

20 YEARS OF SYSTEMIC INTEGRATION STUDIES IN ESTONIA

FACTSHEET

The integration of the Estonian society has been systemically studied for 20 years and this integration monitoring (EIM 2020) is the eighth one. The report is aimed at finding answers to various questions concerning language use, material well-being, the labour market, education, citizenship, the media, participation in social life and trust in state institutions. The adaptation of returnees has been separately surveyed for the first time and the adaptation of new immigrants for the second time in the EIM 2020.

The first EIM (2000) revealed that irrespective of the ethnic group, most people living in Estonia recognise the importance of Estonian language skills. This indicates that a principal shift has occurred among the Russian-speaking residents in the first decade, as learning the Estonian language had not been a priority before that.

Subsequent monitoring has confirmed the gradual improvement of language proficiency and by 2020 the share of people who spoke Estonian based on self-assessment had increased to 42% among Russian-speaking residents. It should be kept in mind that according to the most recent Soviet census (1989), this indicator was only 14%.

Regrettably, Estonian society can still be viewed as segregated rather than cohesive in terms of nationalities and language use, as people mostly communicate in their own language environment during their free time. People interact less with people whose native languages are different, especially at work or school.

However, the trend is positive when we consider the future outlook of integration. For instance, young people who speak different languages at home interact with each other almost twice as frequently as people in the older age group.

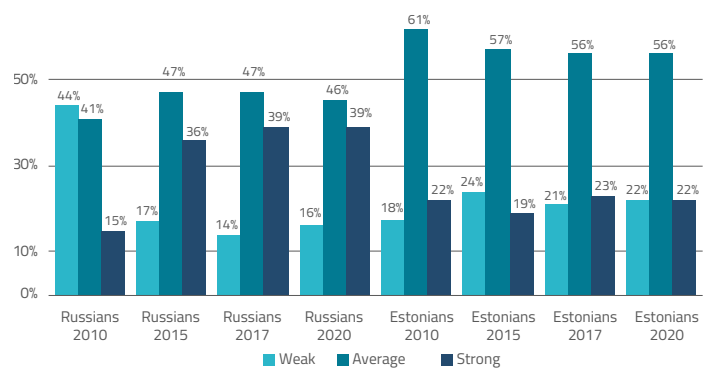
A major fundamental change started in the Estonian media several years ago. The formerly predominant influence of Russia's media is weakening among Russian-speaking residents and the importance of Estonian publications, primarily online media and Estonian public broadcasting, is increasing instead. The importance of social media is also growing, and the channel preferences of different ethnic groups are becoming more similar. The use of Russian social media channels has decreased considerably among the Russian-speaking residents of Estonia and they are replaced with global networks.

The main keyword of the Estonian education policy has been the transformation of Soviet-era parallel school systems into a single education system, and this process started immediately after the restoration of independence.

In the future view of integration, it's very important that irrespective of ethnic background, starting to learn Estonian as early as possible has the increasing support of the residents. For example, according to EIM 2020, 81% of Estonians and 66% of respondents of other nationalities support the commencement of Estonian-language learning in pre-school. The support grows even further when the basic school level is added to the commencement of Estonian language learning in pre-school.

However, there is no consensus on the transformation of the entire school system into an Estonian-language one, i.e. the majority of Estonians prefer education that is only in Estonian whilst the support of Estonian Russians to this is somewhat weaker.

Figure 1. State identity of Estonians and Estonian Russians in 2010, 2015, 2017 and 2020.



Source: EIM 2010, 2015, 2017, 2020

The term 'state identity' that has been used in the EIM since 2015 has been defined on the basis of supporting Estonia as a nation state on the one hand and as a citizen state on the other hand.

The results of the last four monitoring surveys have been very similar in the case of Estonians: the share of people with weak and strong state identity alike is 20%, while the people with a medium state identity comprise 60%. The share of Estonian Russians with a weak state identity is around 15%, the value of the medium indicator is 50% and the share of people with a strong state identity is almost 40%. Thus, there is a strong consensus about the main fundamentals of Estonia as a nation and citizen state among Estonians and Estonian Russians alike.

Whilst the material well-being and socioeconomic position of Estonians and Russians were rather equal in society 30

years ago, inequality appeared in almost all indicators after the implementation of market economy reforms and this has largely remained unchanged. The labour market analysis of the survey of 2020 highlights that the employment rate of Russian-speaking people is lower, their unemployment rate is higher and they rate the security of their employment relationships and labour market situation lower than Estonians. There are fewer managers and specialists, and more skilled and unskilled workers in lower positions among the Russian-speaking people employed on the labour market. The economic crises of the last two decades have also had a considerably stronger impact of Russian-speaking people.

A rapid naturalisation process took place in the first years after the restoration of independence, but it slowed by the end of the decade. Fewer than 1,000 people per year have been granted Estonian citizenship by way of naturalisation since 2017, including automatically all children born in Estonia both of whose parents were stateless at the time of the child's birth. The division of the Russian-speaking population into Estonian citizens, stateless persons and Russian citizens reflects the different adaptation of the people and the different strategies for coping in Estonian society.

Isolation and regional inequality are primarily associated with Ida-Viru County in the context of integration with Estonian society. Many indicators of the socioeconomic and demographic situation as well as the indicators of people's attitudes in the region are considerably poorer than elsewhere in the country. The regional differences have increased over time.

GENERALISATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNIC RELATIONS IN ESTONIA

Until 1991: parallel societies

At the end of the Soviet era, the Estonian society was characterised by the strong segregation of geographic location, workplaces, education systems, social networks and many other areas of the Estonian-speaking majority and the Russian-speaking minority. It was a system of "one state, two societies". However, the statistics of the late 1980s indicated the relative equality of the two language groups, for example, in the case of education and labour market opportunities, which was based on the egalitarianism of the Soviet system.

1990s: establishment of nation state

The politics of the state focused on the establishment of a nation state after the restoration of the Republic of Estonia. A quick transition to a single Estonian-language education system by the end of the 1990s failed, but Estonian gained a dominating status as the state language both formally and substantively. However, the segregation of the two language

communities (and segregation on the basis of citizenship, which emerged as well) as well as social inequality in terms of opportunities for participation in the labour market and politics increased at the same time.

Since the late 1990s: language-centred integration

A shift occurred in the national policy of Estonia in the late 1990s and integration of society was set as a goal. The expansion of the area of use of Estonian and the transition of the education system to an Estonian-language basis continued. The success of integration is vastly different in terms of regions and age, but the positive trends of cohesion prevail in society as a whole. This is particularly visible in the case of young people. However, the national inequality on the labour market and in participation in politics, which developed in the early 1990s, has largely endured.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey Monitoring the Integration of Estonian Society is an independent in-depth survey of integration, which is carried out every two to three years. The concept of the survey is based on the development plan Integrating Estonia 2020.

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The survey was carried out by the Praxis Think Tank, the Institute of Baltic Studies, Tallinn University, University of Tartu and Turu-uuringute AS.

The survey was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture.

DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

Principal survey: Estonian residents aged 15 and older.

Sample of the survey: 1,414 Estonian residents over 15 years of age. The Estonia-wide random sample model was prepared on the basis of the population statistics database of Statistics Estonia, taking into account the gender, age, nationality and regional division of the respondents. The survey of residents was conducted in the form of in-person interviews.

In addition to the principal survey of residents, a survey in the format of an online questionnaire was carried out among 365 returnees and 3,900 new immigrants on the basis of a comprehensive random sample.

Period of survey: October 2020 – January 2021.