



# Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe

Country Reports



# INTEGRATING IMMIGRANT CHILDREN INTO SCHOOLS IN EUROPE

## ESTONIA

### NATIONAL DESCRIPTION – 2003/04

The national contributions contained on this CD-Rom and on the Eurydice website formed the basis for the comparative study on the integration at school of immigrant children in Europe. Each contribution has exactly the same structure with four main sections entitled as follows:

- 1) National definitions and demographic context of immigration
- 2) Measures offering school-based support to immigrant children and their families
- 3) Intercultural approaches in education
- 4) Evaluation, pilot projects, debates and forthcoming reforms

Contributions are available in English and, in the case of some countries, in French.



## 1. NATIONAL DEFINITIONS AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF IMMIGRATION

### 1.1. National Definitions and Legislative Sources

In Estonian legislation, the term *immigrant* is not widely used. Considering the population of the Estonian Republic, the terms 'Estonian citizens' and 'aliens' are used. The Aliens Act (1993; last amended 2003) regulates the entry of aliens into Estonia, their stay, residence and employment in Estonia and the bases for legal liability. The legal status and bases for stay in Estonia for applicants for asylum and refugees are regulated by the Refugees Act (1977; last amended 2003), based on the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees and the Protocol on the Status of Refugees of 31 January 1967.

The legal bases for an alien to stay in Estonia are: a residence permit (permanent or temporary, issued for a term of up to five years); a visa, within the term for stay in Estonia prescribed thereby; the right to stay in Estonia arising from an international agreement, from a resolution of the Government of the Republic to forego the visa requirement or from law, a court decision or administrative act.

According to the Aliens Act, a permanent resident is an Estonian citizen residing in Estonia or an alien residing in Estonia who holds a permanent residence permit.

Children of aliens born in Estonia do not receive citizenship automatically. According to the Citizenship Act (1995, last amended 2003), Estonian citizenship is acquired by birth if at least one of the parents of the child holds Estonian citizenship at the time of birth of the child or if the child is born after the death of his or her father and if the father held Estonian citizenship at the time of his death<sup>(1)</sup>.

According to the Cultural Autonomy of Minorities Act (1993), persons of German, Russian, Swedish and Jewish minority nationalities and persons of minority nationalities whose number is over 3 000 can form autonomous cultural minorities.

### 1.2. Rights to Education and to Support Measures

According to the Constitution (1992), everyone has the right to education and the right to receive instruction in Estonian. The educational institution shall choose the language of instruction in national minority educational institutions. The provision of education shall be supervised by the state. Everyone has the right to preserve his or her national identity.

The children of citizens of foreign states and of stateless persons, who reside in Estonia, except children of representatives of foreign states, are subject to the obligation to attend school.

All immigrant children have the right to some measures described in section 2.

---

(1) An alien who wishes to acquire Estonian citizenship by naturalisation shall: be at least 15 years of age; have stayed in Estonia on the basis of a permanent residence permit for at least five years prior to the date on which he or she submits an application for Estonian citizenship and for one year from the day following the date of registration of the application; have knowledge of the Estonian language, the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia and the Citizenship Act in accordance with the specified requirements; have a permanent legal income which ensures his or her own subsistence and that of his or her dependants. He or she shall be loyal to the Estonian state and take the following oath: 'In applying for Estonian citizenship, I swear to be loyal to the constitutional order of Estonia'.

### 1.3. Demographic Information

In reality, during the 12-year period after re-establishing independence in 1991, neither large immigrant nor refugee groups have arrived in Estonia; children who are seeking asylum or have been given refugee status or are irregularly resident in the country are not known either. The reasons for this are probably the economic situation of the country and also its immigration policy (strict annual immigration quota established by the Government of the Republic, which should not exceed 0.05 % of the permanent population of Estonia annually) <sup>(2)</sup>.

In 2002, the population of Estonia was 1 370 052. The majority of the population of Estonia holds Estonian citizenship (80 %). Other groups hold undetermined citizenship (people who were citizens of the Soviet Union and haven't determined their citizenship after its fall) (12.4 %) or Russian citizenship (6.3 %) or citizenship of other foreign countries (0.7 %) or their citizenship is unknown (0.6 %).

The vast majority of immigrants are Russian-speaking. In one way or another, they have joined the numerous Russian-speaking community residing in Estonia and form a specific group of 'non-Estonian-speaking people'. According to the population and housing census in 2000 (See Table 4 in the annex), the number of immigrants was 8 224 during the period 1990/2000. 2 697 (32.8 %) of them held the Estonian citizenship, 3 855 the citizenship of a foreign country; the citizenship of 1 630 was undetermined and of 42 unknown. About 52 % of all immigrants have come from Russia (about 35 % of them held Estonian citizenship), 9 % from Ukraine and Finland, 5 % from Georgia, 3 % from Belarus, and 15 % of the countries of Asia, Africa, America and Australia and Oceania (about 36 % of them held Estonian citizenship).

98 % of all children aged 5-9 (79 650) and 97.5 % of all children aged 10-14 have been born in Estonia (see Table 2 in the annex). In the 5-9 age group, the biggest groups are Russian (372), (Finnish (160), Ukrainian (69), and Latvian (57) children. In the 10-14 age group, the biggest groups are Russian (1 339), Ukrainian (230), Latvian (84), and Belarus (79) children.

0.9 % of children in both the 5-9 and 10-14 age groups, have a mother tongue other than Estonian or Russian (709 and 1 003 children accordingly; see Table 1 in the annex). 23 % of children in the 5-9 age group and 30 % in the 10-14 age group have Russian as their mother tongue (18 374 and 32 067 children accordingly). In 2002, 307 European immigrant children between ages 0 and 19 lived in Estonia on a temporary basis (see Table 3 in the annex).

## 2. MEASURES OFFERING SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT TO IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

### 2.1. Reception and Guidance

The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research has recently launched a multilingual portal on the Internet providing information on educational opportunities for immigrant children and their families. This information can be accessed in English at <http://www.hm.ee/uus/hm/client/index.php?135262301339141555>.

### 2.2. Integration into School Learning

As Russian-speaking immigrant children study mainly in Russian-medium schools, we cannot bring out the activities aiming only at immigrant children and we cannot differentiate the supporting measures for immigrant children from the ones targeted at the whole Russian-speaking community. These common measures are described in this section of the survey. Most of them consist in the organisation of Estonian language teaching.

---

<sup>(2)</sup> The immigration quota does not apply to the spouse of an Estonian citizen or of an alien who resides in Estonia on the basis of a residence permit as well as a minor child, adult child, parent, grandparent or ward of an Estonian citizen or of an alien who resides in Estonia on the basis of a residence permit (<http://www.legaltext.ee>).

The Estonian State guarantees the instruction of the Estonian language in all minority-language public general schools and minority-language study groups. Children in Estonia have a choice between Estonian-medium and Russian-medium schools both following the same Estonian National Curriculum <sup>(3)</sup>.

A large number of initiatives have been undertaken during the last 10 years aiming at improving the Estonian-language skills of the whole group of non-Estonian-speaking people and at facilitating their integration into the society.

According to the basic Schools and Upper-Secondary Schools Act (1993), in basic schools, specific stages of basic schools and specific classes of basic schools, any language may be the language of instruction – in municipal schools, on the basis of a decision of the local government council, and in state schools, on the basis of a decision of the Minister of Education and Research. The board of trustees of a school shall make a corresponding proposal to the local government council or the Minister of Education and Research. In a school or class where instruction is not given in Estonian, Estonian language instruction is compulsory beginning from the first year. The language of instruction is the language in which at least 60 % of the teaching on the curriculum is given.

Estonian language teaching for non-Estonian speaking children may take the following forms:

- National reception classes (for one or more school years): students whose home language is other than Estonian or Russian attend a class/school where they get an intensive Estonian language course but mainly study in their own language. For example, Ukrainian and Belo Russian classes worked in Estonia but are closed now for shortage of students; at the moment a Jewish school only exists.
- Special support to language studies: foreign students study in a mainstream class, where they are given support through Estonian language lessons. If the school curriculum allows, they can also study their own mother tongue and culture.
- Immersion: in 2001/02, 14 classes participated in language immersion (nine year one classes and five year two classes) in seven Russian-medium schools in Ida-Virumaa region, Maardu, Tallinn and Valga. A specific amount has been allocated from the state budget to finance this immersion program. The program was extended also to kindergartens. In 2003, a later-stage language immersion program (for the last stage of basic school) in 4 schools was introduced on voluntary basis. The process is supported by Estonian-Canadian-Finnish language immersion program. This immersion program will not be generalized to all schools in Estonia.

The training of teachers of Estonian as a second language has an essential impact in this context. In 2001, a cooperation project *Regional in-service training network of teachers of Estonian as a second language* operated in the teacher-training field, in cooperation between the Ministry of Education, the British Council and the UNDP. As a result of the project, a professional association of teachers of Estonian as a second language, the Estonian Language Teachers Association, was established in December 2001.

The development of curricula and corresponding training for the teaching staff of non-Estonian-medium schools should also be mentioned. The purpose is to gradually introduce partial Estonian language subject teaching in non-Estonian-medium schools. Therefore, having the methodological and didactic guidelines in print, aimed at teachers in non-Estonian-medium schools, will become increasingly important, as well as the development of a multicultural school concept and the supervision of compiling development plans for schools. In 2001, within the project named *Open Curricula*, school headmasters and pedagogical staff of Russian-medium schools were trained through the in-service training department of Tallinn Pedagogical University. Training related to the development of curricula was also carried out in schools in cooperation with the educational departments of local governments and schools.

---

<sup>(3)</sup> Several schools exist where some subjects are taught in language other than Estonian or Russian (for example, English, German, Hebrew/Yiddish, Ukrainian, Swedish). The aim of these schools is to maintain the language and culture of immigrant children. These schools under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and are obliged to follow the Estonian National Curriculum.

### 2.3. Support for the Language, Culture and Religion of Origin

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act (1993), schools in co-operation with the state and the relevant local government shall offer pupils who are enrolled in basic education and whose mother tongue is not the language of instruction at the school the opportunity to learn their mother tongue and their national culture with the objective of preserving their national identity. According to the government regulation, schools are obliged to organize two lessons per week of language and culture studies as optional subject at the request of at least ten students with the same mother tongue.

### 2.4. Adaptation of Daily School Life

There are no special rules governing the adaptation of daily school life in recognition of the cultural and religious needs of immigrant children (e.g. menus served at school canteens, observation of religious or cultural holidays etc.).

### 2.5. Access to School Services and Special Financial Assistance

There is no special financial support for immigrant children or their parents.

### 2.6. Language Tuition for Parents and Families

There are no language tuition measures for parents or families in the framework of compulsory school.

### 2.7. Information to Parents

There are no specific arrangements (such as interpreters services) for the provision of information and monitoring of their children's performance for immigrant parents.

## 3. INTERCULTURAL APPROACHES IN EDUCATION

### 3.1. Curriculum and School Activities

In the new version of the National Curricula for Basic and Upper-Secondary Schools (completed in August 2001), the integration of pupils with different ethnic origins is underlined, as well as the need to preserve the ethnic identity of pupils and their knowledge of the culture of their country of origin.

The intercultural point of view is stressed in a number of subjects in the curriculum (geography, history, foreign languages etc.) but mainly in a subject called 'Introduction to Man and Society' that is taught in all grades of basic school. Different fields of study are formed from this subject, like life sciences, health, civic studies.

Forming social competencies begins as early as grade 1. In grades 1-3, the understanding/accepting of differences (different languages, cultures, religions) is stressed. Themes related to the multicultural approach are *Estonian national minorities and neighbouring countries of Estonia* and *Tolerance towards different cultures and nationalities*.

In grades 4-6, a student gets acquainted with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child. Themes to be mentioned are *Estonia as a multicultural society*. In study objectives tolerance is stressed, as well as understanding of differences and special needs of people.

### 3.2. Teacher Training

See section 4.2.

## 4. EVALUATION, PILOT PROJECTS, DEBATES AND FORTHCOMING REFORMS

### 4.1. Evaluation

The impact of support measures described in sections 2 and of the intercultural approach described in section 3 have not been evaluated.

### 4.2. Pilot Projects

In the context of the MATRA Pre-Accession Projects Programme, Estonia has requested assistance in the implementation of the European Union Council Directive 77/486/EEC concerning education of children of migrants workers. Sardes Educational Services (The Netherlands) became a contractor and the project *Promotion of the Education of children of migrant workers* was launched in 2003 in cooperation with the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. During the inception phase it was established that the following activities are envisaged:

- To develop a policy document concerning the education of migrant children. The document will serve as a basis for more detailed policy plans and action plans at school level.
- To improve classroom practice for migrant children in Estonian-medium schools: a handbook containing useful information related to teaching migrant children and training for teachers.
- A teacher-training course will be developed on teaching multicultural classrooms.
- A textbook on Estonian as a second language at the basic/initial level will be developed. The textbook should be aimed at newly arrived migrant children (who need a basic level of Estonian) and requires a different approach than that of existing materials, developed for children of national minorities with a relatively long history in Estonia, which are used in immersion programmes. These immersion programmes make use of the Russian mother tongue of pupils in the first years of (partial) immersion in Estonian language.

The Integration Foundation launches and facilitates various projects related to the integration of non-Estonians into the Estonian society. Under the aegis of this Foundation, a pilot study was carried out in 2001, titled *Non-Estonian Speaking Children in Estonian-language Schools*, where proposals were submitted in order to improve the situation of Estonian teaching and pedagogical education in multicultural classes. Project competitions on the same topic were announced in 2002, including: a program to introduce children to the Estonian-language school; a support program for the Estonian language; in-service training for specialized teachers; development of teaching tools for teaching Estonian as a second language for the pedagogical staff of pre-school establishments.

An adequate method for teaching Estonian as a second language, aimed at the specific group of adolescents who do not have Russian as a first language, is currently lacking. The project should provide a textbook of this kind as another specific result in the form of a learning material, intended for older newly arrived immigrant pupils entering the Estonian school system.

Concerning the intercultural approach in education, a pilot training of teachers is taking place. After the design of courses and implementation of pilot training, it is possible to compile a subject manual where the principles of multicultural education and recommendations to teachers are elaborated.



### 4.3. Debates and Forthcoming Reforms

The curricula for in-service training for teaching Estonian as a second language in pre-school institutions is being planned in cooperation with the Vantaa In-Service Training Centre (Finland). Curriculum drafting started in 2002.

By the year 2007, the curricula and organisation of study of non-Estonian language basic schools will ensure all graduates of basic schools a level of Estonian language skills which enables them to continue studies in Estonian. Transition to instruction in Estonian should be started in state and municipal upper secondary schools not later than in the academic year 2007/08. Activities have been planned, taking into account the objective that by 2007, the graduates of non-Estonian-medium basic schools should be able to cope in society, that their average-level state language skills will allow them to pursue studies in vocational institutions or upper-secondary schools, where the majority of studies are in Estonian, and that the young people who have graduated from secondary level be fluent in Estonian to an extent needed for everyday and working relations. Language studies in foreign language medium schools are carried out in accordance with the principles of the Government national integration program *Integration in Estonian Society in 2000–2007*.

Pursuant to an amendment to the *Basic and Upper-Secondary Schools Act*, conditions will be created for those pupils of Estonian-medium and Russian-medium schools whose mother tongue is not Estonian or Russian, in order to learn their own mother tongue and to get to know their own ethnic culture, aimed at maintaining their ethnic identity. The regulation was adopted in May 2003. According to the regulation, the minority children can have 2 lessons per week of their mother tongue and culture if there are at least 10 children whose parents so wish. The teaching of language and culture of ethnic minorities will start in the 2004/05 academic year.

## ANNEXES

Table 1: Population, 31 March 2000 by Estonian or Russian nationality, age and mother tongue

	Estonian Nationality			Russian Nationality		
	Estonian tongue total	Russian tongue total	Other mother tongue	Estonian tongue total	Russian tongue total	Other mother tongue
5-9	60 182	1 468	99	222	15 572	39
10-14	73 796	1 884	79	341	27 473	50

Table 2: Population, 31 March 2000 by country of birth and age

	5-9	10-14
Males and females		
Whole country		
Total	79 650	107 465
EUROPE	79 021	106 581
Estonia	78 223	104 725
Belarus	16	79
Bulgaria	3	1
Denmark	8	0
Finland	160	20
France	5	1
Germany	34	34
Hungary	1	2
Italy	2	0
Latvia	57	84
Lithuania	12	26
Moldova	5	18
Norway	5	0
Poland	1	4
Russia	372	1 339
Sweden	38	9
Switzerland	3	0
Ukraine	69	230
United Kingdom	2	2
Europe (country unknown)	1	5
Armenia	12	28
Azerbaijan	10	30
Georgia	25	53
India	2	1
Kazakhstan	13	48
Kyrgyzstan	3	13
Tajikistan	1	7
Turkmenistan	1	4
United Arab Emirates	1	1
Uzbekistan	2	10
AFRICA	3	0
Congo	3	0
AMERICA	28	12
Canada	5	2
United States	22	10
CONTINENT UNKNOWN	519	674

Table 3: Population temporarily present in Estonia, 31 March 2000  
by permanent place of residence and age

	0-9	10-19
Males and females		
Whole country		
Total	95	270
EUROPE	89	218
Belarus	1	0
Bulgaria	0	1
Denmark	4	24
Finland	26	49
France	0	1
Germany	10	5
Ireland	1	0
Italy	0	1
Latvia	13	65
Lithuania	2	8
Netherlands	0	2
Norway	1	2
Russia	25	32
Sweden	0	22
Switzerland	2	0
Ukraine	4	6
ASIA	1	15
AMERICA	5	37

Table 4: Population, 31 March 2000 by country of birth, ethnic nationality, citizenship and time of immigration

	Ethnic nationality total							
	Citizenship total				Estonian citizenship			
	1990-1994	1995-1998	1999	2000	1990-1994	1995-1998	1999	2000
Males and females								
Total	4 909	2 470	724	121	1 691	743	238	25
EUROPE	4 126	2 134	627	107	1 369	653	217	19
Belarus	155	49	9	0	46	6	0	0
Bulgaria	6	8	1	0	1	6	0	0
Denmark	8	19	8	2	6	2	3	0
Finland	217	379	91	28	64	96	12	3
France	3	14	1	2	1	7	0	0
Germany	81	49	21	3	36	21	7	1
Italy	3	15	3	0	2	2	2	0
Latvia	176	136	49	24	70	30	18	0
Lithuania	45	50	15	6	12	3	0	0
Moldova	28	8	6	0	8	5	4	0
Norway	3	8	5	0	1	4	0	0
Poland	11	9	3	1	3	2	0	1
Russia	2 848	1 070	305	26	953	373	142	11
Sweden	45	60	30	6	32	35	12	2
Ukraine	460	192	56	4	124	49	11	0
United Kingdom	8	25	12	2	3	5	4	1
ASIA	711	213	49	7	280	49	10	4
AFRICA	5	15	2	0	0	4	0	0
AMERICA	65	102	43	7	40	36	8	2
AUSTRALIA AND OCEANIA	2	6	3	0	2	1	3	0

Source: Statistical Office of Estonia (<http://www.stat.ee>).