

European Migration Network

# Annual Policy Report on Migration and Asylum

## Estonia 2016



*The European Migration Network (EMN) is co-ordinated by the European Commission with National Contact Points (EMN NCPs) established in each EU Member State plus Norway.*



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ANNUAL POLICY REPORT ON  
MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

ESTONIA 2016

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The European Migration Network (EMN), established by the Council of the European Union in 2008 and co-ordinated by the European Commission, is a network for information collection and exchange on migration and asylum issues, comprised of National Contact Points (EMN NCPs) and national networks of relevant stakeholder organisations.

The EMN plays a key role in providing up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum topics to policy makers (at EU and Member State level) and the general public.

Cover photo: Visit Estonia photo and video bank, <http://photos.visitestonia.com>



Co-funded by the  
European Union



ISBN 978-9949-29-341-4  
ISBN 978-9949-29-342-1 (pdf)

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AGIPA	Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens
BIP	Beneficiary of international protection
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EMN	European Migration Network
EU	European Union
FRONTEX	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
ICT	Intra-corporate transferee
IDP	Internally-displaced person
IOM	International Organization of Migration
IRMA	Integrated Return Management Application
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OLPEA	Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act
PBGB	Police and Border Guard Board
TCN	Third-country national
UNHCR	The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
VARRE	Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme from Estonia
VIS	Visa Information System

## I. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Article 9(1) of Council Decision 2008/381/EC establishing the EMN, each National Contact Point is required to provide every year a report describing the migration and asylum situation in the Member State, which shall include policy developments and statistical data.

The EMN Annual Policy Report consists of two parts and a statistical annex. Part I and the statistical annex are intended to inform policy-makers within the European Commission about national developments. Part II, however,

is aimed at wider audiences that are interested in an overview of the asylum and immigration situation in Estonia.

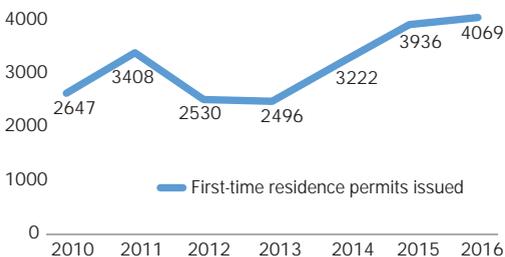
This report is structured to provide an overview of all aspects of migration and asylum in Estonia, covering the period from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016. However, at some instances, it will also include references to developments that begun in 2016 and continued in 2017, as well as references on measures taken in earlier years and their effects.

### Executive summary

This report aims to outline the most significant developments in the area of migration and asylum in Estonia in 2016. This includes providing an overview of statistics, legislative and policy changes, third sector and public initiatives, and relevant debates.

Legal migration to Estonia has been steadily increasing over the last few years and 2016 was no different. In 2016, a total number of **4069 first-time residence permits** were granted in Estonia (See Fig 1) and **the immigration quota was filled before the end of the year**.

**Fig 1. Total number of first-time residence permits issued, 2010-2016.**



Source: PBGB

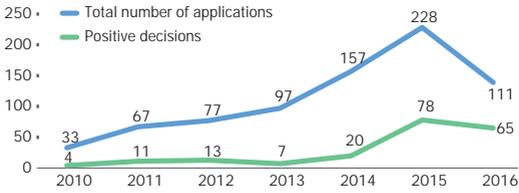
These increases have been happening in parallel with a number of legislative changes in the field of legal migration. Since 2013, Estonia has been actively reforming its legislation to attract foreign workers to counterbalance the consequences of ageing population, emigration and to help the country to rejuvenate its economy.

The first round of amendments came into force in September 2013 and the second round in January 2016. **The most recent round of amendments to the Aliens Act** and other associated legislations were introduced and **passed in 2016**, coming into force in **several stages throughout 2017**. Main changes included the introduction of special regulation for start-ups and investors, lowering salary requirements and exempting IT specialists, startups and investors from the immigration quota.

Important changes have been happening also in the field of asylum. In 2016, the first beneficiaries of international protection arrived through **relocation and resettlement schemes** to Estonia. Altogether **77 individuals arrived as part of resettlement and relocation schemes** (31 were granted a refugee status and 46 received subsidiary protection) in 2016. In addition, **111**

**asylum applications** were lodged in Estonia and **international protection was granted in 65 instances** (44 were given refugee status and 21 received subsidiary protection) (See Fig 2). Estonia granted thus **international protection to 142 individuals** in 2016.<sup>1</sup>

**Fig 2. The number of asylum applications lodged in Estonia, 2010-2016<sup>1</sup>**



Source: PBGB

The growing numbers of migrants also influence the field of integration. In 2016, the majority of changes in integration related to beneficiaries of international protection (BIPs). For instance, legal amendments made it **compulsory for BIPs to participate in language courses and international protection module of the Welcoming Programme**.

While there were no major legal developments in other fields of migration and asylum, Estonia has focused on a better implementation of current policies, measures and improving international collaboration.

## Methodology

This report is based on both primary and secondary data obtained from the key stakeholders in the field of migration and asylum. While the report used some publicly available data such as policy papers, statistics, articles, reports and evaluations available on news and public policy websites when necessary, the majority of data was collected from our stakeholders through formal inquiries, interviews and focus groups with experts. The information presented in this report builds on the material collected for the first part of the annual policy report, intended for the European Commission.

Stakeholders involved in the making of this report include the relevant Ministries: the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Education and Research. Other agencies and organisations involved included the Police and Border Guard Board, Estonian Red Cross, International Organisation of Migration (IOM), UNHCR, Integration Foundation (formerly known as 'Integration and Migration Foundation Our People' or MISA), Estonian Refugee Council, Estonian Human Rights Centre, Living for Tomorrow, Eluliin, and Estonian SOS Children's Villages. The information and data presented in the report were obtained from these organisations unless specified otherwise.

<sup>1</sup> This does not include refugees arriving as part of resettlement and relocation schemes

## II. CONTEXT FOR ASYLUM AND MIGRATION POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** While a number of political changes took place in 2016, the new government has continued to follow the immigration policy of recent years.

### General political developments

In 2016, a number of **significant political developments** took place in Estonia. In October, Ms **Kersti Kaljulaid** became the first **female President** of Estonia after a long and tumultuous election, where both the parliament and a specially convened electoral college failed to elect the President in the early rounds.

Only a month later, a **new government** was formed by Mr **Jüri Ratas** as the previous government led by Mr Taavi Rõivas collapsed after a **vote of no-confidence** in the country's parliament. The new government coalition – the first in nearly two decades not to include the liberal Reform Party – was formed between the left-leaning Estonian Centre Party, the Social Democratic Party and the conservative IRL (*Pro Patria and Res Publica Union*).

This had an impact also on the field of migration and asylum as **new ministers were appointed** to the relevant ministries. Migration and asylum policy in Estonia is largely under the competence of the Ministry of the Interior, where Mr **Andres Anvelt** from the Social Democratic Party replaced Mr Hanno Pevkur from the Reform Party as the Minister of the Interior.

Regarding the reception of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, the responsible ministry is the Ministry of Social Affairs, where the responsibilities are divided between the Minister of Health and Labour and the Minister of Social Protection. In November, Ms **Kaia Iva** from Pro Patria and Res Publica Union replaced Mr Margus Tšahkna as the Minister of Social Protection as he became the Minister of Defence. Mr **Jevgeni Ossinovski** from the So-

cial Democratic Party continued as the Minister of Health and Labour.

The change of government, however, has not lead to any major changes in the migration and asylum system. There were a number of reforms introduced in 2016, which will be highlighted in this report, but most of these changes were introduced to the parliament prior November.

**The agreed priorities of the current government** state that Estonia will **follow its current migration policy** and **will not support mandatory quota** in relocation and resettlement. The priority for the Government regarding **BREXIT** will be **to sustain a close partnership with the UK** even after the latter leaving the Union.

### Estonian Presidency of the EU Council in 2017

Estonia will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time in **the second half of 2017**. The country was initially supposed to begin its presidency six months later in 2018, but took it over from the United Kingdom after London pulled out to focus on negotiations to leave the European Union.

During their Presidency, each Member State sets its priorities, which are intended to be political guidelines from the government for defining the programme for the Presidency. **The priorities of the Estonian Presidency** of the EU Council in 2017 are going to be the following:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As of April 2017, the government has only confirmed the general priorities, but a detailed plan is expected to be made available by the end of June 2017. Information is available on the official presidency website: <https://www.eesistumine.ee/en/>

1. An open and innovative European economy.
2. Safe and secure Europe.
3. Digital Europe and the free flow of data.
4. Inclusive and sustainable Europe.

While all priorities touch upon and inform the fields of migration and asylum in one way or another, migration is directly related to both the second and the fourth priority. The Government of the Republic of Estonia believes that only by acting together and preserving its unity on the global stage can the EU keep its citizens safe and promote peace, prosperity and stability. Under the guideline of moving towards a 'safe and secure Europe', they will focus among other things on:

- ★ Strengthening the fight against terrorism and organised crime, **strengthening the internal security as well as the protection of the EU's external borders** by improving co-operation and using cutting-edge information systems.
- ★ **Continuing the work tackling the migration crisis and reforming the Common European Asylum System.**

The 'inclusive and sustainable Europe' priority category, however, supports equal opportunities for employment, access to services and development of skills. For this purpose, during the Presidency, Estonia will focus on the following issues impacting also migrants:

- ★ Modernising relevant **rules to promote labour mobility and free movement of persons.**
- ★ Ensuring **equal opportunities** in the labour market and **social inclusion.**

### Immigration debates and events

Migration is increasingly becoming a more important issue for the Estonian public, which is reflected both in media coverage and the events organised. In 2016, the most widely discussed issues in the Estonian media were **the European refugee crisis and its impact on Estonia**. For instance, in 2016, the online version of

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presidency/priorities-estonian-presidency.

Postimees, a major daily newspaper in Estonia, published 2099 articles with a word 'refugee'<sup>3</sup> in them, or on average **3 articles per day**. The dominant issues addressed related to **the arrival of refugees and their integration**, followed by **the implementation of EU-level measures**, such as the Dublin system and the EU-Turkey Statement. Alongside the debates on asylum, topics related to labour migration also gained traction, particularly the growing need to attract skilled workers.

Overall, **attitudes towards migration and refugees** have been improving. A public opinion survey,<sup>4</sup> which was commissioned by the Government Office and carried out by Kantar Emor, reveals that **75% of Estonians** believe that **people have the right to travel freely**. In June 2015, the same opinion was expressed by 63% of those surveyed. In 2016, **30% of Estonians were extremely critical towards refugees**; last year, the same figure was almost 40%.

A number of events and conferences were also organised in the field of migration. In March 2016, Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Estonia, in collaboration with the European Migration Network and University of Tartu, organised an international conference on '**Immigration to the Nordic-Baltic Region: New Trends and Integration Challenges**'. Talks focused on the role of the State and local authorities in receiving beneficiaries of international protection: which services are to be provided, and how issues like housing, language-learning and entering the labour market are being organised.

In August, the fourth **Opinion Festival** took place in Paide with an entire area dedicated to migration-related debates. The Opinion Festival is a meeting place for the entire community that gives a word to different political views. Its mission is to improve opinion culture and civic education. Migration Area at the Opinion Festival

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3 The search term used was 'pagulane'. Media overview and analysis conducted by EE EMN NCP.

4 Kantar Emor (2016). *Arvamusuuring Eesti elanike hoiakutest pagulastesse*. Available at: [https://valitusus.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/failid/arvamusuuring\\_eesti\\_elanike\\_hoiakutest\\_pagulastesse\\_nov.2016.pdf](https://valitusus.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/failid/arvamusuuring_eesti_elanike_hoiakutest_pagulastesse_nov.2016.pdf) [Accessed 1 April 2017]

addressed issues related to the European refugee crisis, the Estonian diaspora and attitudes towards immigrants.<sup>5</sup>

In November, the National Contact Point of Estonia for the European Migration Network (EMN) organised an international conference on the recognition of foreign qualifications, entitled '**Assessment and Recognition of the Qualifications of Third-country Nationals: Challenges and Best Practices**'. Besides addressing the existing recognition and assessment practices across Europe, the participants sought to find new ways in which to ensure the transferability of educational qualifications between countries.<sup>6</sup>

Integration issues continued to be addressed at the Integration Foundation's conference in November 2016, where the focus was on combatting radicalization. '**Integration Challenges in a Radicalizing World**' brought together leading experts on integration issues, policy-makers and hands-on practitioners from Estonia and around Europe to share visionary ideas, research results and best practices for the effective integration in diverse societies.<sup>7</sup> Another conference on radicalization was also organised by the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, '**Common Sense vs Radicalization: What we need to know?**'<sup>8</sup>

In December, the Estonian Institute of Human Rights hosted its annual traditional Conference on Human Rights for the sixth time, entitled '**Black-and-White Values in a Polarizing**

**World**'.<sup>9</sup> The conferences focused this year on immigration and propaganda as it related to the freedom of speech, asking "Who is European and who has the right to be European?"

Issues related to migration and asylum, however, are being increasingly addressed in other conferences as well. From those aimed at the private sector (e.g. the annual conference of The Estonian Employers' Confederation in 2016 focused on labour migration to Estonia)<sup>10</sup> to those targeting the public or the third sector (e.g., 'Multicultural school – how to support students, parents and teachers?').<sup>11</sup> These developments highlight among other things that migration is being increasingly viewed as a mainstream issue, closely tied to all aspects of day-to-day life in Estonia.

5 Ministry of the Interior (2016). *Rändeala Arvamusfestivalil: kas on siis rändekriis või mitte?*. Available at: <https://www.siseministeerium.ee/et/uudised/randeala-arvamusfestivalil-kas-siis-randekriis-voimitte> [Accessed 1 April 2017].

6 European Migration Network (2017). 'Assessment and recognition of the qualifications of third country nationals in Europe: Challenges and best practices'. Available at: <http://emn.ee/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/nr7-2017.pdf> [Accessed 28 April 2017]

7 The annual conference of the Integration Foundation, 'Integration Challenges in a Radicalising World'. More information available at: <http://misa-konverents.ee/>

8 The annual conference of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, 'Common Sense vs Radicalization: What we need to know?'. More information available at: <http://www.sisekaitse.ee/conference/>

9 The annual conference of the Estonian Institute of Human Rights, 'Black-and-White Values in a Polarizing World'. More information available at: <http://aastakonverents.humanrightsestonia.ee/en/conference-of-human-rights-2016/introduction-2016-2/>

10 The annual conference of the Estonian Employers' Confederation, 'Kite Flight 2016 - Welcome to Estonia?'. More information available at: <https://www.employers.ee/tuulelohe/2016/welcome>

11 Conference organised by Estonian Refugee Centre and Tartu University, 'Multicultural school – how to support students, parents and teachers?', 21 October 2016. More information available at: <http://www.pagulasabi.ee/hariduskonverents>

### III. LEGAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Estonia revised its immigration system to attract skilled migrants. Main changes included the introduction of special regulation for start-ups and investors, lowering salary requirements and exempting IT specialists, startups and investors from the immigration quota.

#### Introduction

Legal immigration to Estonia has been growing in recent years (see Fig 1). In 2016, a total number of **4069 first-time residence permits were granted in Estonia<sup>12</sup>** and the immigra-

The gender breakdown reveals differences both in numbers and reasons for which the permits were issued (see Fig 3). **Men received more permits** (2553 or 62.7%) than women (1516 or 37.3%) and **primarily for remunerated activities** (1152 permits). **The most common**

#### What is the immigration quota?

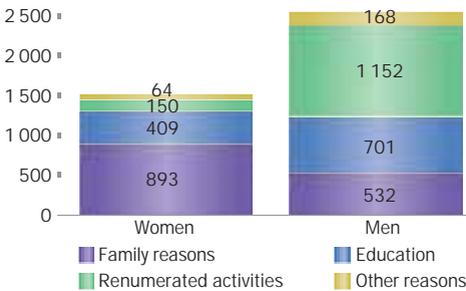
The immigration quota limits the number of aliens who can settle in Estonia. According to the Aliens Act, the total number should not exceed 0.1 per cent of the permanent population of Estonia annually. The immigration quota for 2016 was thus 1317.

In practice, however, many groups are excluded from the quota. Those excluded are, for instance, family members of Estonian citizens, foreign students and citizens of some third countries (USA

and Japan) to name a few. Recent amendments to the Aliens Act also exempted IT professionals, start-up entrepreneurs and large-scale investors from the quota. This is why the total number of first-time residence permits issued per year is significantly higher than the official quota. As more and more groups are being excluded, there are political discussions if it is necessary to have a quota in the first place and whether Estonia should repeal it instead.

*Source: The Ministry of the Interior*

**Fig 3. First residence permits by gender and reason, 2016.**



*Source: PBGB*

**tion quota was filled for the first time in Estonia.** The numbers are expected to continue to rise in coming years.

<sup>12</sup> This does not include first-time residence permits issued for International protection/humanitarian reasons and to individuals as part of free movement of EU/EEA citizens.

**reason for women was family reunification** (893 permits). Education was the second most common reason for both men (701 permits) and women (409 permits). Top countries of origin were Ukraine (1287) and Russia (1040) (see Fig 4 for Top 5 countries by reason).

#### Legislative changes

Since 2013, **Estonia has been actively reforming its legislation in the area of legal migration to attract foreign workers** that could contribute to the Estonian economy and society. The first round of amendments came into force in September 2013 and the second round in January 2016. It is hoped that moderate increases in immigration could help to counterbalance the consequences of ageing population, emigration and help the country to rejuvenate its economy.

Fig 4. Top 5 countries of origin by reason in 2016.

Family reasons	Education	Remunerated activities	Other reasons
Russia (620)	Russia (143)	Ukraine (799)	Undetermined citizenship (137)
Ukraine (337)	Ukraine (141)	Russia (211)	Russia (66)
Belarus (71)	Nigeria (132)	USA (59)	Ukraine (10)
USA (46)	Bangladesh (76)	Belarus (52)	Albania (5)
India (25)	Georgia (75)	India (42)	USA (4)

The third round of amendments to the Aliens Act and other associated legislations were introduced and **passed in 2016**, coming into force in several stages throughout 2017. Two bills were passed with **Bill 251** introducing amendments with the intention to attract foreign skilled work-

The main amendments included the following:

- ★ The establishment of **special regulation for start-ups** to facilitate both the mobility of start-up entrepreneurs and aliens coming to work at an Estonian start-up.

### Key regulations in the field

Legal migration to Estonia is regulated by a number of parliamentary Acts. Main ones include the following:

- ★ **The Aliens Act** regulates the bases for the entry of aliens into Estonia, their temporary stay, residence and employment in Estonia and their legal liability for violation of obligations provided for in the Act.
- ★ **The Citizen of the European Union Act** provides for the legal bases of the temporary stay and residence in Estonia of citizens of the member states of the European Union, citizens of the member states of the European Economic Area or citizens of the Swiss Confederation and their family members.
- ★ **The Act on Granting International Protec-**

**tion to Aliens** provides for the legal bases for the temporary stay, residence and employment in Estonia of applicants for international protection and of those who have been granted protection.

- ★ **The International Military Co-operation Act** provides for the legal bases for the entry into Estonia, temporary stay, residence and employment in Estonia of aliens entering Estonia in the framework of international military co-operation.

The legal bases for the temporary stay, residence and employment in Estonia of the staff of diplomatic missions and consular posts of foreign states and their family members are provided by treaties and other instruments of international law.

ers, including start-up entrepreneurs and investors and **Bill 252** harmonizing national law with EU Directives 2014/66/EU on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer and 2014/36/EU on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers. Both Bills 251 and 252 are **directly intended to address labour market needs by facilitating the admission and mobility of migrant workers at all levels.**

- ★ The possibility to issue temporary **residence permits for foreign investors** who have made investments in Estonia that exceed **1 million euros.**
- ★ **The creation of a new intra-corporate transferee category** for foreign employees who have already received a residence permit from another EU Member State.
- ★ The establishment of conditions of entry and stay for the purpose of **seasonal work** and a range of measures to avoid labour exploitation.

- ★ **The list of fields eligible for hiring aliens temporarily will be expanded** to include occupations beyond those of skilled worker, expert, adviser or consultant to include individuals with lesser qualifications.
  - ★ **Exempting foreign IT professionals and start-ups from the regular immigration quota cap** in Estonia (in 2016, the cap was 1,318 or 1% of overall population in Estonia).
  - ★ **Salary requirements** for foreign workers **will be lowered** to meet the Estonian average gross wage.
  - ★ **Extending the rights** currently afforded to foreign students enrolled in degree programmes in Estonian academic and vocational universities **to encompass individuals obtaining Level-4 and Level-5 vocational qualifications** in Estonia.
  - ★ For foreigners legally present, introducing a **possibility to apply** for a long-stay visa or a residence permit in Estonia **without having to leave the country**.
  - ★ **Simplifying the application procedures** by reducing the number of additional documentation to be submitted.
  - ★ The right for aliens to work short-term without a residence permit will be **extended from 6 months to 9 months**. Also the sectors where short-term employment is allowed will be widened.
  - ★ Easing the continuous residence and physical presence requirements for aliens holding a residence permit in Estonia, including **abolishing the requirement to notify the Police and Border Guard Board (PBGB) of absences of more than 183 days** per calendar year.
- In the field of legal migration, the overall focus in recent years has been on attracting skilled workers, yet the priority groups last year were **start-up entrepreneurs and workers, big investors, intra-company transferees and seasonal workers**.
- Over the next year, the focus will shift to **students and researchers** as the government is planning to introduce further amendments to the Alien's Act with the harmonization of EU Directive 2016/801/EU on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or edu-

#### **Start-up entrepreneurs and workers**

The amendments passed in 2016 established a special regulation for start-ups to facilitate both the mobility of start-up entrepreneurs and aliens coming to work at an Estonian start-up. Start-up visa/temporary residence permit eligibility is linked to the economic potential of the business model, which will be evaluated by an expert committee appointed by the relevant Minister. An exemption from the expert committee evaluation is provided for start-up entrepreneurs who have been accepted to participate in an approved start-up accelerator program in Estonia or who have already been qualified by the regulation of Ministry of Interior as startups. Startups may higher foreign employees without the salary criterion and without the Unemployment Insurance Fund permission. They are also excluded from the immigration quota. Start-up founders have facilitated conditions to enter Estonia and are also exempted from the investment requirements that are in place for more established companies.

#### **Investors**

Foreigners with investments in Estonia that exceed 1 million euros will be now subjected to special regulation when applying for residency. Aliens are eligible to apply for a residence permit for investors if they have either made direct investments in an Estonian company whose economic activity takes primarily place in Estonia or indirect investments in an investment fund that invests primarily into companies listed in the Estonian Business Register. The requirements need to be fulfilled throughout the validity of the temporary residency permit.

**Intra-company transferees**

The category of intra-company transferees (or ICTs) was introduced as a legal basis for entry and gaining a residence permit in Estonia. This relates directly to the harmonization of Directive 2014/66/EU on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer. Directive differentiates between short-term and long-term (over 90 days) transfers, offering the Member State an option to issue their own residence permit in the case of long-term transfer. Estonia has opted out from this, allowing to work in Estonia with the ICT permit issued by another Member State. ICTs have to register their transfer prior their arrival with the PBGB.

**Seasonal workers**

The conditions of entry and residence of seasonal workers were changed as part of the harmonization of EU Directive 2014/36/EU. Although seasonal migration was also allowed previously, these amendments make it more flexible by excluding seasonal workers from the salary requirement stipulated in the Aliens Act and expanding eligible sectors (Hospitality and Tourism Sector alongside Agriculture). A range of measures were also introduced to avoid labour exploitation. Employers wishing to hire foreign seasonal workers now have to supply an employment contract prior the arrival of a foreign worker and have the obligation to compensate for lost income of the temporary worker if the employment ends before the end of the agreed duration for reasons that are dependent on the employer. There is also a requirement for seasonal workers to have an adequate accommodation during their working period.

cational projects and au pairing with national law. Also, the Ministry of Interior has launched a **fourth round of amendments** to facilitate the entry of skilled workers.

**Visa policy**

In 2016, there were **124 210 visas issued by Estonia**. Overwhelming majority of those were **Schengen visas** (121 123, **97.5%**).

With the amendments that entered into force in 2017, changes were also introduced to the visa regulation. The **national visa is now issued for a validity of up to one year**. A possibility to prolong the visa was created for those wishing to continue their short-term employment or development of their startup. For foreigners already legally present in Estonia, it is now possible to apply for a national visa at the PBGB.

In accordance with the scheduled roll-out of the Visa Information System (VIS), **biometrics** are as of 16 February 2016 **gathered for all Schengen visas** issued (with the legally allowed exceptions) by the Republic of Estonia.

**Managing migration**

Recent reforms in Estonia also sought to **streamline the existing system** overall to

make it both **more client-friendly**, but also to make it **more manageable** for local authorities. This included, for instance, the launch of PBGB's new advisory system.

Among other things, the continuous residence and physical presence requirements for aliens holding a residence permit in Estonia were eased by **removing the requirement to notify the PBGB of absences** in excess of 183 days per calendar year. Moreover, the possibility for TCNs legally present in Estonia to **apply for a long-term visa or a residence permit while already in Estonia** was also introduced.

In addition, significant changes were introduced to the procedures relating to the extension of temporary residence permits as **prior checks were replaced with follow-up checks**, where-upon legal proceedings to extend the permit will need to be started only in situations, where the circumstances that form the legal basis for stay have changed. In practice, this means that temporary residence permits will **be granted for a longer period of time without the need for extension**.

In March 2017, a new **migration advisory service** by the PBGB was launched with the aim to both facilitate legal migration and limit irregular migration.

### PBGB Migration Advisors

Immigration law in Estonia is complicated and rapidly changing, which can make it difficult for foreigners to manoeuvre the system. This is why a new migration advisory service was developed by the PBGB to offer accurate information and advice about legal migration so individuals could make more informed decisions. The service is intended both for foreigners seeking to move to Estonia, but also for employers seeking to hire foreign employees. Information is provided in Estonian, English and Russian. As of April 2017, there are 4 advisors working in three cities: Tallinn, Tartu and Jõhvi. Clients are advised in person, but also via phone, email and skype.

*Q: Why was it deemed necessary to launch this new service?*

A: "Previously it was difficult for a regular person to find relevant information about migration. There is a lot of information available, which can easily become overwhelming. This often resulted in individuals submitting wrong types of docu-

ments and information and slowing down their immigration process as a result. Or, instead, we saw at the PBGB that many gave up and decided against coming to Estonia at all.

Our service focuses solely on legal and procedural issues. In some ways, we offer services that in other countries immigration lawyers would offer, but compared to law firms we are able to access their applications and cater our advice to the individual in question. As Estonia does not have many lawyers specialising in immigration and this service fills this gap by offering free advice.

This need was confirmed by the success of the launch. Within the first two weeks, we were contacted ca 440 times. Most commonly via email by foreigners with very specific question, yet many companies and universities have also reached out to us. Organisations tend to have more complex concerns, which result in repeated inquiries. Most commonly asked questions have to do with the residence permit."

*Source: PBGB & [www.migrationadvice.ee](http://www.migrationadvice.ee)*

### Other aspects of legal migration

Legal reforms may create the necessary migratory pathways for skilled workers, yet additional effort is needed **to introduce Estonia as a possible destination for foreign talents**. "Work in Estonia, 2015-2016"<sup>13</sup> Action Plan, which is part of the National Reform Programme "Estonia 2020",<sup>14</sup> set out to find ways to do precisely that.

13 Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications (2015). Work in Estonia – välisspetsialistide Eestisse kaasamise tegevuskava. 2015–2016. Available at: [https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/work\\_in\\_estonia\\_tegevuskava.pdf](https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/work_in_estonia_tegevuskava.pdf) [Accessed 14 March 2017].

14 Government Office (2011). National Reform Plan: Estonia 2020. Available at: [https://riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/ees-ti2020/ees-ti2020\\_action\\_plan\\_en\\_05.05.16.pdf](https://riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Failid/ees-ti2020/ees-ti2020_action_plan_en_05.05.16.pdf) (updated version from May 2016) [Accessed 14 March 2017]

Work in Estonia initiative, currently led by Enterprise Estonia, was launched as a result, which seeks to introduce Estonia as an attractive living and working destination to potential, talented would-be employees worldwide.

## Work in Estonia Initiative

*Q: How does the initiative promote Estonia?*

A: “We have both online and offline activities. Online activities revolve around maintaining the website [workinestonia.com](http://workinestonia.com), which compiles, on the one hand, general information about Estonia and, on the other, practical information and tools on the topic of foreign specialists’ recruitment. The latter includes, for instance, all current employment opportunities with English as the main working language, but also Employment Contract templates in English for Estonian employers. In 2016, we also updated and disseminated different materials that introduce Estonia as a working destination, such as the Relocation Guide (available in English, Russian and Finnish) with the private sector.

Offline activities include work with media, promotional events and campaigns. In 2016, Work in Estonia carried out targeted campaigns in Ukraine and Finland to introduce Estonia as a destination for skilled specialists. This included an award-win-

ning “Book a job on Airbnb” campaign in Finland, which offered Finnish IT specialists a possibility to book a working table at an Estonian company of interest on Airbnb, instead of a place to stay for the night. In 2017, Work in Estonia plans to continue its outreach campaigns in Ukraine, but also explore new target countries like Turkey.”

*Q: What makes Estonia attractive to foreign workers?*

A: “We try to understand from different sources what do highly skilled specialists are looking for and what Estonia has to offer. An example is the cooperation with Teleport, an Estonian tech start-up that builds software to help people find out where they should live and work, to understand what makes Estonia attractive to foreigners. Data shows that our attractive features include environment, low cost of living, and our image as a digital e-society definitely helps. The most competitive feature, however, is definitely the possibility to fast track your career.”

*Source: Enterprise Estonia*

## IV. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** In 2016, first beneficiaries of international protection arrived through relocation and re-settlement schemes to Estonia, which was accompanied with legislative reforms.

### Introduction

Beneficiaries of international protection are received in Estonia currently under one of two scenarios. Firstly, individuals may have applied for international protection while in Estonia, and, secondly, persons, who have been relocated or resettled to Estonia.

**Beneficiary of international protection** is a person who has been granted refugee status or subsidiary protection status.

**Refugee status** is the recognition by a Member State of a third-country national or stateless person as a refugee. Refugee in the EU context, is either a third-country national who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country, or a stateless person, who, being outside of the country of former habitual residence for the same reasons as mentioned above, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling

If we include resettled and relocated individuals as well, then nearly half of all recipients of international protection in 2016 **originated from Syria** (58 individuals, **40.8% of all recipients**), followed by citizens of Iraq (27 individuals), Ukraine (21 individuals), Russia (9 individuals) and Afghanistan (7 individuals) (see Fig 6).

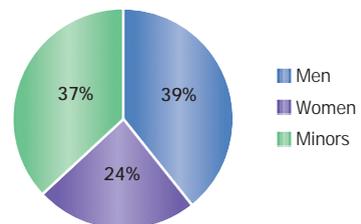
to return to it, and to whom Art. 12 (Exclusion) of Directive 2011/95/EU does not apply.

**Subsidiary protection** is the protection given to a third-country national or a stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to their country of origin, or in the case of a stateless person to their country of former habitual residence, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm as defined in Art. 15 of 2011/95/EU, and to whom Art. 17(1) and (2) of Directive 2011/95/EU do not apply, and is unable or, owing to such risk, unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country.

*Source: European Migration Network (2014)*

In 2016, **the total number of asylum applicants lodged in Estonia was 84** (33 were men, 20 were women and 31 were minors, see Fig 2 and Fig 5; see also Fig 2 for the total number of applications) and international protection was granted to 65 individuals (44 were given refugee status and 21 received subsidiary protection). It is important to note that these numbers do not include **77 individuals** arriving as part of **resettlement and relocation schemes** (31 were granted a refugee status and 46 received subsidiary protection). This means that altogether **Estonia granted international protection to 142 individuals in 2016**.

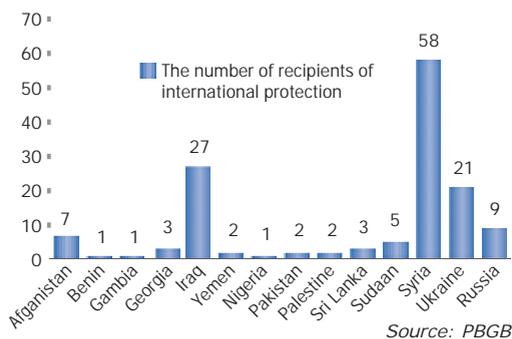
**Fig 5. Age and gender breakdown of applicants of international protection in 2016.**<sup>15</sup>



*Source: PBGB*

<sup>15</sup> This does not include refugees arriving as part of resettlement and relocation schemes

**Fig 6. Origin countries of all beneficiaries of international protection in 2016.**



**The Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens (AGIPA)**, originally passed in 2005 and has been amended several times subsequently, regulates the bases for granting international protection to a third-country national (TCN), the legal status of an TCN who is applying for international protection and of a TCN who has been granted in-

to get legal assistance in administrative court proceedings.

- ★ In order to prevent TCNs from submitting unfounded asylum applications, the law allows for a **list of safe countries of origin** to be compiled.
- ★ The conditions for the **expedited processing** of application were provided.
- ★ **A definition of a final decision** was established.

ternational protection and the legal bases for his or her temporary stay, residence and employment in Estonia on the basis of treaties and the legislation of the European Union. According to the Act international protection is granted to a TCN with regard to whom refugee status or subsidiary protection status is established.

## Legislative changes

In 2016, Estonia introduced a number of amendments to the Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens (AGIPA) to **streamline the existing system** and to **harmonise national legislation with Directives 2013/32/EU** on common procedures for granting and withdrawing International protection and **2013/33/EU** laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection. Amendments came into force on May 1, 2016.

Recent amendments are comprehensive and include, but are not limited to the following:

- ★ **The regulation of relocation and resettlement procedures** was introduced to facilitate Estonia's participation in relevant EU schemes.
- ★ **The registration of an application shall now take place immediately** after a person has submitted a wish to be granted international protection but **no later than in 3** (or 10 under special circumstances) **working days**.
- ★ It was established that under all circumstances, the individual has to be **informed of his or her situation and rights**, including the right

★ The law established a **general rule** according to which the applicant of international protection has **the right to stay in Estonia until the final decision**.

★ There were **changes to possible grounds for detention** and regarding **the process of extending the detention**.

## Resettlement and relocation

The year 2016 marked the first year of participating in resettlement and relocation schemes for Estonia. First refugees arrived as part of **relocation programmes in March 2016** and as part of **resettlement in August 2016**. Estonia is currently committed to **relocating 329 asylum seekers** from Italy and Greece and to **resettle 180 asylum seekers, most of them (160) in the context of the EU-Turkey Statement**. In 2016, **66 persons were relocated**, all of whom from Greece, and **11 refugees were resettled** to Estonia. The **relocation from Italy has been on hold for organizational reasons**, but is expected to start in 2017.

Several **legal amendments to the AGIPA** were introduced to facilitate the implementa-

### What is the difference between resettlement and relocation?

Resettlement is defined by UNHCR as 'the selection and transfer of refugees from a state in which they have sought protection to a third country that admits them – as refugees – with a permanent residence status'. In the EU, resettlement means the movement of refugees from a country outside of the EU to an EU Member State. In March 2016, EU and Turkey agreed to work together to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU. The EU-Turkey Statement seeks to put an end to smugglers' business and to replace disorganised, chaotic, irregular and dangerous migratory flows by organised, safe and legal pathways to Europe for those entitled to international protection in line with EU and international law. The EU and Turkey agreed among other things that all irregular mi-

grants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands will be returned to Turkey. However, for every Syrian being returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled to the EU from Turkey directly.

Relocation, however, refers to the movement of refugees from one EU Member State to another as an expression of solidarity, in which Member States help another Member State to cope with the pressure of hosting a relatively large refugee population by agreeing to receive a number of them. In 2015, the European Commission proposed to relocate 160,000 people by September 2017. The number of refugees each EU Member State should take is based on a distribution key calculated upon objective, quantifiable and verifiable criteria.

Source: UNHCR

tion of resettlement and relocation schemes and came into force in May 2016. Previously the application for international protection could only be submitted in Estonian territory or at Estonian border crossing points, but now **the application may be accepted by the PBGB in the territory of a foreign state**. This, however, only applies in the context of relocation and resettlement.

Estonian liaison officers have been deployed both to **Italy** (since 2015) and to **Greece** and **Turkey** (since 2016). The main task of the migration liaison officer is to facilitate **exchange of information** to carry out relocation and resettlement activities and to **establish links** with relevant international agencies.<sup>16</sup>

### Procedural changes

Alongside the amendments to the AGIPA, there were also **a number of changes in practices**, intended to make the procedures more applicant-friendly and efficient. The average processing time in 2016 was **89 working days**, a decline compared to the previous year when the average processing time had been 107 working days.

<sup>16</sup> Estonia made the formal commitment to participate in resettlement programmes in 2015, yet the actual implementation began in 2016.

In 2016, there was **a restructuring of the PBGB unit for international protection**. Case workers are now divided into '**generalists**' and '**specialists**' with the latter processing more difficult cases and one official specialising solely in Dublin procedures. Besides case workers, **a country of origin information (COI) expert** was employed.

The PBGB has also **increased the number of reserve officers** for asylum procedures, trained in collaboration with the IOM and AMIF. There are currently **200 reserve officers** with the right to accept applications for international protection. Out of all reserve officers, 59 may conduct the whole procedure and 8 are trained for relocation and resettlement procedures.

Additional regulations were developed for the successful completion of the process, including one regarding **the nature of interviews** ('*The order of conducting personal interviews with the applicant of international protection*') entered into force in 13.05.2016. It stipulates who are allowed to participate in an interview, what are the requirements for the interview and how the interview should be protocolled or recorded.

While there were no major amendments to the AGIPA regarding the appeal procedures specifically, the practices have changed significantly

## Estonia and the refugee crisis in Europe

In 2016, Estonia began accepting asylum seekers through resettlement and relocation schemes. Estonia is participating in these programmes voluntarily and in proportion to its weight within the European Union.

*Q: What were the main lessons learnt from the first year of operating resettlement and relocation schemes?*

A: „It is important to have an action plan and involve all stakeholders in its execution. In order to ensure the smooth launch of these schemes in Estonia, a working group was established to ensure the successful cooperation and coordination between various stakeholders, organising regular meetings with social partners by the Ministry of the Interior. Moreover, information events were organized in all counties to inform local representatives and population of the recent changes that have occurred in the area of international protection and to give answers to any questions that might have risen as a result. The collaboration between stakeholders was critical for successfully launching these schemes.”

*Q: Could you describe the relocation process?*

A: “Estonian authorities carry out all the necessary proceedings on-site in either Greece or Italy, including interviews and other expert consultations. The on-site relocation team consists of officials from the PBGB, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Estonian Internal Security Service. The need for international protection is thus determined before the people actually arrive in Estonia.

If the need is real and individuals are chosen to be relocated to Estonia, IOM organizes their transportation to Estonia. Once they arrive in Estonia, the final formal hurdle they need to get through is a medical examination at the airport. If they get a green light, they then meet with their own personal support person, who will guide them to their accommodation and helps them to settle into their new life in Estonia.”

*Q: How else is Estonia contributing to resolve the refugee crisis?*

A: “Alongside relocation and resettlement schemes, Estonia is also providing other types of assistance to other Member States with the migrant crisis unravelling in Europe. In 2016 the PBGB experts participated three times in EASO activities as part of the Asylum Support Teams, twice in Greece and once in Italy. The PBGB employees also participated in Frontex Joint Operations, ESTPOL missions and EASO activities, where they have provided help for the management of international migration crisis. This has included missions to Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Slovakia and Spain, where the PBGB employees have been deployed as documentation experts, capturing fingerprints, border guards, return officials etc. In addition to human resources the PBGB has provided support with equipment (e.g. providing patrol boats, surveillance cameras and CO<sub>2</sub> sensors). In cooperation with the European Union, Estonia also participates in preparing a long-term migration plan, a part of which should be targeted at resolving crises in the countries of origin.”

*Source: PBGB and the Ministry of the Interior*

over the last year. Previously, the return decision was generally issued together with the negative asylum decision. Since May 2016, however, the return decision is now issued after the final asylum decision, which means that it is now **possible for the rejected applicant to appeal twice** – firstly, the asylum decision and, secondly, the return decision. Before these changes in practice, these two decisions were generally appealed together.

## Support services for asylum seekers

**The provision of free interpretation and translation services** for refugees continued in 2016. The project was co-funded by the European Union through the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Estonian Ministry of the Interior. The aim of the project is to provide regular and high-quality translation services for uncommon languages in order to facilitate the proceedings of international protection or return.

Beginning from 2016, **free legal aid** financed by the State **is only provided during the legal proceedings in the Court**. At the same time in order to ensure access to legal remedy and awareness about their rights, the applicants for international protection **have access to daily legal counselling** in the detention centre as well as in accommodation centres and also while living outside from the centres by special counsellors to whom they can turn to. A new pro-

vision, however, was introduced to the Code of Administrative Court Procedure according to which **courts shall consider the examination of international protection cases a priority** to expedite the appeal processes. The Estonian Human Rights Centre in cooperation with the UNHCR continued to offer legal aid to asylum seekers in 2016, but only in **strategically important cases**.

### Housing asylum seekers

The legal pathway taken – whether one lodges their application in Estonia or arrives through resettlement/relocation schemes - influences refugees' first experiences in Estonia. While resettled and relocated persons know their legal status when they arrive, then those individuals, who arrive through the first pathway need to establish first whether they will be granted international protection. During that time, they are generally accommodated either at detention or accommodation centres, unless they have enough funds to

support themselves, or if some Estonian resident supports them, while they are waiting for the decision on their application.

The primary accommodation centre in Estonia is located in Vao, but in 2016, a new branch was opened in Vägeva. The new centre offers accommodation for up to 22 asylum seekers and mostly to families with children. The PBGB has established additional premises for temporary accommodation for up to 80 persons in case a TCN is in need of accommodation during the preliminary proceedings.

*Source: PBGB and the Ministry of Social Affairs*

## V. INTEGRATION

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Developments in the field of integration focused primarily on BIPs. Legal amendments made it compulsory for BIPs to participate in language courses and the international protection module of the Welcoming Programme.

### Introduction

Integration is a field that has received a lot of attention since the re-independence of Estonia in 1991, yet the focus has been primarily on Russian-speaking minorities. In recent years, however, the demographics of immigrants have been changing, which has prompted authorities to make adjustments to facilitate the arrival on new migrant groups.

As a result, Estonia has been launching different initiatives and measures to facilitate the integration of newcomers. The most important of these is **the Welcoming Programme**, which was launched in 2015. In 2016, the majority of developments in the field of integration focused on asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, which will be the main focus of this chapter.

### The Welcoming Programme

The Welcoming Programme is a set of trainings aimed at foreign nationals (third-country nationals, citizens of other EU countries and their families), who have legally resided in Estonia for less than 5 years. It was developed to help new migrants settle successfully in Estonia. The programme consists of various modules:

- ★ a basic module that gives an overview of the functioning principles of Estonian state, society, culture and people, rights and obligations of residents and public services;
- ★ additional thematic modules on work, entrepreneurship, family life, studying and research;

preneurship, family life, studying and research;

- ★ separate training modules for children and for beneficiaries of international protection;
- ★ basic level Estonian language training (level A1).

All modules take approx. 8 hours with the exception of language training (80 academic hours).

While the participation in this programme is generally voluntary, since 2016, it is compulsory for BIPs to participate in the international protection module of the Welcoming Programme.

*Source: The Ministry of the Interior*

### Legislative and policy changes

Legislative changes introduced in the field of integration impacted **primarily beneficiaries of international protection**. New provisions enacted in the AGIPA made it **compulsory for BIPs to participate in Estonian language courses, support person system and in the international protection module of the Welcoming Programme**.

Language course costs up to 1560€ are **compensated for the BIPs for two years** and it is expected that they will acquire:

1. Language proficiency **level A1 within one year** as of the granting of international protection.
2. Language proficiency **level A2 within two years** as of being granted international protection.

3. Language proficiency **level B1 within five years** as of being granted international protection.

The accommodation centres at Vao and Vägeva arrange language courses for those asylum seekers, who stay there. Language courses are also offered by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund. For the BIPs arriving in the framework of resettlement and relocation, language courses are offered by Tartu Folk High School.

### Other changes in the field of integration

#### FACILITATING CIVIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

In 2015, the Ministry of the Interior called together **a support network** to assist stakeholders working with newly arrived immigrants. The network continued to meet throughout 2016, facilitating information sharing and problem-solving so stakeholders could in turn promote the effective adaptation and integration of immigrants. Moreover, the network collaborates in developing the services offered and organise seminars on best practices. The support network meets regularly twice a year.

In 2016, there were a number of improvements proposed and implemented in the field of **educational attainment**. Since 2016, all

basic schools, where an immigrant is enrolled, receive **additional resources (€400 per year per student)** to provide language and cultural classes.

The Ministry of Education and Research is in the process of designing **a coherent and sustainable support system for non-native students**. In 2016, however, a pilot study was carried out to identify good practices in integrating immigrants and ethnic minorities. Those practises will be analysed and form the basis of policy recommendations. Moreover, in 2017 there will be **two manuals** developed for teachers: how to work with illiterate grown-ups and how to measure competency before a foreign student enters the Estonian educational system.

Estonia has also **continued to employ and improve its support person system**. According to the AGIPA, a beneficiary of international protection is **required to use the service of a support person** of international protection where appointed to him or her. Support persons help BIPs to settle into their new lives in Estonia. The system is designed to be flexible and cater to the specific needs of the beneficiary of international protection. The main NGOs involved in this are the Johannes Mihkelson Centre and the Estonian Refugee Council.

#### Support person system in Estonia

*Q: What can a BIP expect from their support person?*

A: "The aim of the service is to help the individual to settle and re-gain their independence – economic independence, social independence, linguistic independence. In other words, to make sure that they can function fully in the Estonian society. In the beginning, support persons help the individual to manoeuvre the bureaucratic system in Estonia: help them to sign up for different services, find a doctor, school for their children and all that. We have 20-30 steps that each BIP has to go through and our guidelines explain to the person receiving the service what the role of the support person in each step is going to be. Overall, they provide guidance, information and help them to socialise better.

Each month, however, their role as a support person should be decreasing and they should begin to distance themselves as support persons. This is not to say that they cannot remain friends, which often happens, but this would be outside the formal support person services system

In addition to support person services, we are organising also social clubs for our clients. We have already launched a 'Women's Club' in Tartu, where our female clients could come together in a safe place and share their experiences. They cook together, they had an OB/GYN over to discuss their health and so on. We are planning to launch this in Tallinn too. We are also thinking about organising similar social clubs for individuals looking for employment, where they could write CVs, prepare for interviews and find general support."

*Source: Interview with the Estonian Refugee Council*

In 2016, the UNHCR Regional Representation for Northern Europe conducted a **major study on the state of refugee integration** in Estonia, highlighting some of the key challenges that need to be addressed in coming years (See UNHCR, 2016).

While there were no major reforms in the field

of integration regarding other types of migrants, the key stakeholders have continued to improve the services offered. If the Welcoming Programme is meant for recent migrants, then the Integration Foundation offers integration help to foreign-born individuals who have lived in Estonia for more than 5 years.

### Integration of refugees in Estonia: UNHCR report

The study found that refugees faced difficulties in finding accommodation, learning the language in an efficient way, finding employment at the level of their qualifications and taking part in the socio-cultural life of the society without feeling discriminated against. Some of the specific obstacles identified by respondents included:

- ★ the short duration of residence permits granted to beneficiaries of subsidiary protection;
- ★ the lack of individual “labour inclusion plans”, which built on the refugee’s qualifications and aspirations, coupled with labour market-related cultural orientation sessions for both employers and refugee employees;
- ★ the lack of centralized language learning opportunities adapted to the needs of the refugees;

- ★ discrimination against refugee children in schools;
- ★ difficulties in finding housing and securing lease agreements due to, amongst other things, xenophobia and discrimination and short duration of residence permits;
- ★ insufficient provision of information about refugees’ rights and obligations in Estonia;
- ★ discrimination and xenophobia against refugees in the society at large.

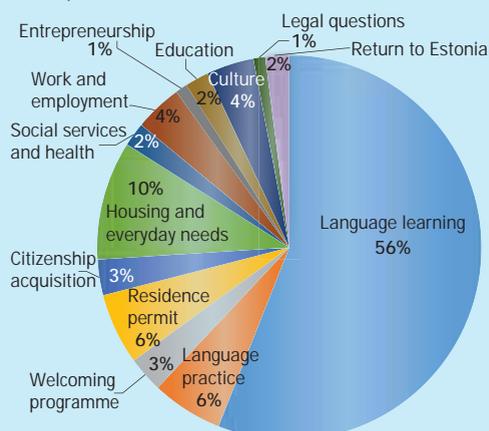
The report expresses the belief that by encouraging participation of refugees in the identification of opportunities and challenges we can empower the refugees and enhance their sense of responsibility and motivation, strengthening their ownership of the processes and also improve the quality of information that guides national policy makers.

*Source: UNHCR and Estonian Human Rights Centre*

### The Counselling Centre at the Integration Foundation

If the Welcoming Programme is only available to recent arrivals (last 5 years), then earlier arrivals and ethnic minorities can turn to the Counselling Centre at the Integration Foundation. This service was launched in 2014 and its consultants offer clients a wide range of integration-related information, including information on Estonian language studies and practice (‘language cafes’) or how to apply for Estonian citizenship. Individual consultations are available in Tallinn and Narva, but the Counselling Centre also has a free hotline. Since autumn 2015, the Integration Foundation has also been organising monthly consultation days outside of Tallinn and Narva and are available to

**Fig 7. Topics addressed in the counselling sessions, 2015-2016.**



*Source: Integration Foundation*

provide group advice and counselling on-site at workplaces.

Over the period of 2015-2016, the Centre counselled 2915 individuals in about 5200 sessions

with three most common concerns being language, housing and residence permit (see Fig 7).

Source: Source: Integration Foundation

### Equal treatment and non-discrimination

In 2016, Estonia was **piloting sensitivity trainings**, meant for law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and victim support specialists for sensitive, non-discriminative treatment of victims of crime for preventing their re-victimization during the proceedings. These activities are supported also by the Strategy for Preventing Violence 2015-2020.<sup>17</sup>

In 2017, Estonia is **preparing to ratify the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence**. The draft law for amending the Penal Code and other acts was sent to the Government for approval in January 2017.

Estonia is also preparing legal amendments to bring the definitions and sanctions of **incitement to hatred offences** in line with the EU Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia and make hate an aggravating circumstance.

As part of the 'Integrating Estonia 2020' development plan, which formulates the forthcoming seven-year objectives of the integration policy of the Republic of Estonia and the activities needed to achieve them,<sup>18</sup> the government has also begun to take more active steps to **enable and support inclusion and diversity within the public sector**.

### The linguistic composition of the public sector

The fulfilment of "Integrating Estonia 2020" development plan includes the analysis of linguistic background of public sector employees in Estonia. In 2016, the pilot study, entitled "Does mother tongue matter? The recruitment of individuals with a native tongue different from Estonian at the Ministries – from the HR practices to attitudes", was carried out. The aim of this study was to understand the current experience with and general attitudes towards hiring such employees by Secretary-Generals and HR managers. The report made recommendations how to improve the fair treatment of non-native speakers of Estonian. In addition,

a new methodology to measure the linguistic composition of the public sector was devised as a result. This will be used to carry out further studies on the linguistic composition in 2017. The aim is to repeat such studies in every 5 years.

In 2017, the Ministry of Culture, in partnership with the European Social Fund, will carry out a public awareness campaign, encouraging young people with a native language different from Estonian to apply to work in the public sector. The campaign is also aimed at the leadership of the relevant public institutions to encourage them to hire more non-native speakers of Estonian.

Source: The Ministry of Culture

17 Ministry of Justice. 2015. *Strategy for Preventing Violence for 2015-2020*. Available at: [http://www.kriminaalpoliitika.ee/sites/krimipoliitika/files/elfinder/dokumendid/strategy\\_for\\_preventing\\_violence\\_for\\_2015-2020.pdf](http://www.kriminaalpoliitika.ee/sites/krimipoliitika/files/elfinder/dokumendid/strategy_for_preventing_violence_for_2015-2020.pdf) [Accessed 11 April 2017]

18 Ministry of Culture (2014). *Lõimuv Eesti 2020*. Available at: [http://www.kul.ee/sites/kulminn/files/integrating\\_estonia\\_2020.pdf](http://www.kul.ee/sites/kulminn/files/integrating_estonia_2020.pdf) [Accessed at 10 April 2017]

## VI. VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** The numbers are currently minimal, but Estonia has been improving its legislation and service provision to ensure a better system for detecting victims and enhancing their access to support services.

### Introduction

Human trafficking is a constantly evolving phenomenon and evidence suggests that **human trafficking criminality is diversifying**, meaning that traffickers have developed more complex and multifaceted ways of exploiting victims.<sup>19</sup> While usually associated with sexual exploitation, human trafficking offences also include **labour exploitation, forced criminality, forced begging and sham marriages**.

Estonia has historically been a **source and transit country for victims of trafficking** in human beings rather than a destination country for victims of trafficking, which is why the number of victims is currently small.<sup>20</sup> In 2016, Estonian authorities detected **2 instances** of human trafficking of TCNs. Both cases involved labour exploitation and one of the victims was a minor.

Minors and children are considered a vulnerable population. Other vulnerable groups include but are not limited to pregnant women, elderly, disabled persons and those with chronic health conditions, including severe mental illness. **Vulnerable groups need special attention**, especially in situations of forced migration.

During the current refugee crisis, the growing number of unaccompanied minors has become a particularly critical problem across Europe. In Estonia, however, their **numbers are currently minimal**. In 2016, only **1** individual was recognised as an **unaccompanied minor**.

<sup>19</sup> Council of the Baltic Sea States (2017). Human Trafficking: Baltic Sea Region Round-up 2016. CBSS: Stockholm

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

### Legislative changes

#### VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In 2016, new amendments to the Victim Support Act were passed by the Parliament with the aim to **ensure a better system for detecting the victims** of trafficking in human beings and to **enhance their access to the victim support services**. All amendments to the Victim Support Act will come into force January 2017.

According to the amendments, presumed victims of human trafficking may be now **granted a recovery period of up to 60 days** before reporting the offence to authorities. Moreover, **the right to 60 days of support services** will be offered to all victims, even in instances if a decision is made to not to start criminal proceedings. NGOs now also have a right to identify potential victims for them to begin receiving support services.

The law now also ensures access to victim support services **in case the criminal procedure** against the crime of human trafficking has been **initiated outside Estonia** and if the victim of human trafficking has been identified as such by a competent authority of another country.

In order to **enhance domestic cooperation** in the field of trafficking and illegal employment, there were several **joint training sessions** for the Police and Border Guard Board, Estonian Tax and Customs Board, Labour Inspectorate and the prosecutor's office. In 2016, IOM organised **training sessions** to officials working with vulnerable groups.

## Unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups

Estonia is taking active steps to **take into consideration the special needs of vulnerable groups**, especially in relation to **asylum seekers**. The objective is to ensure that all administrative bodies dealing with applicants monitor the presence of special needs and offer systematic and individual support based on these special needs throughout the international protection procedure.

New provisions to the Act of Granting International Protection to an Alien (AGIPA) came into force in 2016 **establishing a more thorough regulation on the evaluation and consideration of special needs** of an applicant for international protection when carrying out procedural acts, providing also **a list of people with special needs** (such as disabled people, victims of human trafficking, persons with serious illnesses, persons with mental disorders and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence). In practice, however, the special needs were also taken into account prior to the new provisions.

Despite the small numbers of unaccompanied minors, Estonia has been also building its capabilities to handle greater numbers if necessary. Aforementioned amendments also **included new provisions to protect the rights and interests of minors**, such as establishing circumstances, when the application procedures for unaccompanied minors may be fast-tracked.

## Other developments in the field of human trafficking and vulnerable groups

### Raising awareness on human trafficking

In 2016, the Ministry of Justice and NGO Living for Tomorrow collaborated to design the first major public awareness campaign on human trafficking in Estonian since the early-2000s. The EU-funded '1LIFE' campaign will run in 2017 and will focus on three issues: labour exploitation, sexual exploita-

In 2016, **public procurement was undertaken** to find providers of government-funded services such as shelter and counselling for victims of human trafficking. The winners were NGOs Eluliin and SOS Lasteküla (SOS Children's Village), who had offered the same services before as well.

An important improvement in 2016 was the agreement between stakeholders at national level that unaccompanied minors, including those who are also victims of human trafficking, will be interviewed and all other necessary **proceedings carried out at the newly-established Children's House (Barnahus) using child-friendly methods** to safeguard children's rights and avoid any kind of re-victimization.

There have been also other improvements in service provision. Applicants for international protection with specific medical or psychological special needs are **granted access to health care services**, including mental health care services (psychological counselling and psychiatric treatment). **Free social services** (including psychological support and legal services) are provided for **victims of domestic violence** in 16 shelters all over Estonia. These shelters provide help also to disabled people, victims of trafficking, persons with mental disorders and other vulnerable groups. There are free specialised services also available for **the victims of sexual violence**.

Estonia **does not currently have a special policy or services intended for victims of female genital mutilation**. In Estonia, there are currently no registered cases of victims of female genital mutilation, but there is also a lack of knowledge about the phenomenon.

tion and the exploitation of minors.

*Q: What is the goal of '1LIFE' campaign?*

A: "1LIFE campaign seeks to draw attention to human trafficking in Estonia and encourage people to report it to the authorities. We are used to thinking of Estonia as a source or a transit country and Estonians as victims, but these things are happen-

ing also at home. Moreover, we also want to stress that human trafficking is not a synonym for prostitution and sexual exploitation, but encompasses much more: labour exploitation, forced criminality and debt bondage to name a few. "

*Q: How would you characterise human trafficking cases in Estonia?*

A: "We are seeing many cases of repeated victimisation, where victims have been exposed to several types of trafficking at the same time (e.g. labour and sexual exploitation). Labour exploitation seems to be on the rise as well. Living for Tomorrow hotline services are receiving more calls

about suspected labour exploitation. This involves Estonians abroad, but also TCNs present in Estonia. In particular, there have been a number of instances involving Ukrainian and Moldovan construction workers. When it comes to TCNs, however, human trafficking is often linked to human smuggling, in other words smuggled persons are also exploited during their journey. Estonia is a transit country for smugglers bringing people from or through Russia to Scandinavia, Poland and Germany, which is why our efforts to tackle smuggling are also important in our fight against trafficking."

*Source: The Ministry of Justice & NGO Living For Tomorrow*

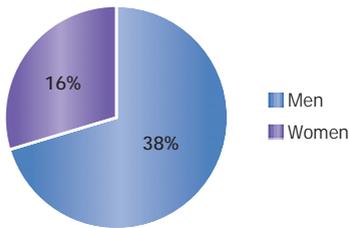
## VII. IRREGULAR MIGRATION INCLUDING SMUGGLING

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Investments were made to acquire new border check equipment and develop a new migration advisory service to facilitate legal migration and decrease irregular migration.

### Introduction

In 2016, there were **263 cases of illegal border crossing** and **526 TCNs were detained** as a result. The total number of TCNs crossing the EU's external border<sup>21</sup> was 60. The number of TCNs identified as smuggled persons that year was **54**, out of them 38 were men and 16 were women (See Fig 8).

**Fig 8. Gender breakdown of smuggled persons in 2016.**



Source: PBGB

### Legislative and policy changes

There were no major legislative and policy changes in this field. Estonia continued **implementing horizontal measures** in the context of irregular migration. Estonia **participates actively in the work of various EU programs and agencies**, using exchange of information for the more efficient organisation of irregular migration and returns. Estonia also launched a new migration advisory service, which seeks among other things to minimise irregular migration (read more about this in Chapter III).

In the context of monitoring illegal migration and human smuggling, the cooperation of third countries and the timely exchange of

operational information is vital. Estonian authorities have signed **cooperation agreements with neighbouring countries** to detect and prevent smuggling cases.

### Other developments in the field of irregular migration

In 2016, Estonia, however, made **significant improvements with regards to border control measures and equipment**. All border patrol checkpoints got **new equipment for document checks** (DORS1250), all magnifiers were replaced with **new mobile multifunctional control devices** (Regula 1019). In addition, new USB Microscopes were obtained and several other pieces of equipment (for instance, barcode readers, MICA inspection lights). Besides first line checks, several new Docubox HDs were obtained for second line checks. Further procurements are expected in 2017.

There were **two border checkpoints under construction** to provide better and smoother border checks and to handle additional flows of passengers and cars. In one of the checkpoints, this means separating the flow of trucks from smaller transportation to promote passenger flows.

New plans were also made for **the replacement of existing automated border control (ABC) systems** in Tallinn Airport and to introduce new ABC gates also to some land border checkpoints.

Moreover, training sessions and courses were conducted **to improve the capability of border control staff** in providing smoother border checks and dealing with the flows of passengers as well as handling and maintaining new acquired equipment.

21 This refers to Estonia's border with Russia.

In 2016, there were **improvements made to the border control information system (PIKO)** that had been implemented the year before. These developments help to guarantee the quality in data management to meet the standards of Schengen Borders Code.

## VIII. RETURN

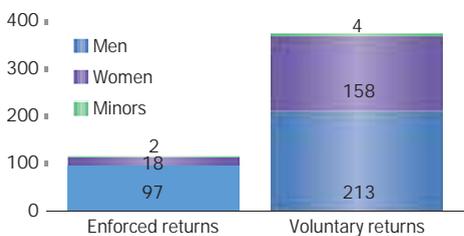
**KEY TAKEAWAY:** While there were no major legal developments in this area, Estonia focused on a better implementation of return directive and began to participate more actively in relevant EU programmes and joint operations.

### Introduction

Ensuring the return of irregular migrants is a critical part of all immigration systems as it enhances the credibility of policies in the field of international protection and legal migration. The need for effective return policies has become particularly critical during the migration crisis unravelling across Europe.

In 2016, a total number of **486 individuals returned** following an order to leave Estonia. Out of those, **115 individuals returned** as part of **forced return** measures and **371 returned voluntarily** (see Fig 9 for a gender breakdown). Among TCNs returned voluntarily, 40 individuals returned as part of an assisted return programme (IOM's VARRE programme).

**Fig 9. The gender breakdown of TCNs returned, 2016.**



The highest number of TCNs ordered to leave as part of forced return measures were citizens of the following countries: **Vietnam, Russia, Ukraine, Iraq** and **Belarus**. When it came to voluntary returns, the highest number of individuals originated from **Russia, Ukraine, United States, Georgia** and **Belarus**.

### Legislative and policy changes

There were **no major changes in the existing legislation in 2016**, yet smaller modifications were introduced in the law and practice to make the system more efficient. This is partly because there is currently a lot of uncertainty about the direction of return policies at the EU-level.

In 2016, the definition of **the risk of absconding** in the Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act (OLPEA) was **supplemented by an additional criterion**, according to which absconding may occur if an alien has left without a permission the designated place or other member state of the Schengen convention.

There was also a change in the law and practice regarding **the process of extending the detention**. Previously the administrative court could extend the detention term up to two months at a time in case the basis for detention still existed and detention was a proportionate measure, currently the court can extend the detention term up to **four months**.

The development of **a database of aliens staying without a legal basis** in the country was also started in 2016. The aim of the database is to enable electronical identification of aliens who are staying illegally in the country as well as conducting the proceedings of detention and injunction. The project is funded from the Asylum-, Migration-, and Integration Fund, and its development should be **completed by 2018**.

Illegal stay of visa-free country nationals is not a significant trend in Estonia. Despite this, **visa-free migration is monitored**. If problems are discovered, the return of persons from visa-free third countries have been efficient.

Since the accession to the common Schengen visa zone, Estonia has **inserting entry bans to the SIS system** and individuals are informed promptly guaranteed. There is also **preparedness to start entering also return decisions** to the SIS system if deemed necessary by the European Commission.

### Cooperation on joint return actions

In 2016, Estonia begun to participate more actively in the work of various EU programmes and agencies to exchange information for the better management of irregular migration and the more efficient organization of returns.

Estonia **contributes to FRONTEX and EASO activities** according to its capabilities, sending national experts and technical support in order to help member states under extreme migration pressures. Estonia plans to continue with these activities, including contributing to the reserve of return experts and escort officers in deportation operations. Under the EURLO programme, Estonia also deployed its communication officer in charge of returns to India.

Estonian officials took part in the area of return **Schengen assessments**. Officials of the PBGB as well as the Ministry of the Interior were **trained to use the information system IRMA**.

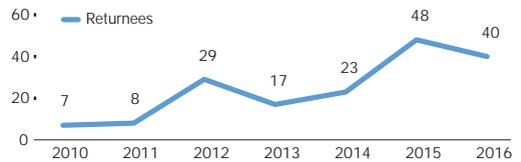
### IOM's VARRE Programme

Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme from Estonia (VARRE) provides the individual with the option to return home voluntarily. This humanitarian programme assists migrants in need who wish to voluntarily return from Estonia to their country of origin but do not have the necessary means. After returning home, the individual is eligible also for reintegration assistance from the local IOM office. In order to qualify for assistance, the PBGB must not have issued the order of expulsion yet and the person must wish to return home voluntarily and fulfil one of the following conditions: (1) person is staying in country irregularly his or her residence permit or visa has expired, (2) his or her asylum application has been rejected, (3) he or she has withdrawn their asylum application

### Measures to promote voluntary return

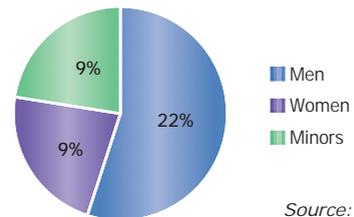
Since 2010, the IOM Estonia has been implementing the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme from Estonia, known as VARRE. In 2016, **40 individuals** returned voluntarily through VARRE, which is less than in 2015 (see Fig 10). The most popular return destination was **Ukraine** (14 individuals), followed by Lebanon and the United States (both 5 individuals) and Armenia (4 individuals). The majority of returnees were adult **men (22 individuals)**, but also 9 women and 9 minors left Estonia through the assisted return programme (see Fig 11).

**Fig 10. Voluntary returns through VARRE, 2010-2016.**



Source: IOM

**Fig 11. People returned through VARRE in 2016.**



Source: IOM

and (4) he or she is beneficiary of international protection has revoked their international protection.

*Q: How has VARRE changed in recent years?*

A: "The programme itself has remained largely the same. We have made some small adjustments, but nothing big. What has changed, however, is the profile of people choosing to return. More and more people also need help with acquiring the necessary documentation to travel, so this makes up a bigger part of our work. We also have more families rather than single individuals leaving and in 2016, for the first time, we had people returning through VARRE, who had been granted international protection and thus had a legal basis to remain in the country."

*Q: What does the reintegration assistance entail?*

A: "Reintegration assistance may include skills-based training and education, help with applying for a job, or with establishing their own business. The general aim of the reintegration assistance is to facilitate your return by providing you with material support. This can in practice mean different things. For example, we helped one Iraqi man with opening a barbeque restaurant and another

with buying merchandise for a shoe shop. When it comes to a family that decided to return to Lebanon, IOM covered tuition fees for their children. With another family in Armenia, we also helped with children's education, but it involved music classes and instruments. It really depends on the person and their needs, previous skills etc."

*Source: IOM and varre.directmedia.ee*

## Monitoring return

Estonia has a functioning monitoring system. Since 2011, the Estonian Red Cross has been contracted by the State to monitor the forced returns of migrants. The monitoring activities continued in 2016. This initiative is co-funded by the European Union through the European Asylum,

Migration and Integration Fund and the Estonian Ministry of the Interior. In 2016, the Estonian Red Cross observed 44 enforced returns of 66 individuals (including 3 women, one minor and one person with special needs). Red Cross also made 3 visits to the detention centre at Harku to observe the conditions there, yet no violations were found.

## Monitoring enforced returns

The Estonian Red Cross is informed when enforced returns are expected to take place. Observers can then monitor the transfer of an individual from Harku detention centre to the border. If there are, however, vulnerable groups (including women and children) involved, observers will accompany the returnee until the destination country. After each monitoring, a detailed report is submitted.

*Q: What do you monitor during the returns?*

A: "One of the core missions of the Red Cross globally is to ensure that all individuals are afforded due process, held in decent conditions and treated humanely. These inform also our observations during the return process. We do not intervene, but we observe how the authorities treat the individual. Not only whether coercive measures are used, but whether the returnees are briefed properly, treated with

dignity and whether their basic needs are met at all times. If we accompany the returnees to their final destination, then we observe how they were treated during the transit as well. Ideally, the returnees should be treated as any other passenger and should not be recognizable as somehow different. We have a long list of things that we observe and we always make suggestions to the authorities on what they could improve.

While monitoring is important for individuals returned as part of forced return measures, many people do not realise that it is also important for the officials carrying out the procedures. This also helps to minimise false accusations that could undermine the credibility of the system in place. It is not our place to question the return decision – this is the role of the court system – the Red Cross is there to make sure that everyone involved is treated humanely and fairly."

*Source: Interview with the Estonian Red Cross*

## IX. MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** There were no major developments in this area in 2016 and Estonia has continued with policies and projects established in previous years.

### Introduction

Estonia's development policy follows standards established in 2003 by the **Principles of the Estonian Development Cooperation**,<sup>22</sup> which states that an integral part of Estonian foreign policy, development cooperation is directed towards ensuring peace, democracy, the observance of human rights, economic and social stability and the eradication of poverty in the world in accordance with internationally approved principles of sustainable development. These principles have guided all strategy plans and policies since then, including those in the field of migration.

### Legislative and policy changes

In 2016, there were **no major legislative changes** in the field of migration and development and the country **continued with policies and strategies established in previous years**. The current strategy is outlined in the '**Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Strategy 2016-2020**', which built on the previous strategy for 2011-2015 as the underlying principles and directions were continued and developed further.

This strategy also **links development cooperation to the attempts to reduce migration pressures**, stating that "Safeguarding stability in developing countries also ensures a liveable environment for people and reduces their need

to leave homes, at the same time decreasing forced and illegal migration".<sup>23</sup>

The strategy document names **Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Belarus** as Estonia's priority partners in development cooperation, because the government believes that in these countries Estonia can offer additional value on the basis of its own experiences.

### Civil society initiatives

In 2003, 'Principles of the Estonian Development Cooperation' established that **civil society organisations are expected to play a key role in Estonian development cooperation** by participating in policy formulation, preparing and implementing concrete projects and presenting the subject matter to the Estonian population. Two of the most active NGOs in this field are Mondo and the Estonian Refugee Council.

22 Ministry of the Foreign Affairs (2003). *Principles of Estonian development cooperation*. Available at: <http://www.vm.ee/en/principles-estonian-development-cooperation> [Accessed 10 March 2017]

23 Ministry of the Foreign Affairs (2015). *The Strategy for the Estonian Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid 2016–2020*. Available at: [http://vm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/development-cooperation/2016\\_2020\\_arengukava\\_eng\\_kodulehele\\_0.pdf](http://vm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/development-cooperation/2016_2020_arengukava_eng_kodulehele_0.pdf) [Accessed 10 March 2017]

### **Estonian Refugee Council's humanitarian projects in Ukraine and Turkey**

*Q: What humanitarian aid projects did the Estonian Refugee Council participate in last year, 2016?*

A: „In 2016, we were actively involved with several humanitarian projects in Ukraine and Turkey. 'For Ukraine!' was our first humanitarian project abroad. It started in 2014 and initially involved providing IDPs with food, hygiene products, bed linen and medicine and other medical supplies. Now, however, the focus has changed, because the needs of IDPs have changed. We are currently offering busi-

ness development grants instead to support these individuals in rebuilding their lives.

Since 2015, we are also involved with two projects in Turkey. One of them offers educational and psychological support services to refugee children in the city of Reyhanlı in Hatay Province, a mere 5km from the Syrian border. Many of these kids have been out of school for years and have been traumatised, so we are paying for psychologists to work with the kids and their families to offer them a better chance in life. The other project provides basic necessities and supplies to Syrian refugees based in Ankara.”

*Source: Interview with Estonian Refugee Council*

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