evening low-income women who have no family support can leave their children there to go to work). The Municipal Housing Institute also functions in one of the buildings, to help people, mostly from the low-income population and immigrants, to look for accommodation, inform them about economic support for renting and help them with the application form.

The project's plan for long term sustainability



Mayor of Fuenlabrada, Javier Ayala

Javier Ayala, Fuenlabrada's mayor has revolutionised the way in which the city administration functions. The most important change is in the fact that around the mayor's office, physically the closest, are the offices of an EU team, which stimulates all the other departments, to innovate and create a better reality, by using EU funds, and by managing them appropriately. According to Mayor Ayala **MILMA** has been central to this extraordinary decision. At the beginning the coordination of the project was to be ceded to an outside expert office. However, as declared Juan Carlos Hernandez Navas, the technical director for city projects and the coordinator of **MILMA**, the decision was changed and the project was managed from inside the city



Juan Carlos Hernandez

administration, in order to be able to measure the "pulse" of the project in a permanent way, to install the running of projects inside the city administration and to improve the competences of all concerned. This allowed the project to become very reactive to the needs of the participants, increased its effectiveness and brought a whole lot of information into the city administration, which otherwise could have been lost. For example, the needs of the future participants were not correctly analysed at the beginning and therefore high-level professional trainings were planned in computing and other advanced technologies, drones included. However, the needs of the unemployed and migrants proved to be quite different and of a much practical calibre; gardening, supporting the ill in hospitals or qualified floor covering workers are examples of the capacities of the beneficiaries and at the same time of the needs of the local employers. The project planned initially to share the benefits of the project with large companies, functioning in Fuenlabrada. This did not work, as those companies would have liked exclusivity and were already running other programmes. Small local companies however were very excited by the project, as they saw the possibility of really finding and testing future employees. This however meant that the "Labs" could not be managed by a single small company, therefore the model which had been prepared had to evolve.

The city administration and its partners, are going to continue to use the methodologies developed in **MILMA**, to continue the Labs, and inspire other cities to do the same. Other Fuenlabrada projects will also benefit from these experiences.

Generated Knowledge

Lessons learnt in relation to the 7 UIA challenges

The City of Fuenlabrada, made **MILMA** a central action to its functioning. After considering the possibility of an external leader to the project, the **leadership** of the project was placed right in the heart of the city administration, and in close collaboration with CIFE, the municipal training centre. This allowed the mayor and the coordinator to have a direct influence on the project, which, as the mayor said, became central to the functioning of the city administration. In fact the offices of the "changemakers" of the city, the EU team, were placed physically just next to the mayors office. The employees working there, became the mayors closest collaborators. The **implementation** of the project was thus simplified, as the changes which were required could be brought into action rapidly, without the need to negotiate with a third party. According to the leaders, this was a critical take away and has taught the city that it has the competences to lead and can be active in the areas that are the most important in its strategies and policies. This approach also facilitated the crucial area of **public procurement**, where the inside department dealing with this question was in close collaboration with the projects team.

The reorganisation of the city, installed by the Mayor also facilitated **integrated cross-departmental cooperation**. Due to the changes in the needs of the public, and the businesses which were ready to cooperate, the Labs and all the other trainings had to be rapidly adapted to the new situation. This was of course made even more difficult by the COVID 19 pandemic, which for a time halted the planned procedures, but they were very quickly transformed into on-line work for the participants. This is not to say that everything was easy; an enormous amount of time went into reformulating programmes, seeing how they work and compensating the lack of face to face contact.

The **participative approach** used deeply in the project is symbolised by two different aspects:

- firstly the participative approach to **the collaboration with private companies**. Their needs dominated the way in which the trainings were done, allowing the companies to insert their specificities. The representatives of the companies, mostly CEO's underlined that for them this was very motivating and gave them the possibility to really collaborate efficiently with CIFE and the other actors.



Representatives of the companies during the exchange with the expert and UIA representative

- secondly the participative approach in regard **to the beneficiaries of the project** included integrating them into the socio-cultural dimension, meaning the collaborative work, as well as the economic dimension, where they were participants in the process of identifying what type of company they would like to work for, where they would feel good and working together on how to improve their technical capacities, going towards higher employability.



Discussion with some of the different Lab participants

As can be seen from the above, changes in the work done were numerous and sometimes unplanned. The constant **monitoring** done between the partners, and **measuring the impact** in regards to the beneficiaries was complicated, but finally gave very good results.

The **financial stability** of the project was assumed by the city administration, which has positioned **MILMA** as central to its approach in the area of employment and integration. The continuation of the Labs and the developed methodologies, which will continue to evolve with time, is proof in itself that the financial stimulus of the Urban Innovative Action (UIA) financing has a dynamic influence on decision makers.

Communicating with the target beneficiaries. The partners of the project, have all progressed in their methodologies, and some of the imported tools have been largely improved. This now allows CIFE and the city to use all these assets to maintain a high level of efficiency and remain close to the ground, as the **tools are participative and are based on satisfying the changing and very individual needs of beneficiaries** (migrants and residents alike) **and the companies.** The **scaling up** processes have also begun in the transfer of several of the tools to other cities which have shown a lot of interest for what Fuenlabrada has achieved. Inside the administration, the processes and tools of the **MILMA** project are very strongly influencing the way in which the city functions and especially how new projects are constructed and run.

Recommendations to other urban authorities who wish to implement similar innovative projects

Open-mindedness and energy are the two main factors of success in a project such as **MILMA**. It does require a little more time and passion than usual, but it would appear that this is the only way that a city can be up to date with what is really the situation of its inhabitants and can take creative initiatives to help them become **at ease with themselves, successful neighbours and efficient employees and sometimes employers.**

Other key recommendations to other cities are:

- 1. management from inside the city:** experiment to see if you can manage projects from within your administration. This requires administrative agility, sometimes transformation of the way in which the city works, as project-based actions do not function in a 12 month calendar, have specific requirements in as far as the administration is concerned, and if they are well run, closely to the needs of the inhabitants, they will require change and adaptation to the current situation all the time. This requires permanent political and management support.
- 2. satisfaction of small companies needing workers:** the project was planning to work with large companies and to get them to organise each "Lab". Small companies became the projects best partners and were capable of employing some of the beneficiaries. So initial standpoints should always be tested in confrontation with the reality which may lead to surprises, which any city has to be capable of integrating and transforming into a success.
- 3. innovative system of training:** the system of training developed in the Labs, was based on an already tried out methodology – it relied on the candidates to get to know themselves and to know what they want and what type of company they would like to work for. This activation of unemployed persons, migrants or not, is crucial in building up confidence, self-awareness and creativity, which is what all cities would want from their residents.
- 4. mixing of the resident population and newcomers:** in contrast to other projects **MILMA** secured financing for both the resident unemployed population and the migrant population. This is really a key for any other city, as the complex processes of integration always consist in a two-way process, getting accepted and accepting what is there. This should be a condition for any project wishing to take on, directly or indirectly, the challenges linked to newcomers.
- 5. improved identification of who the migrants with needs really are:** know your city really well as the persons who you think are the group you are aiming at, maybe don't exist, are already working or there is some other reason why they do not "come out of the hat" as the magician would say. In the **MILMA** case, the idea that migrants would in general be "young" was proven to be false, as many participants were of a different age and their initial educational level was much lower than supposed initially.
- 6. Communication to the city at large is vital in regards to migration.** The debate as to when someone stops "being a migrant" and becomes an (ex)migrant and therefore a resident, like the others, is a difficult one. However, progress can be made by showing the determination and exceptional efforts of newcomers, in their journey, lasting years sometimes, and in their search for lodgings and work and how they work when they get it. This can be done, based on the **MILMA** example by publishing interviews with these people, disarming in this way many of the so-called arguments and giving them a true status of **contemporary 'heroes'**.

The expert's final reflection and "evaluation" of the project

Fuenlabrada, as a city laying close to Madrid has lived through a very rapid growth in population over the last 40 years, going from 80 000 in 1980 to 200 000 today. At the same time the city has developed many economic activities, but not all the inhabitants have managed to secure employment, the unemployment rate is nearly 12%,

with a majority of women. The city administration has tried to help resolve this challenge and **MILMA** has been one of the main channels through which new and experimental methods have been used to try to prepare the beneficiaries for employment and to identify their eventual employers.

On both sides **strong co-working** has been done, the whole process becoming an **exceptional participative process**, which will benefit more and more inhabitants of the city as time goes on, as well as beyond.

The fundamental assumption of all this work, is that each person living or coming to live in Fuenlabrada constitutes a human force, who's energy it is worth developing, respecting and co-using.

The main legacy of the project, both in terms of knowledge generated and the solution implemented

MILMA has developed in all areas of the different transitions the planet is now facing:

- the green transition with the creation of the Urban Recycling Lab,
- the democratic transition, with the method of finding out by each person who she/he is and what they want/are capable of,
- the digital transition, with the drone lab,
- the health transition with the hospital wardens,
- the food transition with the garden assistant...
- ...

The legacy of the project is even further strengthened by the principle of **RESPECT** towards all the inhabitants and the profound conviction of the partners of the project, that working together for the benefice of the city and its inhabitants is really worth it. **MILMA** made these elements come into being by managing this collective energy and giving it the added value, it deserves, through, as the Mayor Javier Ayala says, **being close to the inhabitants and knowing what their needs are**. This has allowed the **MILMA** project to be symbolically at the centre of the development of the ethos of the city, developing its identity in all directions.

Integration of migrants and refugees

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