



INTERCULTURAL CONGRESS 2018

ENGLISH SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

The City of Reykjavik's Intercultural Congress was held for the fifth time on 17th of November 2018 in Reykjavik City Hall. As it has been in previous years the congress was organized by the City of Reykjavik's Human Rights Office and its main objective was to create a forum where immigrants in the city can discuss the various issues that concerns them and share their experiences.

The results of previous congresses have been published and presented to the public and to the councils and committees of the City of Reykjavík. They have been used to improve services for immigrants in the city. The results can be found on the website of the Human Rights Office, <https://reykjavik.is/skrifstofaogsvið/mannrettinda-and-lydraedis> under the category 'útgefið efni'.

PREPARATIONS AND EXECUTION

Preparation mainly consisted in keeping track of presentation material, the organization and registration of the participants, as well as elaborating the topic of the congress and processing the results that were presented there. Volunteers do most of the work.

Registration was held online and 120 participants were registered. Discussions were conducted in English. Participants were expected to join one of the seminars they wanted to participate in, both before and after lunch.

The arrangement of the congress was different from the previous ones. The workshops were organized according to discussion topics, and not by language.

In the preparation of the congress, the ideology of *The Days of Dialogue* from the Netherlands was viewed in collaboration with Olga Plokhooij. There is experience of the use of methodology since 2006 and its aim is to promote mutual understanding and social cohesion by organizing conversations in all areas of society.

According to the ideology, discussion is divided into 3 parts. First, participants introduce themselves and share their experiences on a particular topic, telling what difficulties they have

and what creates problems. After that, participants are asked to tell about their dream situation. Finally, participants present suggestions for improvement and change.

Participants had to follow the rules of mutual respect and the importance of listening to each other's views and be willing to participate in discussions.

Dialogue group discussion facilitators were employees of the Human Rights Office and the role of recording secretaries was filled by volunteers from NGOs and students from the University of Iceland.

Themes for the dialogue groups were chosen in collaboration with the City's Intercultural Council, and this time emphasis was placed on the issues of children, employees of the City and women of foreign origin.

At the 2018 Congress there were six Dialogues:

1. Disabled children of foreign origin
2. Children of immigrants: raising a child in a new country
3. Adolescents of foreign origin: social participation and well-being
4. Employees of the City of Reykjavik of foreign origin: communication in the workplace
5. #Metoo for foreign women in Iceland
6. Democratic participation of immigrants

COOPERATION

The city invited grass-root organizations and special interest groups to participate in the preparation of the congress. The dialogue of disabled children of foreign origin, was organised in cooperation with Þroskahjálp - National Association of Intellectual Disabilities. Chairman of Samfok - the Association of Parents of Primary Schools participated in the dialogue about raising children in a new country. Three representatives of youth councils in Reykjavík attended the dialogue on adolescents of foreign origin. The trade unions Sameyki and Efling were included in the discussion about employees of the City of Reykjavik of foreign origin. A representative of the Women of Multicultural Ethnicity Network in Iceland participated in the discussion about foreign women in #metoo movement. Alda – the Organization for Sustainability and Democracy came to the preparation of a seminar but was unable to attend due to illness.

RESULTS

DISABLED CHILDREN OF FOREIGN ORIGIN

The main discussion in the dialogue about disabled children of foreign origin, emphasized the lack of information for parents of disabled children of foreign origin. Parents were not aware of all the opportunities for support for their children, and their experience was that some received more service than others. Participants wondered whether they were getting all of the necessary information according to the laws. They also pointed out that it is important for the staff to be aware of the cultural differences. Foreign parents of disabled children often do not know their rights at work. Having to request vacation time to take keep doctors' appointments or taking time off to care for sick children creates an extra burden. It was also discussed that the school system does not take these children into account when organising services. They also thought that services offered by neighbourhoods should be increased.

As a solution, the participants talked a lot about the necessity of an immigrant information centre, where all information could be obtained in one place. It would also be necessary to allow more experts of foreign origin to obtain operating licenses in Iceland. Also, a support group for foreign parents is necessary.

CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS: RAISING A CHILD IN A NEW COUNTRY

The educational achievements of children of foreign origin were of great concern. It is important to support better mother tongue education for immigrant children and to stop placing the sole responsibility for teaching mother tongue on parents. Not everyone had the time and opportunity to bring children to mother tongue education on weekends.

The foreign parents find it difficult to participate in school activities because of the lack of language skills in Icelandic. The parents often work a lot and do not know their right to leave work to participate in school meetings and celebrations. This problem can be even greater for single parents. Schools need to take more initiative in communicating with the parents in order to improve their participation in school life. To do so, it is also important that parents have the opportunity to learn Icelandic. Parents need help and encouragement to actively participate and get involved in after-school activities and sports and leisure clubs.

The participants discussed the importance of supporting the creation of organizations/ groups for foreign parents or to focus on getting parents of foreign origin to participate in the parents' organizations that already exist. There is a big demand for establishing an information centre

for immigrants, where all information could be accessed in one place. It would also be good to establish family centres in neighbourhoods where parents can meet, discuss, and receive necessary information. Furthermore, information about sports and leisure activities in neighbourhoods needs better presentation in other languages than Icelandic.

ADOLESCENTS OF FOREIGN ORIGIN: SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND WELL-BEING

There are not many youth organizations of adolescents of foreign origin who are spokesmen for young people. Those organizations find it difficult to get grants to fund projects and meeting facilities. Young people find it more difficult to feel accepted by others, and often don't want to reveal their origin to peers. They often feel categorized as "second class citizens" in society because of their origins. Teachers also need further intercultural education as such education is only an elective course in Iceland's teacher education programmes.

Although language skills were widely discussed, factors as social status have to be taken into consideration. Having Icelandic communication skills does not solve all problems. Foreign students find it difficult to learn their own mother tongue, as the studies only take place on weekends. Parents often do not have the time or the resources to support their mother tongue language education.

EMPLOYEES OF THE CITY OF REYKJAVIK OF FOREIGN ORIGIN: COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Employees of foreign origin find it difficult to get information on what is expected of them at work and about their rights. Communication difficulties often arise between immigrants and Icelanders. Immigrants are also afraid to comment on problems that arise in their workplace, because they fear losing their jobs. Employees complained about a lack of feedback about the job they were doing. They often don't know how to perform at work.

It is important to clarify procedures for communicating with staff. The City of Reykjavik needs to create an information package for newcomers and perhaps provide new employees a mentor for the first 3 months. Employees need to know how to deal with complaints and how to submit suggestions in their workplace.

There is a lack of counselling for immigrants about where and how education can be validated. It is important to establish an information centre for immigrants where immigrants could access all necessary information in one place.

#METOO FOR FOREIGN WOMEN IN ICELAND

Many women of foreign origin have told their stories on the Facebook group #metoo women of foreign origin, but there are still many who dare not express themselves publicly. Language difficulties can have an impact there as well as culture and fear of prejudice. No comprehensive action seems to be in progress to improve the position of women of foreign origin. There are many women who do not seek help as they simply don't know where to seek help, hence their cases go unreported. Definitions of sexual harassment and violence can also vary between cultures and therefore many women do not realize when harassment or violence are involved.

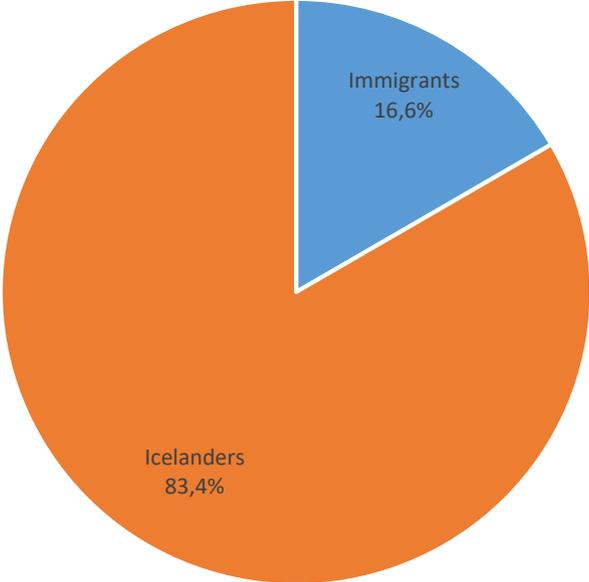
Participants in the seminar experienced a strong sense of solidarity between both foreign and Icelandic women. It is important to improve access to information and services, for example at Bjarkarhlíð.

DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION OF IMMIGRANTS

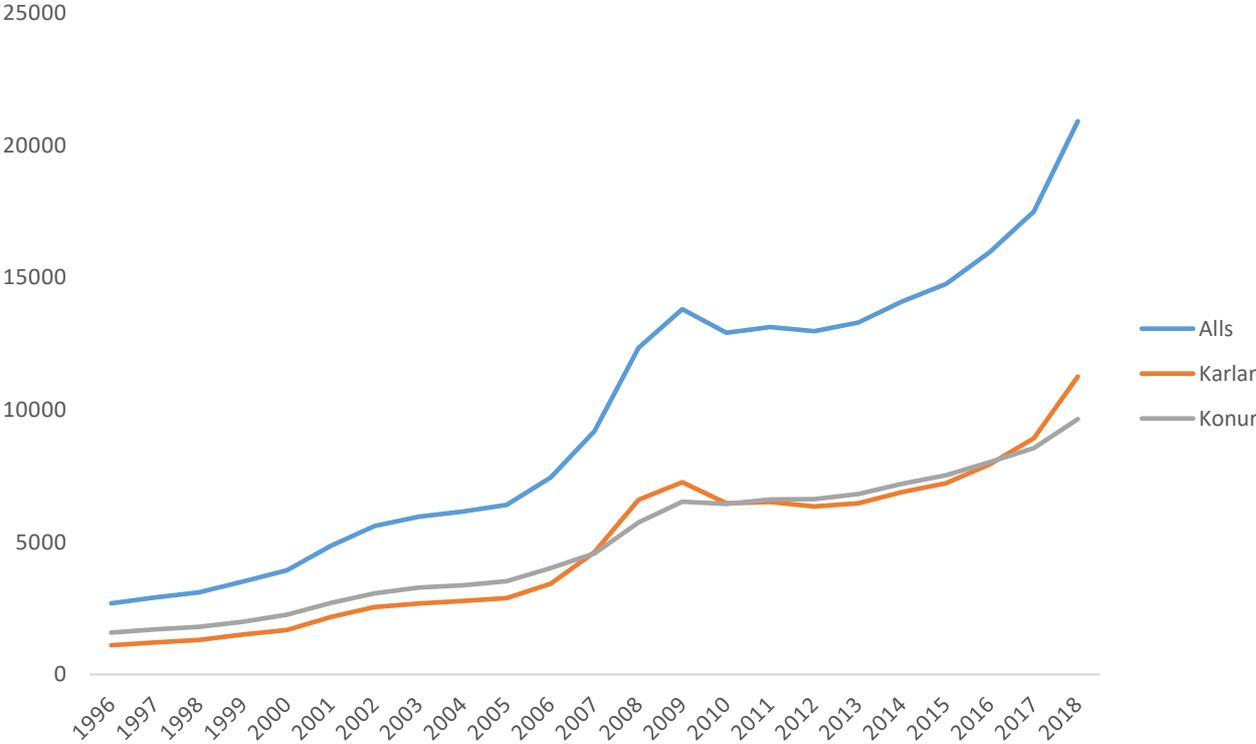
Participants pointed out that issues related to immigrants are not on political agendas. Many parties often work on the same issue and the communication between the state and local authorities is difficult. Immigrants are struggling to understand where to go for services and who is responsible for instance, state or local authorities? It was important to build trust between governments and immigrants, and the immigrant grass root organisations have to be stronger. The need to establish an information centre for immigrants was discussed, where all the necessary information and guidance could be obtained in one place. Difficulties in getting their education evaluated were also debated, and people find it very difficult when they do not get jobs according to their education and experience. The state needs to develop a clear policy on immigration.

STATISTICS ABOUT IMMIGRANTS (HAGSTOFA ÍSLANDS)

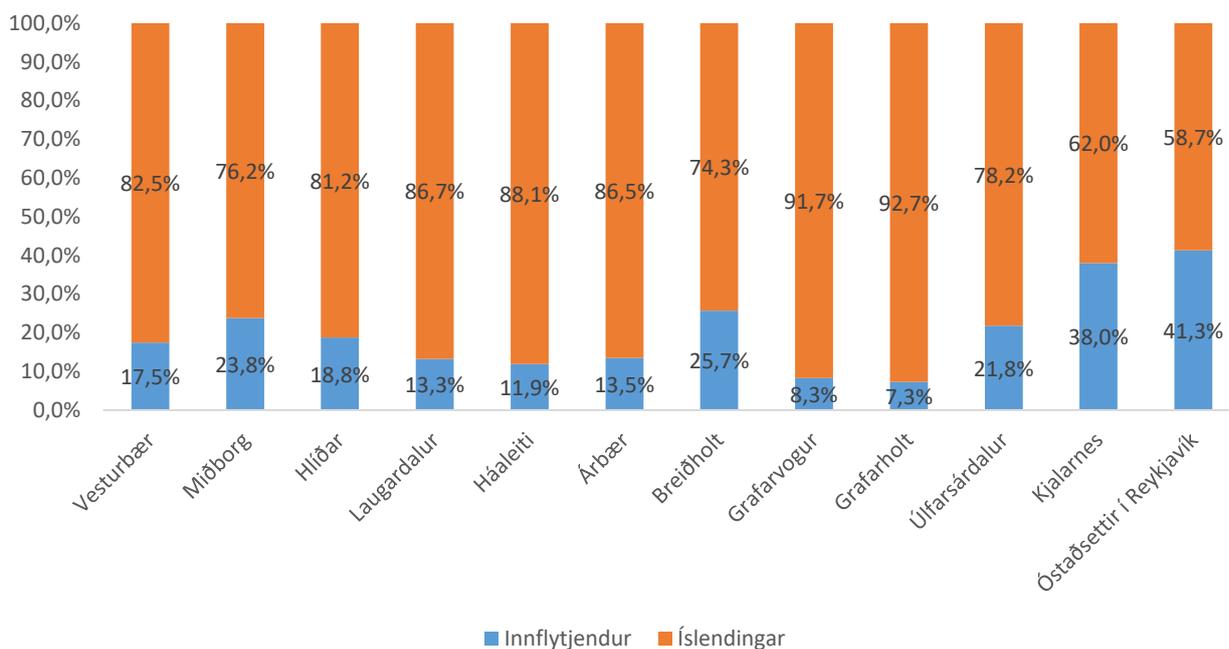
% OF ICELANDERS AND IMMIGRANTS IN REYKJAVIK 2018



IMMIGRANTS IN REYKJAVIK 1996-2018



IMMIGRANTS AND ICELANDERS IN DISTRICTS IN REYKJAVIK 2018



15 NATIONAL GROUPS IN REYKJAVIK ACCORDING TO PLACE OF BIRTH AND GENDER 2018

