

## **Students with different mother tongue and cultural backgrounds in Estonian schools: attention, awareness and support at school level**

Eve Mägi

Mihkel Nestor



Euroopa Liit  
Euroopa Sotsiaalfond



Eesti tuleviku heaks

2014

*The analysis was commissioned by the European Commission and supported by the SIRIUS Network.*

### **Authors:**

**Eve Mägi** is an education policy analyst at Praxis since 2008 and a PhD student on higher education at the University of Tartu. Her research interests include international and comparative education, multicultural education, educational inequity. Eve holds an M.A. degree in International Education and Development from the George Washington University (Fulbright Scholar) and an M.A. degree in School Management and Mentoring from the University of Tartu. Her previous professional experience includes working with international education and training programs at the United States Institute of Peace.

**Mihkel Nestor** has worked at Praxis Center for Policy Studies since March 2011 – November 2013. His previous work experience involves working as an analyst of vocational education and training in Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (2008- 2011) and as a junior auditor in Estonian National Audit Office (2007). Mihkel has graduated from University of Tartu with a MA degree in economics. Mihkel's main fields of interest are links between education and labor market, private and social returns on education, vocational education and financing of education. In Praxis, Mihkel has specialized on quantitative analysis.

### **In addition to the authors, this work has been made possible with the contribution from:**

Maie Soll, Irene Käosaar, Liis Kasemets, Aaro Toomela, Kersti Kivirüüt.

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#### **Praxis Center for Policy Studies**

Tornimäe St 5  
10145 Tallinn, Estonia  
Ph +372 640 8000  
[www.praxis.ee](http://www.praxis.ee)  
[praxis@praxis.ee](mailto:praxis@praxis.ee)

Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium  
Estonian Ministry of Education and Research



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## List of Abbreviations

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| EHIS   | Estonian Education Information System   |
| EMER   | Estonian Ministry of Education and Research   |
| SIRIUS | A European Policy Network on the education of children and young people with a migrant background |

# 1. Introduction: Figures and policies

Estonia as a relatively new European Union member state has become a source country rather than a major migration destination. However, 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>1</sup> It is important to highlight a growing trend of people who have decided to return to Estonia: based on the data of the 2011 Population and Housing Census, the share of returnees among all immigrants and the number of returnees have increase almost over the entire past decade (a considerable amount between ages 20-30 years) (Tammur & Meres, 2013). Although Estonia has very few new migrants, Estonia, historically, from the migrant wave between the years 1950-1988 has a considerable number of immigrants of mostly Russian origin. In 2013, ethnic Russians consist of 25% of the total population in Estonia.<sup>2</sup> Hence, it is important to distinguish the following migrant background groups in the context of current and future educational needs: students with ethnic Russian background (Russian-speaking minority); new immigrant students and returnees (former residents returning to Estonia).

## The number of Russian-speaking minority students

There were 33 473 students 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 students. The total number of students 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 students in Estonian-medium schools was 63% in 1991 and had reached to 82% in 2011<sup>3</sup>. It has to be noted that according to EHS, the number of students in general education institutions in Estonia shows a clear decrease and has fallen from 206 561 in the academic year 2003/2004 to 140 945 in the academic year 2012/2013. The number of students from schools with Russian as the language of instruction has fallen from 36 228 in the academic year 2004/2005 to 23 532 in the academic year 2012/2013.

## The number of new immigrants

Estonia has a relatively small number of new immigrant students<sup>4</sup>. According to EHS, the number of new immigrant students during the last five years has varied between 136 and 71. In the academic year 2008/2009 there were 136 new immigrant students in 40 general education institutions and in the academic year 2012/2013 171 new immigrant students in 14 institutions in Estonia (see table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Estonia [<http://www.stat.ee/34286?highlight=migration>] 12.07.2013

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Estonia [[www.stat.ee](http://www.stat.ee)] 30.10.2013

<sup>3</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>4</sup> New immigrant student 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 (EMER, 2004).

**TABLE 1.** NUMBER OF NEW IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND GENERAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, 2008/2009-2012/2013.

| Academic year | New immigrant students | General educational institutions with new immigrant students |
|---------------|------------------------|--|
| 2008/2009     | 136                    | 40   |
| 2009/2010     | 188                    | 49   |
| 2010/2011     | 141                    | 42   |
| 2011/2012     | 170                    | 44   |
| 2012/2013     | 71                     | 14   |

Source: Estonian Education Information System (EHIS)

The number of new immigrant students is in constant change even during short periods (e.g. within one academic year) for several reasons. Firstly, this group can be characterized as highly mobile. Secondly, the status of new immigrant student is defined with a short period of time. New immigrant students are the children of new immigrants – workers, asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants who have arrived to Estonia from the EU or other states - who wish to commence their studies in an Estonian school and who have lived in Estonia less than three years (EMER, 2004).

Not all schools have received new immigrant students in Estonia. The data (Kasemets *et al.*, 2013) show that the number of schools with new immigrant students is between 20-50 per academic year which is about 10% of all general education institutions in Estonia. Even though new immigrant students form only some 0.1% of the overall student body in Estonia, in the context of growing mobility trends and transnationalism<sup>5</sup>, the Estonian education system has to demonstrate ability to support all students with various language and migrant background.

Currently, Estonian general education system enables to study in various languages. Education at preschool and basic level is available in Estonian and Russian, but also in English and Finnish in a few educational institutions (see table 2).

**TABLE 2.** NUMBER OF GENERAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS BY LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION, 2008/2009-2012/2013.

| Academic year | Estonian | Russian | Estonian/<br>Russian <sup>6</sup> | English | Estonian/<br>English | Estonian/<br>Finnish |
|---------------|----------|---------|-----------------------------------|---------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 2008/2009     | 473      | 62      | 27                                | 2       | 1                    | 1                    |
| 2009/2010     | 465      | 61      | 28                                | 2       | 1                    | 2                    |
| 2010/2011     | 454      | 58      | 28                                | 2       | 1                    | 2                    |
| 2011/2012     | 447      | 8       | 77                                | 2       | 4                    | 2                    |
| 2012/2013     | 440      | 9       | 75                                | 2       | 4                    | 2                    |

Source: Estonian Education Information System (EHIS)

<sup>5</sup> When people are living essentially in several countries at once (Kalev & Jakobson, 2013)

<sup>6</sup> Includes schools that provide both basic and secondary level education.

In parallel with the overall decrease in the number of students and the transition to Estonian-language instruction<sup>7</sup> the number of general educational institutions in Estonia has decreased over the last years. However, there is an increase in the number of schools with several languages of instruction (one of them being Estonian language). In 2012/2013, there were 532 general educational institutions in total out of which 440 with Estonian as a language of instruction, 81 with several languages of instruction (in most of them Estonian and Russian) and 11 schools with a language of instruction other than Estonian. 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 (mostly the local government) is free to choose the language of instruction.<sup>8</sup> This kind of situation is quite unique compared to the countries in Western Europe. In Estonia it is possible, under some limits (which are applicable also in Estonian-medium schools), to create a school where the language of instruction differs from the official one and, at the same time, students have the right to study their mother tongue as an optional subject in Estonian-medium school or in schools with a language of instruction different than a student's mother tongue. Many Russians have chosen to study in Estonian-medium schools. The reason can be to enhance their competitiveness in labour market.

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. All the schools in Estonia have to follow the Estonian national curricula, regardless of the language of instruction. The difference between schools according to the language of instruction is that the schools can choose to teach Estonian language on the basis of Estonian as a mother tongue subject curriculum or Estonian as a second language subject curriculum. In schools with the language of instruction other than Estonian, the language of instruction is taught.

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>9</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 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.

### Targeted measures

The core elements of the Estonian approach to the education of students 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. The students whose mother tongue is not Estonian are required to fit into the established system. On the one hand, it has a symbolic meaning, stating that a migrant child should get special attention and

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<sup>7</sup> The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act of 1997, designed 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.

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

<sup>9</sup> The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research [<http://www.hm.ee/index.php?148680>] 11.08.2013

support. If students with migrant background arrive, they get additional support to learn the language and can use other support services (e.g. school psychologist, social pedagogue). 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 students.

Currently, there is only one national measure which is specially intended for students with a migrant background. 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 students who have arrived in Estonia during the last three years and have started their studies in an Estonian-medium school<sup>10</sup>. Although the measure is intended to cover four 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 students need to learn the Estonian language.

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 student's needs. This measure is widely used in the schools (Soll & Palginõmm, 2011). The Estonian national curriculum is flexible, enabling and strongly encouraging the use of individual approach and compile curriculum that take into account and are appropriate for the student's individual needs (e.g. additional language learning support).

The **individual curriculum** is used until a student is ready to continue studying solely in the Estonian language. The individual curriculum states, for instance, for which lessons the student has to join his/her classmates and which lessons are individual. The overall approach leans towards enabling a migrant student 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 in some cases. The assistant teacher, then, accompanies the student in the lessons to provide assistance with translation and learning. The individual curriculum is supported by study materials that take account individual needs as well as extra-curricular activities. Schools can provide outside school hours acculturation courses, especially for newcomers, with local government funding.

A student with a migrant background 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 students. The examination materials, e.g. Mathematics, can be translated into a migrant student's native language.

According to national legislation and strategies, the goal is to approach the education of children from migrant background from an inclusive point of view, but in practice, similarly to other students with special needs, sometimes problems occur implementing the inclusive point of view. Currently, all the targeted measures addressing students with a migrant background are determined by schools. Therefore, a range and quality of support mechanisms depends on a particular school and on their staff 'competence.

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<sup>10</sup> This measure is not applicable for Russian-medium schools.



In short, the national approach to address the education of students 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 student's individual needs.

## 2. Perceptions on the main problems on policy implementation about migrant education

The perceptions on the main problems related to migrant education in Estonia in this chapter are based on various research and thematic literature, the national focus group report in Estonia (Nestor & Mägi, 2013) and the discussion results of the SIRIUS National Roundtable that took place in Tallinn in 2013.

### 2.1. Insufficient data on migrant students

It is important to note that there is no accurate data and hence a very clear overview how many students with migrant background are there in Estonia who would need targeted measures. The Estonian Education Information System, a national database, enables schools to enter information on students who have arrived in Estonia within the last 3 years. Research (Kasemets *et al.*, 2013) shows that the data on new immigrant student in EHIS may include a wider group of students and not only those who meet the definition above, including students who have lived in Estonia more than 3 years; students with a mother tongue other than the language of instruction at school, exchange students etc. In other words, the data may include students who typically require support for adaptation and language learning but who are not new immigrants by the definition.

EHIS 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 students may not be familiar with this option and therefore lose the opportunity to apply for additional funding. On the other hand, there may be students 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 immigrants, students 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 students<sup>11</sup>. For the reasons provided above, this number is probably overestimated in terms of new immigrants and underestimated in terms of Russian-speaking minority, containing limitations as the data are collected only in Estonian-medium schools. According to the data of the Estonian Population Registry, there were 620 students 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 students.

### 2.2. Current measures favour schools with large migrant population

Currently, all the other targeted measures addressing students 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 accompanied with this approach is the scale effect. In other words, the money allocated by the state

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

to schools is per each student. That means the schools with a relatively large number of migrant students receive much greater support and are, therefore, able to apply a wider range of measures. The schools with a small number of migrant students, 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. Additionally to the state budget with the single measure described above, schools have applied funding from other sources, such as financial means provided by the European Social Fund programmes and special agencies (e.g. the Integration and Foundation of Our People - MISA).

Even though effective, the support mechanism which includes individual approach and other support services requires considerable amount of finances 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 student population have used adaption classes method with a primary goal to teach the Estonian language.

Hence, it is clearly a positive development that the state has enabled schools flexible teaching process through the application of individual curriculum, support services and the option for customized exams. However, it must be noted that these measures (1) favour schools with a large migrant population and (2) may affect students' chances to continue their education in general upper secondary education because schools have a right to select their student population and special circumstances, e.g. modest language skills, may have an impact on students' competitiveness.

Based on the interviews, most schools in Estonia do not use all the previously described measures (Nestor & Mägi, 2013). Often the four additional language lessons per week funded by the state is all they can provide to educate students with a migrant background. The options for assistant teachers or private lessons have been used, although the financial means to use these options offered by the state are perceived rather modest.

### **2.3. The preparedness of schools to enrol and educate migrant students is uneven**

From the schools' perspective, public policy towards migrant students does not seem to be defined clearly (Nestor & Mägi, 2013). Considering the relatively small number of general education institutions with students from migrant background (between 20-50 schools per academic year (Kasemets *et al.*, 2013), the majority of schools have not experienced 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 students with a migrant background. Moreover, it is sometimes perceived that a migrant student appears to be only school's responsibility (Nestor & Mägi, 2013). It means that the situation has not changed much over the past five years as school representatives have expressed earlier that they have been forced to bear full responsibility and that no complete approach to the field as a whole has been adopted (Kasemets, 2007).

Research (for example Kasemets, 2007; Kasemets *et al.*, 2013) shows that not all general education institutions in Estonia are prepared to enrol and educate new immigrant students. Even though the capability to manage diversity in a classroom must be equally excellent everywhere, various patterns can be identified depending mostly on school's experience with students from a migrant background (Nestor & Mägi, 2013).

Many of the interviewees pointed out that there are a few model schools which have done an excellent job in teaching migrant students (Nestor & Mägi, 2013). However, the situation is somewhat unpredictable if a general education institution has no previous experience with students from diverse migrant backgrounds. Thus, speaking at school level, what becomes relevant is staff

competence in a particular institution. As the representative from a school with migrant student population and high professional competence stated during the interview, the main problem is that schools without previous experience with migrant students feel insecure because their school professionals often lack competence and confidence on teaching in diverse school settings (Nestor & Mägi, 2013). Similar conclusions were reached in earlier study in which a major problem in improving preparedness for schools was perceived the lack of knowledge and skills among staff (Kasemets *et al.*, 2013).

In general, institutions approach to the education of students with a migrant background from two perspectives (Nestor & Mägi, 2013). Either they welcome diversity, take on new challenges and look for in-service training courses for school professionals on education in diverse setting. Alternatively, they make every effort to avoid migrant students at school. As the interviewed experts put it, one can understand the nervousness that schools without previous exposure to students 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 (Nestor & Mägi, 2013). As reported by the school with the largest number of migrant students in Estonia, once more students with diverse language and cultural backgrounds started to arrive in Estonia at the beginning of 2000s, everybody was excited to have a migrant student in their class. Now, when a migrant student in classroom is not a unique phenomenon, students 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 students are not connected with a student's ethnicity (Nestor & Mägi, 2013).

In the field of mainstreaming the inclusive and flexible teaching approach to migrant education in which a migrant student attends a local school instead of a special school for migrant students, there are various challenges to be faced. In order for schools to welcome and be able to support high quality education to students with migrant background, they need to feel support system and availability of guidance should they need it. The opposite situation causes schools to refuse to admit migrant students and makes both students and the parents feel unwelcome.

## **2.4. Lack of preparation to address individual differences including students with migrant background**

If the school has no previous experience with students 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. Based on the interviews, the schools with previous experience in educating students from migrant background note 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. (Nestor & Mägi, 2013)

Recent research (Toomela & Pulver, 2012) results demonstrate that it is important for school professionals to pay attention not only for special education needs in terms of language acquisition and migrant background, but individual differences among students which can be typologized according to intellectual, personality and educational setting characteristics. Different students require various problem solving strategies. Typologizing approach enables to increase effectiveness of quality in migrant education.

At the same time, students with different mother tongue in Estonian schools do not get enough support at school which creates a situation (especially in elementary stage) in which their study results are in many cases lower compared to their academic ability and to the students with Estonian as a mother tongue (Toomela & Pulver, 2012). It means that school professionals and school organizational culture in many cases fail to support migrant students in enabling them studying according to their ability. Teachers may sometimes incorrectly assume low achievement with academic abilities rather than special educational needs (e.g. language and cultural background).

Research (Kasemets *et al.*, 2013) on the educational opportunities and advancement of new immigrant students shows that the connection between assessing student's educational special needs and providing necessary support during the study process is not a common practice in general educational institutions in Estonia. Student's background knowledge and skills assessment and identifying educational needs by school professionals has occurred in about half of cases. Even if such assessment has taken place, the results of such assessment may not reach all teachers engaged in teaching process of that particular student. Out of all the cases in which the institution has information on a new immigrant student's previous study experience, prior knowledge and readiness level, the support measures and services are implemented for only half of those. This means that only 25% of new immigrant students receive support services that meet exactly their special educational need and individual abilities.

## **2.5. Current teacher training model does not prepare teachers to educate students with migrant background**

The current teacher training model does not include a systematic preparation for working with migrant students. Current pre-service teacher training provides teachers' with inclusive learning competencies (Trasberg, 2013), but does not prepare them to work in a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom. Teachers in Estonia have expressed that they perceive the need to have more competence to pay attention and be aware of students' educational special needs and to use appropriate methods to provide support in the study process (Kasemets *et al.*, 2013).

At the same time, teachers may not be able to identify, what competencies they are lacking or evaluate their competence level adequately (Toomela & Pulver, 2013). Moreover, the same study points out that some teachers systematically use ineffective teaching methods and styles which may frustrate students.

As clearly emerged from the round table discussion, the current pre-service teacher training does not support teacher professional development in terms of shaping attitude for knowledge-based teaching-learning process. Shortcomings in incoherent teacher in-service training do not support shaping such attitude and strengthening research-based approach to planning teaching-learning process.

Facilitating teacher professional development and developing in-service training have been addressed by a nationwide programme "Increase of the Qualification of Teachers in General Educational Schools, Updating Their Skills" implemented by the EMER which is taking place between 2008-2014.

## **2.6. Teachers' in-service training is incoherent**

Teachers' in-service training system is currently unsystematic and unregulated. It is a positive that the in-service training participation rate among school professionals is high. However, the quality of acquisition and application of competencies is uncertain and problematic.

One of the concerns is the non-compliance of course names with the actual content of the training, which means that there is little certainty for the teachers or other school professionals whether they receive training with the expected aims and outcomes. Often, the content of training is not sufficiently related to the practical day-to-day teaching process and there is little practitioner-to-practitioner type of training available.

It was stressed during the roundtable discussion, that one of the reasons why the in-service training does not meet the needs of school professionals is perceived to be a lack of demanding client organization that is able to precisely define the expected outcome of the training and control the implementation of training, therefore guaranteeing the quality for participants of trainings. Thus, the problem is perceived to be a difference between school professionals' needs and in-service trainings available. Hence, there is a clear need to widen opportunities for school professionals to have access to need-based training that include both – trainings with narrow focus on practice areas as well as broad training programmes which develop reflective practice skills and support implementation of up-to-date research results and innovative approaches in migrant education.

A further issue is the implementation of the knowledge and competence acquired through in-service training. The motivation of Estonian teachers to reflect and update their skills by following the most current educational research and reading thematic literature is perceived to be relatively low. At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that supportive organizational culture is a key element in the process of implementation of new competencies.

At the same time, teaching in a multicultural setting is not perceived as a strong professional development need among teachers in Estonia (Loogma *et al.*, 2009). External evaluation of the education system in the academic year 2012/2013 (EMER, 2013:21) shows that many teachers working with students with mother tongue other than the language of instruction have not participated in training that prepares to teach them in a multilingual setting. Moreover, school management has not supported teachers to pay attention to the needs of student with different mother tongue. The reason is a relatively low number of students whose mother tongue is different from the language of instruction at school and therefore, the need for preparedness for admitting migrant students is not a priority. Hence, it is not uncommon view among the school leaders that the topic is not crucial enough to concentrate on migrant education topics in teachers' in-service trainings.

## **2.7. Cooperation within and between various levels is unsystematic**

Strategies to admit and educate new immigrant students are in place in just a few general education institutions (Kasemets *et al.*, 2013). These are often schools that have chosen to prepare to receive migrant students and plan their study process accordingly. If the schools are not prepared, there is a risk that the main responsibility for migrant students study process and support upon their arrival (including communication with parents) would fall on teacher. Therefore, in order to share responsibility and engage other school professionals, it is important that schools have strategies and roles in places for the migrant students.

Teachers have expressed that cooperation between school professionals in the same educational institution to be aware and support educational special needs has more potential that is currently used in migrant education (Kasemets *et al.*, 2013). It was suggested at the roundtable discussion that

schools with extensive experience with students whose mother tongue is other than Estonian can share their experience and provide collegial support for those facing the same challenge.

However, it is difficult to ensure migrant students' with high quality educational opportunities and implement comprehensive support system if the strategic agreement and education policy that states activities, roles and responsibilities of all levels - - school professionals, schools, local governments, state - is absent. Such a strategic plan is especially needed to address the issue of incoherence in teacher in-service training. Cooperation between all levels – school professionals, schools, local governments, countries – is necessary to improve the high quality in support for students with migrant background.

## **2.8. Many graduates do not acquire a sufficient level of Estonian to be competitive in the labour market**

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 from schools with Russian as the instruction of language are able to fulfil this requirement<sup>12</sup>.

In order to improve the situation, education policy has placed emphasis on increasing the volume of subject courses taught in Estonian in basic schools, where the language of instruction is Russian, 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 students 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 (Nestor & Mägi, 2013). 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 students (with special assistant teachers for children with other mother tongue) (Masso, Kirss & Kriger, 2012).

Although not common, but a problem that may occasionally occur and was emphasized during the interviews, is inadequate level of Estonian proficiency of admitted students with Russian background (Nestor & Mägi, 2013). The schools may discover insufficient language skills somewhat unexpectedly, because it is often challenging to determine students' language skill beforehand. Despite several measures for Russian-medium schools to facilitate learning of the 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 students 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 students, a transfer from Russian-medium school to an Estonian-medium school may be perceived very sudden from both student and school staff perspective.

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<sup>12</sup> Foundation Innove (2012).

## Conclusions

Current analysis is based on the statistical data, various research and thematic literature, the national focus group report in Estonia (Nestor & Mägi, 2013) and the discussion results of the SIRIUS National Roundtable that took place in Tallinn in 2013.

Estonia has a rather extensive experience in designing and implementing education policy in the situation where approximately 20% of students' in general education institutions mother tongue or language spoken at home (mostly Russian) is other than the official language (Estonian). Choosing a policy for general education institutions to have different languages of instruction at the pre-school and basic education level has advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage is that state provides framework for migrant education enabling school level a considerable amount of independence for decision making on the choice of support mechanisms for migrant students. The main disadvantage is that institutions and teachers are used to a rather homogeneous group of students in terms of cultural and linguistic background. Schools may not appreciate independence in decision-making which assumes responsibility from their side. In a situation where the number of students with diverse cultural and lingual background is growing, not all institutions and school professionals are ready and prepared to support students from migrant background.

The results of this analysis suggest that there are notable differences between schools on their approach for teaching students with a migrant background. There are few schools with a relatively large migrant student population in Estonia, and therefore extensive experience that have been successful in application of various measures in order to address the needs of migrant students. At the same time, many schools lack resources and competence to provide appropriate education and assistance to migrant student population.

The current teacher training model does not include a systematic preparation for working with migrant students. Pre-service teacher training provides teachers' with inclusive learning competencies but does not prepare them to work in a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom. Even though in-service training participation rate among school professionals is high, the quality of acquisition and application of competencies is uncertain and teachers' in-service training system unsystematic and unregulated. At the same time, teaching in a multicultural setting is not perceived as a strong professional development need among teachers or school management.

This creates an interesting, almost paradoxical situation, in which having a single new immigrant student it would be relatively easy to address his/her individual educational needs and integrate the student. However, schools appear to perceive that a small number of migrant students is not an argument for teachers to participate in topical in-service training sessions. In schools with a larger number of migrant students, the schools have opportunity to use a wider extent of support services. However, it is more likely that those students form a community among themselves and are more reluctant to integrate.

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 and increase preparedness, for example, operational strategies for teaching students with various language and cultural background. As the numbers of new immigrants 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. Alternatively, operational strategies and vision for migrant education may be a role of local government.



In a current situation where the state has chosen to support inclusive approach to migrant education, the funding arrangements should be reconsidered as they lack flexibility and appear to favour schools with large migrant population. In this case, supplementary funding should not be heavily dependent on the migrant student number but has to consider the minimal educational needs of migrant student population as well as the individual needs of a student.

It is interesting to note that many of the perceptions on the main problems on policy implementation about migrant education are not characteristic to only migrant education but can be attributed to general education system in general.

### 3. List of potential good practices on policy implementation about migrant education

The following potential good practices on policy implementation suggestions about migrant education emerged based on the national focus group report and the Estonian national round table discussion:

1. Teacher's in-service training can be improved in a variety of ways, which include, inter alia, increased coherence between the role of teacher's in-service training and pre-service training curriculum. In-service training for school professionals should support teachers' and school principals' mutual learning and cooperation between educational institutions. It is important to have an opportunity to provide trainings based on the needs.
2. Teacher networks for professional development have a good potential to be active partners in providing in-service training. The Ministry has expressed readiness to facilitate teacher networks for professional development and to stimulate practice-based learning space driven by teacher needs (Haaristo, Kirss, Mägi & Nestor, 2013). Teacher networks in Estonia are active and their potential for identifying in-service education and training needs, organizing training sessions as well as providing training sessions can be developed. However, there is a need for in-depth analysis to identify in-service training need and the capacity of networks in order to determine applicable solutions.
3. A training module for educating migrant students can be developed in cooperation between universities (with teacher training programmes) and general education institutions with migrant student population (schools with Estonian as a language of instruction and/or international schools with English as a language of instruction). The training module would be based on those school professionals' competence who have extensive experience with students from various cultural and language background in order to provide support for colleagues facing the same challenge.
4. All general education institutions have to have operational strategies for teaching students with various language and cultural background. The strategies should involve the role and responsibility of all school professionals, including teachers, support services and school management in order to create a cohesive and supportive organizational culture. It may be considered for the purpose of efficiency that there would be a set of guidelines that schools can adapt according to their needs.
5. The participation rate in lifelong learning and in-service trainings among school professionals is high. However, the quality of acquisition and application of competencies is uncertain and problematic. Participation in trainings does not necessarily translate into learning. In order to change this situation, it is crucial to pay attention to teacher professional development in terms of shaping attitude for knowledge-based teaching –learning process which is currently one of the shortcomings in (initial) teacher education. Incoherent teacher in-service training does not support shaping such attitude and strengthening research-based approach either.
6. A solid theoretical base is essential for good practice. Given the teachers' heavy workload, they may not have time resources to delve into content which means that instead of providing additional training activities, it is necessary to focus on effectiveness and efficiency of in-service training.

7. It may be considered to apply the shared responsibility method during in-service training courses in which teacher and training team share responsibility for the process and outcomes as this approach has shown positive results in terms of effectiveness in various countries (e.g. in the UK). This kind of approach means that training process does not stop on the spot but continues after the training course in a format of individual work (e.g. literature review, writing reflective analytical reports based on theory or training session) or individual supervision and support for a teacher at his/her institution. In this case, an in-service training contract must specify that evaluation is part of the training.
8. The centrally coordinated in-service training system allows creating a common organizational culture which lays a foundation for all school professionals' mutual understanding and support in implementing new knowledge and skills they have acquired in training and hence, promote effective cooperation. School leadership has a key role in leading the team, which does not include only management but it also requires pedagogical competence. Alternatively, school management can lead the team successfully without pedagogical competence with a presumption that management understands the need for such competence and is willing to bring this competence in the school from the experts.
9. In addition to in-service trainings with a narrow focus on practice areas among school professionals, there is a need for broad in-service training programmes which develop reflective practice skills and support implementation of up-to-date research results and innovative approaches in migrant education.
10. It is important to ensure the availability of publications, various methodological and informational support materials for teachers and other school professionals on migrant education. Moreover, the materials should be accompanied with the appropriate training and support in implementing the methodology. In order to successfully support migrant students, school professionals need to be competent not only in understanding and paying attention for special education needs in terms of language acquisition and migrant background, but individual differences among students.
11. For raising the awareness and competence of considering students' individual needs among school professionals, it is important to have educational counselling services and necessary assistance available both inside and outside the school.
12. In order to provide migrant students' with high quality educational opportunities and implement comprehensive support system, there is a clear need for a strategic agreement between all levels - school professionals, schools, local governments, countries – that involves activities, roles and responsibility of all parties.
13. Moreover, a strategic plan for in-service training among school professionals has to present coherence and outline how different levels (e.g. school professionals, local governments, countries) engage and what are their activities, roles and responsibilities. Without this kind of strategic approach, the solutions related to migrant education and in-service training for school professionals will remain unsystematic.

## 4. Policy directions on migrant education

Policy directions on migrant education in Estonia appear to continue following the current direction of inclusive approach. Even though policy makers have no intention of changing this direction on migrant education, their effort is focused on improving schools' capacity and quality of teaching learners with migrant background. It means that the Ministry of Education and Research expects general education institutions and school professionals (teachers, management, and support service staff) to take responsibility for the quality of migrant education by providing schools with various strategies, materials and conducting external evaluation to ensure the quality. The current legislation and the national curricula enable flexible approach for schools to educate students with migrant background. It means that as a different mother tongue from Estonian can be considered as an educational special need, schools can choose the approach best suited to meet the needs of an individual student with a migrant background.

Considering that the current legislation enables flexibility following the policy direction described above, the relatively small number of new immigrants and that the problems emerged (see Chapter 2) appear to be related to schools' inability and incompetence to realize potential and measures provided to a considerable extent, increasing schools' capability to educate students with migrant background may be effective to solve some of the problems emerged in this report. It is considered as optimal solution by the policy makers. That being said, a strategic agreement between various levels (school professionals, schools, local governments) that would define activities, roles and responsibilities of the parties would provide a solid basis for further developments.

Some of the priorities and focus areas for the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research are the following:

- 1) To increase parental and community (including local government) involvement;
- 2) To increase technical preparedness of school professionals (e.g. language skills, attitudes, multicultural competence) which, currently, needs major improvements as pointed out earlier (see Chapter 2);
- 3) To bring more multicultural component into both teacher pre- and in-service training which is hoped to achieve in cooperation with universities who provide teacher training;
- 4) To not focus solely on technical preparedness (e.g. multicultural and lingual competence) but the need to shape attitude and strengthen research-based approach among school professionals. The issues of fear and even hate speech need to be addressed related to transition from Russian to Estonian-language instruction (see Chapter 1) among school professionals teaching Russian minority students;
- 5) As the minority communities are unevenly distributed across Estonia, the Ministry plans to focus on specific regions' (e.g. Ida-Virumaa) individual needs to address the problems related to migrant education;
- 6) To produce and guide the usage of various support materials related to migrant education.

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