

# CITIZENSHIP AND NATURALISATION

## FACTSHEET

**A person's attitude towards a state and state authorities as well as their political and social activity are affected by whether or not they are citizens of their country of residence.**

The population of Estonia has been growing again since 2015 and its composition is becoming increasingly more diverse with the support of increasing immigration. Although the number of residents with undetermined citizenship continues to decrease, this process is very slow, especially in comparison with the considerably faster naturalisation process that took place in the years after independence was regained.

Naturalisation means that a person doesn't get their citizenship by birth, but in relation to their marital status, personal request or special merits.

Less than 1,000 people per year have received Estonian citizenship by way of naturalisation since 2017. Among them, all children whose parents are stateless at the moment of their birth are automatically given Estonian citizenship.

## CITIZENSHIP CHOICES

The first survey Monitoring the Integration of Estonian Society (EIM) was carried out in 2000. Since then, more than half of stateless persons surveyed in the EIM have said that they would like to become Estonian citizens. Fifty-six percent of them said that in EIM 2020.

The main advantages of Estonian citizenship in the eyes of the people who would like to obtain it are:

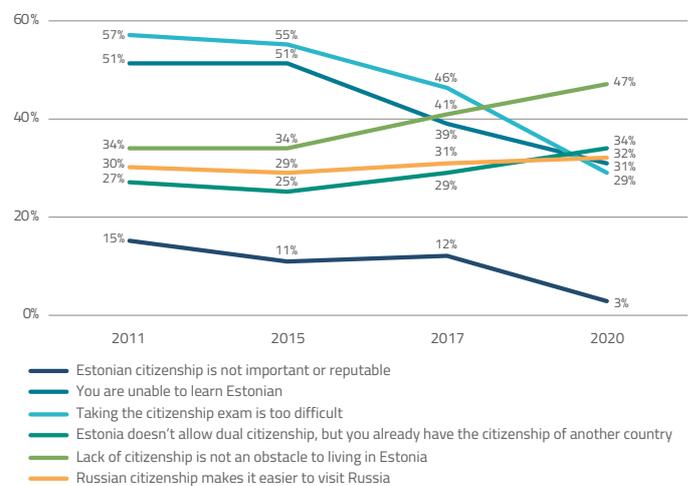
- the possibility to vote and participate in the political and social life of Estonia (57%);
- the possibility to travel to countries that have a visa-free regime with Estonia (53%).

The reasons why people don't want to become Estonian citizens are mostly practical. Also, approximately half (48%) of the people who don't have Estonian citizenship find that not having it is not an obstacle to living in Estonia.

The fear of the citizenship exam and the difficulty of learning the Estonian language, which is required for the exam, has

decreased primarily among young people from 2010–2020. Information on what must be done to apply for citizenship as well as the rights and obligations associated with citizenship is easily accessible to people interested in applying for citizenship.

**Figure 1. Responses of persons who don't want to become Estonian citizens regarding the reasons why they're not applying.**



Source: EIM 2011, 2015, 2017, 2020

## POLITICAL ACTIVITY

The rate of participation of citizens of other nationalities in elections is still lower (72%) than that of Estonians (80%). The ethnicity-based gap is also clearly evident in political preferences.

Half of young people in Estonia don't have clear preferences in terms of political parties or they don't find that any of the parties shares their views.

The e-voting introduced in 2005 has also failed to make more young people cast their votes or become popular among voters of other nationalities, although one of the reasons for the introduction of e-voting was to increase participation in voting. Thirty-nine percent of Estonians and 15% of residents of other nationalities entitled to vote voted electronically in the 2019 Riigikogu elections.

## SOCIAL ACTIVITY

The political activity of the residents of Estonia outside institutions has increased in comparison to 2017. This has primarily occurred among four groups: Estonians, younger people, people with a higher education and people of other nationalities with good Estonian language skills.

This includes social activities such as signing petitions, attending public meetings, joining protest campaigns, participating in online political discussions and contacting a politician.

Forty-four percent of Estonians and 33% of people of other nationalities had performed at least one of the eight activities listed in EIM 2020 in recent years. Every fourth Estonian has signed an appeal, protest or petition and every sixth has attended a public meeting or participated in a political discussion online.

## TRUST IN STATE AUTHORITIES

As before, Estonians trust state authorities more than people of other nationalities, but the trust of all residents in the Government, Riigikogu and the President has decreased in comparison to 2017.

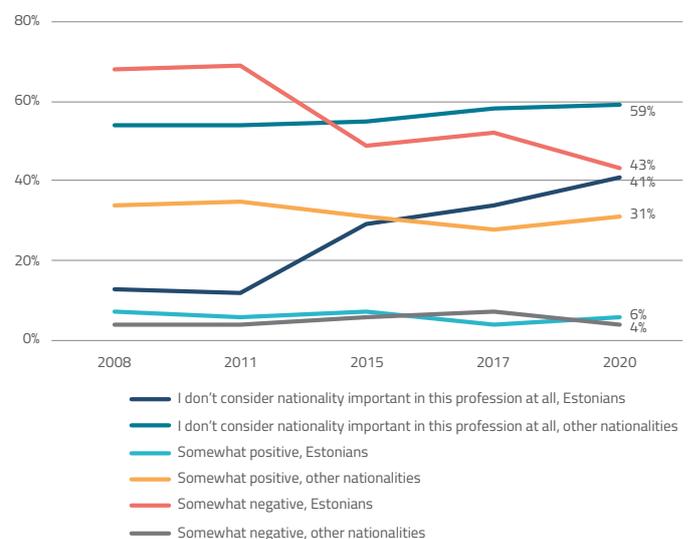
The differences in the opinions of Estonians and people of other nationalities were still vast in 2008, but the trust of people of other nationalities in Estonian authorities has grown to a level similar to that of Estonians in about a decade.

In 2020, the authorities that the residents of Estonia trust the most (on a scale of four) are still the Defence Forces (3.23) and the police (3.24) whilst the least trusted authorities are the Government (2.59) and the Riigikogu (2.56). Whilst the citizens of Estonia and Estonians trust the authorities more than other residents in general, the trust in the Government and the Riigikogu (2.58 and 2.53, respectively) is the smallest among Estonians.

Trust in the President, the police, the court system and local governments among Estonian citizens of other nationalities, Russian citizens and stateless persons has increased significantly over the last 12 years.

As the head of the executive power, the Prime Minister has a strong impact on the state of Estonia and the lives of its residents. Since 2008, the respondents in the EIM have been asked about the hypothetical situation: how would you feel if the next Prime Minister of Estonia was a(n) (Estonian) Russian? The share of people who think this would be bad has decreased over the years and increasingly more people find that the nationality of the Prime Minister isn't important at all.

**Figure 2. Responses to the question "How would you feel if the next Prime Minister of Estonia was a(n) (Estonian) Russian?" based on ethnic groups.**



Source: EIM 2008, 2011, 2015, 2017, 2020