

**EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS'
COMMISSION FOR CITIZENSHIP, GOVERNANCE, INSTITUTIONAL
AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (CIVEX)**

Conference

**Integration of migrants and refugees: unlocking new opportunities for cities
and regions**

9 July 2024

*Artis Centrum Hotels Conference Centre,
Totorių str. 23, Vilnius, Lithuania*

PROGRAMME

Over the past decade, the European Union has been confronted with unprecedented migratory flows due to various political, economic, environmental and social reasons. This phenomenon has been intensified by armed conflicts, with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine being the latest such example.

The reception of migrants and refugees puts solidarity among EU Member States to the test, with those at the EU's external borders being most affected by mass arrivals. While the EU is adapting its regulatory framework and policies to manage migration in the long term, the successful integration of people today can be a win-win for newcomers and host communities. Labour shortages, demographic challenges and skill gaps in the local economies are some of the issues which cities and regions can address with successful integration strategies.

The conference will bring together decision-makers from different levels of government and other key stakeholders for a debate on ways to unlock the opportunities linked to the integration of migrants and refugees for EU's regions and cities. Participants will exchange their experiences on integrating migrants and refugees, to share the insights and knowledge on how to best communicate about migration, encourage society to change its attitude towards newcomers and involve it in their integration.

08:30–09:00	REGISTRATION AND COFFEE
09:00-09:30	<p>WELCOME REMARKS</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patrick Molinoz (FR/PES), CIVEX Chair • Arnoldas Abramavičius, Vice-Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania • Valdas Benkunskas (LT/EPP), Mayor of Vilnius City, Member of the CIVEX commission • Mindaugas Sinkevičius (LT/ PES), CIVEX Second Vice-Chair, Mayor of Jonava district municipality
09:30-09.40	<p>KEYNOTE SPEECH</p> <p>"Migration and integration, a cornerstone of vibrant and cohesive communities"</p> <p>Cohesive communities are built on the values of tolerance, respect and solidarity. At the same time, the facts and figures speak for themselves: the European Union and its individual Member States are a land of migrants, from both within and outside the EU, who have successfully settled in the continent. With this in mind, the successful integration of migrants proves its worth as a win-win process that brings both economic, as well as social and societal benefits.</p> <p>Local and regional authorities are the ones who are welcoming newcomers and providing them with essential services to ensure their effective integration into local communities. They are also the ones who play a key role in the building of cohesive communities by putting into practice successful initiatives that are beneficial to newcomers and local communities.</p> <p>Keynote speaker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juan Fernando López Aguilar, Chair of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, European Parliament (video message)
09:40-10:55	<p>SESSION I. CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ON MIGRANT AND REFUGEE INTEGRATION FOR SOCIAL COHESION AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH</p> <p>Migration is often framed in political and media debates as a crisis to be solved, while the benefits of migrant integration are largely overlooked. Disinformation about migration is increasingly being employed to polarise public opinion, especially against the current complex geopolitical situation.</p> <p>Beyond the obvious aspect of solidarity with those in need, the integration of migrants and refugees is a strong element of social cohesion and inclusive growth in the European Union.</p> <p>As the successful integration of migrants and refugees can help to address challenges facing Europe, such as the depopulation of regions due to demographic decline and brain drain, as well as labour shortages and reduced competitiveness, local and regional authorities can play an important role in promoting new narratives, anchored in facts and figures and the values of the European Union.</p> <p>The session will bring together high-level policy makers, experts in the field and</p>

	<p>representatives of cities and regions to share their insights and discuss what can be done to change the narrative on the integration of migrants and to counter disinformation.</p> <p>Moderated by Justīne Pantelējeva (LV/Greens), Member of Riga City Council</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justina Jakštienė, Vice-Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania • Eitvydas Bingelis, Head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Office in Vilnius • Aleksandra Dulkiewicz (PL/EPP), Mayor of the City of Gdańsk and Member of the CIVEX commission • Friso Roscam Abbing, Communication Adviser, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) <p>Debate with CIVEX members</p>
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10.55-11.30	COFFEE BREAK - PRESS OPPORTUNITY
11.30-12.45	<p>SESSION II. INTEGRATING MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES AT LOCAL LEVEL: UNLOCKING THE OPPORTUNITIES</p> <p>Integration happens at the local level. It is local and regional authorities that welcome migrants and refugees, provide them with essential services and ensure their successful integration into local communities. They are also best placed to have a coherent overview of the current situation and needs in their local communities.</p> <p>The session will bring together CIVEX members with representatives from EU regions and cities, including from the CoR Cities and Regions for Integration of Migrants network, to discuss challenges and share best practices. Experts from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the European Commission will join the discussion to share their insights and policies in this field. In the light of these exchanges, the session will highlight the need to involve local and regional authorities in designing tailor-made and holistic integration policies at EU level in order to ensure effective protection of the most vulnerable group of migrants and refugees - children - and to provide opportunities for the integration of newcomers into the labour market.</p> <p>Moderated by Mindaugas Sinkevičius (LT/PES), CIVEX Second Vice-Chair, Mayor of Jonava district municipality</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karolis Žibas, Integration Officer, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representation for the Nordic and Baltic countries • Vitalijus Mitrofanovas, Mayor of Akmenė District Municipality • Anne Rudisuhli (FR/ Renew Europe), Member of the Bouches-du-Rhône Departmental Council and of the CIVEX commission • • Aurélie Belzunces, Head of Sector on Integration, Directorate General for

	<p>Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission</p> <p>Debate with CIVEX members</p>
12:45-13:00	<p>CLOSING STATEMENTS</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patrick Molinoz (FR/PES), CIVEX Chair • Alin-Adrian Nica (RO/EPP), CIVEX First Vice-Chair and President of Timiș County Council