

Estonian Language Training for Adults with Other Native Languages as Part of Estonian Integration and Employment Policy: Quality, Impact and Organisation

Part I:

Overview of the study and summary of results



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The study “Estonian Language Training for Adults with Other Native Languages as part of Estonian Integration and Employment Policy: Quality, Impact and Organisation” consists of the following parts in separate files:

- 1. Overview of the study, summary of results and policy recommendations**
2. The population’s language learning experience so far and demand for Estonian language training
3. Perspective of language training providers on offering Estonian language training
4. Estonian language training provided as a labour market service
5. Report on the methodology of the study

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION: THE BACKGROUND, PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY	4
THE STATE-SET OBJECTIVES, THE ORGANISATION AND SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ESTONIAN LANGUAGE TRAINING FOR ADULTS WITH OTHER NATIVE LANGUAGES	4
OBJECTIVE AND TASK OF THE STUDY	8
METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS OF THE STUDY	8
RESULTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	10
INTRODUCTION.....	10
I. NEED FOR ESTONIAN LANGUAGE TRAINING AND MOTIVATION FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING.....	10
<i>Language proficiency, intention to learn the language and the necessary amount of language training.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>State funding for Estonian language learning.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Motivation for Estonian language learning.....</i>	<i>14</i>
II. ORGANISATION AND QUALITY OF ESTONIAN LANGUAGE TRAINING	16
<i>Overall satisfaction.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Modernisation of skills and learning materials of training providers.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Structure of training courses.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Support structure of Estonian language training</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Composition of training groups.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Lack of language teachers for adults.....</i>	<i>21</i>
III. EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF ESTONIAN LANGUAGE TRAINING.....	22
REFERENCES	24

Introduction: the background, purpose and methodology of the study

The state-set objectives, the organisation and shortcomings in the Estonian language training for adults with other native languages

Pursuant to the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the state of Estonia must guarantee the preservation of the Estonian language through the ages. Based on that, providing state support for teaching the Estonian language to those adult residents of Estonia who do not speak Estonian is justified according to the value-based language policy objectives. At the same time, the Estonian language skills also have a pragmatic purpose, related to equal participation opportunities of people with other native languages in the local labour market and social life. In the labour market, people with insufficient Estonian skills are in an unequal position – working in the public sector and in many private sector jobs require proficiency in Estonian.

Various strategic documents cover the topic of Estonian language training for adults: “Integrating Estonia 2020” (IE2020) (*Lõimuv Eesti 2020*); “Adult Education Programme 2018–2021” (*Täiskasvanuhariduse programm 2018–2021*) created for the implementation of “The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020” (ELLS2020) (*Elukestva õppe strateegia 2020*), “Language Programme 2018–2021” (*Keeleprogramm 2018–2021*), “Welfare Development Plan 2016–2023” (*Heaolu arengukava 2016–2023*). Different development plans include the need for teaching Estonian language to adults as part of their strategic objectives, primarily for the purpose of achieving better labour market prospects. Although Estonian language proficiency is included in various development plans and strategical documents, the latter do not set any specific targets as to what level of language proficiency is expected from every adult person in Estonia or what level of language proficiency is supported by the state in the Estonian language training for adults .

IE2020 sets an objective according to which the non-Estonian speaking working age residents who are less integrated and newly arrived immigrants **have guaranteed opportunities** to enhance their knowledge and skills for a more competitive participation in the labour market (IE2020:23). Some strategic documents expand the objectives of teaching the Estonian language. In the Adult Education Programme, proficiency in the official language of the country is treated as a key competency, which is essential for dignified self-realisation in the society, and in professional and domestic life. By developing key competencies, the readiness for independent learning and participation in lifelong learning will increase (Adult Education Programme 2018–2021:7).

Although IE2020 sets guaranteed opportunities to learn the Estonian language as one of its objectives, the fulfilment of this objective is measured by the **number of people with active language skills**. To benefit the society, i.e. to preserve the Estonian language and aid the employment of non-Estonians, it is specifically the share of people with active language skills that should increase. The achievement of this objective must be supported by effective learning opportunities.

State-supported Estonian language courses for adults with other native languages are currently offered within the framework of following measures:

- 1) **Integrating Estonia 2020** sets two objectives, which, among other things, offer Estonian language training to people with other native languages.

- a. *Objective 2. The social engagement of less integrated permanent residents with a foreign background has increased through acquiring Estonian citizenship and new social knowledge.* This objective includes, *inter alia*, integration training funded by the European Social Fund, which include Estonian language courses.
- b. *Objective 6. Working age residents with other native languages have guaranteed opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills for a more competitive participation in the labour market.* In IE2020, the achievement of this objective is foreseen through the development plan of the Ministry of Social Affairs and through ELLS2020. This objective includes two measures, the first of which is to increase the employment of non-Estonian residents through the provision of labour market measures offered by the Unemployment Insurance Fund (Töötukassa), including Estonian language courses for non-Estonian speaking population; and the second of which is to improve the knowledge of the official language of individuals with other native languages, which is a measure offered in the framework of the Ministry of Education and Research development plans (see the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy and the measures of the Language Programme).

The measures brought out in **Integrating Estonia 2020: Implementation Plan 2017–2020** under its objective of social engagement of less integrated permanent residents with a foreign background are as follows:

- c. language training at level A1 for less integrated permanent residents (600 study places, 66,000 euros in 2017; 132,000 euros in 2018),
- d. language training for 640 imprisoned persons per year (area of responsibility of the Ministry of Justice) with the planned cost of approx. 280,000 euros a year.

Integration training for less integrated permanent residents is offered through the **Operational Programme for Cohesion Policy Funds** (incl. Estonian language courses for achieving proficiency levels A2, B1 and B2). The participant targets for integration training were initially planned as 500 persons in 2016, 3,500 persons in 2017 and 5,500 persons in the following two years.

- 2) The **Welfare Development Plan 2016–2023**, guiding the domain of the Ministry of Social Affairs, sets more general objectives for the match between labour demand and supply, which ensures the high level of employment. This objective outlines the problem of unemployment risks of non-Estonian speaking residents, which are higher than for the Estonian-speaking community, and the reason for such risks, among other things, is the lack of Estonian language skills. To improve the labour market situation of this segment of the labour force, the authorities intend to continue offering individual labour market services. Estonian language courses for the unemployed are offered by the Unemployment Insurance Fund as part of their employment training, whereas no separate objectives have been established or separate funds allocated.
- 3) **The Adult Education Programme of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020** offers adults vocational refresher training and re-training, including for the development of key competencies. One of the key competencies is proficiency in the official language. The programme is being implemented with the support from the Operational Programme for Cohesion Policy Funds 2014–2020. One of the objectives of the Adult Education Programme (2018–2020) is to provide language courses for 12,000 people whose native

language is not Estonian. However, the objective covers training in key competencies in general and Estonian language is only a part of it. The total cost of such training is planned as 9 million euros in 2018 and 2019, and 8 and 4 million euros in 2020 and 2021 respectively.

- 4) The activities of the **Language Programme (2018–2020)** under measure 3.1 are targeted at improving the learning opportunities of Estonian as a second language. The objective is to create additional opportunities for learning the Estonian language for people in an unfavourable situation and citizenship applicants. Measure 3.1 of the programme foresees the reimbursement of language learning costs for approx. 800 people who successfully pass the proficiency exam (incl. citizenship applicants, persons sent to the exam on the grounds of the Language Act, as well as all other persons who pass the proficiency exam) per year. The development of a system for quality control and monitoring of Estonian language teaching is also supported. The total funds planned for these activities are 130,000 euros a year in the period of 2018–2021.

Activities (Activity 3.2) are also prescribed for teaching the Estonian language to the education workers in the public sector. The objective is to train 200 education sector workers in each year of the programme, of whom 75% would pass the language proficiency exam. These activities are carried out by the Integration Foundation (INSA) and the planned cost for the activities is approx. 240,000 euros per each programme year.

The overall picture of national organisation of Estonian language training for adults is complicated and fragmented between different contracting entities of language training and different development projects, such as the preparation for and organisation of Estonian language proficiency exams, development of digital learning tools, refresher training for teachers, etc. Based on budget volumes and participant numbers, the largest institutions procuring Estonian language courses for people with other native languages are INSA and the Unemployment Insurance Fund. Through the Unemployment Insurance Fund, a total of 1,500–2,000 persons a year have participated in Estonian language courses in the past few years, and the number of participants in INSA language courses, in the years the funding from Structural Funds is secured, is approx. 3,000 persons per year. Overall, in 2017, the EU Structural Funds and the state together financed about four million euros worth of Estonian language courses for adults with approx. 6,000 participants. In the years where the funding from structural funds is small or non-existent the training funds shrink by more than a half and so does the number of participants.

There are several challenges in the organisation of Estonian language teaching for adults:

- **So far, the level of Estonian language proficiency among the non-Estonian speaking population has increased, albeit slowly** (Kruusvall 2015). Based on the integration monitoring of 2011, the share of 15- to 74-year-old residents of other nationalities who were either fluent in Estonian or understood Estonian, could speak the language and write in it (Kivistik 2017:53), i.e. people with active language skills, was 36%. The results of the integration monitoring of 2017 revealed that the share of such people was somewhat higher (39–47%)¹. Over a slightly longer period of time, there has been a shift towards better knowledge of language – in 2002–2003, the share of Russian-speaking population with active Estonian language skills was 29% (Masso and Vihalemm 2005: 8).

¹ Calculations by the author based on the integration monitoring database, the age group is limited with up to 75-year-olds. Evaluation range at 95% confidence level.

- **Poorer Estonian language skills of non-Estonian speaking residents is linked to poorer prospects in the labour market.** Numerous studies have been conducted about labour market gaps based on nationality, but no direct conclusions about the disadvantages being linked to Estonian language skills could be drawn. A considerably smaller amount of studies have been carried out regarding the labour market gaps linked to Estonian language skills. There is a connection between the employment, unemployment and Estonian language skills of Estonian residents with other native languages (Toomet 2011, Krusell 2016). By using the data from the survey of adult skills (PIAAC), Halapuu (2015) indicated that when comparing people with similar background features, the better the Estonian language skills, the smaller the pay gap with the Estonian-speaking population. However, Toomet (2011) found that there is a connection between the income and the Estonian language skills when it comes to women (the salary was approx. 9% higher for those with better language skills), but such a link does not exist for men.
- **There are several shortcomings in the organisation of Estonian language teaching:**
 - **There is no information collected systematically to allow for the mapping of the demand for Estonian language training, for performance evaluation or consequential adjustment of supply.**
 - **The support structures of language training and the training supply are not organised based on the demand.** There is not enough knowledge for demand-based supply, the demand and supply of language training have not been analysed from this point of view, which is why it is difficult to offer demand-based Estonian language training. This is probably also the reason for regionally varying satisfaction levels with the organisation of language courses, as a result of which the people in Ida-Viru region are considerably less satisfied with the organisation of Estonian language training than the people elsewhere in Estonia. The lack of the Estonian-language communication environment in Ida-Viru region demands a different approach to learning and teaching the Estonian language compared to other regions where the Estonian-language communication environment exists.
 - Since several state institutions provide/procure Estonian language courses independently from each other and in line with their own objectives, the target groups of different providers partially overlap; there is a lack of clear division of labour and coordination between the institutions offering Estonian language training.

In summary, from the point of view of the state, there are two broader objectives for teaching Estonian language to the residents with other native languages: ensuring the viability of the Estonian language and a coherent society, including better labour market prospects for the residents with other native languages. The narrower objective of language teaching is to increase the level of Estonian language skills, which contributes to the achievement of broader objectives. To this end, there must be opportunities to learn the Estonian language, whereas those opportunities are not an objective in themselves but a means for reaching the objective. Since the time Estonia regained its independence, numerous funds from the state budget and the European Union structural funds have been used to increase the Estonian language skills. Nevertheless, many adults with different native languages are still not proficient in Estonian. The study assesses the level of Estonian skills of adults with other native languages and analyses how to better target

the provision of Estonian language courses in a way that reduces the number of people with no Estonian skills more efficiently.

Objective and task of the study

The objective of the study is to analyse the demand and supply of Estonian language training and, based on the analysis, make recommendations on how to reasonably alter the provision of non-formal Estonian language teaching² organised by the state. The analysis does not cover the Estonian language teaching as part of formal school education (general, vocational and higher education) but is focusing on non-formal language teaching. The study briefly touches upon the topic of informal teaching³ as it has some contact points with non-formal teaching, e.g. if independent learning replaces the learning in the form of training. The study consists of three main parts and each of these parts deal with different study questions that were established in the initial task of the study:

- 1) analysis of the demand for Estonian language training among the adult population with other native languages,
- 2) analysis of service providers,
- 3) analysis of Estonian language training provided as a labour market service.

The analysis of the demand for Estonian language teaching for adults with other native languages answers the research question from the population's view point. The analysis evaluates the following: the population's current level of proficiency in Estonian, the main motives and obstacles for learning Estonian, forms of language learning available, most popular forms of language learning and related needs and expectations.

The analysis of service providers is focused on the training providers offering Estonian language teaching services, their ability to offer training in Estonian and the shortcoming in providing the training, as well as the mechanisms ensuring the quality of the training.

The analysis of Estonian language training provided as a labour market service looks at the provision of Estonian language training by the Unemployment Insurance Fund from different angles. The analysis covers the organisation of language training, as well as its efficiency and effectiveness. The language training provision system of the other major national procurer of Estonian language training, INSA, is not analysed as thoroughly as the Estonian language training organised by the Unemployment Insurance Fund. Therefore, the conclusions of the survey are more reflective of the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

Methodology and results of the study

All three parts of the study are based on different data collection and analysis methods.

To carry out the needs analysis for Estonian language training among adults with other native languages, data from previous surveys was used in addition to the data collected from the population survey. More precisely, the data used included the feedback data from the training courses offered by INSA and the data from the Estonian Social Survey and integration monitoring. To cover the information gaps left by the above-mentioned sources, a representative survey of 15

² Non-formal learning is voluntary learning in different environments outside the school with the purpose of developing oneself.

³ Informal learning is a generic term for learning from experience.

to 74-year-old residents with other native languages was carried out with the aim to collect more data. The survey database contains the answers of 1,009 persons and the results can be generalised to the population of non-Estonian speakers in Estonia .

The analysis of service providers is based on a survey and interviews with service providers. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent to all training providers that offer Estonian language training listed in public registers. The invitation to participate in an online survey was sent to a total of 164 training companies. Since the parameters of the population of service providers are unknown, the respondents cannot be weighted and the responses from the sample cannot be generalised to the population of service providers. Therefore, the frequency distributions are only valid for the sample of service providers that participated in the survey. Focus group interviews and one-to-one interviews were used to collect data from the service providers.

To analyse the Estonian language training provided as a labour market service, the process of training provision was mapped with document analysis and interviews with the employees of the Unemployment Insurance Fund. For further details on the quality control procedure, an interview was also carried out at the Language Inspectorate. Data from the register of the Unemployment Insurance Fund was used to describe the number of participants in language training and the changes that had occurred over time. Two online surveys were carried out in January 2018 to find out about the views and attitudes of the unemployed who had participated in the training and those of the unemployed who belonged to the risk group due to their lack of knowledge of Estonian but who had not participated in the training. All the people who had participated in Estonian language training over the period 2015–2016 were surveyed, plus a random sample was chosen from among those who had not participated in the training. Additionally, an analysis of joined registry data of the Unemployment Insurance Fund and the Tax and Customs Board was carried out to evaluate the impact of Estonian language training. In the analysis, a control group who did not participate in the training was formed, matched to the participants in training with respect to their background characteristics. When comparing the employment and wages of the two groups, the impact of Estonian language training on labour market outcomes was evaluated.

Based on the synthesis of the three parts of the study and its joint part , the authors make recommendations on how to better direct the Estonian language training and to increase its effectiveness .

The results of the study are presented in three reports and a more thorough description of the methodology used for data collection and analysis can be found in a separate methodology report. The annexes of the methodology report include the data collection instruments. A report written for each part of the study gives answers to the research questions of the specific part set in the initial task of the study. The synthesis of the different parts of the study and the policy recommendations are included in the present report.

Results and policy recommendations

Introduction

The present section summarises the results of all three parts of the study –the institutions providing Estonian language training, the unemployed receiving Estonian language training through the Unemployment Insurance Fund and the population survey. The analysis focuses on the three main research questions:

- What is the need for Estonian language training and the motivation to study Estonian?
- What is the availability and suitability of Estonian language training and how satisfied are people with the quality and training methods?
- What is the efficiency and effectiveness of Estonian language training?

All these questions are considered from the point of view of both the institutions organising Estonian language training as well as the adult learners participating in the Estonian language training. The analysis does not include the narrow aspects of organising the Estonian language training, which do not directly influence the students' motivation to learn the language or the quality and availability of language training or the efficiency and effectiveness thereof (for instance, the cost of language training for the taxpayer, the calculations for which are made in the chapter about Estonian language training offered as a labour market measure). The policy recommendations resulting from the study are integrated in the text of the summarising chapter.

I. Need for Estonian language training and motivation for language learning

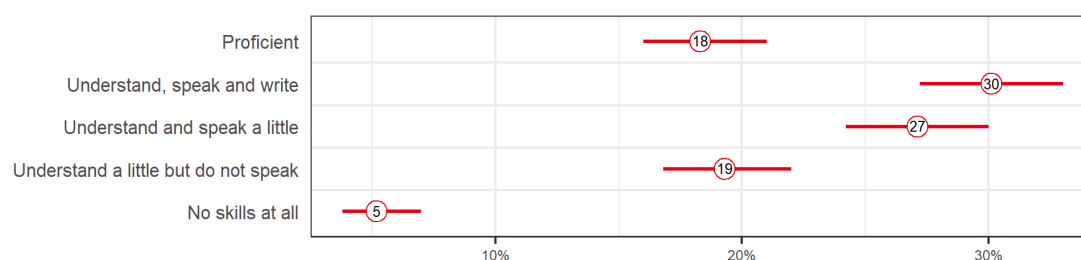
Language proficiency, intention to learn the language and the necessary amount of language training

According to the results of the survey, about half (43–54%, Figure 1)⁴the adults with other native languages are either fluent in Estonian or understand Estonian and can speak and write it (referred to here as active language skills) at the beginning of 2018. Therefore, the remaining half of the adults with other native languages (45–59%) do not possess active language skills in Estonian. If active language skills of all the residents of Estonia were the objective, then the latter would form a wide target group for refresher courses on Estonian. The estimated size of this group (among 15- to 74-year-olds⁵) is between 133,000 and 176,000 people (incl. approx. 11,000–21,000 people who have no knowledge of Estonian, 50,000–65,000 people who understand Estonian but do not speak it and 72,000–89,000 people who understand Estonian and also speak a little).

⁴ Evaluations of study results are presented using 95% confidence intervals.

⁵ Table RV071 from the online database of Statistics Estonia. *Native and foreign-origin population by county, sex and age*, 1 January. Foreign-origin resident is a person who does not belong to the native population. Native population is made up of people with at least one parent and a grandparent having been born in Estonia. The number of 15- to 74-year-old immigrants as of 1 January 2016 was 297,526.

Figure 1. Estonian language skills of 15- to 74-year-old adults with other native languages (proportions in % and 95% confidence intervals).



Source: survey of adults with other native languages in 2018

17–22% of people with other native languages (aged 15 to 74) are currently learning Estonian (i.e. 49,000–65,000 people), 18–23% of them plan to start learning Estonian in the next three years (52,000–68,000), 20–25% plan to do it in a more distant future (59,000–74,000). Approx. 35–41% of this population never plan to start learning Estonian (i.e. 104,000–122,000 people). Therefore, the total number of current learners of Estonian and people potentially interested in learning Estonian is approx. 161,000–208,000. This includes both people with a lower level of Estonian language skills who would need to study for a longer period of time or undergo several Estonian language training courses in order to achieve active language skills, as well as people with active language skills who wish to improve further.

Table 1. Plans to study Estonian by level of current skill, 15 to 74-year-old people (95% confidence intervals)

Level of language skills		Currently learning	Plan to learn in the next 3 years	Plant to learn in the more distant future	Do not plan to learn	Total
No skills at all	%	2–27%	10–33%	9–34%	39–70%	100%
	number	312–5,951	1,568–5,951	1,360–5,951	5,504–11,901	11,336–20,827
Understand a little but do not speak	%	5–14%	16–30%	27–42%	29–44%	100%
	number	2,755–8,926	9,045–17,852	14,787–26,777	16,185–26,777	49,984–65,456
Understand and speak a little	%	16–26%	21–32%	25–36%	18–29%	100%
	number	12,645–20,827	16,513–26,777	19,577–29,753	14,073–23,802	72,001–89,258
Understand, speak and write	%	20–31%	18–28%	13–22%	30–40%	100%
	number	17,822–29,753	16,126–26,777	11,604–20,827	25,915–38,678	80,927–98,184
Proficient	%	16–28%	3–9%	6–14%	57–71%	100%
	number	8,331–14,876	1,538–5,951	3,273–8,926	29,544–41,654	47,604–62,480

Source: survey of adults with other native languages in 2018

The actual number of language learners in the next few years will undoubtedly be smaller than the estimated target group above (133,000–176,000 people) or the number of people who wish to start studying Estonian (112,000–143,000). Nevertheless, it is evident that the **number of people who require Estonian or are willing to learn it, is considerably larger than the volume of Estonian language training supported by the state**, which is approx. 2,000–6,000 participants during the years when Estonian language courses are funded from structural funds and considerably smaller when such funding is not provided.

In the process of the population learning the Estonian language it is difficult to imagine a so-called upper limit or a time when all residents of Estonia are (self-reported as) sufficiently proficient in Estonian. Constant self-improvement and treating language learning as a constant process in the society which values lifelong learning is a positive per se. The constant need for language training also arises from immigration.

To determine the approximate necessary volume of language training for the next few years, we assume that the state only provides language training for those who do not yet have active language skills and who are willing to participate in training in the next three years. We also assume that one person needs two courses to achieve a level of active language skills. Based on the survey, the number of such people is 28,000–48,000. The required number of training instances in the next three years would then be 55,000–96,000, amounting on average to 18,000–32,000 training instances a year. If we were to extend the objective and also include people who cannot speak Estonian and do not plan to learn the language or plan to learn it in a distant future, the volume of the necessary training instances would increase drastically. All in all, **if the rapid increase of the overall level of Estonian language proficiency among the people with little Estonian skills is set as the goal, the volume of Estonian language training should be several times larger than the quantity of courses currently offered.**

Based on integration monitoring, the Estonian language skills of 15- to 74-year-olds with other native languages have increased in the past six years. When comparing the people with no Estonian language skills from 2011 to 2017 based on the data of integration monitoring, the decrease has been 7.5 percentage points and the number of people with active language skills has increased by 6.7 percentage points. Language training for adults, more effective language training in general education and the new generation that speaks better Estonian – all this has contributed to the improved Estonian skills. Therefore, the share of people with no Estonian language skills has decreased on average by 1 percentage point a year and the share of people with active language skills has increased on average by 1 percentage point a year. **Assuming that the current volume of Estonian language training can be maintained, it is as effective as currently, and other processes in the society continue to follow the pattern of the past seven years, it would take approximately another 50 years at the current language proficiency level to achieve the level of active language skills for all residents.**

The majority of **those wishing to participate in Estonian language training expect the state or their employer to offer them free language courses.** 33–39% of respondents are not willing to pay anything for Estonian language training. 26–32% are willing to contribute 20% of the cost of training. Many fewer are willing to contribute more and only 5–9% of respondents are willing to pay more than 80% of the costs. Therefore, the majority of the population expects someone else to pay for Estonian language training. Considering that a very few people are able or willing to contribute to their Estonian language training, the **continued provision of state-funded language training is essential for the purpose of increasing the number of people with active language skills and relying solely on privately funded Estonian language training would not achieve the objective.**

RECOMMENDATION 1. At the current pace of improvement of Estonian language skills, it will take a very long time for all the people with other native languages to reach the level of active Estonian language skills. The self-evaluated willingness to learn Estonian considerably exceeds the volume of Estonian language training offered by the state. **If there was a wish to speed up the improvement of Estonian language skills, the volume of state-funded training should be increased considerably.**

The following recommendations are based on the assumptions that the target group of state-funded language training includes all people, including the elderly, people with no language environment and people who have no active intention to learn Estonian. The following recommendations are also based on how to increase the effectiveness of language training and involve in training the part of the target group whose willingness to learn Estonian has so far been moderate.

State funding for Estonian language learning

Free Estonian language courses targeted at adults are linked to the funding from the European structural funds. During the period of EU funding, the number of provided courses and state procurement for Estonian language training is considerably higher, whereas in the periods between the EU funding, considerably fewer training courses have been offered (see Part 3 Chapter 2.2 and Part 4 Chapter 2.1). A large-scale dependency on the funding from the EU structural funds creates the **cyclicity in Estonian language training**, which, for instance, resulted in very few free of charge language courses being offered outside of the Unemployment Insurance Fund between two financial periods during 2014–2015.

Cyclical funding has an impact on the structure and capacity of the organisations offering Estonian language training. In the market condition of cyclical and project-based funding, the institutions offering Estonian language training often employ only one or two employees and then make up their team of language teachers by employing them based on temporary contracts under the law of obligations after winning public procurements. Such **training providers largely depend on public orders and function as project-based institutions**. Several training providers pointed out that the free of charge courses procured by the state eliminate their chances of selling Estonian language courses in the private sector. Such a situation combined with cyclical funding means that there can be no stable and sustainable high-quality provision of Estonian language training on the market because the training providers have no motivation to train their teachers and develop study materials.

RECOMMENDATION 2. To ensure a stable and sustainable funding for state-procured Estonian language training, which allows training providers to develop continuous and sustainable business activities in more stable market conditions and invest in high-quality language training.

The service providers operating in Ida-Viru county outlined that **in the past few years, the activities of the state of Estonia have resulted in an increased interest in learning the Estonian language**. As a positive factor, the service providers pointed out the work of INSA, the Unemployment Insurance Fund and Foundation Innove, which have increased the awareness of language learning opportunities among the population and resulted in a more active use of such services. The number of Estonian language courses organised by the Unemployment Insurance Fund also indicates that the language courses have become more popular, since the cost of training and the number of participants in 2017 was higher than in previous years and the share of participants from Ida-Viru county totalled at 59%, compared with 43% in 2016 and 33–39% before that. Similarly, 49% of the participants in Estonian language training offered by INSA have been from Ida-Viru county (in 2011–2017), whereas the number of people who have completed training in Estonian language and culture clubs has increased from 45 people in 2013 to 240 people in 2017.

Motivation for Estonian language learning

The motivation of adults with other native languages to learn the Estonian language tends to be instrumental and associated with external pressure. The most common perceived need for learning Estonian is improved outlooks in the labour market. Although in addition to insufficient Estonian language skills, the unemployed usually have also other obstacles that stop them from finding work, the unemployed believe that their most important obstacle was the lack of Estonian language skills (90–94% of the unemployed who participated in the training and 73–83% of the unemployed who did not participate in the training). In the interviews, the institutions offering Estonian language training also confirmed that the main reason for learning the Estonian language is related to the labour market. The population survey also revealed that the most common motive for obtaining better Estonian language skills was the wish to find a better job (42–48%) or the need to fulfil language skills requirement of their job (38–45%). Therefore, the surveys carried out in all three target groups indicate that successful performance in the labour market is one of the main motivators for learning Estonian. Therefore, the professional groups that are most interested in learning Estonian in the near or more distant future are **skilled workers and service personnel who are expected to have language skills at level B in the labour market.**

Although some service providers hinted that coping in the public space without knowing the Estonian language is even easier now than it used to be, which, again, does not create the external pressure to learn Estonian, the results of the population survey and the survey of the unemployed revealed that in addition to the labour market outcomes, the **everyday social life and the Estonian language skills necessary for that are also important motivators for participating in language training.** 41–48% of the people with other native languages found that among other reasons, they needed to obtain better Estonian language skills to cope better with daily life, and the same number of respondents (37–46%) found that they needed better language skills to understand better the Estonian culture. The survey of the unemployed also indicated that in addition to the chance of finding a better paid job and expanding one's career opportunities, 88–93% of the respondents agreed that it was important to participate in Estonian language courses for the purpose of coping better with daily life and 75–81% of the respondents agreed that language courses would help them understand better what is going on in the Estonian society. In the survey, the institutions offering the Estonian language courses confirmed that the external pressure (from the labour market, the employer, the state) is no longer that important, i.e. more and more people have started learning Estonian at their own initiative and are more interested in learning the language than they used to be.

Even though the Unemployment Insurance Fund directs people to Estonian language courses with an aim to improve their labour market position, the survey indicates that there is a large number of people who wish to study Estonian to cope better with their daily life. Therefore, there is also need for those (free of charge) training courses that are not directly related to the needs of the labour market and which are not available only via the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

It is important to note that obtaining citizenship is a motivation factor for learning Estonian only for a small number of people and compared to 2004, the prevalence of this motivation factor has decreased by half among the population (12% vs. 26%).

RECOMMENDATION 3. In addition to the external pressure to obtain Estonian language skills due to the labour market requirements and expectations, the respondents consider

coping with their everyday life and the participation in the Estonian society equally important. **Therefore, it is important to continue to offer Estonian language training as a labour market service to meet the needs of the labour market as well as in a broader sense to promote the integration and social engagement.**

The present survey indicates that the most common obstacles which prevent people from improving their Estonian language skills are the lack of finances, which makes it difficult to find the means for studying (62–71% of adults with other native languages find that this obstacle is important or very important to them); lack of time (61–70%); complexity of the Estonian language (60–69%) and the fact that they have no-one to communicate with in Estonian (57–67%), i.e. they would have no use for improving their Estonian language skills. On the one hand, these are institutional obstacles related to the small number of free of charge training courses and the timing of the courses, which means that people cannot fit it into their everyday life. Obstacles are also related to people’s circumstances, as many people are not immersed in the language environment, which would provide obvious advantages to Estonian language skills. On the other hand, these obstacles also reflect the attitudes, which are related to people’s priorities and the lack of interest in improving their Estonian language skills.

Therefore, for more than a half of adults with other native languages, one of the obstacles for studying Estonian is their belief that other activities they spend their time and money on seem more important to them. Additionally, the Estonian language is complex and the benefits of being proficient in it are difficult to see due to the lack of language environment.

Figure 2. Which obstacles to increasing your level of Estonian language skills have you had in the past or are having now? (% of the population with other native languages, whose Estonian language skills are lower than “Understand, speak and write”, 95% confidence intervals)



Source: survey of people with other native languages in 2018

RECOMMENDATION 4. If the objective is, among other things, to bring those people to Estonian language training who do not see the benefits of language learning for themselves and are not willing to spend time and money on it, it is necessary to **increase the interest of such people and to motivate them to learn the language**. The present study did not focus on the measures, which should be used to achieve this objective. However, the use of different measures should be deliberated, e.g. communication activities and social campaigns, which create an image of Estonian language learning as something pleasant, stimulating and not related to proficiency tests. At the same time, there must always be available learning opportunities.

The readiness of people with no knowledge of Estonian to learn Estonian is smaller than of those who are already proficient. The number of adults with no knowledge of Estonian is approx. 11,000–21,000 people and 30–61% of them are willing to learn the language. The survey of people who had studied Estonian language through the programmes of the Unemployment Insurance Fund indicated that the likelihood of people with no knowledge of Estonian participating in Estonian language training is considerably smaller, considering the fact that the group of people with no knowledge of Estonian includes elderly people and people with lower level of education. Throughout the years, the number of participants at level A1 training has significantly increased: in 2012 there were 92 people who started their level A1 language course through the Unemployment Insurance Fund and over the years the number has gradually increased, reaching 346 people in 2017. Level A1 training funded through INSA will add another approximately 200 participations to this number in 2017 and about 500 in 2018.

RECOMMENDATION 5. To improve the language skills of people with no knowledge of Estonian, it is important that these people can learn the language in a formal setting. Taking into consideration the average lower willingness of people with no knowledge of Estonian to learn the Estonian language, the increase in the number of participations at level A1 training courses is positive. **The provision of level A1 training should continue in a way that people could join training by using the help of a supervisor.**

II. Organisation and quality of Estonian language training

Overall satisfaction

The representatives of the Unemployment Insurance Fund and the Language Inspectorate assessed the quality of Estonian language training generally as positive. Also, the majority of the learners who had participated in the training through the Unemployment Insurance Fund were generally satisfied with it. The overall satisfaction rate with the different aspects of the training was high (over 75%) – 84–92% of participants were satisfied with the frequency of the classes, the time of the classes and the professionalism of the teacher.

The learners who participated in the training through the Unemployment Insurance Fund were most dissatisfied with the methodology of teaching and the total volume of the training (12–19%, Part 4 of the survey, Chapter 5.3.1). It is important to note that the participants had different wishes and needs as regards to the times, frequency and total volume of the classes.

Therefore, the organisation of training cannot be improved by changing the existing times, frequency and volume of classes but the unemployed prefer a situation where they can choose between different options.

Additionally, the results of the population survey indicated that there are not enough types of training courses that would suit elderly people and those of pension age (orientated more on communication, no tests, slower learning pace) and therefore, the elderly are less likely to participate in training compared to younger age groups. In addition to the need to diversify the language teaching forms in order to attract the elderly, an overall change of attitudes towards learning in older age is also required.

Modernisation of skills and learning materials of training providers

The need to diversify the forms of teaching is perceived both in and outside the classroom. Since the group of people who need Estonian language training is very diverse – it includes pupils and students, working people, the elderly, people with lower level of education and lower learning skills, people who have just arrived in Estonia – the variety of study materials and learning environments (wider selection of e-environments) and teaching methods is necessary. The conclusion is that there is a demand for **courses with different learning and teaching methodologies**. However, it is also important that the learner understands the type of the teaching method used in the course and his/her aims before they sign up (e.g. preparing for an exam, developing everyday communication, etc.). The learning and teaching methodology of the course must be reflected in the information materials.

The prerequisite for implementing various forms and methods of teaching is the continuous in-service training of teachers. Service providers acknowledged their need for in-service training for their teachers, the need to update their approaches to teaching and for contemporary and more varied learning materials.

For the purpose of making the Estonian language teaching more effective, **it is necessary to increase the opportunities for providing in-service training for the Estonian language teachers who work with adults**. The in-service training courses are mostly held for the teachers of general education schools and they follow the curriculum of general education schools and the methodology of teaching children. The in-service training of Estonian language teachers working with adults is currently left on the shoulders of language companies who do not, however, have enough resources to provide it (this is due to the project-based nature of Estonian language training of adults which does not promote the hiring and training of full-time teachers). Service providers expect the state to provide in-service training for Estonian language teachers who teach adults. Service providers noticed that although there were some training courses being held in Tallinn, the number of such courses in Ida-Viru county was considerably smaller.

They also pointed out that there was a **great demand for contemporary study materials**. Especially for high-quality textbooks – this was pointed out by practically all the interviewed service providers. The lack of proper textbooks for levels B2 and C1 was also noted. Publishers are unable to offer a sufficient amount of currently available textbooks to language training providers as demand exceeds supply. The development of new learning materials could be combined with in-service training, which could include either training about new study materials or developing new study materials as part of the training.

RECOMMENDATION 6. Estonian language **service providers require in-service training:**

Teach people with different socio-demographic backgrounds in one group requires **in-service training** in the **development of methodological and didactical skills of the teachers working with adults**. Instead of dividing the learners into different groups based on their age or other socio-demographic characteristics, we suggest developing the methodological and didactical skills of the teachers on how to teach in a way that involves different age and socio-demographic groups.

In addition to the skills of teaching different people in one group, there is a need for in-service training about **andragogy skills** for teachers.

Since according to the service providers there is a lack of study materials, a systematic development of study materials must be undertaken. Among other things, the in-service training could also be linked to the development of **new study materials that meet the needs of the teachers**.

Structure of training courses

The challenge of expanding the Estonian language training is the involvement of elderly people, people with lower levels of education and people with no knowledge of Estonian. One of the reasons for difficulties in learning and teaching these groups is the lack of general learning skills.

RECOMMENDATION 7. For several language training target groups, it is necessary to **combine Estonian language training with the development of learning skills**. This helps to reduce course dropout rates, increase satisfaction with the quality of Estonian language training and, as a result, improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the course. On the one hand, the recommendation is targeted at service providers who should include the development of learning skills in their programmes and, on the other hand, it is targeted at contracting entities who should demand the development of such skills from service providers.

Approximately one fourth (27–34%, Part 4, Chapter 5.3.2 of the study) of the registered unemployed thought that the communication part of the language course was too short, whereas people with no Estonian-language communication environment were more critical about this aspect. The results of the population survey also revealed that the courses which paid attention to the development of communication skills got most positive assessments (almost everybody thought these courses were effective – 93–98% of respondents) and the possibility to speak in the classroom was valued the most. Non-formal language learning, one-to-one language training with a native Estonian speaker and playful language learning were also considered effective.

Courses developing communication skills and those paying attention to communication were considered to be the most effective and, at the same time, participants felt that not enough attention was paid to this sub-skill during the course.

RECOMMENDATION 8. Service providers should offer courses, which are targeted at the development of different linguistic subskills. The greatest demand is for developing communication skills, which is why this subskill should be addressed the most. **Communication needs to receive more attention in the classroom** also due to the fact that this cannot be practiced alone, whereas reading and writing can be practised independently if the learner has sufficient learning skills. Giving larger weight to the subskill of communication in the training courses should primarily be the responsibility

of the service provider, however, it can also be indirectly influenced through the terms and conditions of public procurements and the requirements of the curricula.

Support structure of Estonian language training

The study supports the known relationship between the language learning motivation and effectiveness and the language environment – in the regions where there is no Estonian-language environment or in case of learners who are mainly in their own language environment, the effectiveness of language training is lower in the longer run. This is also confirmed by the surveyed service providers and unemployed. Contact with the Estonian language environment considerably increases the motivation for Estonian language learning and the effectiveness of the training. Among the unemployed whose main language of communication is not Estonian, 26–37% have contact with the Estonian-language communication environment, but among those who signed up for the training, the share is 63–70% (Part 4, Chapter 3.2.5). Hence, the presence of the communication environment motivates people to learn Estonian. The learners who participated in the Estonian language training through the Unemployment Insurance Fund and who have some contact with the Estonian language communication environment assess the improvement of their Estonian language skills as a result of the training more positively (53–62% think that they experienced great improvement) than those with no Estonian language communication environment (25–37%). At the same time, in some regions of Ida-Viru county there is no Estonian-language communication environment, which is why the absence of it must be compensated for. It is necessary that the courses providing certain language levels would also be followed up by other services, which would help to affirm and maintain the achieved level of language skills. These services mainly include language cafes and language clubs.

RECOMMENDATION 9. If possible, language courses should always be complemented by **language cafes and language clubs** (non-formal forms of learning Estonian), which allow the development of communication in a situation where there is no respective communication environment. This means that there should be state-provided **opportunities for offering Estonian-language communication environment for maintaining and developing the Estonian language skills in regions where otherwise there is no such communication environment.**

The Estonian language training courses procured by the Unemployment Insurance Fund (the so-called procured courses) are generally broad-based courses preparing the learners for level examinations. 86–91% of all the people who attended Estonian language courses through the Unemployment Insurance Fund said that they participated in courses, which prepared them for level examination (Part 4, Chapter 3.1). To obtain specific professional language courses or to develop specific linguistic subskills, people must use other opportunities, for instance, choose a language course from among the courses offered by the partners of the Unemployment Insurance Fund. Every unemployed person can use up to 2,500 euros worth of training, the so-called training card. Dropout rates from procured courses are considerably higher than from training card courses (25% vs. 13%), which is due to the fact that procured courses are much more time-consuming (the average length of a procured training course is 279 hours and the average length of a training card course is 121 hours) and the courses take place in the daytime. If procured courses are organised as 3-hour training days on five days a week, then the length of the language course is 93 days and 18.6 weeks, which means a total of 4.7 months of Estonian language training, which is difficult for adults to combine with their work, considering that most of the time they also have family-related obligations. The most common reason for dropping out of the language courses is

getting a job (37–63% of the people who participated in the Estonian language training offered by the Unemployment Insurance Fund). A part of the target group will never even consider participating in the language courses due to the current labour market situation, knowing that the training is long and that they would have to discontinue their studies if they got a job.

Adults engage in refresher training if they find it beneficial and if, for some reason, the learning activities attract them more than the alternatives. To reduce the number of people dropping out of the courses and to increase the number of participants, the courses should be more flexible as regards to the timetable, allowing the unemployed who have found jobs or are planning to get a job still continue in Estonian language courses. In the open market, service providers also offer more flexible courses, which is evident by the shorter duration of the training card courses. Service providers themselves have also divided long courses preparing the participants for level examinations into shorter sublevels. The risk with such modular trainings, however, is their non-standard nature and the situation where in reality there is no flexibility because after passing one part of the course, one cannot move on to the next level.

RECOMMENDATION 10. In addition to long courses that prepare participants for level examinations, **create flexible solutions** as regards the form of the study, volumes, tempo and time frames. Different options for achieving this should be considered, e.g. **divide the level exam preparation courses into standard modules**, e.g. by sublevel courses or in other ways. Adult learners should have the opportunity to enhance their Estonian language skills by smaller steps, by combining the training of subskills they prioritise, different course timings and by flexibly changing their studying arrangements to match their changed labour market situation (moving from daytime modules to evening modules). The division of level courses into modules requires systematic work by describing the outcomes and prerequisites of different modules, so that it would be possible to evaluate the acquired knowledge after passing the module.⁶ In this way, the funders of Estonian language training could procure Estonian language courses in smaller modules.

Composition of training groups

The most common problem with the courses offered by the Unemployment Insurance Fund is related to varying levels of language skills of the participants within a group (pointed out as a problem by 63–70% of participants, Part 4, Chapter 6.1.1 of the study) – the varying levels of language skill within groups was by far the most common problem relating to course participation. Although the initial language skill level is determined in cooperation with the unemployed person and the consultant of the Unemployment Insurance Fund and after that the service provider must test the language level of the unemployed person in order to direct him/her into the right group, then despite this process, approximately two thirds of participants have had minor or major problems with the uniformity of the language skill level within the group. Approximately one third (31–38%) of the unemployed who participated in the courses found that their Estonian language skills were not sufficient for participating in the training for the given language level. At the same

⁶ Preparing guidelines for dividing language skill levels into sublevels is also recommended by the study on The Implementation of the Common European Framework for Languages in European Education Systems commissioned by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (Broek and van den Ende 2013, p. 77). Such definitions for sublevels have already been prepared in some European countries (e.g. Switzerland, Sweden).

time, the uneven level of language skills of the learners were not among reasons for discontinuing studies.

The continued and systematic work of the Unemployment Insurance Fund with the unemployed for preparing them for suitable courses was assessed positively by the service providers, but they also found that this process created problems of participants ending up in the courses with wrong a skill level and excessively long waiting lists. Service providers pointed out that even if the Unemployment Insurance Fund provides information about a person having participated in a certain language training in the past, they do not note whether he/she has finished the course or not. And even if a person has passed the level examination previously, the level of his/her language skills may no longer correspond to this level.

Language learners who participated in INSA courses also pointed out the problem of uneven levels of language skills of the learners.

Even more attention should be paid to the harmonisation of the initial language level of the study groups to increase the satisfaction of the learners from participating in the language training and the resulting improvement in their language skills.

RECOMMENDATION 11. To solve the problem of determining the language proficiency level of the learner, to reduce the subjectivity and use of misleading information, a **jointly used testing environment for determining the Estonian language proficiency level of the user should be implemented** by using, if possible, the already existing testing environments, **provided that the environments are accepted by different parties.** The test could be used by both the future learners, who can independently determine their language proficiency level by using a professional language test, as well as the parties procuring training to calculate the sizes of training groups and to procure the training. It should be a test, which is used and acknowledged by both the parties procuring training services as well as different training providers. A jointly used and acknowledged test would reduce waiting times created by wrongly determined initial language proficiency level and the training group. The online test should be developed on the initiative of the state by the specialists of the field and its implementation should be organised together with IT development. Once the tests exist, it is the task of training procurers and training providers to implement them efficiently.

RECOMMENDATION 12. When assigning participants to language training groups in procured courses, **give the language training providers more freedom to assigning people the different learning groups** with the aim to avoid the situation where learners with different language levels and learning skills end up in one group.

Lack of language teachers for adults

The factor which limits the provision of Estonian language training, according to the service providers, is the lack of Estonian language teachers for adults. Although the results of interviews with the Unemployment Insurance Fund revealed that the number of currently open language training groups corresponds to the number of people who wish to participate in language training, it is not possible to open more groups because of the lack of teachers. Due to the lack of teachers specialising in adults, the teachers of general education schools often teach Estonian to adults. However, the teachers of general education schools may not have the experience or skills necessary to train adults. To ensure high-quality Estonian language training for adults, it is necessary to increase the number of qualified teachers by using different solutions – providing in-

service training for existing teachers as well as finding new teachers (training of Estonian language teachers in institutions of higher education, involving people from other fields in teaching Estonian).

RECOMMENDATION 13. Increase the number of Estonian language teachers by considering and using different options (including training the people with education from other fields to become Estonian language teachers, extending the terms and conditions of public procurement of the Unemployment Insurance Fund in a way that the philologists of other languages would also be able to participate in offering Estonian language training as Estonian language teachers, provided that they have the necessary skills, increase the admission to the specialties related to the basic training of Estonian language teachers, promote the image and value of Estonian language teachers in order to increase the number of people who decide to stay active in this field). In-service training courses must be offered for developing the methodological and didactical skills of Estonian language teachers (see also **RECOMMENDATION 6**).

III. Efficiency and effectiveness of Estonian language training

The efficiency and effectiveness of Estonian language training was evaluated as a labour market service. The objective of training offered by the Unemployment Insurance Fund is to encourage the unemployed to enter into and remain in employment, to improve the Estonian language skills of the learners and to take their Estonian language skills to the level required in the labour market (level examination courses).

The participants of the training procured by the Unemployment Insurance Fund themselves assess the impact of the language courses on the improvement of their language skills positively – 85–90% of participants find that their Estonian language skills improved as a result of the training (46–53% a lot and 35–42% a little). However, other performance indicators of Estonian language training are different:

- 1) One third of people who join the training to prepare for a level examination would not take the exam. The large number of people not taking the exam may indicate that at the end of the training people do not feel ready to take the examination or that taking the level examination was not their reason for taking the course.
- 2) Less than half of participants (42–49%) in Estonian language training organised by the Unemployment Insurance Fund have after the training worked in the field that requires Estonian language skills.
 - a. For half of them, the Estonian language skills they obtained were not sufficient for working and the main problem was the lack of communication skills (81–92%). 53–68% found that their vocabulary and 19–32% found that their writing skills were insufficient for work.

When comparing the unemployed who took a language course and the ones who did not and who had similar background characteristics, it can be seen that the Estonian language training organised by the Unemployment Insurance Fund have a so-called lock-in effect, which lasts for several months, i.e. getting a job is less likely since people are engaged in their language training (they are not even looking for a job or they postpone their employment for the purpose of completing the course). The lock-in effect disappears by the seventh or eighth month after the beginning of the training; starting from the tenth month, the effect of training on employment becomes positive. In a longer run, the Estonian language skills obtained in Estonian language

courses therefore have a positive effect on employment (not, however, on their income). Taking into consideration the cost of the training as well as the impact on employment and the lock-in effect, it can be seen that in the short run, procured courses are more expensive for the society than the benefits arising from higher employment rates. Training card courses, however, have a slight net positive effect in terms of costs and benefits. Although there is a selection effect in assigning the participants to either training card or procured courses, i.e. people who are more capable or have a higher motivation to find a job quickly are more likely to enter training card courses. This result supports the recommendation to make the procured courses more flexible **(RECOMMENDATION 10)**.

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