



WELCOMING
INTERNATIONAL

STORIES OF RESILIENCE:

Spain

Placing long-term vision,
collaboration, and solidarity at the
forefront of emergency response

CREDITS

A case study based on conversations on the project [Juntas En la misma dirección](#) with Carmen Luz Baso (Tenerife Council/Cabildo de Tenerife), Vicente Zapata (University of La Laguna, OBITen) and Brahim Khardy (Jóvenes por la Diversidad)

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Background

Tenerife is the largest island of the Canary Islands, a Spanish territory off the northwestern coast of the African continent. The island has invested in welcoming processes for over 20 years, and has recently strengthened its approach by partnering with Welcoming International.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the island successfully adapted its welcoming efforts to mitigate additional challenges. Partners implemented innovative ways of organizing meetings and activities to build upon existing relationships between Tenerife Council (Cabildo de Tenerife, the local government), the University of La Laguna, the NGO sector, and local communities.

In partnership with Welcoming International, work also continued to further define Tenerife's welcoming standards, by using collaborative solutions to make previously planned work compatible with ongoing pandemic restrictions.

The key elements for Tenerife's successful emergency response were stakeholder collaboration and the active participation of various community groups. A long-term partnership between the [Tenerife Council](#) and the [University of La Laguna](#) allowed them to lead a response that was rooted in grassroots co-creation and knowledge sharing. The fact that their vision was already long-term and intersectional allowed for the growth and resilience of Tenerife's welcoming communities.

In 2001, these partners began collaborating on the [Observatorio de la Inmigración de Tenerife](#) (Immigration Observatory of Tenerife, or OBITen), a joint initiative that generates research for scientific work, publications, and reports. It has also evolved to include direct interventions for the management of diversity and social coexistence.

One such intervention is [Juntas En la misma dirección](#) (Together in the same direction), a participatory initiative that was launched in 2009 in response to the disinvestment in diversity, migration, and intercultural initiatives due to the global financial crisis. With a presence in all corners of the island, the initiative involves Tenerife's society as a whole — from children to elderly people — and brings different communities together to build a more just, inclusive, and resilient society that welcomes all people.

Because the pandemic amplified the adversities faced by people who had recently arrived on the island, the Tenerife Council and OBITen put in place targeted support to further boost the resources available to

people experiencing hardship in the island. In particular, they redoubled efforts to welcome and find accommodation for unaccompanied minors. New grassroots initiatives, such as Tenerife Solidario (Tenerife in Solidarity), have played an important role in these efforts and were instrumental in organizing collections for food banks.

In the following case study, we highlight just some of the exciting and innovative projects, activities, and strategies that contributed to the resilience of Tenerife's communities and its successful emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key elements of success

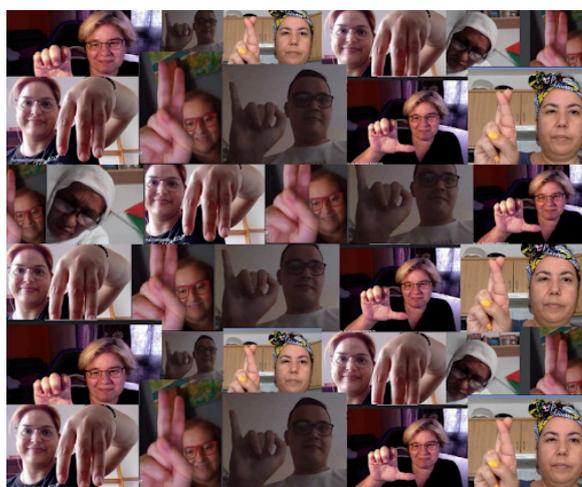
#1 DIGITAL ORGANIZING TO ADVANCE INCLUSION

Above all, the pandemic disrupted social life on Tenerife, which had an immediate effect on welcoming projects. The work of Juntas En la misma dirección is always centered around physical, social spaces: in the street and working directly with people.

During the first lockdown, the project was forced to suspend nearly all group activities and find another way of sustaining communications and welcoming work. Because of the project's ability to adapt and spot opportunities along the way, a newer and more inclusive network actually emerged.

Brahim Khardy, a participant in the [Jóvenes por la Diversidad](#) (Youth for Diversity) group run by the Juntas En la misma dirección project, recalls: "When the pandemic started, we were on video calls every day, which could get a little overwhelming. But it was a positive thing to know that you were not the only one in a difficult situation, and that all of your friends and the people you knew felt the same way about the pandemic. The Internet allowed us to reconnect with people that we hadn't seen in a while, and it opened us up to learn about experiences from other parts of the world."

In Khardy's group, Jóvenes por la Diversidad, members started having meetings for creative problem solving and planning activities. Instead of meeting in a classroom or a library, they used online spaces and video calls. This allowed them to organize multiple meetings at different times of the day, and it allowed everyone in the group to contribute opinions.



Credit: Juntas En la misma dirección

Online meetings also widened participation among past participants of Jóvenes por la Diversidad, many of whom no longer live on the island. Current residents were happy to reconnect to their colleagues in Bulgaria, Germany, and mainland Spain. As in-person meetings resumed, the group implemented a system of circulating notes and minutes online to keep everyone connected.

Digital communication has also connected various groups of people that live in distant parts of the island. When Juntas En la misma dirección conducted the 2020 [Mesa Insular para la convivencia intercultural](#) (Island Roundtable for intercultural coexistence), one of their key annual events, they held it in small groups across the island. They then connected all the groups via video call, allowing for increased participation and hearing from new voices.

The Tenerife Council and other Juntas En la misma dirección partners also deepened their partnership with Welcoming International. The Welcoming International team provided advice and examples of welcoming standards from across the Welcoming International alliance. These frameworks and indicators are forming the basis for Tenerife's welcoming standard, which are in development.

Together with several partners, Juntas En la misma dirección carried out the fifth Anti-Rumors Youth Summit in 2020, which included people from across Spain. It was a timely intervention — since moving to online spaces has allowed people to communicate faster, it has also created an unprecedented challenge: the proliferation of harmful hoaxes and rumors that blamed the difficult situation on migrants and/or minorities. Correcting this dangerous misinformation through the Summit had a deep impact, strengthening efforts to promote welcoming attitudes. Reinforcing this work has been key, especially in the context of increased hateful discourse and the spread of racist attitudes.

Juntas En la misma dirección has been a very important initiative, because it works with people collaboratively. These are not projects that are thought up in a separate meeting and then implemented; they come out of reality, and are developed with people who have lived that experience. This is in order to be able to create successful coexistence, and work on the objectives directly, in a faster and more collaborative way.

— Brahim Khady, participant of Juntas En la misma dirección, and Jóvenes por la Diversidad

#2 BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The University of La Laguna and the municipality of San Cristobal de La Laguna are developing a project called Comunidad (Community) led by Vicente Zapata of OBITen. Its objective is to engage and organize local community members and create solutions collectively, as well as generate new proposals.

The partners have used all available communication channels to invite people to participate in Comunidad, including the local press, outreach by communications staff from the municipality, videos, social media, and word-of-mouth marketing.

One of the key takeaways from this project is that government institutions and public administrations should collaborate, support, and move hand-in-hand with civil society. The partners want Comunidad to be a model for other municipalities in Tenerife, the Canary Islands, and across the world. The municipality, Tenerife Council, and OBITen understand that challenges like COVID-19 or climate change cannot be solved unilaterally.

In November 2020, the Council and OBITen jointly organized the [20th Technical Conference on Immigration](#), which was fully dedicated to inclusive recovery. Mayors, Tenerife Council officials, NGO stakeholders, and the general public participated to reflect and generate recommendations for moving forward.

#3 INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

As a collaboration between a local public institution and a university, Juntas En la misma dirección is often cited as an example of a strategic multi-sector alliance for promoting active processes for coexistence with an intercultural approach. This has enabled Tenerife Council and the University of La Laguna to position

the island as both a national and international reference point for other territories through their research on international migration and implications for the island.

The project has also received praise for its excellent work with the public in creating a welcoming culture for migrants, especially at a time when the island experienced an increase in migration by sea. This led to the creation of the island-wide strategy, *Tenerife vive Diversidad* (Tenerife lives Diversity). Through this, the Tenerife Council aims to work with the 31 municipalities on the island and equip them with the tools to include all stakeholders in the development of public policies.

Additionally, the Tenerife Council and OBITen have strengthened their participation in the [Red de Ciudades Interculturales](#) (Spanish network of Intercultural Cities), despite the pandemic. Tenerife became part of a working group to develop strategies for cities to acquire new intercultural competences, with a focus on technical and political aspects. Working with the cities of Donostia-San Sebastian, Bilbao, and Castellón de la Plana, they have produced [a manual](#), [a video](#), and a training course.

At the regional level, *Juntas En la misma dirección* has collaborated with the Government of the Canary Islands and OBITen has participated in the Canary Islands Immigration Forum, which gathered many stakeholders.

In 2020, Tenerife took part in Welcoming International's annual convening dedicated to inclusive recovery, which was an important milestone in the island's welcoming work. It enabled the people on the forefront of Tenerife's welcoming processes to introduce themselves to other countries and actively participate in collective learning and knowledge sharing.

Zapata explained that “the pandemic has highlighted that challenges are increasingly becoming global, but that we must provide effective solutions at a local level because otherwise, we will not be able to face these major challenges.” However, he stressed that “the key lies with local initiatives communicating between each other. Tenerife needs to talk and collaborate with Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and so on, in order to generate multiple networks.”

Zapata believes that the more people and organizations are interconnected, the greater the guarantee we have of producing structural change. “This connection helps us make local initiatives more effective,” he says in contributing to the success of emergency responses and inclusive recovery.

Carmen Luz Baso, a Councillor from Tenerife, explains: “We are an island of solidarity, and we believe that we will better ourselves by collaborating with others at all levels: regionally, nationally, and internationally.”

#4 DECENTRALIZED AND PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES

OBITen's stakeholders aim to decentralize their work by supporting and facilitating individual groups through training, awareness-raising campaigns, and other activities. Its project, *Juntas En la misma dirección*, is responsive to new ideas, which often come from evaluations designed to inform future activities and objectives.

This approach can be observed in the evolution of the project's name, which reflects participant feedback. Zapata recalls:

In 2009, it started as “En la misma dirección” (In the Same Direction), then in 2010 became “Juntos En la misma dirección” (Together In the same direction) to reflect the idea of things being done collectively; the Council, the University,



Issue 33 of the Juntas En la misma dirección newsletter focuses on the “Welcoming International” strategy for welcoming migrants that is starting to be developed in Tenerife through the “Welcoming Tenerife” initiative. Credit: Juntas En la misma dirección

migrant collectives, community organizations, the Tenerife society as a whole. Finally, in 2020, the initiative was renamed “Juntas En la misma dirección.” This is a more inclusive name that refers to both the word ‘persons’ (the feminine form in Spanish) and to a feminine collective. It reflects the presence of many women who work very actively on the project and are part of the network.

In this way, Juntas En la misma dirección approaches coexistence horizontally (giving all stakeholders equal access to express their experiences and opinions) and pluralistically (in an environment that supports divergent opinions and ways of thinking).

When problem solving in areas such as education, prejudice, racism, interreligious dialogue, equality, and social participation, the voices of children, young people, newcomers, and non-migrants are all heard.

Khardy confirmed that he doesn’t perceive any barriers to participation within the initiative:

“All voices are heard, and participants’ ideas are taken onboard in the initiative. There is also no obligation that one must always be there. There is an understanding that people have complex lives and other priorities, and the doors are always open for those that can come.”

Khardy stresses that the project has always worked inclusively to support people who arrive in Tenerife so that they can continue being who they are. Those who arrive can adapt to the island, but without ceasing to be themselves or losing their culture.



Credit: Juntas En la misma dirección

Projects like Juntas En la misma dirección foster the development of participatory processes. This is a model that public policy planning should follow, and that we as politicians at the forefront have to take into account. If this is not the case, public policies will not address everyone’s needs.

If we want to provide an inclusive response to challenges, and if we want to have a society that is increasingly resilient, we have to encourage the participation of all the different groups that are part of that society.

— Carmen Luz Baso, Tenerife Council

#5 CENTERING LIVED EXPERIENCES AND CO-CREATION IN PROGRAMS

Inspired by the collaboration with Welcoming International and the islanders’ response during lockdown, the OBITen Technical Conference in November 2020 centered around the theme of inclusive recovery. Local policy makers, experts, and NGO practitioners, as well as the general public, including people living in vulnerable situations, presented their perspectives. A [video presentation](#) gave people a platform to share their experiences and demand their perspectives be taken into account.

One takeaway was that by including all of the people and organizations that make up a community, it is possible to generate recovery processes that are truly inclusive for everyone. Zapata explained that, in the context of the project Comunidad, they carried out a community consultation process that went beyond conventional research methods:

“...we managed to get people from the community to be the ones leading the consultation with other people from their own community. So, it was not a technical advisor but a neighbor who listened to another member of the community to learn about their experience, their expectations. And with all of the testimonies gathered, we will be able to generate a diagnosis of the current situation that will allow us to draw up a series of strategic proposals for the future.”

Another strand of their work is the Stories of Resilience. These are testimonies from migrants with complex lives who have overcome adversities. Juntas En la misma dirección [released the stories on social media](#) to convey the resilience of newcomers to people who have always lived on the island.

Zapata said: “It proved to be very healing to read the stories, not because the person had had a bad time, but because they were telling us how they had managed to cope with adversity. It was a very simple process: some people wanted to tell their story, and so we shared it. It has been one of the activities that has been most well-received.”

#6 LEVERAGING PREVIOUS WELCOMING EXPERIENCE

Welcoming is an ongoing process. Tenerife’s effective emergency response is rooted in previous welcoming activities that have enabled the Tenerife Council and its partners to build trust among local community groups, as well as gather information about their circumstances, needs, and priorities.

OBITen has been active for 20 years and Juntas En la misma dirección for 11 years, and they often share their expertise with other projects and institutions on the island. During the pandemic, they sought ways to sustain contact with partners and reached out to new groups in more remote areas of the island.

They also circulated an open questionnaire to find out how people’s lives had been affected by the pandemic. The responses were high and included those from migrants. The Tenerife Council also held several meetings and working groups with other stakeholders, such as the business community. This period of adversity has encouraged the partners to root their project and the work with Welcoming International even more firmly in service of Tenerife’s society.

Baso explains: “Being part of Juntas En la misma dirección for so long, and having the experience of participating with so many collectives, gave us an advantage that helped us be more resilient.” She believes that the Tenerife Council’s participation in emergency response is critical because it has the resources and experience to respond effectively.

The public administration can also benefit from involving multiple sectors of society in the recovery process. Initiatives such as Juntas En la misma dirección help the Council stay in touch with Tenerife’s many different social groups, some of which require targeted solutions during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the peak of the pandemic, Juntas En la misma dirección led an emergency response effort to support those in need, while also deepening its understanding of participatory practices that engage the community in everyday life. The information and experience that the Tenerife Council and OBITen gathered were also used in specific projects to improve the employability of the groups they work with. It is fundamental that such work happens with cultural diversity in mind so that no one is left behind.

Takeaways for other welcoming initiatives

- Dedicating financial resources to systematize knowledge and collect data directly from those with relevant, lived experience is critical to apply the learning gained to future projects.
- Universities can play a key function in collecting, systematizing, sharing, and transferring knowledge, alongside other stakeholders. Zapata believes that “the importance of the community approach and working collaboratively with all stakeholders of any given context, is fundamental: public administrators, technical advisers, practitioners, the general public, the business community.”
- During a crisis, local governments may find themselves unable to offer the required level of emergency response. For example, on Tenerife, initial emergency responses came primarily from NGOs and community members who knew their neighbors. Therefore, local governments must partner with others to achieve an inclusive and resilient emergency response, and they need to adequately invest in these relationships before crisis strikes. Zapata explains that “public administration must not offer an isolated response to challenges, in part because their response time is always going to take longer. It should seek to work with other stakeholders and facilitate spaces for exchange, dialogue, and sharing work.” This enables government to move more agilely in responding to community members experiencing hardship and offer resources.

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