



Jonava Intercultural Profile

March 2023

Contents

1. Introduction to Jonava	3
2. National Political Context	4
Integration policies	7
3. Local diversity and political context	9
4. Commitment	10
5. Reception of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees	11
The Social Service Centre (SSC).....	12
The Refugee Reception Centre in Rukla	13
6. Language and multilingualism	15
7. Education	15
8. Employment	16
9. Cultural and social life	17
The Public Library.....	17
10. Neighbourhoods, public space and housing	19
11. Civil society and participation	20
12. Conclusions and recommendations	21
Strengthening political commitment.....	22
A commitment to transversality/mainstreaming	22
The importance of training	22
The creation of a networking space with key social partners	23
The process of elaborating an intercultural city plan	23
The construction of a shared "framework narrative" on intercultural Jonava	24
Information, data and indicators	25
Annex 1 - Agenda	26

This report is based upon the expert visit of the Council of Europe to Jonava on 18 and 19 January 2023, including a Council of Europe staff member and Intercultural Cities (ICC) expert Dani de Torres. It is complementary to the results of the Intercultural Cities index assessment for Jonava¹, which report was published in February 2022, and contains many recommendations and pointers to examples of best practices.

The Council of Europe has defined the intercultural city as encompassing people with different nationality, origin, language or religion/ belief, where:

- Political leaders and most citizens regard diversity positively, as a resource;
- The city actively combats discrimination and adapts its governance, institutions and services to the needs of a diverse population;
- The city has a strategy and tools to deal with diversity and cultural conflict and to enhance participation;
- The city encourages greater mixing and meaningful interaction between diverse groups in public spaces.²

Real equality, diversity, meaningful intercultural interaction and participation and active citizenship are four inter-linked values that underpin the development and sustenance of an intercultural city.³

Equality refers to the state of being treated equally, whether before the law, in policy or in practice. This includes equal enjoyment of human dignity and fundamental human rights, and equal access to services and opportunities. More broadly, equality of life chances (or ‘access’) can be distinguished from equality of outcomes, with different political and economic philosophies putting differing emphases on each end of this spectrum. Within interculturalism, equality is most closely linked to the principles of non-discrimination and inclusion, and there is particular attention paid to equity: that is, allocating resources and opportunities to each person, according to their circumstances and needs, in order to obtain a more equal outcome.

Diversity is the condition of a group or entity within which individuals differ from one another in various ways, some but not all of which are characteristics protected by human rights law. Aspects of identity such as age, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, mental and physical abilities, social class, education, economic background, religion, work experience, language, geographic location, political opinion, or family status, are among the sources of diversity.

Meaningful intercultural interaction is any constructive encounter in a social setting between individuals or groups from different cultures and lifestyles in an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and cooperation. Intercultural policy speaks of ‘meaningful interactions’ between different cultural or ethnic groups, which recognise both the differences and similarities between such groups/individuals, promote the atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and cooperation, and counter the tendency towards self-segregation. Meaningful interactions are those that take place on equal terms, be they challenging or positive, and which should ultimately be fulfilling for all involved, advancing common goals.

¹ Jonava Intercultural Cities Index report, Council of Europe, 2022, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/intercultural-cities-index-report-jonava-lithuania-2021/1680a569ca>.

² The Intercultural City Step by Step: Practical guide for applying the urban model of urban integration, Council of Europe, 2019, page 14.

³ Council of Europe, Model Framework for an Intercultural Integration Strategy at the National Level, Intercultural integration strategies: managing diversity as an opportunity, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-093421-gbr-2555-intercultural-integration-strategies-cdadi-web-a/1680a476bd>

Participation and active citizenship occur when stakeholders (all citizens, including foreign residents where appropriate) have the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and the support to freely express their opinions and influence decision-making on matters that affect them. In some situations, participation may mean those who are directly affected taking the lead and driving the process. Intercultural participation requires an equal and respectful basis, in which everyone feels heard, and involves tackling obstacles that may hinder certain stakeholders' active participation.

This report provides an updated intercultural profile of Jonava following its first Index report published in early 2022. It is important to note that almost a year has passed between the publication of the Index report and the expert visit and that it has been marked by the Russian Federation's sudden military aggression against Ukraine which started in February 2022 and is still ongoing at the time of writing (March 2023). During this time, the number of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Lithuania is estimated to be more than 60,000 where more than 700 have arrived in Jonava.

The aim of the expert visit was to learn more about the reality and context of Jonava and its policies in favour of interculturality, which go beyond what is commonly understood as policies for the reception and integration of immigrants and refugees.

The impact of the increase in the arrival of thousands of refugees has led to the need to reinforce reception strategies during these months, both at the state level and, above all, at the local level. For this reason, this report aims to complement the Index report. On the one hand, it explains in greater detail some of the main local services and actions of Jonava, and on the other hand, it puts a particular emphasis on actions that have been created or reinforced due to the arrival of a greater number of refugees in the past year and which were therefore not included in the Index report.

1. Introduction to Jonava

Jonava is the ninth largest town in Lithuania, located almost in the centre of the country, on the banks of the river Neris. The city was founded in 1750 during the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as a multinational trading city inhabited by people of different religions: Christians, Muslims (Tatars) and Jews. Before World War II, 80% of the population was Jewish, but many of them were murdered during two massacres in 1941.⁴

After the war, the city built the largest fertilizer factory in the Baltic states and became one of the four biggest industrial cities in Lithuania. As the mayor of the city said during the opening meeting of the visit, "Jonava is mainly an industrial city and not very touristic". However, since several years it has become a place of welcome for people who have been forced to migrate from different countries of the world.

To better understand the content of this report it is necessary to explain the three different administrative levels making up the Lithuanian territory. There are 10 counties divided into 60 municipalities-districts which in turn are divided into so-called elderships/wards (which can be a region, a city, a town or a group of villages).⁵

Jonava is a municipality-district in Kaunas County, and in 2021 it had a population of 40,746 people. Jonava district consists of elderships and the capital and main settlement is the city of

⁴ Source: [History | Jonava](#)

⁵ Source: [Index analysis of Jonava](#) published in February 2022

Jonava (of the same name as the district) with a population of 27,381 people in 2021. The rest of the elderships have a population size ranging between 1000 and 2300 inhabitants.⁶

Rukla is one of the villages under the Jonava district. It is located at about 10 kilometres from the city and is where the District Refugee Reception Centre has been located for the past 25 years.

Although most main headquarters of some of the services or facilities visited, such as the Social Service Centre or the public library, are in the city of Jonava, they also have decentralised offices and branches in many of the villages that make up the Jonava municipality district.

2. National Political Context

Lithuania is a parliamentary republic on the Baltic Sea, bordered by Latvia to the north, Belarus to the southeast, Poland to the south, the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad to the southwest and the Baltic Sea to the west.

In January 2023, Lithuania had a population of 2,86 million⁷ and the most populated areas are the counties of the biggest cities: Vilnius (the capital), Kaunas and Klaipeda.

The Republic of Lithuania was annexed to the USSR in 1940 and remained a part of it until 1990, when it declared its independence, although this was not recognised by Moscow until 1991. After 1991 the country undertook major economic and social reforms and in 2004 it became a member of the EU and NATO. The country's economic growth suffered a severe blow during the 2008 crisis, but it was able to recover quickly in the following years. In 2015 it adopted the euro as its national currency and in 2017 GDP growth soared.

However, this growth was slowed in recent years by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and later by the consequences of the war in Ukraine. In 2022 inflation reached 18.9%, although the government forecasts that during 2023 it will fall to 9%. In 2022 the economy has performed better than expected, with growth of 2.4% and is expected to remain positive, albeit lower, during 2023.⁸

The services sector accounts for the largest share of GDP generation, followed by the industrial sector with just over 25% and finally agriculture with just over 3%. In relation to employment, after years of steady reduction in the unemployment rate, during the period 2018-2020 the rate increased again to reach 8.49% in 2020, and although during 2022 it decreased to 5,9%⁹, at the beginning of 2023 it started increasing again.

The Human development index (HDI) of Lithuania from 1990 to 2021 shows that the HDI score has risen from 0.734 in 1990 to 0.875 by 2021. The HDI is a statistic that combines life-expectancy, education levels and GDP per capita. Countries with scores over 0.800 are considered to have very high levels of human development, compared with countries that score lower.¹⁰

Nowadays, the country is among the 'moderate innovators group' in the International Innovation Index, as it ranked 15th in the European Innovation Scoreboard among all EU

⁶ Source: [Index analysis of Jonava](#) published in February 2022

⁷ Source: [Lithuanian State Data Agency](#)

⁸ Source: [Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania](#)

⁹ Source: [Statista](#)

¹⁰ Source: [Statista](#)

countries. Lasers and biotechnology are key fields of the Lithuanian science and high-tech industry.¹¹

According to data from the general population census of 2021, 85.1% of residents of Lithuania were Lithuanians, 6.6% were Poles, 5.1% were Russians and 1.0% were Belarusians, 0.5 Ukrainians and other nationalities less than 1%. There were 154 nationalities living in Lithuania, according to the same census.¹² Obviously, as we will see shortly, the number of Ukrainian residents has greatly increased as a result of the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

The official language is Lithuanian, but in some areas, there is a significant presence of minority languages, such as Polish, Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian. State laws guarantee education in minority languages and there are numerous publicly funded schools in minority-populated areas

There is no state religion in Lithuania, however, according to the same census of 2021, 49 religious communities have been recorded.¹³ The biggest faith group is Roman Catholicism, and other religions represented are Russian Orthodox, Old Believers, Evangelical Lutherans, Reformed Evangelicals, among other faiths.

	Population persons ¹
	2021
Total by religion	2,810,761
Roman Catholics	2,085,340
Orthodox	105,326
Old Believers	18,196
Evangelical Lutherans	15,741
Evangelical Reformed Believers	5,540
Balts' Belief	3,917
Jehovah's Witnesses	2,118
Sunni Muslims	2,165
Pentecostalists	3,032

Figure 1: State Data Agency - Religions in Lithuania

If we look at the historical development of migration, from 1990 to 2018 Lithuania's migration balance was negative. In this period the number of residents in Lithuania decreased by almost 900,000 people. While some 243,000 were due to natural causes (ratio of births/deaths), the remaining 659,000 people emigrated to other countries.

Statistics show that during the period from 2004 to 2016 immigration flows to Lithuania consisted mainly (80%) of returning Lithuanians with the remaining 20% representing citizens from other EU and non-EU countries. In 2017 this trend changed as both returning Lithuanians and foreigners amounted to 50% of all immigration.¹⁴

However, since 2018 there has been an important change in this trend.¹⁵ The number of immigrants has been increasing significantly (a majority are Lithuanian citizens who have returned to their country, but the number of foreign immigrants has also increased).

¹¹ Source: [European Innovation Scoreboard 2022](#)

¹² Source: [Lithuanian State Data Agency](#)

¹³ Source: [Lithuanian State Data Agency](#)

¹⁴ Source: [European Migration Network](#)

¹⁵ Source: [Lithuanian State Data Agency](#)

	Emigrants persons	Immigrants persons	Net international migration persons
2022	23,021*	95,393*	72,372*
2021	25,205	44,858	19,653
2020	23,103	43,096	19,993
2019	29,273	40,067	10,794
2018	32,206	28,914	-3,292
2017	47,925	20,368	-27,557
2016	50,333	20,162	-30,171
2015	44,533	22,130	-22,403
2014	36,621	24,294	-12,327
2013	38,818	22,011	-16,807
2012	41,100	19,843	-21,257
2011	53,863	15,685	-38,178
2010	83,157	5,213	-77,944

Figure 2: State Data Agency - International migration flows 2010-2022

While in 2018 the migration balance¹⁶ was almost zero, from 2019 onwards it has been positive.

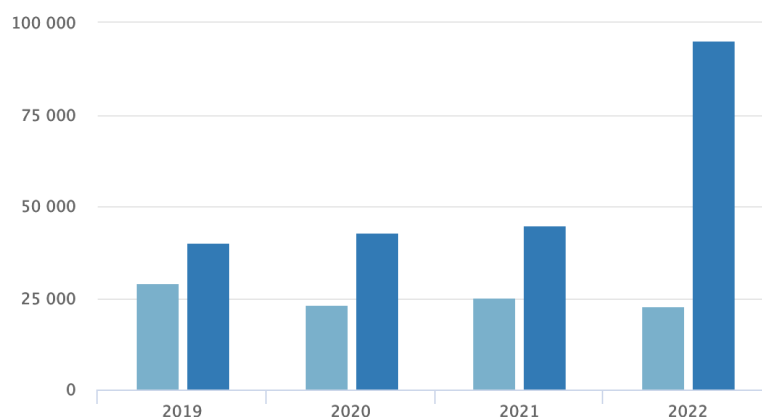


Figure 3: State Data Agency - Emigrants (light blue) and immigrants (dark blue) in Lithuania

In 2022, the difference between the flow of emigrants and immigrants was largely positive (72,372 people). This increase was largely due to the arrival of refugees fleeing Ukraine following the country's aggression by Russia. According to the State Data Agency, more than 75,000 war refugees, including more than 19,000 children aged 6-17, have arrived in Lithuania since February 2022.¹⁷

However, such high emigration and low immigration figures for so many years, combined with other variables (for example a low birth rate), have created important challenges for the country that influence its capacity for development. The ageing of the population, labour shortages in various sectors or the outflow of skilled professionals are some of the main challenges. For this reason, the change in trend of the last years, with a greater increase in immigration than in

¹⁶ The migration balance is the difference between the number of people entering a territory and the number of people leaving it.

¹⁷ Source: [Lithuanian State Data Agency](https://www.stat.gov.lt/)

emigration, should be seen as an opportunity for the country, which should be accompanied by a greater commitment to policies of reception, integration and interculturality.

Integration policies

From 2014 onwards, Lithuania started to adopt various plans and strategies related to migration policies and immigrant integration. That year the government approved the Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines and the Action Plan 2015-2017 on the Implementation of Foreigners Integration Policy.

Precisely in 2018, the year in which the migration balance turned around and started to be positive, the government approved the Strategy for Demography, Migration and Integration 2018-2030.

This strategy focuses heavily on the return of Lithuanian citizens, the attraction of highly skilled labour from non-European countries and the creation of a system of integration of foreigners as strategies to cope with the country's demographic challenges.

Considering integration of newly arrived foreigners, the Strategy aims to promote decent working and living conditions, strong and inclusive local communities, trust in state institutions and a tolerant receiving society¹⁸.

In the same year (2018), the government approved the new Action Plan 2018-2020 on the Integration of Foreigners into Society, in an attempt to concretise in practice, the lines of work set out in the strategy. The Action Plan includes provisions regarding cooperation among state institutions, employment, education, social and health care services, community relations, non-discrimination, foreign women, monitoring of progress on integration, and responsibilities and resource allocations for authorities.¹⁹

However, despite these initiatives, assessments show that there is potential for improvement when it comes to integration policies. If we analyse Lithuania's results in the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), the index that measures the integration policies of 52 countries in 8 areas (labour market, education, political participation, access to nationality, family reunion, health, permanent residence, anti-discrimination), the results are below average, although in the last period they have improved slightly.

In the 2020 MIPEX assessment covering the period 2014-2019, Lithuania's score is 37 out of 100, significantly lower than the country average of 49 out of 100. According to these results, Lithuania is among the countries where immigrants encounter more obstacles than opportunities for integration.

While immigrants enjoy basic rights and protection in Lithuania, they do not enjoy equal opportunities to participate in society. Lithuania's approach is similar to most Central and Eastern European countries. Lithuania's current policies encourage the public to see immigrants as strangers instead of as their equals. A country's approach to integration matters because policies influence whether or not integration works as a two-way process. The way that

¹⁸ Zibas, K. (2018) Strategy for Demography, migration and integration 2018-2030. European Commission: European Website on Integration. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/strategy-demography-migration-and-integration-2018-2030_en

¹⁹ Zibas, K. (2018) Action Plan 2018-2020 on the Integration of foreigners into Society. Euperan Comission: European Website on Integration. Retrieved from : <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/action-plan-2018-2020-integration-foreign>

governments treat immigrants strongly influences how well immigrants and the public interact and think of each other.

Many obstacles emerge for immigrants in Lithuania in several areas, especially in areas like health, political participation and access to nationality. Without greater support, immigrants will remain invisible in public life and the Lithuanian public will also continue to see immigrants more as threats than as opportunities.²⁰

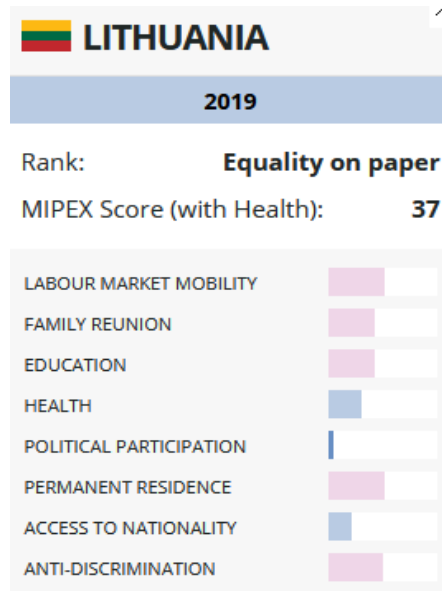


Figure 4: MIPEX 2020 - Lithuania's score

Regarding access to citizenship, most foreign residents must wait at least 10 years and dual citizenship is only accepted in exceptional cases. The following figure shows that Lithuania ranks lowest among EU countries when it comes to the number of people acquiring citizenship in 2021 (0.1 per 1000 persons, whereas the EU average is 1.8).

Acquisitions of citizenship per 1000 persons, 2021

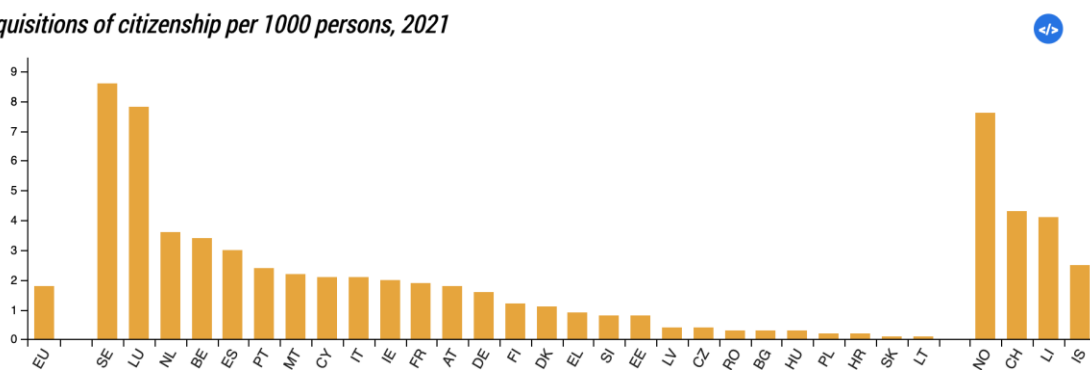


Figure 5: Statistics on the acquisition of citizenship in the EU (Source: Eurostat)

The results of MIPEX are for the period 2014-2019 and it should be noted that the increase in the arrival of foreigners, especially Ukrainian refugees, has pushed reception and integration policies up the political agenda. It could be a turning-point for the country in terms of achieving significant and ambitious change to improve its integration and inclusion policies. In this regard, it would be desirable for the government to increase support and resources for local authorities,

²⁰ Source: [Lithuania | MIPEX 2020](#)

which are key actors in integration and inclusion processes, as acknowledged by the Action Plan. In addition, a clearer definition, including by law, of the specific role of municipalities in facilitating integration at the local level, as well as enhanced coordination and cooperation between the different levels of governance, are additional factors that could contribute to improving integration and inclusion overall.

3. Local diversity and political context

Little information can be found at local level regarding the evolution in the number of residents of foreign origin. According to the data of the Migration Department, 433 foreign-born persons were living in Jonava district at the beginning of 2020.²¹

Before the war in Ukraine, the main minority groups present in Jonava were Russians, Ukrainians, Poles and Belarusians. In addition, refugees mainly came from Syria, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan. Since the war in Ukraine began, hundreds of Ukrainians have arrived in Jonava.

While Jonava was already one of the most proactive Lithuanian cities in promoting reception and integration policies, the arrival of Ukrainian refugees has led to an increase in commitment and activities in this area.

The absence of large NGOs in Jonava means that the provision of most support services for migrants and refugees falls on municipal organisations.

Specifically, the Social Service Centre (hereafter referred to as SSC) of the Jonava district is the reference centre and is responsible for providing most of the reception and integration policies, with the collaboration of some partners such as the Cultural Centre of the city or the public library, in addition to the work carried out by the team of the Refugee Reception Centre (hereafter referred to as RRC) of Rukla, with whom the SSC maintains a close collaboration.

Jonava has had to face the challenge of welcoming and integrating immigrants and refugees in a particularly complex period. First, during the years of the pandemic, which, as in all countries, had a major impact on the capacity to boost its activities. And in the last year, to manage the arrival of Ukrainian refugees. But the SSC started with a good experience, with a very strong and experienced leadership and a very professional team of social workers, including two Ukrainian and one Syrian staff members.

Following the increased influx of refugees, the Jonava SSC, which provides support to all people at risk of vulnerability - whether young, adult or elderly - decided to go for the one-stop model to manage information, support and counselling services for migrants and refugees more effectively.

The SSC has a staff of more than 100 employees and, apart from the building in the capital, has offices in the seven main towns of the district.

In the words of the SSC director: *“Refugees, forced migrants, foreigners and their children are one of our target groups. And we don't separate people from this target group from other users, we try to involve refugees/ forced migrants and other foreigners into our common activities and services. We are working with people from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Venezuela, Chechnya, Belorussia, Ukraine, Africa's republics and other countries, who live in Jonava district.”*

²¹ Lithuanian Migration Department (2020), Migration Yearbook 2019, [https://migracija.lrv.lt/uploads/migracija/documents/files/Migracijos%20metra%C5%A1%C4%8Diai/MIGRACIJOS%20METRA%C5%A0TIS_2019%20\(1\).pdf](https://migracija.lrv.lt/uploads/migracija/documents/files/Migracijos%20metra%C5%A1%C4%8Diai/MIGRACIJOS%20METRA%C5%A0TIS_2019%20(1).pdf)

The SSC has become a benchmark, not only in Jonava but in the whole country. In November 2022 it received the highest municipal award "**Golden Krivule**" (**Auksinė krivūlė**) for the "one-stop" assistance system for immigrants and refugees, set-up in the city of Jonava.

"We understand integration as a two-way, complex and multilayered process that requires both: the preparation of forced migrants to integrate into a host society and the preparation of society for accepting new members. That's why we work not just with refugees, immigrants, foreigners, but also organise different trainings and activities for Jonava local community".²²

Although the SSC is the centre where the main reception and integration policies are promoted, there is also collaboration with other local actors that play a key role in promoting interculturality, such as the Cultural Centre and the public library, as well as sports clubs and associations of Syrian and Ukrainian immigrants.

On the other hand, the SSC also maintains a very close relationship with the Refugee Reception Centre in Rukla (run by the national government) as well as with other actors such as the Rukla Employment Service, which is located within SSC office in Rukla and works for the incorporation of refugees into the labour market.

However, as discussed in the first meeting with the mayor and local authorities, in Jonava there is no presence of large NGOs, as there is in Vilnius or Kaunas, which carry out integration support activities and complement the work carried out by the municipality. These circumstances also call for a greater effort on the part of the local government to promote the mainstreaming of policies and to avoid placing all the responsibility on the SSC. It is logical that in a period of momentum there should be an actor to lead this process, but what would be needed now is for the whole administration to adapt to the new reality and, from areas such as education, health, employment and the local police, among others, to become more involved in this process of moving towards a more intercultural city.

Jonava's overall ICC Index result is low (37/100). This is understandable because it is a city that has recently joined the network and is at the beginning of its intercultural journey. Nonetheless, the SSC team is very professional and motivated and committed to innovation and to evolving from a more assistance-based model to one that is more in favour of inclusion and interculturality. There are challenges, but also opportunities, ahead, which we will be sharing in the following sections, based on the meetings we held with local authorities and other social actors in Jonava.

4. Commitment

Although Jonava does not yet have an intercultural city strategy or plan, and has only recently joined the ICC programme, several factors can be identified that show that there is a commitment beyond paper to promote integration and adopt the intercultural approach.

On the one hand, it should be noted that the city's global strategic plan²³ includes three lines of work that refer to:

- Jonava's membership in the COE's ICC programme and the work that it entails.
- The promotion of integration policies

²² Source : Presentation by PhD. Valentina Demidenko, Director of the Social Services Centre in Jonava District.

²³ The city's global strategic plan is available at the following link: <https://www.jonava.lt/administracine-informacija/planavimo-dokumentai/strateginiai-pletros-planai/613> (Lithuanian only).

- Language learning

The mayor's speech at the opening meeting of the visit was very clear in defending the importance of these policies and of the philosophy that everyone is different, but equal. In addition to highlighting the fundamental role of the SSC, he also emphasised the importance of promoting more cultural and sports activities to promote integration and interculturality.

Another aspect to highlight is that the position of social worker specialised in integration has been created. This is a newly created position which is key to being able to dedicate resources to the area of reception and integration.

On the other hand, local media covered the visit, including on local TV, and the municipality spread the news about the visit on its website and social networks. This contributes to creating a narrative in favour of interculturality and spreading it among the citizens of Jonava, showing the institutional commitment.

These encouraging signs of commitment still need to be reinforced to ensure sustainability and transversality of intercultural principles in the city. Important steps should be taken, such as the design of an intercultural plan for the city, promoting the mainstreaming of interculturalism in policies and moving away from centralising all responsibility to the SSC. Areas such as education, health and the local police, among others, need tools to become more involved in integration policies. This also involves allocating resources to training municipal workers in intercultural competences and promoting participatory processes that give a voice to citizens and representatives of diverse cultural backgrounds and generate debate and proposals in line with the needs, challenges and priorities that Jonava has in this area.

The mayor met during the visit was re-elected for a new mandate following the March 2023 elections. It will soon be possible to assess if the political commitment to strengthen Jonava's intercultural agenda will be translated into concrete measures, especially in favour of mainstreaming the intercultural approach and designing an intercultural city plan.

5. Reception of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees

In a context marked by an increase in the number of asylum seekers and refugees in Jonava, it is logical that the city should reinforce what we can generically understand as welcome policies, which form the first stage of integration processes.²⁴

Access to information on basic services and rights, language learning, support to access the labour market, education or the health system among others are very important.

Welcome policies are those that must be activated from day one to enable people arriving in the city to obtain the information and tools needed for them to be autonomous and access all services, spaces and rights on equal terms with the rest of the population. Some people will need more support than others, which is why services must be flexible and adaptable to different profiles.

But these policies should not be understood from an assimilationist or welfarist perspective. The intercultural approach requires going further and not only promoting strategies aimed at the host population, but also promoting interaction and the creation of links, focusing on

²⁴ Detailed information on the state of integration and service provision to third-country nationals in Jonava can be found here: <https://www.diversitygroup.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Jonava-district-municipality.pdf> (Lithuanian only).

immigrants as people who contribute with their knowledge, experiences and talents to the development of the host society.

In Jonava, steps are being taken to improve the effectiveness of welcome policies and to broaden the focus to avoid any approach purely based on supporting people in need.

The Social Service Centre (SSC)

As mentioned above, the SSC has adopted the format of a one-stop centre for people at risk of vulnerability, including all foreigners living in Jonava (independently of their status), to get access to all the information they might need. Social workers support beneficiaries on various topics and tasks, such as enrolling children in school, access to housing, employment and health services, opening bank accounts, etc. (). Figure 2 shows the detailed set of services offered by SSC.

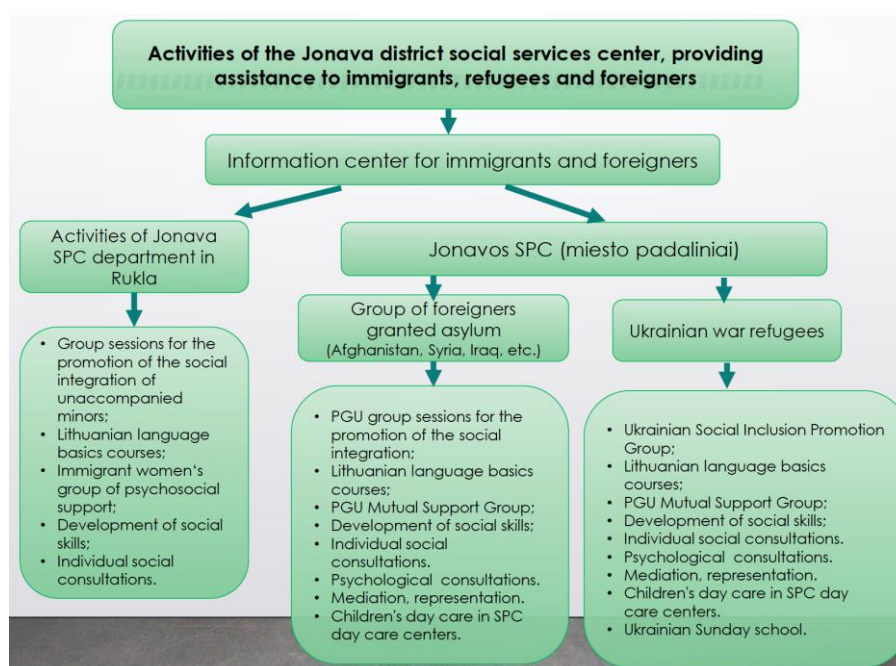


Figure 6: Types of services offered by the Jonava district social services centre.

During the visit at the SSC, we were informed that the government's Migration Offices has solely been offering "online" services. This creates additional hurdles for many people to which the SSC has been adapting by offering assistance to people in managing their application and permit processes online.

When a country has not yet accepted its status as a country of immigration with a diverse society, often many of its basic services (education, health, etc.) are not adapted to this socio-cultural reality. Adapting services to changes in the context, as well as taking into account new needs and user profiles, is a fundamental element of the intercultural approach, especially to guarantee equality of access and treatment based on the recognition of diversity. This requires an effort because it must start with awareness-raising and diagnosis in order to promote these adaptation processes. But if these services do not adapt, then the burden of work falls on actors, such as the SSC, who end up compensating for the lack of adaptation of the rest of the services.

This seems to be a very clear reality today in Jonava, for example in the area of access to health care. The SSC must support migrants in their access to health care facilities, because hospitals are not yet ready to manage the diversity of their patients.

The risk of becoming the reference service for attention and support to migrants and refugees is that other municipal departments refer migrants to the SSC, instead of adapting themselves to the new needs posed by diversity. This is undoubtedly one of the great challenges that Jonava must face today.

The Refugee Reception Centre in Rukla

The visit also covered the Refugee Reception Centre (RRC) in Rukla, located at about 10 kilometres from Jonava city and next to the NATO military base. This centre, falling under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, was set up 25 years ago. It currently only takes in people considered as vulnerable:

- Unaccompanied minors;
- Pregnant women;
- People who have suffered torture;
- People with health problems;
- Persons with disabilities or mental disorders;
- Parents or families with minor children.

Refugees can stay and get support for integration in the centre for up to 3 months while waiting for a favourable decision on their application. If for objective reasons, a foreigner who received asylum failed to prepare for integration in the territory of the municipality within the specified period, this period may be extended.

Support for integration is provided in the territory of the municipality up to 12 months from the date of departure of foreigners who have received asylum from the centre. The waiting time for a decision can be longer, in which case the total period of integration in the centre and territory of the municipality cannot be longer than 3 years.

At the centre, refugees are required to take a compulsory 96-hour language course. Many activities related to sports, music, gardening, IT training and others are offered, as well as psychological support services.

Some examples of activities carried out by the centre to promote the reception and integration of refugees in Jonava are the organisation of “open doors” day at the centre with sports, music and gastronomic activities to share about diverse cultures and create opportunities for meaningful intercultural interaction between refugees and local population. The RCC also collaborates with former refugees who share their testimonies with the new residents and explain the difficulties they encountered and how they overcame them. The RCC also celebrates International Refugee Day with the participation of the municipality, of schools and of the cultural centre.

Specific groups such as unaccompanied minors who have a very complex situation benefit from targeted support. In addition to going to school with local children, collaboration has been set up with a martial arts gym which welcomes several of the minors at the RCC which also is a good opportunity for them to learn the Lithuanian language.

Picture 1: Children playroom in the Rukla refugee reception centre



During the visit at the centre, discussions on challenges and areas for improvement were held with the staff. In terms of possible improvements, they commented that more activities could be promoted to connect refugees with local neighbours. Another strategy that could be strengthened is to reinforce the narrative that refugees not only require support but can also contribute to the development of society and that, as the intercultural approach advocates, they should not only be seen as people with needs but also with resources.

The important thing about the visit was also to see the collaboration that exists between the RRC and the SSC. Reception must be approached from a multidimensional perspective, and this requires the collaboration of the different agents in the territory, even if they depend on different levels of the administration. Further to partners at the municipality level, in providing services for facilitating reception and integration processes, the RRC also has various partners, including large NGOs (for example Red Cross and Caritas). In addition, training opportunities for staff were provided with external support, including through EU funding, and interpreters are deployed at the RCC by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to support asylum and reception procedures and overall exchanges.

To this must be added the work carried out by some schools, especially in supporting unaccompanied minors, or in offering Lithuanian language courses, as is also the case of the public library in Jonava, which in recent years has become a key space for reception but also for interaction and the creation of meeting spaces.

Reception policies in Jonava can still be improved by providing basic information in more languages, organising institutional welcoming ceremonies, designing a shared reception strategy among the different actors involved or planning more joint activities with the neighbours, etc.



Picture 2: Library of the Rukla Refugee reception centre

But in any case, it must be recognised that in Jonava a lot of importance is given to reception and that since the Index report was published very important steps have been taken, especially the establishment of the SSC as a one-stop information and reception centre, which in fact was already mentioned as a recommendation in the report. Jonava can inspire many other cities to take similar steps and reinforce their reception strategies.

The RRC has a great library offering books in different languages and activities for children.

6. Language and multilingualism

Jonava scored low in the language section of the ICC index. During the visit, it appeared that many people highlighted Lithuanian language learning as one of the most determinant and complex aspects for the integration process. Indeed, access to relevant information other than Lithuanian is rather poor overall and even on institutional websites it is not easy to find complete information in English.

However, it is also true that since the Index report, existing language learning spaces have been reinforced and new ones have been created.

In addition to the services offered by the SSC, the RRC and the schools, the role of the city's public library as a space not only for language learning but also for the promotion of multilingualism must be added, although it particularly focuses on the availability of books in Ukrainian. The RRC library also has books in languages such as Arabic, Russian, English and Ukrainian.

In any case, during the visit it became clear that the city still has to allocate more resources to increase the offer of courses, tools and opportunities to learn Lithuanian, and on the other hand it has to make a greater effort to promote and enhance multilingualism as a useful resource for the municipality.

7. Education

Although Lithuania has a high-quality education system, it has not yet adapted to provide a more comprehensive and nationally standardised response to the needs arising from having a more diverse population, in particular when it comes to facilitating access and providing comprehensive support to foreign pupils.

There are interesting initiatives, such as the support of pedagogues and psychologists for unaccompanied minors, or language classes. But the education department is one of the key actors that should be more actively involved in this journey towards a more intercultural city, even if some of the competences that have to do with avoiding segregation depend on the regional or state level. But this is one area that needs to be prioritised because is crucial for promoting interculturality based on the principles of equality, diversity, interaction and participation.

In many countries, the lack of a proactive attitude in education has led to very complex problems related to segregation and inequalities.

We are not only talking about deficiencies in a system that may favour segregation, but also about supporting teachers with training in intercultural competences, in promoting projects to involve families and to promote interculturality inside and outside the classroom. In many countries, segregation is consolidated in the access to after-school activities. In these matters, many initiatives can be promoted by the city and in the case of Jonava this cannot fall mainly on the responsibility of the SSC.

During our visit we were able to see the important role that the city's public library is playing in generating spaces and activities for children and youth, for example, by organising exhibitions in collaboration with the city's art school, among many other activities. We were also told that more and more activities are being organised in partnership with sports clubs and other cultural centres. All this is important and very necessary, but it must be the department of education that makes a diagnosis, identifies the challenges and weaknesses, in particular when it comes to

equal access to services and activities, and promotes policies in favour of inclusion and interculturality in collaboration with other actors.

A novelty with respect to the information in the city's ICC Index report is the initiative to create the Ukrainian Sunday school, promoted by the community itself with the support of the city in order to be able to maintain its own educational space.

8. Employment

Jonava scored 0 in this area of the ICC index. However, during our visit we were able to learn more about some of the initiatives that are promoted to facilitate access to the labour market, especially for refugees.

The SSC provides information and advice to people who want to find work and offers occupational training courses. Furthermore, the Rukla Employment Office, located in the local branch of the SSC, is dedicated to support and advise refugees who have obtained a temporary residence permit to enter the labour market. It was opened six years prior, following an increase in refugees in the area. Although it reports to the central government, it works closely with the SSC as well as with the RRC, NGOs and Ukrainian refugee registration centres. More recently, it started working with translators covering languages such as English, French, Arabic, Dari, etc.

In 2022, the Employment Office served 93 persons, and the main countries of origin were Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea.

Of the total number of people served at the office, 27 found employment in Jonava and 66 moved to other cities to look for work, including Vilnius and Kaunas, motivated by higher salaries and easier rental markets. The main sectors in which refugees found jobs were furniture, metal, food industry, hotels and restaurants, construction and health and care.

It should be noted that Ukrainian refugees have direct access to the labour market and the employment service from the moment they register with the Migration department for a temporary residence permit. Access to the labour market is also easier for Russians and even for Afghans if they speak Russian, but for those coming from Syria, Eritrea or Iraq it is more complicated because of the language barrier.

The services of the employment office are aimed at both refugees and employers. Refugees are offered support and advice in finding a job, support in job interviews and in signing contracts, as well as for the recognition and accreditation of diplomas or training in English and Russian. For employers, there are incentives to hire unemployed refugees. State support consists of funding 75% of the salary and taxes for two years.

The municipality also offers grants targeting all resident and not only for refugees. These consist in six-month contracts to carry out jobs like supporting social workers, taking care of elderly persons, repairing roads, etc.

During the meeting with the Head of the Employment Office, the following main challenges or difficulties faced by refugees were highlighted:

- Language barrier
- Cultural differences at work
- Expectations that have been created and that do not reflect the reality (Lithuania is in the EU, but its situation is different from Germany for instance. This is also applicable within a same country between urban areas/capital cities and other geographical areas where refugees might be located.)

- Problem of recognition of professional qualifications
- Difficulty in renting a flat

The main difficulties faced by employers are:

- Language barrier
- Differences between the skills needed in certain sectors (technological, agricultural, etc.) and the skills of refugees
- Barriers linked to stereotypes and prejudices (not only on the side of employers, but also of local employees, who sometimes do not want to work with refugees)

Finally, support for entrepreneurship was also reported, as willingness to start businesses had been expressed by several beneficiaries. Some success stories include two brothers opening up a Barber shop, restaurant openings, or a Syrian woman setting up catering services from her home. However, there are some barriers that make entrepreneurship difficult, such as the language issue, but also the heavy and complex bureaucratic processes. This is a difficulty that affects all Lithuanians, not only foreigners.

From an intercultural point of view, this last barrier has a more profound impact than is sometimes thought of. Indeed, local shops play an important role for the revitalisation of neighbourhoods, to generate meeting places, foster cohesion and even a greater perception of security. In many countries, it is immigrants who are maintaining many local businesses, and this helps to make them visible, create job opportunities and generate spaces for interaction. The fact that there are impediments to the creation of this type of business has a negative impact on job opportunities, but also on levels of cohesion and interculturality.

9. Cultural and social life

During the visit, the existing collaboration between the SSC and the city's Cultural centre, as well as the city's public library which we had the opportunity to visit, was discussed.

The Director of the Cultural Centre highlighted activities they organise for immigrants and refugees, such as guided tours of the city and museums in collaboration with the tourist information centre. The aim is to learn about aspects of local history, culture and heritage, but also to generate debate and exchange on cultural diversity. However, they usually only manage to attract women in these activities and the difficulty to engage men was raised. Here again, the prejudices and stereotypes that locals have about migrants and refugees were highlighted, especially prejudices about refugees from Syria and Afghanistan. The Director said that thanks to the activities they organised to promote positive interaction spaces and opportunities, these stereotypes and rumours are progressively dismantled.

It is essential to reinforce this type of activities that allow mutual knowledge, dialogue and interaction to facilitate intercultural relations and not only avoid prejudices but also take advantage of the opportunities that arise from cultural diversity.

A good example of this is the Jonava public library, which apart from its two buildings in the city, has a network of 17 libraries in the different villages that are part of Jonava district, and which play a key role in cohesion and the promotion of intercultural relations.

The Public Library

Jonava's public library welcomes around 200 people daily in its main building. It has become a reference point for promoting culture, cohesion and interculturality. The increase in immigration and especially the arrival of hundreds of Ukrainian refugees in the city posed a

challenge for the library and especially for its employees, because they had to rethink their approach and working methods.



Picture 3: One of the main rooms of the public library

The library has transformative spaces that can be adapted to host cultural events such as book launches, concerts, debates, etc. It has everything from an intimate space with blood pressure equipment, to a computer room, to a space dedicated to poetry, which is often occupied by many children.

A little more than a year ago the library hardly offered any books in languages other than Lithuanian, but now they have more than 200 books in Ukrainian, as well as books in Russian, English, Polish, German, Estonian, Latvian, French and Latin. In addition, the library offers a rich programme of activities for diverse audiences all year long. These include cultural and wellness activities, IT and Lithuanian language-learning courses, clubs and choirs for the elderly, activities for children, such as exhibitions of pictures painted by the city's art school students about the war or a summer camp for Lithuanian and Ukrainian children, among many others. In branch libraries of surrounding villages, children's birthdays are celebrated. However, the Director acknowledged that it happened that some older people were reluctant to meet with Ukrainians and that the library teams have to think of strategies to attract them to these types of activities.

During our visit to the library, we were informed that staff receive training on managing particularly stressful situations. This is an example of collaboration with the SSC, which has the library as a great ally to promote inclusion and interculturality in the city. Another example worth mentioning is an activity on psychology targeting different groups, including refugees.

The library is obviously doing a great job. It could enhance its intercultural impact by further promoting multilingualism by incorporating books and resources in other minority languages, promoting projects such as "language pairs" to reinforce the language learning offer and facilitate interaction or, continuing to think of activities that would be stimulating to attract those people who are reluctant to mix with migrants and refugees. But in any case, many cities would like to have a library and a team with the commitment,



Picture 4: Exhibition of art school student's paintings about the war in Ukraine

dynamism and capacity to innovate and adapt to change as the Jonava library. It is undoubtedly one of the great assets of the city, or in the words of its director: "*a true temple of the people*". We would like to add that it is also a fundamental ally in the journey towards a more intercultural city.

10. Neighbourhoods, public space and housing

During our visit, information was shared about a policy which was not included in Jonava's responses to the ICC index, but which has been put in place years ago and, we believe, has had a positive impact. It concerns a fundamental change in the city's social housing policy.

The director of the SSC told us that previously the policy was to concentrate all vulnerable people in social housing blocks. However, that policy led to social segregation and the existence of issues of coexistence. Fortunately, they became aware of it and changed the policy. Nowadays, social housing is distributed all over the different neighbourhoods of the municipality as it has over the years acquired individual flats to accommodate beneficiaries, including refugees.

In the words of the director, "before, there was segregation due to the social housing policy, which generated many problems and conflicts but since the policy has changed and all social housing is no longer concentrated in one place, the problems have been greatly reduced". This is interesting because from an intercultural perspective, segregation is a major obstacle both to equality and social interaction and cohesion.

This is a good example of how a policy that many people would not link to interculturality can be one of the most decisive. Therefore, it is important for cities like Jonava to incorporate these examples into their intercultural city narrative. It can also be a good strategy to engage the urban planning and housing department in the intercultural agenda.

The limited number of local shops is another aspect of the urban space of Jonava that has an impact on the possibilities of interaction. We talked with the employment office about the bureaucratic and management difficulties involved in setting up a business such as a local shop. But this lack of a commercial fabric of local businesses has an impact on the way public space is experienced and perceived. Squares, parks or cultural and sports centres are important for the existence of opportunities for meeting and interaction. But local businesses contribute to more dynamic neighbourhoods with more opportunities to interact.



Picture 5: Open-air library installed in front of the public library

Various activities happening in the public space and creating opportunities for meeting and participation, whether through sports, culture, organisation of events, celebrations, etc., have been mentioned. For instance, the mayor mentioned a new, disabled-friendly, indoor swimming pool inaugurated shortly before our visit and which offers leisure spaces and classes for babies, pupils, children, seniors, pregnant women, etc. Unfortunately, as our visit was in the middle of winter, we did not have the opportunity to

observe the more intensive use that Jonava residents make of the public space during warmer months. We could however mention the success of the "open-air library" space created in front of the public library which example has even inspired other cities in the country.

11. Civil society and participation

Jonava has not yet promoted participatory processes or created any space or consultative council in which different organisations and social actors can debate and participate more actively in public policy design processes.

Moreover, Jonava does not have a rich network of associations, and we have already mentioned that there is no presence in the city of big NGOs that are in other larger cities. However, during our visit we had the opportunity to meet representatives of the Syrian community and a group of Ukrainian women. In these meetings we were able to see the close link and collaboration that exists between these communities and the SSC.

In our conversation with representatives of the Syrian community, they told us that compared to other Lithuanian cities, Jonava had much more support services for reception and integration of refugees. One of the representatives is currently working as a social worker in the SSC, but he is also a Lithuanian language teacher for other refugees, he collaborates with UNCHR sharing his testimony, and among other things he is also a singer.

In his own experience: *"When I arrived five years ago, the most difficult thing was learning the language. Also, the local residents didn't know other cultures and asked weird questions. Now, however, people are much more used to cultural diversity, which makes you feel good."*

When asked about possible improvements to promote integration and interculturality in Jonava, they first emphasise the importance of a wide, diverse and flexible offer to learn the language. Among other reasons, because if you do not speak the language, it is very difficult to for instance rent a flat. They comment that Ukrainians speaking Russian have it a little easier when it comes to communicating, because it is a very useful language in Jonava.

Finally, they stressed the importance of working on awareness-raising and training in two directions. On the one hand, with local residents, so that they better understand the reality of refugees, and on the other hand, with the refugees themselves to reinforce the training they receive because they have to deal with significant inequalities that are important to reduce as soon as possible.

We also had the opportunity to meet a group of Ukrainian women who have had to flee the war and who meet at the SSC to discuss and promote various activities. During our visit they were writing and creating artistic letters to send to Ukrainian children and creating paper butterflies to sell and send the money to Ukraine. They told us that Ukrainians who had left the country feel a sense of guilt and want to do things to support their country. Apart from their meetings, they also collaborate with local schools where they explain their experience as refugees.

With the collaboration of the SSC and the Cultural Centre and the Library, various activities are organised, and a Ukrainian school was set up during the weekend, based on the idea of a large Vilnius organisation.

When talking about the most important challenges they have encountered, they highlight the language issue, but also the important support provided by the SSC in accessing the health system or understanding and managing some legal issues. Finally, they stress that their main interest is to be able to work, to feel useful and to organise more cultural activities.

Through these meetings, we were able to see that, although Jonava does not have a very rich network of associations, promising and necessary spaces for informal participation are emerging. Precisely because there are few actors it would be possible to create a more formal space for participation with both representatives of migrant communities and other local actors related to culture, sports, etc.

12. Conclusions and recommendations

During our visit we were able to learn more about some of the policies and actions promoted by the municipality and some local actors, such as the role played by the public library and the city's cultural centre.

What is most evident after the visit is the leadership of the SSC through its director and committed work team. The mayor himself acknowledged in the opening meeting that *"all the work is done by the SSC"*. This leadership and commitment of the SSC team has enabled Jonava to promote a series of important actions to facilitate work towards integration and interculturality. This work has made Jonava a referent in Lithuania, which has led it to win the most important municipal award in recognition for its commitment and innovation last year.

In this context, the main recommendation for Jonava would be that the SSC should no longer be the only responsible and referent for the city's policies to promote interculturality. This has been necessary and very valuable during the past years, but now a qualitative and quantitative leap seems timely, and this can only happen if all the municipal areas and departments join this process and share responsibility in this journey. This must be conveyed by the political leadership, which must be committed to foster genuine cross-cutting cooperation between the different departments, based on the definition of common and shared objectives.

In this sense and based on the experience of many other cities, the best way to do so is for the city to promote and put in place a process to design its strategy or action plan to promote interculturality.

The cross-departmental design of a strategy or action plan is not only relevant for the final content of the specific actions to be implemented. Also indeed, the process in itself represents a valuable opportunity for various stakeholders to come together, assess existing actions and policies and address the main shortcomings identified, which are often similar for cities such as Jonava.

Currently, there is one main actor that drives almost all actions through a very proactive leadership that is recognised at both the political and technical levels. However, this actor, which has enabled Jonava's policies to take a major leap forward, is no longer sufficient to address the challenges and demands arising from a more diverse and complex city that requires an approach to interculturalism that goes beyond the scope of social services.

Education, culture, sports, but also employment and economy, urban planning, communication, participation or law enforcement, among many others, are areas that must incorporate intercultural principles and approaches in the design and implementation of their policies. This is the only way to make comprehensive progress towards a truly intercultural and inclusive city.

The key elements that a process of designing a strategy or action plan should have in order to meet the objective of addressing main shortcomings are highlighted below.

Strengthening political commitment

To make this qualitative leap, it is crucial that there is a political commitment that is willing to promote the intercultural agenda. The mayor we had the opportunity to meet during our visit has been re-elected in the 2023 March elections and the coming months will show whether or not there is a sustained commitment to strengthen the city's intercultural agenda.

It is important that the leadership of the SSC contributes to strengthening this political commitment by sharing the reports and materials of the Council of Europe, highlighting all the work that has been done and pointing to the most important challenges for the future. With a strong and sustained political commitment, Jonava can become an important city of reference beyond the Lithuanian borders.

A commitment to transversality/mainstreaming

Promoting internal mainstreaming is one of the great challenges shared by all cities. There is no magic recipe, but there are strategies that are more effective than others.

The level of political commitment is important, but so are the means used to promote collaboration between the different areas. The most effective way is to highlight the things that are already being done and, at the same time, to promote a process of reflection, awareness-raising and internal training to identify challenges and ways to incorporate the intercultural approach in each area.

It is obvious that mainstreaming requires some formal space, such as a commission, committee or cross-cutting table between different actors, for coordination purposes. It is also of utmost importance that the different areas understand the importance of their implication, assume their responsibility and feel motivated during this process.

Therefore, it is best to start by organising internal brainstorming sessions, including good practices examples from other cities, highlighting what has been done positively in Jonava and identifying internally the weaknesses and possible actions that could be taken.

The importance of training

A few things are as important as training in order to move this process forward. Many cities fail to achieve progress because their insufficient key internal actors have the necessary competencies to incorporate the intercultural approach.

It is often the case that the only people who are trained are those already working on these issues on a day-to-day basis (as in this case the social workers of the SSC), but that neither technicians nor those responsible for communication, education or security policies for instance, are trained from the outset. Nor is it easy for policy makers to be trained. However, in those cities where they have been trained, the impact has been very positive. It is not possible to train all workers, even less so in a short period of time. A strategic decision has to be taken based on the identification of the most important and decisive profiles, so that the training provided has the greatest impact.

The most advisable is for officials to participate in training, in order to promote mainstreaming of intercultural principles from the political level, and to continue with technical managers working in key areas, as well as with technicians and employees who work directly with the public or who implement municipal policies and services of those key areas.

For example, when conducting a diagnosis of the city's main diversity policy challenges, the results can help with deciding which areas of work are best to prioritise for training. In any case,

areas such as education, culture, employment, urban planning, communication, security or sports, are areas that we already know play a key role.

Overall, it is important to start with training in which staff from different areas participate in order to evaluate its impact and gradually extend the training to other profiles and levels of responsibility.

In particular, developing intercultural competence²⁵ among officials and diverse stakeholders involved in service design and provision (health, police, education, etc.) contributes to more inclusive policies and to the provision of services that are better suited to the socio-cultural reality of each territory as they would be sensitive to the increasing local diversity and take into account new needs and user profiles. For instance, this would also avoid a situation where, due to a general lack of intercultural sensitivity among public service providers, the responsibility to compensate and support to migrants and refugees in accessing those services would fall on a single competent actor.

The ICC programme has developed a series of training resources on intercultural competences²⁶, which can feed into the organisation of a first training session for an internal group of key actors, who should be allies of the SSC in this mainstreaming process.

The creation of a networking space with key social partners

Parallel to the internal work, a space for the participation of social actors and civil society should be designed so that they can become involved and participate in the debates around the diagnoses and proposals for actions to be carried out in Jonava.

For example, the creation of an “intercultural Jonava network” could start with actors with whom cooperation is already established and could gradually expand to include other actors.

This network could become a space for work and collaboration between representatives of: neighbourhoods; migrant communities; cultural, educational, sports and health sectors; businesses ; etc. In turn, this would contribute to generating a culture of active participation in Jonava.²⁷

The city could also make use of members in this network to disseminate information within their communities, may it be orally, in writing or using social media for instance, in particular taking advantage of their language competences.

The process of elaborating an intercultural city plan

All the steps discussed so far can be reinforced through the process of designing an intercultural city plan.

²⁵ “Intercultural competence refers to the set of knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes which enable both individuals and organisations to act in an interculturally competent manner. Intercultural competence is not a single concept, but a wide range of competences, which when put together allow for proactive action to ensure an intercultural environment, as well as for interculturally competent reactions in the diverse situations we all face daily.” Source: Council of Europe (2022), Manual for the design of a training course on intercultural competence, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/manual-for-the-design-of-a-training-course-on-intercultural-competence/1680a948b1>.

²⁶ More information is available at : <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/intercultural-competence>.

²⁷ More information on participatory processes: Council of Europe (2023), Building meaningful public participation in Intercultural cities – A guide to the appreciative inquiry approach, available at : <https://rm.coe.int/policy-brief-building-meaningful-public-participation-in-intercultural/1680aa3e22>

The first step would be to define the process of designing the Plan, which should include an internal and external participatory process (as suggested above) as they allow to avoid stereotypical ideas about diversity, migration and minority groups and contribute to the coherence, sustainability and buy-in of the intercultural plan. Indeed, exchanges with a diversity of stakeholders and actors would make it possible to greatly enrich the diagnosis in order to identify the main challenges and priorities and to contrast them with those that appear in Jonava's ICC Index assessment, which already constitutes a good diagnosis as a starting point.²⁸

For the design of the city Plan it is important to identify both political and technical responsibility, and it is advisable to create a core team with representatives from different areas to guarantee the mainstreaming approach and co-responsibility from the beginning of the process.

There are different types of plans. Some are very detailed, with very specific descriptions of the actions to be developed by the different areas, identifying those responsible, the timetable and the budget. Others are more generic and serve as a strategic framework that identifies some lines of work and some actions but does not attempt to define all the specific actions to be developed. Depending on the context, the teams and the needs, one type of plan or another may be more useful. This is a decision to be taken at the political level. The important thing is to start with a good diagnosis and to identify specific objectives and lines of work and, above all, to define a system for following up, monitoring and evaluating the plan during its implementation.

The construction of a shared "framework narrative" on intercultural Jonava

One of the main weaknesses of many cities is that they do not prioritise the creation of a narrative around their own story as an intercultural city. Unfortunately, negative, and toxic narratives about diversity are currently spreading and strongly amplifying in many countries. This is very dangerous because perceptions play an important role and must be taken into account when promoting intercultural policies.

The question here is to define a framework narrative about intercultural Jonava, based on values and a vision shared by all the departments and various social actors in the city. It is a matter of constructing a tailored positive narrative that responds the following questions:

- Why is it important to move together towards a more intercultural Jonava?
- What global and shared goals do we have in our idea of an intercultural Jonava?
- Why is this a shared responsibility and what can we do to move forward?
- How do we imagine an intercultural Jonava in 5 and 10-years' time?

It is important to find answer to these kinds of questions together with different actors. The narrative that will come out of it will be all the more effective and stronger if it is honest and shared by many actors. Time and energy should be invested in this fundamental issue as it contributes to strengthening the commitment and impact that the intercultural policies and actions may generate.²⁹

²⁸ More information on strategy design is available at : <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/designing-intercultural-strategies>.

²⁹ More information is available at : <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/alternative-narratives-and-inclusive-communication>.

Information, data and indicators

Another shortcoming shared by many cities, including Jonava, is the lack of available information, data and indicators to better understand the reality of the city from an intercultural perspective. Information must be gathered in order to make a good diagnosis that helps, first with identifying priorities and lines of action, and then with evaluating their impact.

The ICC index is a great tool to assess the situation of a city and the level of commitment to interculturality at a given time. But as the Index itself has shown, it is important that Jonava collects more information on its diversity in different areas (education, employment, participation, culture etc.), but also on citizens' perceptions of diversity.

A good starting point is to use the information that already exists or is being collected, and to create some type of local “observatory of diversity”. Gathering information requires resources and it is necessary to prioritise which information to collect and what allies could help with this work. Many ICC cities find ways to collaborate with universities and experts to work on data collection and on developing indicators at the city level.

There are many examples of ICC cities that can inspire Jonava and that would undoubtedly efficiently showcase and demonstrate the importance of working in favour of interculturality, but also to highlight the work that is being done already in Jonava. This is important to reinforce political commitment, but also to be able to set short, medium and long-term objectives and assess how they are being achieved.

In short, Jonava must take the step that other cities have taken before (but many still refuse to take), which is to recognise that it is not a culturally homogeneous city that has taken in migrants and refugees only on a temporary basis. Socio-cultural diversity is a reality and a structural factor, it is not a temporary reality that requires a temporary effort to support some groups of people. It is about assuming that societies are and will be increasingly diverse and complex, regardless of the occasional arrival of immigrants or refugees.

Promoting the intercultural agenda requires an awareness that diversity poses complexities and opportunities, and that depending on how this diversity is perceived and managed, a city will either develop to become fairer, more inclusive, open and dynamic, or on the contrary move towards segregation, inequalities and conflicts. For this awareness to happen and for a city to move towards the former model, it is important to continue strengthening the commitment to adapt to this reality and to continue to take decisions to support this at the institutional level.

It is not possible to leave almost all the responsibility in the hands of the SSC. It is necessary to take a leap towards a greater mainstreaming of policies, to promote training in intercultural competence among a wide range of stakeholders (municipal staff and leaders, teachers, law enforcement, medical staff, etc.) and to promote spaces for participation among others. And for this, there is nothing better than to promote the process of designing an intercultural city plan. Jonava is in a very good position to be a reference and a pioneering city that serves as an inspiration and motivation for other cities in the region towards interculturality.

The Intercultural Cities programme would like to thank Jonava for their welcome and for the interesting visit. The work done to date goes beyond the initial assessment through the ICC index and several good practices to share with other cities were identified.

Annex 1 - Agenda

First ICC expert visit to Jonava (18-19 January 2023)

2023-01-18	10.00 - 12.30	Meeting with Jonava mayor and vice mayor and representatives of: Jonava municipality administration; Social Support Department (<i>Socialinės paramos skyrius</i>); Educational Assistance Service (<i>Švietimo pagalbos tarnyba</i>); Jonava Cultural Centre (<i>Jonavos Kultūros centras</i>); Public Library (<i>Viešoji biblioteka</i>); Social services centre and UNHCR.
	12.30 – 13.30	Lunch
	13.30 – 15.30	Visit of the Jonava district social services centre (<i>Socialinių paslaugų centras</i>) - presentation of the activities of the ICC coordinator and of the Immigrant Information and Integration Centre.
	15.30 – 17.30	Meeting with representatives of immigrant communities (refugees from Syria and Ukraine) and other social partners.
2023-01-19	9.00 -10.00	Visit of the Rukla department of the Employment service (<i>Užimtumo tarnybos Ruklos skyrius</i>) and the Rukla department of social services centre.
	10.00 – 12.30	Visit of the Refugee Reception Centre (<i>Pabėgėlių priėmimo centras</i>) – presentation of the activities of the institution and its links with the ICC activities of the city.
	12.30 – 13.30	Lunch
	13.30 – 15.00	Visit of the Public Library (<i>Viešoji biblioteka</i>) - one of the main partners of ICC activities in the city.
	15.00 – 16.30	Debriefing meeting at the Jonava district social services centre - preliminary conclusions of the expert visit, discussion on the findings and on the next steps.