

2015



[MULTICULTURAL CONGRESS 2014]

Results from Reykjavik's multicultural
congress, November 15th 2014
Summary in English

Reykjavik's multicultural congress 2010, 2012 and 2014



Introduction

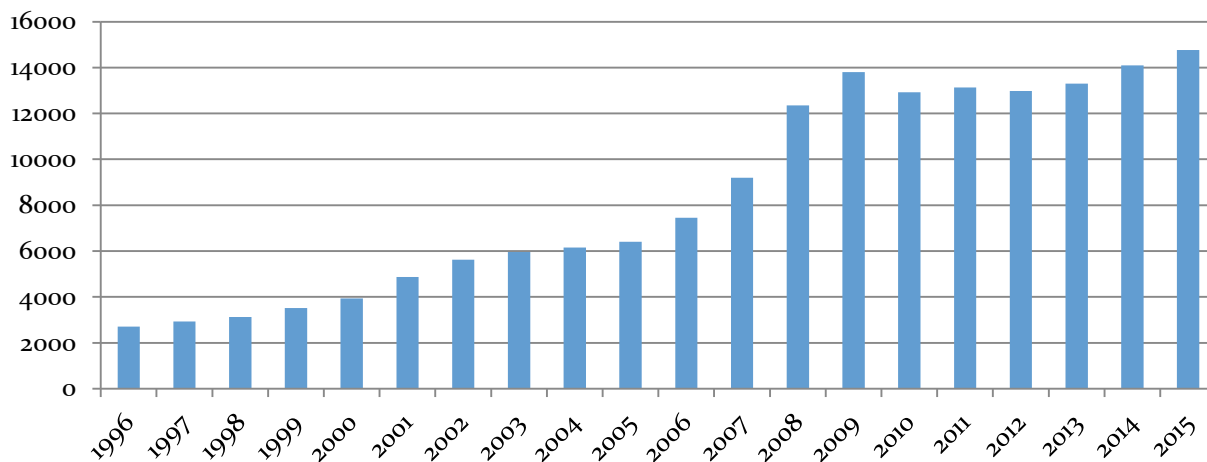
Reykjavík's multicultural congress was held for the third time on November 15th 2014 in Reykjavík's City hall. Former congresses were held in 2010 and 2012. The purpose is to create a venue where immigrants living in Reykjavík to communicate their experience of the service that the City of Reykjavík gives and make suggestions of how to improve it. The congress was organised by the Cities of Reykjavík human rights office with the purpose to create an open discussion about issues related to the crevice of the city from immigrants point of view. The topics discussed were: information, education, reception of new residents, protection of interests and mutual adjustment in Reykjavík. The discussion was organised on 11 tables, with an animator and a secretary on each table, in 11 languages: Icelandic, English, Polish, Lithuanian, Russian, Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese, Latvian, Spanish and Arabic. Almost 200 people participated in the congress and it was the first time that Chinese and Latvian languages were included.

The results of former congresses have been introduced to the public and to boards and councils of the City of Reykjavík. They have been used in policymaking and to improve service for immigrants. The reports from the congresses are accessible in English on the webpage of the Cities of Reykjavík human rights office at <http://reykjavik.is/utgefidenfni-mannrettindaskrifstofa> .

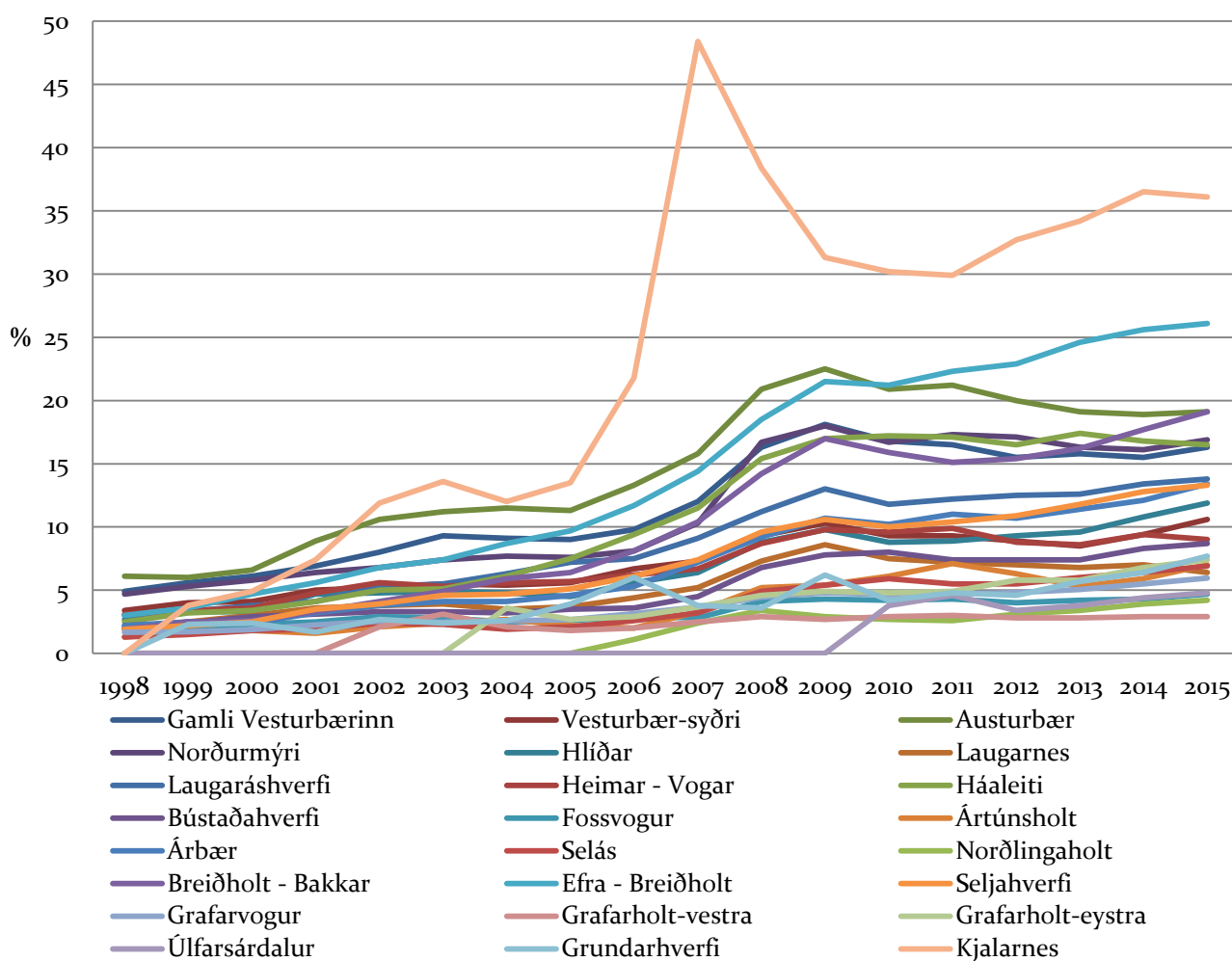


The opening of the Multicultural congress, Dagur B. Eggertsson mayor, addresses participants.

Immigrants in Reykjavík 1996-2015



Immigrants by districts 1998-2015



Summary

The results of this multicultural congress are in coherence with the results of former congresses. It appears that two subjects are underlying themes in most of the comments and recommendations: information and communication. People want more information, that the information is more accessible and that it is offered in more languages. Some of the information that was mentioned as lacking already exists, but the departments have to make it even more accessible. There was also a request for schools and other institutions to be more pro-active in informing people about resources available to them and where to find information. The idea to provide people that move to Reykjavik with a “Welcome to Reykjavik” package of information either printed or a welcoming letter with a link to a webpage was very popular.

A central office with information and counselling for immigrants was called for by many. The model would be Alþjóðahúsið – an information centre for immigrants that the City of Reykjavik had affiliation with. Currently this service is offered in different places and for different groups, scattered around the country. Such an information and service centre would also serve as a platform for communication and to strengthen the work of associations of immigrants. People want to be active participants in the society and many are, but insecurity, especially in relation to language, prevents many from taking the initiative to communicate with others.

An emphasis was laid on the importance of the professional and financial support that the City of Reykjavik gives to mother tongue teaching for children of immigrants. Participants requested increased cooperation and financial support to immigrants associations. It might be necessary to make the current support that the City of Reykjavik offers in form of grants to associations, companies and individuals for activities and services in coherence with its policy, more visible.

Children of immigrants are well received in school, generally speaking, especially in pre-school, but there is always room for improvements. Still increased quality in reception and initial support can decrease or even prevent problems further down the road. But seeing all children of immigrants as a homogeneous group should be avoided. Visible immigrants suffer more prejudice than other immigrants. All employees of the school system need to have a continuous education in the field of cultural capacity that would increase the quality of their work and make it easier. The City of Reykjavik needs to employ more people with diverse language skills and immigrants should be more visible as employees, and not only in cleaning and kitchen.

It is important for the City of Reykjavik to hold an event as this congress is where the citizens have an opportunity to offer constructive criticism of the City's services and suggestions for improvements. A light is also shed on what of the good work the City is doing is not getting across to the target group. The participants should as well have a strengthened awareness of themselves as citizens of Reykjavik and active members of the society with a voice and direct access to the City's administration.