

# Adaptation of Newly-Arrived Migrants in Estonia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
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Research: **Adaptation of Newly-Arrived Migrants in Estonia**

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research – both applied and academic – on the adaptation of newly-arrived immigrants is still in the early stages in Estonia. The first in-depth study on this topic which covered various target groups was completed in 2014 and the first study with a large sample that quantitatively described the attitudes of the target group was done only in 2017.

Yet, several hurdles to the adaptation of newly-arrived immigrants have been known for a while – for example, in the 2011 integration monitoring (EIM2011), the main problems in adaptation faced by immigrants who had newly arrived in Estonia were the lack of opportunities for learning Estonian and insufficient information on various services. These topics were also highlighted in the 2014 study, as well as in this study in 2019. Some hurdles have been improved a lot, some however, have remained the same.

A decade ago, various stakeholders, i.e. policymakers, employers, officials, etc did not yet recognise the need for an effective and planned migration policy. Today, however, we see that the topics of migration, adaptation of newly-arrived immigrants and integration have made their way into political, professional, as well as social debates. This has mainly been brought on by the two crises – the so-called migration crisis in Europe and so-called labour force shortage crisis in Estonia.

Public awareness and desire to contribute to the development on this area have also increased – several stakeholders, including representatives of employers and universities, and NGOs are today making their opinions known more actively; different working groups have been put together to discuss the adaptation or migration policy, as well as several events supporting information exchange have been organised (e.g. the immigration working group under the Ministry of the Interior to discuss issues related to labour migration quotas, discussions related to migration at the Opinion Festival, proposals of the Estonian Employers' Confederation for simplifying foreign recruitment, etc.). In addition, several significant legislative amendments have been made to the Aliens Act with the aim of – among others – promoting the attraction and retention of foreigners in Estonia (e.g. visas related to start-up businesses, quota exceptions, etc.)

In addition to previous research, discussions and legislative amendments, several policy measures and activities supporting the adaptation of newly-arrived immigrants have been implemented in the past years, such as the development and launch of the Welcoming Programme by the Ministry of the Interior in 2015, migration advice service by the Police and Border Guard Board in 2017, the Work in Estonia programme launched by the Enterprise Estonia in 2014. In addition, two international houses have started work in Tartu (in 2016 and 2019) and one in Tallinn (fall of 2018). The activation of Estonian cities on the topic of immigration is related to the wider global trend, i.e. realisation that people move between or into cities, not countries.

As the adaptation mainly takes place on the local level, the support of the local environment, including the local government or municipality, holds significant value in engaging with newly-arrived immigrants. However, it is also important to note that irrespective of the life on the local level, newly-arrived immigrants are not isolated from what is happening in the Estonian society as

a whole – therefore, significant changes in the attitudes of the Estonian locals also have a direct impact on the adaptation and long-term integration of newly-arrived immigrants.

The aim of this study was to describe the current situation of how newly-arrived immigrants are adapting in Estonia – which factors inhibit the adaptation of newly-arrived immigrants and which factors support it.

The qualitative method was mainly used for collecting information for this study – interviews and focus group interviews with newly-arrived immigrants (direct target group), as well as with persons who interact with this target group from universities and employers as well as from the public, third and private sector (indirect target group or stakeholders). Our study also includes several results from other recent studies carried out in this field, as well as statistics and an overview of the services provided.

In the first half of the report, we describe in different chapters these changes separately by different thematic areas, i.e. in areas where the newly-arrived immigrants are mostly having challenges related to their life, work and studying in Estonia (e.g. labour market, education, healthcare, information space, learning Estonian, communities, etc.). We also describe which services offered by various service providers are used by the newly-arrived immigrants in Estonia in these thematic areas (the so-called ecosystem of services).

Each chapter on a specific thematic area includes (a) an overview of the currently offered services and service providers, (b) in-depth analysis of the situation considering the target group (newly-arrived immigrants) and stakeholders (employers, universities, state authorities, local governments, etc) and (c) recommendations for the improvement of the area. Where applicable, we also comment the results by comparing them to the 2014 adaptation study of newly-arrived immigrants, to describe the changes (or lack of changes) over the past five years. Thus, each chapter can be read on its own and the main results and recommendations have been provided separately under every chapter.

In the second half of the report, we discuss the cross-thematic topics which relate to varying degrees to majority of the newly-immigrants – for example, the awareness and competences of local governments, the use of social media and information usage by newly-arrived immigrants, mental health related issues, as well as the possibility for creating an index of integration to measure the adaptation-integration of newly-arrived immigrants.

The report ends with the summary and main conclusions from the research. In this part, we present the major cross-sectoral challenges that Estonia faces in the adaptation of newly-arrived immigrants and that we find deserve the most attention based on the results of the study. In this part, we also present the policy recommendations and proposals from the analysis on how to improve the current situation in Estonia, categorised between the different thematic areas.

The major challenges identified with the research include topics which are mainly horizontal and cross-sectoral, i.e. topics which are regularly repeated in the various chapters of the study and which should be kept in mind and considered when developing or analysing an area in the future. The major challenges also consist of topics which are specific to a more specific area or target group of newly-arrived immigrants, but that we find also require special and in-depth attention.

For example, it is important to understand that newly-arrived immigrants are not a homogeneous group of people and there are significant variations inside this target group. Among others, they can be distinguished by the country of origin (including citizens of the European Union and third

countries, returnees) or by the reasons for moving to Estonia (working, studying, family migration, international protection); thus, their needs, desires and concerns, as well as adaptability with different (Estonian, Russian, international) communities may be completely different from one other. Separate attention should also be paid to persons who have previously not been researched much – those who have registered a short-term employment in Estonia and are staying in Estonia based on a visa.

Some recurring concerns can also be highlighted as a result of this study. Although the lack of information is not a general problem in itself, its fragmentation and insufficient cooperation between different institutions and information providers raises concerns, e.g. when transferring or directing foreigner from one service to another. It is important that information regarding different services and life in Estonia would reach newly-arrived immigrants in as timely and user-friendly manner as possible.

Another recurring issue that is brought up is the lack of communication between the locals and newly-arrived immigrants. It is one of the major challenges for Estonia of how to promote meaningful contacts on the local level between locals and immigrants in a way which would, on the one hand, prevent the feeling of alienation and, on the other hand, support a sense of belonging and mutual integration, i.e. decrease in prejudices on both sides. The Estonian language skills of the newly-arrived immigrants are also important preconditions for the mutual interaction, which is why it is important to ensure that everyone who wants to can consistently learn Estonian.

For the long-term and sustainable adaptation policy, it is important to keep in mind that not anyone wishes to have access to all kind of different (public) services in Estonia. But those foreigners, who have the needs or might have them in their different stages of life in Estonia, should clearly understand how to access them and have quality of knowledge based on what to make informed decisions.

See the full report (in Estonian) [here](#).