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Final Report: Inclusion Policy Development

ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNCIL MÝRDALSHREPPUR
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MOSTY

MÝRDALSHREPPUR | Austurvegur 17, 870 Vík

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„Appoint a qualified person to oversee the implementation of this policy and applicable practices for all organizations within the municipality. The employee in question will be tasked with ensuring compliance with the duties and responsibilities defined in the policy while promoting accessibility and support within the community supported by the municipality's leadership". 14

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1. Introduction

Mýrdalshreppur's English-speaking council was founded in the fall of 2022 in the hope of being able to increase the influence of immigrants in the community and increase their opportunities to participate in the municipality's committee work and policymaking. The members of the council were appointed by the local government and special care was taken to ensure that the members had as diverse a background as possible to reflect the diversity of people in the municipality.

There have been major changes in the composition of society in Vík í Mýrdal in recent years. In 2010, 500 people lived in the municipality and 30 of them had foreign citizenship. Today, in 2025, 970 people live and 590 (60.8%) of them have foreign citizenship.ⁱ It is worth noting that, according to Byggðarstofnun, the population in Mýrdalshreppur has increased by 67.5% since 1998. Tourism is an important profession in the region and has had both positive and negative effects on community development. Positive: Economic growth has been good, essential jobs are being filled, and innovation has fueled businesses that have sprung up in the tourism industry, local culture has blossomed, attracting more visitors. However, there are challenges, including social tensions, experiences of discrimination and pressure on the housing market and public services.

In order to respond to this through capturing positive trends, meet challenges and counter negative trends, the English-speaking council considered it necessary to start consultation with residents and formulate a strategy for inclusion. The council's desire was and is to promote cohesion, promote community activity and participation as well as continued development and growth. This strategy also promotes understanding and cooperation between residents regardless of origin or background.

1.1. Delimitation of Subject

In formulating an inclusion policy for a municipality experiencing a dramatic demographic shift – where immigrants have become 60% of the population – it is important to recognize both the positive transformations and the challenges that come with such diversity. Our society imposes barriers that are often unconscious, and in order for us all to enjoy equal opportunities, it is necessary to systematically reduce and prevent situations that lead to discrimination. The law on equal treatment outside the labor market 85/2018 provides for equal treatment of individuals regardless of race, [national origin, religion, outlook on life, disability, age, sexuality, gender identity, gender characteristics or gender expression] in all areas of society, outside the labor market, cf. law on equal treatment in the labor market. The aim of the law is to combat discrimination and establish and maintain equal treatment of individuals in all areas of society. Mýrdalshreppur's inclusion policy aims to embrace interculturalism by preventing discrimination

and segregation while at the same time promoting increased opportunities for social activity for all. Emphasis is placed on interculturalism and residents of foreign origin in the inclusion policy due to the large percentage of immigrants who have come to settle in the municipality in a short period of time. However, it is important to emphasize that the main goals, values and actions set out in the policy are valid and will be a guide for validation among all kinds of diversity that thrives here in Mýrdalshreppur among the population, incl. information dissemination, basic services, housing and planning issues as well as business development. Among other things, it is a particularly urgent task to ensure the preservation of Icelandic and to offer both children and adults the opportunity and support to learn the Icelandic language.

The policy is the commitment to adapt the practices of the municipality and the responsibility of the public sector as employers, authority and service provider to reflect and meet the needs related to the demographic composition of the population. In this way, we can create an environment where diversity is not only recognized but celebrated. By providing a platform for dialogue and participation of all residents, we will remove barriers and promote unity among residents so that we as a society can harness diversity as a solid foundation for shared growth and prosperity for generations to come.

1.2 Role of the English-speaking committee:

On October 19, 2022, a meeting of Mýrdalshreppur's local council approved a mission statement regarding the establishment of an English-speaking council of professionals for guidance in matters that fall under the scope of work related to multiculturalism and consultation with the residents.

In more detail, the mission letter contains a well-defined role of the council

"3. art. The main roles and tasks of the English-speaking Council are:

- to make proposals to the local government on policy in matters of new residents, as well as to supervise that the policy of the local government is followed at all times,*
- to assess the services provided by the municipality, as well as discuss suggestions and comments that may be received,*
- to be a consultation platform for residents of the municipality who are immigrants,*
- to promote the promotion of services provided by the municipality,*
- to be the local government in other respects to the ministry regarding multicultural issues."*

With just over a year left in the current election period, an approved policy on validation and an implementation plan have been approved by the council and sent to the local council for approval. When looking at the role of the council, it is clear that the main responsibility of this council is to hold regular dialogues with residents and about immigration issues, as well as the

municipality's services. It is a great honor and responsibility to be an immigrant advocate in a rapidly changing society and to be, in many ways, the person who ensures that assimilation is handled and sustained.

The policy includes actions and initiatives that take into account the council's defined role and the policy even goes one step further to strengthen the council's responsibility in terms of monitoring the policies of the local council, receiving and discussing suggestions and comments that may be received within the community regarding the inclusion and composition of the population, developing new projects related to Icelandic teaching and training, and promoting further consultation with residents of all origins.

2. Model and quality standards

Although the creation of an inclusion policy was a new task for the representatives of Mýrdalshreppur, there was no need to look far for inspiration and criteria for best practices. Here you will find several links to various useful policies, model projects and actions that were useful in the policy-making process and can continue to be useful to people who take the lead and show an interest in working with the English-speaking council in implementing a new policy on inclusion into the municipality of Mýrdalshreppur.

2.1. Municipality, town and city

Municipalities play an important role in being a model for development in the society of each country. There are examples of cities, towns and municipalities that have implemented policies and projects that are used as models on a global scale. Local authorities are responsible for developing and shaping local services to meet the needs of the population in accordance with international and national laws, regulations and policies, and may even take the lead in development in the area of inclusion.

Cities and towns around the world where inclusion has long been enforced include Alberta in Canada, Mechilin in Belgium, and Chula Vista in California. Here in Iceland, we look at policy from Reykjavík and Reykjanesbær as good examples to follow.

2.1.a. Exemplary foreign towns and cities:

- Alberta: [measuring_inclusion_tool_-_strategies_to_improve_your_inclusiveness_20190830.pdf](#)
- Mechelen: [Diversity: policy and vision - City of Mechelen](#)
- Chula Vista California: [Welcoming City | City of Chula Vista](#)

2.1.b. Exemplary Icelandic towns and cities:

- Reykjavík: [Stefna í málefnum innflytjenda og flóttafólks | Reykjavík](#)
- Reykjanes town: [fjoldemningarstefna2017.pdf](#)

2.2 Policymaking by authority and international organization

In developing the policy on adaptation, many international and local examples of policies and best practices were studied and used as models to support the process and learn from the experiences of others. International policies that were taken into consideration were UNESCO, the European Collaboration of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR), Intercultural Cities (ICC) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

While the policy-making process was launched in Mýrdalshreppur, there was an opportunity to closely monitor the progress of the policy-making process for the first policy on immigration issues and inclusion by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor Market. Part of that process was an assessment conducted by the OECD, which stated that the number of immigrants has increased proportionally the most in Iceland over the past decade of all OECD countries. Immigrants in Iceland also have the highest employment rate and a higher employment rate than natives in Iceland. There was also a clear recommendation to the authorities that the integration of immigrants needs to be higher on the agenda.

2.2.a. International policy and standards:

- ECCAR: [Mechelen | ECCAR](#)
- ICC: [Intercultural Cities - Home - Intercultural Cities Programme](#)
- SDG og inngilding: [23216Together_2030_Position_Paper_HLPF_2019.pdf](#)
- White book draft Ministry of social affairs and labor market: [Stjórnarráðið | Fyrsta hvítbókin í málaflokknum: Samfélag okkar allra – framtíð og stefna Íslands í málefnum innflytjenda](#)
- OECD Report: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/skills-and-labour-market-integration-of-immigrants-and-their-children-in-iceland_96adc300-en.html

2.3 The relationship between the Inclusion Policy and the United Nations' Global Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations Global Sustainable Development Goals cover both domestic affairs and international cooperation. Therefore, here is a summary of policies (SDG 's) that relate to

inclusion and with an emphasis on immigration issues. The global goals cover a number of issues as they are integrated and inseparable and form a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

SDG 3 focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being of all, including citizens with disabilities, by addressing their specific health needs, improving access to health care, and fostering inclusive health policies that support their overall well-being. The municipality of Mýrdalshreppur is a participant in the Heilsueflandi community project organized by the Office of the National Medical Examiner with the aim of promoting improved health and well-being of the population while also creating an environment and conditions.

SDG 4 promotes quality education for all and emphasizes the need for fair and valid education systems. Implementing language policies and culturally sensitive curricula can ensure that all children, regardless of their background, receive a high-quality education that respects and includes diverse backgrounds. Adult education and language teaching are one of the most important equalizing and validating opportunities for immigrant adults.

SDG 8 contributes to inclusive, sustainable economic growth for all, full and productive employment and fair work for all, which are necessary to reduce poverty and promote economic stability and prosperity.

SDG 10, focuses on reducing inequality within and between countries, directly addressing the need for mainstreaming policies that support equal access to opportunities regardless of background. By fostering a validating environment in the municipality, we will be able to take significant steps towards achieving this goal.

SDG 11 aims to make cities and settlements for all, safe, flexible and sustainable. Emphasizing the development of valid and accessible public spaces and infrastructure that cater to a diverse population will contribute to achieving this goal.

SDG 16 focuses on promoting inclusive and peaceful societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and independent institutions at all levels. This goal includes objectives related to democracy and democratic participation, such as ensuring responsive, valid participation and representative decision-making at all levels of society.



3. Consultation and data collection:

3.1 Framework and organization of strategic planning

The Author of this report agreed to work as a project manager to work on behalf of and alongside the English-Speaking Council in implementing the strategic process of inclusion. The main focus was on extensive consultation with different stakeholders in society and ensuring that as many and diverse voices as possible were heard.

The English-speaking council collaborated closely with the project manager on the implementation and progress of the strategic planning process through regular communication and collaboration related to the organization due to open meetings and the implementation of a survey. The project manager attended monthly council meetings (either in person or electronically via TEAMS) to update members on progress and take into account the council's decisions on next steps over an eight-month period. In December, a special working meeting was held with the representatives of the English-Speaking Council where the emphasis was placed on shaping the future vision, main goals and actions in the implementation plan. The strategy was approved by the Council in January 2025 and the implementation plan in February of the same year.

The first policy action took place in July/August 2024 when a survey was conducted on diversity, equity, inclusion and experiences of prejudice/discrimination, and the response rate was almost 10% among the population. The purpose of the survey was to measure the attitudes of the population and their experiences of bias, discrimination, validation and unity. In addition, the survey was used as a method to raise awareness of the policy-making process that the English-speaking Council was embarking on (see Appendix 4 for more details).

Answer to an open survey question:

“Focus more on what we have in common in our culture rather than what separates us. Cohesion in society is based on shared values and needs, not on trying to fulfill the special needs of each individual.”

In September, an open consultation meeting was held with the residents, where 30 people attended, and Hvammshrepp's Women's Association provided refreshments. The agenda of the meeting was arranged so that the participants first received an introduction to the strategy and approach of the English-speaking Council to recognition and the role of local authorities in promoting recognition. Then people divided into groups and councilors led a consultation

process where the implementation of SVOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities) was an analysis and each group formed a vision of the future based on strengths and opportunities and contained solutions to what it defined as a weakness or threat (more specifically in appendix 2).

Example of opportunities designated as priorities by participants:

Opportunities

Mentorship – buddy system

Postbox

Icelandic: clarify the narrative about the benefits and degree of difficulty related to learning Icelandic

The town website should increase information for new and long-term residents

Activities specifically for locals: offer events for locals i.e. hidden pub, movie nights at Leikskálar / more social events game nights, sports events/club, karaoke, silent disco

Yellow pages type of directory for exchanges i.e. sharing and connecting

Offer more diverse employment opportunities outside of tourism

Create a point in Town Hall with help for foreigners (Designated employee)

A new way of life to cultivate an easier way of life (aim for a better quality of life/work balance)

Diversity and Diversification

Creating more social events

The month of October was used to process the results and prepare for the next steps in the policy making, where leaders within the community were consulted, e.g. managers of municipal institutions, business owners and representatives of social organizations.

At the end of November, a half-day workshop was held with directors in Mýrdalshreppur's institutions, where a lecture about cultural sensitivity was presented, followed by a SWOT

"Mýrdalshreppur is a safe and reliable harbor for everyone, where culture, diverse services and job opportunities together with strong infrastructure flourish".

analysis, and measures formulated that the managers believed needed to be implemented, and as a whole, the managers formulated a proposal for a vision statement (more specific in appendix 3). Proposal for a future vision from the management of Mýrdalshreppur:

In December and January, we were invited twice to meetings with representatives of social organizations and business owners, but unfortunately, attendance was low; only seven representatives attended those meetings. It is worth noting that although attendance was low, these representatives, like so many in Mýrdalshreppur, were business owners and active in social life. The consultation was helpful. These meetings were conceived more as brainstorming sessions where the participants discussed the challenges, they experience in a society that is developing and changing at a high speed and then come up with ideas for solutions. As with all meetings, the meeting ended with creating a future vision (more specific in the appendix 4).

An example of a solution submitted by representatives of social organizations and companies:

Solution:

1. Increased access to information or a "someone" who can support immigrants in navigating society and life in Iceland.

a. Though there is information on the community website it isn't used and not everything is current or obvious

3.2 Key findings



Key finding #1 Promoting the increased use and visibility of the Icelandic language is very important for both immigrants and the native population in order to unite the population and promote increased capacity in society and participation in society.



Key finding #2 Housing and accessibility issues affect the safety of all residents and put a certain tone on people's connections. It is a heavy burden on employers to provide accommodation for staff. People don't stay long if they haven't been given access to housing, and a residents talked a lot about getting tired of always having to welcome new people.



Key finding #3 Great desire for continued development in innovation and better services (both public and private). Residents believe it is important to continue to develop more diverse business activities and basic services.



Key finding #4 Increased consultation, support and networking opportunities. Residents want to see more people set down roots in Mýrdalshreppur and believe it is important to welcome newcomers to the municipality with effective and useful information so that people can be independent and feel safe.

4. Vision statement and main objective

The vision for the future and the inclusion policy's main goals were formulated regarding the common strengths and opportunities that emerged through the consultation process. The residents of Mýrdalshreppur and representatives of the English-speaking council have presented an ambitious and sincere vision for a community they care deeply about.

4.1 Vision statement

"Our vision is to foster a community of resilience and inclusion where respect and empowerment allow all individuals to flourish." By celebrating our diversity, we are committed to ensuring the equal growth and development of a safe and prosperous society that celebrates the differences between people while uniting for the common good of the population. Through cooperation and shared values, we aim to create a society where everyone experiences a sense of belonging and has the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of life".

4.2 Main objectives

"Mýrdalshreppur's goal is to open people's minds and increase their horizons. The mission of the policy is to encourage residents, staff, elected representatives, and other stakeholders to see the importance of inclusion and diversity in life and work. By cultivating an inclusive mentality and actively participating in inclusion, it is the wish of the English-Speaking Council that inclusion becomes a normal part of the life and mindset of people in Icelandic society".

5. Policy and implementation strategy

The purpose of the inclusion policy aims to foster a connected and prosperous society in Mýrdalshreppur by setting inclusion as a basic principle, increasing awareness and setting clear guidelines for all stakeholders within society to effectively integrate inclusive practices into all aspects of social, economic and political life and ensure that progress is measurable and accessible to all.

This policy applies to all institutions, employees, residents, voluntary or non-profit organizations and companies within the municipality of Mýrdalshreppur. It covers all operations of municipalities, plans, services, and communication with the municipality.

The Inclusion policy was developed around three main roles and responsibilities of municipalities: as a service provider, as an authority and as an employer. The local government of Mýrdalshreppur can't force inclusion, but with this ambitious policy, the municipality can set an important precedent in action. The municipality can contribute to inclusion and unity by

developing and ensuring inclusive services where all residents experience equality and fair treatment. The municipality can lead development by making effective planning decisions that increase access to housing and participation. A municipality can make a targeted decision to welcome new residents and provide people of all backgrounds with clear and accurate information and raise awareness.

Last but not least, the municipality can promote inclusion by focusing on fostering an inclusive work environment and ensuring diversity in employment, fair advancement opportunities, and a supportive workplace culture. We implement non-biased hiring processes and offer comprehensive diversity and inclusion and develop policies that consistently reduce discrimination. When a municipality focuses on promoting an inclusive atmosphere that recognizes and respects diverse backgrounds, opinions, genders, and disabilities, including the LGBTQ+ community, it is guaranteed that all staff members feel valued and empowered to contribute to achieving the best possible results. The full inclusion policy can be found in appendix 5.

The purpose of the implementation plan is to enforce the validation policy and ensure the role of the English-speaking council as the responsible body for monitoring. As a municipality, it is important to fulfill our responsibilities as an employer, authority and service provider. An implementation plan has targeted, timed and measurable actions that focus on cultivating a diverse workforce, ensuring fair governance and providing services that aim for equivalence and promote inclusion. Implementation will involve collaboration with community leaders and social and volunteer organizations to reflect and serve our diverse population. By engaging the whole community, we have an opportunity to foster unity, promote equality of opportunity and ensure that services and governance meet the needs of all residents. The implementation plan as a whole can be found in appendix 6.

6. Icelandic and Inclusion officer

Throughout the consultation process, it was obvious that there is a great need to find many methods to improve access to the Icelandic language. Whether it is through organized courses either in person or digitally, through community courses and opportunities to speak with Icelandic speakers, there must be a concerted effort to work together as a community to support residents who want to learn the Icelandic language.

The school system also needs to ensure that students with a second language are given support in learning Icelandic, not only to do well in school, but also to form social relationships with children who speak Icelandic as their mother tongue.

The English-speaking Council has regularly discussed its concerns and proposed that the municipality hire an Icelandic teacher to work with the community. The task of ensuring that 60% of the population receives Icelandic instruction is a complex task, but nevertheless a task that needs to be solved.

While the policy was being developed, it was also clear that residents and business owners expect more from the English-speaking council in terms of inclusion support and consultation. As the council has no formal staff or agency to undertake inclusion, there was an obvious need to hire an inclusion officer to work with the community, the English-speaking council, business leaders, associations, and residents.

Although it may not be feasible to hire a teacher directly to teach all residents who want to learn Icelandic, it is the opinion of the project manager who is also an expert on immigrant affairs and inclusion that some kind of inclusion officer could be assigned the of supporting individuals, companies and education providers to ensure that Icelandic is maintained and even that Mýrdalshreppur could develop methods of innovation in community-based Icelandic teaching.

In the validation strategy and implementation plan, there are many actions and opportunities to do exactly that. See Policy in Appendix 7.

The Inclusion Officer will report directly to the English-Speaking Council and support them in their role of working more closely with the community to promote inclusion. This is a very exciting opportunity for the municipality and for the lucky person who will be hired to work with the ideas, hopes and wishes of the diverse people in Mýrdalshreppur and put them into practice.

From Mýrdalshreppur's approved validation plan:

„Appoint a qualified person to oversee the implementation of this policy and applicable practices for all organizations within the municipality. The employee in question will be tasked with ensuring compliance with the duties and responsibilities defined in the policy while promoting accessibility and support within the community supported by the municipality's leadership “.

7. Appendixes

The following is a list of supplementary appendixes specified in the report. By reading the companion appendixes, readers are enabled to form a full understanding of the policy making process and develop a deeper relationship with the will of the residents of Myrdalshreppurs. Nowhere in Iceland can you find such a high proportion of immigrant population. Opportunities to set a good example and ensure continued development and improvement are widely at hand.

1. Appendix 1 - Viðhorfskönnun
2. Appendix 2 - Opin samráð með íbúa
3. Appendix 3 - Vinnustofa stjórnenda
4. Appendix 4 - Samráð eiganda fyrirtækja og samtaka
5. Appendix 5 - Inngildingarstefna
6. Appendix 6 – Innleiðingaráætlun
7. Appenix 7 - Málstefna

ⁱ Hagstofu. 2025.

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