**Migration and education in Estonia**

What are, in your country, the biggest challenges for migration and education?

Estonia has very low number of new immigrants and refugees. Due to climate and low labour market, Estonia is not very popular target country. At present moment there are not any big challenges for migration and education, but it could occur in the future.

What are, in your country, the policy concepts related to migration?  In other words: in which context is migration placed from the policy point of view?  Does it have to do with inclusive policies, with special needs education, with social cohesion policies,...?

Concerning immigrants’ education, generally, all legal regulations in education are applicable to them. The right to education is equally guaranteed for all residents, regardless of ethnic, religious or citizenship background. Basic education (one to nine grades) is comprehensive and obligatory for all those residing in Estonia.

Estonian schools are obligated to accept and educate all residents. This does include new immigrants – children of all EU citizens and non EU citizens – workers, asylum seekers, refugees, migrants – who wish to start their studies in Estonian schools and who have resided in Estonia for more than three years.

### Country report: Estonia

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### IV.2. Access to education

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According to the interview with Ave Härsing, Coordinator at MISA, approximately 15 per cent of local governments a 40 per cent of schools in Estonia have had some experiences with new immigrant children (this does not include children of asylum seekers and refugees). Currently, there are approximately fifty-five educational institutions in Estonia that are teaching children of new immigrants. The only experience teaching RASC comes from Illuka school and is considered under the best practices section of this report.

Asylum seekers and refugees are first directed to the Asylum and Refugee Reception Centre, where they are informed by the local authorities about the educational possibilities for RASC. In the case, they get temporary residence permissionso that they can move to another locality. However, local governments have to ensure that every child residing on the territory of a local government can have access to education. Meeting the specific needs (language learning, or other kind of support) of a student is within the competenceofand is the responsibility of schools. New immigrants may not know Estonian and may also not arrive at the beginning of the school year, but in the middle of a semester. In that case, schools would be facing a problem in that neither the child nor his/her parents may speak Estonian or other commonly used language that could be utilised to communicate between schools, children and their parents.

Forimmigrant students some specific terms can be applied, if necessary: complementary study of Estonian language for four hours in a week, simplified curricula (like no demand for study of second language or the second language can also be the mother tongue), simplified terms for national tests, appointment of assistant teachers, who should help to socialise into the school culture and some others. However, as school´s conditions can considerably vary between local governments, also the possibilities to meet specific needs can be different. The above-mentioned tools are applicable for all categories of immigrant children, including for RASC. From local governments’ point of view, however, things can seem more problematic. In small localities, resources are much more limited and local governments have problems with providing the necessary translation services, assistant teachers, specific teaching materials, training for teachers, etc. (interview with the Illuka local government representative). Additionally, as the number of RASC is very small and children come from different language contexts, the school has to mediate between different languages, and apply individualised curricula in each case (interview with the principal and teachers from the Illuka basic school).

There are no special educational conditions for unaccompanied minors, girls, RASC without any school certificates proving level of schooling, RASC who have been victims of crimes or other minority groups. There are also no specific social programs aimed at children of asylum seekers and refuges who attend school. The same conditions and legislation applies to all immigrant children.

The main problem concerning the education of new immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers is the language barrier – the Estonian curriculum is not prepared to accommodate foreign language speaking children (***Promotion of the education of the children of migrant workers* (2006),**Integration and Migration Organisation Our People).

Next to the common problem of lack of resources (money for necessary school supplies, etc.) the most common problems with foreign (this includes children of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers) children are:

1. kindergartens and schools lack experience with teaching children of new immigrants;
2. kindergartens and schools do not register possible issues (language, communication, preparation of teachers) of teaching foreign (this includes children of new immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers) children before the first child arrives;
3. even though specific teacher training programs for in-service teachers have been introducedin big universities in Tallinn and Tartu, teacher education does not include systematic preparation for teaching children of new immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers (http://old.meis.ee).

Preparatory work, however, has been done to give new immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers a better overview of Estonian education system and of their possibilities of receiving education.

In 2006 the Integration and Migration Foundation published a booklet entitled *Promotion of the education of the children of migrant workers*. The booklet describes the educational system in Estonia and was issued in Estonian, English and Russian. It provides a brief overview of the country’s system of education, enrolment conditions, study formats, etc. The goal was to facilitate an improved understanding of the Estonian educational system among newly arrived immigrant parents interested in learning about various educational options for their children.
Starting from 2008, the new 2008‑2013 Integration Strategy has been implemented.However, the new programme is quite similar to the previous one and it does not go much further beyond language training. At the same time, the integration strategy fails to take into consideration the needs of those immigrants that come from countries other than the former USSR republics and have different cultural backgrounds (***Promotion of the education of the children of migrant workers* (2006),** Integration and Migration Organisation Our People).

By the legal regulations, all acts and measures targeting minorityand immigrant children apply to RASC as well – such as the right to free additional Estonian courses for four hours per week for the duration of three years, the opportunity to decline additional foreign language studies, the opportunity to study in their native language, the right to an individualised curriculum, and the right to assistance from a psychologist and speech therapist.

The country’s main experience up to the present time has beenwith the teaching of children of new immigrants, who generally come from better social and financial conditions (Russia, Finland etc). Until now, they have been considered the main target group of educational integration, disregarding refugees and asylum seekers specifically.