

# The National Focus Group Report: Estonia

Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium  
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## Introduction

Estonia as a relatively new European Union member state is not a major migration destination largely due to its low income level and poor economic conditions. Besides the modest income level, one of the main factors which have deterred people from migrating to Estonia is its strict immigration policy. Since Estonia regained its independence in 1991, the migration policy has been clearly restrictive to immigration. The Aliens Act establishes clear quantitative and qualitative restrictions, such as the annual immigration quota and the specific grounds for granting of a residence permit (e.g. work, learning, family connections).<sup>1</sup> The absence of larger existing new immigrant communities and cold climate are the other factors which have hindered more extensive migration to Estonia. Especially if geographically surrounded by the Nordic countries which compared to Estonia are more attractive migration destinations with the desired social benefits and insurance as well as a relatively higher income level. Still the number of migrants shows increase, mainly as a consequence of free movement of labour within the European Union. In 2005, 1436 persons immigrated into Estonia while the figure was 4244 in 2012.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in 2011, the record number of asylum applications were submitted – 67.<sup>3</sup>

The reason why Estonian migration policy has been rather restrictive lies in history. Although Estonia has very few new migrants, Estonians constituted only 69% of the total population in 2012, the others being mainly ethnic Russians.<sup>4</sup> Estonia was conquered by the Soviet Union in the II World War and as a part of the russification policy, a large share of ethnic Estonians were deported to Siberia and instead ethnic Russians moved to Estonia in order to enforce cultural assimilation. As a result of these policies and the loss of lives during the war, the share of ethnic Estonians was greatly decreased. More specifically, from almost 90% to 60% between 1940 and 1989 (Järve 2009<sup>5</sup>). In other words, the share of non-Estonians in the population had pushed from around 10% in 1940 to 38.5% in 1989 (Järve & Poleshchuk 2013<sup>6</sup>). A separate education system with Russian as the language of instruction was created for newcomers during the Soviet period.

Today, Estonian general education system enables to study in various languages. Education at preschool and basic level is available in Estonian- and Russian- language, but also in English- and Finnish-language in a few educational institutions. Schools in which subjects are taught in the language of a national minority form a part of the Estonian education system. The state has emphasized<sup>7</sup> that only the harmonized educational system can ensure quality of education which includes equal opportunities to all secondary graduates. The ability to speak the Estonian language is

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<sup>1</sup> The Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, *Satisfying Labour Demand through Migration*, 2010 [<http://www.sisekaitse.ee/erv/publikatsioonid/uuringud-2/2010-2/>]. The study is in Estonian and can be found at [[http://www.sisekaitse.ee/public/ERV/SATISFYING\\_LABOUR\\_DEMAND\\_THROUGH\\_MIGRATION\\_IN\\_ESTONIA\\_eesti.pdf](http://www.sisekaitse.ee/public/ERV/SATISFYING_LABOUR_DEMAND_THROUGH_MIGRATION_IN_ESTONIA_eesti.pdf)]

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Estonia [<http://www.stat.ee/34286?highlight=migration>] 12.07.2013

<sup>3</sup> Estonian Refugee Council, statistics on asylum seekers [<http://www.pagulasabi.ee/eesti-statistika/>] 23.11.2012

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Estonia [[www.stat.ee](http://www.stat.ee)] 23.11.2012

<sup>5</sup> Järve, P. (2009). *Estonian citizenship: Between ethnic preferences and democratic obligations*. In Bauböck, R., Perchinig, B., Sievers, W. (Eds.). *Citizenship Policies in the New Europe*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 45-65.

<sup>6</sup> Järve, P.& Poleshchuk, V. (2013). *Country report: Estonia*. EUDO Citizenship Observatory [<http://eudo-citizenship.eu/docs/CountryReports/Estonia.pdf>]

<sup>7</sup> The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research [<http://www.hm.ee/index.php?148680>] 11.08.2013

essential at university, where the studies commences in Estonian; it is a pre-requisite for acquiring Estonian citizenship, and will be of advantage to students on labour market.

*At the secondary education level (grades 10 to 12, which are not mandatory) the language of instruction is defined by the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act of 1997. The act, deigned to ensure that graduates have a level of Estonian language skills that enables them to continue their studies in Estonian, stipulates that as of the 2011/2013 academic year, the language of instruction is to be Estonian for at least 60% of studies in all public schools, including those that once taught only in Russian. The remaining 40% of the curriculum can be taught in another language chosen by the school. The schools can choose the Estonian curriculum or Estonian as a second language curriculum as the basis for teaching Estonian. The provision of general education at all levels of education is carried out on the basis of common national curricula irrespective of the language of instruction.*

There are 45 upper secondary schools with Russian as the language of instruction in Estonia in 2012/2013 academic year, all of which will switch to Estonian language subject study. In basic schools, the owner of the school (generally the local government) is free to choose the language of instruction.<sup>8</sup> Many Russians have chosen to study in Estonian-medium schools. The reason can be to enhance their competitiveness in labor market. This kind of situation is quite unique compared to the countries in Western Europe.

The main focus in this analysis lies on new migrants<sup>9</sup> and their situation in the Estonian education system in order to provide a comparable basis for other participating countries in the SIRIUS network.

Personal interviews instead of a focus group meeting were held with the experts in the field of migrant education for two reasons: they are divided between two largest cities in Estonia – Tallinn and Tartu; and the time frame for interviews fell on the professionally busiest time – October and November. The detailed list of interviewees is provided in Table 1.

As Estonia has a relatively small number of new immigrants, the selection of possible interviewees with a profound expertise in the field was limited. In order to get recommendations about persons to be interviewed, the first meeting was held with an adviser of the Ministry of Education and Research, who is a leading expert in this field in Estonia. As Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, with its 400 000 inhabitants is the only city in Estonia, which has some generalizable experience in migrant education, a head of General Education Unit in Tallinn City Department of Education was involved in the study. The school perspective concerning migrant education was represented by Lilleküla Gymnasium in Tallinn, which has grown into the competence centre for migrant education. The interview with the head teacher as one of the recognised experts in this field was conducted. Although migrant education is not extensively studied research subject in Estonia, there are a few studies available on migrant education, often as a result of the international projects. For the interviews, two noted researchers in the field were chosen as well.

The most difficult part was to find representatives of NGOs working with migrant children and minority community. After some inquiries, it became clear that there are no NGOs dealing solely with migrant children. As an alternative, a representative from the Estonian Refugee Council, an NGO

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<sup>8</sup> The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research [<http://www.hm.ee/index.php?1510030>] 10.07.2013

<sup>9</sup> New migrant is someone who has lived in Estonia less than three years and would like to study in Estonian school. Typically requires support for adaptation and language learning. Definition source: the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. (2004). Uusimmigrantide lapsed Eesti hariduses. Hariduspoliitilised põhimõtted ning hariduskorraldus. Tartu: HTM.

dedicated to support asylum seekers, was interviewed. As there are no well-known migrant community leaders, a decision was made to pursue an interview with an NGO Russian School in Estonia. This is an advocacy group which aims the preservation of upper secondary education in Russian as a language of instruction in Estonia.<sup>10</sup> Despite numerous attempts and some temporary success, we could not get a positive answer from the NGO and their opinions are not included in the subsequent analysis.

**TABLE 1. LIST OF INTERVIEWEES**

Date of the interview	Place of conduction	Professional position
16/10/2012	Tartu, Estonia	Adviser, the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research
29/10/2012	Tallinn, Estonia	Head teacher, Lilleküla Gymnasium
30/10/2012	Tartu, Estonia; Brussels, Belgium (via Skype)	Independent researcher
05/11/2012	Tartu, Estonia	Senior researcher, University of Tartu
06/11/2012	Tallinn, Estonia	Head of General Education Unit, Tallinn City Department of Education
12/11/2012	Tartu, Estonia	Chairman of the board, Estonian Refugee Council

<sup>10</sup> NGO Russian School is an advocacy group, alleged to have ties with Russian secret services, who opposes the expansion of subjects taught in Estonian in Russian schools and supports continuance of two separate education systems.

# 1. Profile of the position of migrant children in the education system of Estonia

When talking about children with migrant background in Estonia, a clear distinction must be made between new migrants and Russian-speaking minority in Estonia. As Estonia has a relatively small number of the new 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation migrants, topics related to migrant education are a rather recent addition to the agenda.

It is important to note that there is no accurate data and hence a very clear overview how many migrant children are there in Estonia who would need targeted measures. The Estonian Education Information System, a national database, enables schools to enter information on pupils who have arrived in Estonia within the last 3 years. This serves as the basis for the measure through which, schools receive additional funding targeted to support migrant education. The problem, however, is that schools that have no prior experience with migrant children may not be familiar with this option and therefore lose the opportunity to apply for additional funding. On the other hand, there may be pupils with migrant background, who have arrived in Estonia more than 3 years ago, but did not attend kindergarten with Estonian as the language of instruction and hence have not acquired sufficient level of the Estonian language.

Data collected by the Ministry of Education and Research shows that the official number of new migrants, pupils who have arrived in Estonia during the last 3 years and study in Estonian-medium schools, has been around 60, peaking in 2008 with 86 pupils<sup>11</sup>. For the reasons provided above, this number is probably underestimated and contains limitations as the data are collected only in Estonian-medium schools. According to the data of the Estonian Population Registry, there were 608 pupils in the Estonian general education system who reported that their mother tongue is a language other than Estonian or Russian in the academic year 2011/12, which is 0.4% of the total number of pupils.

Nonetheless Estonia has a large, mainly Russian speaking minority population. There were 33 473 pupils whose mother tongue was Russian or both Russian and Estonian (1318) in the academic year 2011/12, which forms 26% of the total number of pupils. The total number of pupils in Russian-medium schools was 27 344, which means that many ethnic Russians have chosen to study in Estonian-medium school. This conclusion can also be drawn based on the fact that the proportion of pupils in Estonian-medium schools was 63% in 1991 and had reached to 82% in 2011<sup>12</sup>. Being able to speak Estonian is seen as one of the preconditions to be successful in the labour market, largely because the language of instruction in the Estonian higher education institutions is predominantly Estonian. Even though the graduates of Russian-medium basic schools should be able to speak Estonian at level B1 and the graduates of Russian-medium secondary school at level B2, only half of the graduates are able to fulfil this requirement<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup>As Russian schools do not receive extra funding from the authorities for a migrant student as the pupil is not studying in Estonian.

<sup>12</sup> Statistics Estonia [[http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/I\\_Databas/Social\\_life/02Education/06General\\_education/06General\\_education.asp](http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/I_Databas/Social_life/02Education/06General_education/06General_education.asp)] 21.08.2013

<sup>13</sup> Foundation Innove (2012).

In order to improve the situation, education policy has placed emphasis on increasing the volume of subjects courses taught in Estonian as described above. However, this is a slow process and rapid changes are not to be expected. At the proposal of a school and upon the agreement of the school owner, the language of instruction in a basic school may be a language other than Estonian. It is important to note that it is optional for pupils entering higher education to take the Estonian language courses as a pre study option. Some of the interviewees emphasized that the most effective way to improve the Estonian language proficiency would be losing separated kindergarten system. Although this is currently not on the political agenda; the preconditions for this seem to be there as the majority of Estonian and Russian speaking population of Estonia prefer common Estonian language based kindergartens for all pupils (with special assistant teachers for children with other mother tongue) (Masso, Kirss, Kriger 2012<sup>14</sup>).

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<sup>14</sup> Masso, A., Kirss, L., and Kriger, T. 2012. „Haridus ja noored“ Integratsiooni monitooring 2011/Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011. AS Emor, SA Poliitikauuringute Keskus Praxis, Tartu Ülikool.



## 2. Perceptions on the Estonian approach to educating children with a migrant background

### 2.1. Core elements of the Estonian approach to educating children with a migrant background

The core elements of the Estonian approach to the education of children with a migrant background are stipulated very broadly in the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act by declaring that a different mother tongue from Estonian can be considered as an educational special need. On the one hand, it has a symbolic meaning, stating that a migrant child should get special attention and support. At the same time, the fact that the insufficient language level is considered to be an educational special need means that schools are subject to receive extra funding for teaching migrant pupils. The national curriculum, which is judicially the next level, states an important principle – individual curriculum must be applied to the extent that is appropriate for the pupil's needs. This measure is widely used in the schools<sup>15</sup>. In short, the national approach to address the education of children with a migrant background can be summarised as follows: to use individual approach and compile curriculum that take into account and are appropriate for the pupil's individual needs.

From the schools' perspective, public policy towards migrant pupils does not seem to be defined clearly. Considering the relatively small number of pupils with migrant background in Estonia, most schools have not had any contact with them. Schools have expressed that the national approach has remained rather vague or appears to be absent as there are no clear principles to address pupils with a migrant background. In their view, a migrant child seems to be only school's responsibility. Schools with pupils from migrant background have more experience noted in the interview that the authorities have directed migrants to study in these schools, or have suggested other schools in need of advice and expertise, to contact professionals from more experienced schools. If the school has no previous experience with children from migrant background, the teaching process can be characterized as learning-by-doing method, where outcomes depend on staff's competences and their ability to adapt to new situations in the classroom. It is expected by schools with a migrant pupil population to receive support by clearly stated guidelines from the authorities on approaching and supporting pupils with a migrant background. Positive developments have been noted regarding the approach on the education of children with a migrant background: the state has enabled schools flexible teaching process through the application of individual curriculum and the option for customized exams. However, it must be noted that this may affect pupils' chances to continue their education in general upper secondary education because schools have a right to select their pupil population and special circumstances, e.g. modest language skills, may have an impact on pupils' competitiveness.

Although not common, but a problem that may occasionally occur is inadequate level of Estonian proficiency of admitted pupils with Russian background. The schools may discover insufficient language skills somewhat unexpectedly, because it is often hard to determine pupils' language skill beforehand. Despite several measures for Russian-medium schools to facilitate learning of the

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<sup>15</sup> Soll, M., Palginõmm, M. L. (2011). Õppekeelest erineva emakeelega õpilane koolis. Tartu Ülikool, Narva, 93-100.

Estonian language, due to the internal migration, especially in smaller municipalities, children coming from Russian-medium kindergartens or schools may not speak Estonian at the sufficient level. Many of those pupils need additional measures to support learning the language. However, the current funding system does not necessarily enable it. As many municipalities are closing local Russian-medium schools due to the small number of pupils, a transfer from Russian-medium school to an Estonian-medium school may be very sudden from both pupil and staff perspective.

## **2.2. Impact of the financial crisis on the Estonian approach to educating children with a migrant background**

As stated earlier, Estonia has a relatively small number of children with a migrant background. Therefore, the financial crisis has not had much influence on the Estonian approach on the education of children with a migrant background. In general, the attitude towards immigration has maybe even improved, because it has become clearer that in order to increase the economic growth, Estonia needs more qualified workforce from abroad.

### 3. Perceptions on the implementation of the Council conclusions on the education of children with a migrant background in Estonia<sup>16</sup>

#### 3.1. General quality of the school system

Firstly, it must be noted that Estonia has not experienced a heavy flow of migration resulting in a relatively small number of pupils with a migrant background. Therefore, it is challenging to draw far-reaching conclusions regarding a quality of the school system for children with a migrant background. When talking about children with mother tongue other than Estonian, i.e. Russian, a distinction has to be made. Final grades, national examination scores and PISA survey show that pupils in Russian-medium schools receive considerably lower grades/scores than their peers in Estonian-medium schools, whereas pupils with Russian background in Estonian-medium schools receive equal scores with their Estonian classmates<sup>17</sup>. On the one hand, this may refer to a better teaching quality in Estonian-medium schools. On the other hand, it may highlight the selection problem: more capable pupils from families who attribute education a considerable value tend to choose Estonian-medium schools with the purpose of assuring equitable access to higher education and increase competitiveness in the labour market.

A theme which is closely related to the quality of the school system and children with a migrant background is a belief, that a high proportion of migrant pupils in a school decreases the quality of teaching. However, several interviewees considered it to be more of a myth than reality. From their perspective, having pupils with a migrant background in a classroom means that one needs support mechanisms and appropriate teaching methodology but migrant pupil population in the classroom certainly does not lower the quality of teaching itself. Nevertheless, schools that have experience with migrant pupils consider the optimal number of foreign pupils in a classroom to be around 2 or 3 to be able to provide individual support and they have tried to retain this number. The choices of assistant teachers or private lessons have been used, although the financial means to use these options offered by the state are rather modest. Schools with a relatively large migrant pupil population are eligible for additional state funding to be able to implement specific measures for migrant pupils.

#### 3.2. Diversity in school

Even though the capability to manage diversity in a classroom should be equally excellent everywhere, various patterns can be identified depending mostly on school's experience with pupils from a migrant background. Many of the interviewees pointed out that there are a few model schools which have done an excellent job in teaching migrant pupils. However, the situation is somewhat unpredictable if a school has no previous experience with pupils from diverse migrant backgrounds. Thus, speaking at school level, what becomes relevant is staff competence in a particular school. As the representative from a school with migrant pupil population and high professional competence

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<sup>16</sup> Author's comment: although Estonia is not a country in an advanced stage of the development of targeted policies, the analysis scheme of an advanced country will be used with the purpose of providing a clear structure.

<sup>17</sup> Foundation Innove (2012).

stated during the interview, the main problem is that schools without previous experience with migrant pupils feel insecure because their staff lacks confidence on teaching in diverse school settings.

In general, schools approach to the education of pupils with a migrant background from two perspectives. Either they welcome diversity, take on new challenges and look for staff in-service training courses for teaching in diverse setting. Alternatively, they make every effort to avoid migrant pupils at school. As the interviewed experts put it, one can understand the nervousness that schools without previous exposure to pupils with a migrant background experience. However, it is the positive attitude, self-confidence and openness to develop competence that is necessary at schools.

At classroom level, however, there appears to be more confidence with diverse settings. As reported by the school with the largest number of migrant pupils in Estonia, once more pupils with a migrant background started to arrive in Estonia at the beginning of 2000s, everybody was excited to have a migrant pupil in their class. Now, when a foreign-born pupil in classroom is not a unique phenomenon, children have got used to diverse setting and it is considered a norm rather than exception. Interviewees pointed out that they had not witnessed any disagreements on the basis of ethnicity or language and quarrels that occur between pupils are not connected with a pupil's ethnicity.

Several interviewees pointed out that children get used to diverse setting much quicker than the parents. Even in the schools with a considerable migrant pupil population, there have been cases when parents have begun to worry, if teachers have enough time for all children in a multi-lingual and ethnically diverse classroom. In order to overcome these issues, the schools have thoroughly explained the teaching process to the parents, assuring that this does not have a negative impact and if pupils with a migrant background need special attention, assistant teachers or adaption classes will be used as a measure.

### 3.3. Targeted measures for migrant pupils

Currently, pupil there is only one national measure which is specially intended for pupils with a migrant background as Estonia has a relatively small number of new migrant pupils. Schools are eligible to receive (extra) funding from the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research to teach migrant children **the Estonian language for additional 4 lessons per week**. This measure is applicable only for pupils who have arrived in Estonia during the last 3 years and have started their studies in an Estonian-medium school<sup>18</sup>. Although the measure is intended to cover 4 extra Estonian lessons per week, the Ministry of Education and Research has enabled schools flexibility and freedom of choice how to allocate this funding at a school level, as there have not been many applicants. For instance, contemporary language learning does not necessarily take place in a special language class, but can be integrated into teaching other subjects. The goal, which is expected to be achieved in schools, is that all pupils need to learn the Estonian language.

Currently, all the other targeted measures addressing pupils with a migrant background are determined by schools. This has been considered to be the most effective solution by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research to enable schools independence and choice on the most appropriate approach to education of children with a migrant background. The problem that is

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<sup>18</sup> This measure is not applicable for Russian-medium schools.

accompanied with this approach is the scale effect. In other words, the money allocated by the state to schools is per each pupil. That means the schools with a relatively large number of migrant pupils receive much greater support and are, therefore, able to apply a wider range of measures. The schools with a small number of migrant pupils, e.g. just a few, can barely cover the cost for those four additional Estonian language lessons which leaves the options for other support measures rather limited.

It has to be noted that in addition to the state budget with the single measure described above, schools have applied additional funding from other sources. One of the major ones being the European Social Fund (ESF) financed programs or programmes provided by special agencies. For instance the Integration and Foundation of Our People (MISA) that promotes integration processes in Estonia and coordinates activities related to immigration and migration.

Next, an example of the admission process for pupils with a migrant background is shortly described based on the representative of the school with a relatively large migrant pupil population. The process starts with a meeting between the pupil family and school representatives to find out the intended length of stay in Estonia and pupil's general expectations. In case the family has an intention for permanent residence, the pupil is provided with an intensive Estonian language course, up to 10 lessons per week. Even though the state funding covers only 4 language lessons per week, the relatively large number of migrant pupil population at the school enables to provide extra means. The intensive language course at the beginning of studies serves the purpose of a migrant pupil being able to join his/her classmates in lessons (taught in the Estonian language), which do not require extensive language skills, e.g. Physical Education, Arts, if possible, Mathematics, as soon as possible.

All migrant pupils have an **individual curriculum** which is adapted to their needs. The individual curriculum is used until the pupil is ready to continue studying solely in the Estonian language. The individual curriculum states, for instance, for which lessons the pupil has to join his/her classmates and which **lessons** are **individual**. The overall approach is leaned towards enabling a migrant pupil to join with his/her classmates in all the lessons as soon as possible; in linguistically more demanding lessons the help of an **assistant teacher is used**. The assistant teacher, then, accompanies the pupil in the lessons to provide assistance with translation and learning.

Even though effective, this kind of a support mechanism is also very expensive and only a few schools are able to afford it without having the need to find an additional funding. Schools with a relatively large migrant pupil population have used **adaption classes method** with a primary goal to teach the Estonian language.

According to some interviewed experts, most schools in Estonia do not use all the previously described measures. Often the four additional language lessons per week funded by the state is all they can provide to educate pupils with a migrant background.

In case a pupil with a migrant background is in Estonia temporarily just for a few years and formally continues studies following the national curriculum in his/her native country, the approach is somewhat different. The pupil is expected to study Estonian, English, Mathematics etc., but is exempted from the country-specific subjects, e.g. History. The individual curriculum in this case is designed in a manner which enables the pupil enough time to follow his/hers native country curriculum. In this case, a pupil has an option to graduate from the basic school taking **customised exams** which means that they are not expected to have acquired the same level of the Estonian language skills as native Estonian pupils. The examination materials, e.g. Mathematics, can be

translated into a migrant pupil's native language. In previous years, the city government of Tallinn has provided financial support for schools to cover the costs of the process.

### **3.4. Governance and mainstreaming**

The current governance model advocated and also implemented in Estonia, which could also be called a Finnish approach as its roots come from there, is considered to be the best by the interviewed parties. The emphasis lays on the idea of diversity which is followed through that a migrant pupil attends a local school instead of a special school for migrant pupils. The Estonian language is a must and taught intensively not only in the specific Estonian language lessons but in an integrated manner. A migrant pupil is encouraged to join his/hers classmates in all lessons as soon as possible. The support mechanisms should be used according to a pupil's needs.

In the field of mainstreaming there is a lot of work to be done and the situation depends on if and to what extent the number of pupils with a migrant background changes. Schools have to feel that support and guidance on education of pupils with a migrant background is available should they need it. The opposite situation causes schools to refuse to admit migrant pupils and makes both pupil and the parents feel unwelcome.

### **3.5. Impact of the financial crisis**

At the state level, there have been no changes to the targeted measures for migrant pupils as a result of the financial crisis. All pupils who arrive in Estonia during the last 3 years and study in Estonian-medium schools get additional funding from the state budget.

At the municipal level, e.g. in Tallinn, there has never been a permanent annual budget to support schools with migrant pupils. However, there have been several project-based initiatives when extra-funding has been granted to schools with the purpose to provide additional support mechanisms for migrant pupils. The economic crisis significantly reduced the incomes of municipalities and their revenues are pegged to income tax, hence the ability to support schools with migrant pupils has decreased considerably.

## 4. Perceptions on policy measures aimed at meeting the goals of the EU 2020 Strategy and the ET 2020 Targets

### 4.1. Policy measures for goals for pre-primary education

As the share of children between ages 4 to 7 (the age of starting compulsory primary education in Estonia) participating in early childhood education is quite high (94.2% in 2011), there are no targeted measures to directly increase the participation. However, as a consequence of a rapid suburbanisation in recent years, many municipalities are building new childcare facilities to satisfy sharply increased demand.

### 4.2. Policy measures for goals for secondary education

According to PISA results (OECD, 2009), the share of low-achieving 15-year old pupils in reading, mathematics and science was 11.4% in Estonia. That is considerably below the benchmark of 15% that has been established under the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020"). For this reason, Estonia has no national goal to decrease the share of low-achievers.

There is an objective to reduce the number of early school leavers among 18-24 years old to 9.5% by the year 2020 in Estonia<sup>19</sup>. To fulfil this goal, more emphasis has been placed on educational counselling and other support services provided by school psychologists, special needs specialists etc. The main problems with early school leaving lie within vocational education as the dropout rates are much higher there compared to general education indicators. Although the precise measures are still unclear, it is very probable that new initiatives will be introduced within the European Union 2014-2020 financial framework.

### 4.3. Policy measures for goals for tertiary education

Estonia has a well-educated population. In 2011, 40.2% of 30-34-year old Estonians had completed third level education. This proportion is considered to be optimal<sup>20</sup> and therefore, there is no target set for 2020. As increasing participation in higher education is not a priority, the focus has turned on the quality of higher education system. There is an on-going higher education reform in Estonia which aims to monitor and increase the quality of higher education, while guaranteeing tuition free study places to all full-time students. Some of its instruments have been intended to raise the exam threshold to be admitted to higher education institution and quality assessment of higher education curricula. The requirements for completing higher education on the basis of state commissioning have become stricter compared to the earlier requirements. **Policy measures for goals for lifelong learning**

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<sup>19</sup> National Reform Programme "ESTONIA 2020", approved by the Government on 28 April 2011 [[http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nrp/nrp\\_estonia\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nrp/nrp_estonia_en.pdf) ]; The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. (2013). Haridus- ja Teadusministeeriumi valitsemisala arengukava „Tark ja tegus rahvas“ 2014-2017. Tartu.

<sup>20</sup> The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. (2013). Haridus- ja Teadusministeeriumi valitsemisala arengukava „Tark ja tegus rahvas“ 2014-2017. Tartu.

Lifelong learning has been viewed as the top priority in Estonia. About one third of the workforce in Estonia does not have a higher or vocational education qualification which is believed to be a major shortcoming and a cause of a labour shortage. The participation rate has been growing in recent years and had reached 12% in 2011. The reasons partly lay on the ESF funded vocational training and popular adult education courses as well as the general increase of awareness about lifelong learning opportunities. As the Estonian target for average of adults participating in lifelong learning for 2020 is 20%, more measures are expected to be intended within the coming years.

**TABLE 2.** NATIONAL INDICATORS ON THE GOALS OF THE EU 2020 STRATEGY AND THE ET 2020 TARGETS

Indicator	EU 2020 Strategy / ET 2020 Targets	National goal	Present national figure	Optional notes on availability of national figures
Share of children between 4 years and the age of starting compulsory primary-education participating in early childhood education	95%	-	94,2% (2011)	
School drop-out rate	10%	9,5%	10,8% (2011)	
Share of low-achieving 15-year olds in reading, mathematics and science	15%	-	11,4% (2010)	
Share of 30-34-year-olds completing third level education	40%	40%	40,2% (2011)	
Average of adults participating in lifelong learning	15%	20%	12%	

*Data source: EUROSTAT, Statistics Estonia (2012)*



## 5. Perceptions on the possible contribution of the SIRIUS Network for stakeholders

Interviewed experts stated that the SIRIUS Network's main contribution is expected to be increasing awareness and attracting attention with raising discussion on the topic in Estonia. The exchange of experiences and sharing of good practices was noted as an expectation by several interviewees. However, they did not emphasize any specific sub-themes or issue they would particularly be interested in.

## Conclusions

The results of this rather short analysis suggest that there are notable differences between schools on their approach for teaching pupils with a migrant background. There are few schools with a relatively large migrant pupil population and therefore extensive experience that have been successful in application of various measures in order to address the needs of migrant pupils. At the same time, most schools lack resources and competence to provide appropriate education and assistance to migrant pupil population. If the number of migrants is to increase in coming years as expected, the Estonian schools must develop their competence of teaching in diverse classrooms. As the numbers of new migrants is relatively low, it is difficult to motivate schools to prepare for a possible change in the situation. However, if the changes occur, schools must be able to adapt quickly. The current funding arrangements should be reconsidered as they lack flexibility. Supplementary funding should not be heavily dependent on the migrant pupil number but has to consider the minimal needs of migrant pupil population as well as the individual needs of a pupil.



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