

DIVERSE

Diversity Improvement as a Viable Enrichment Resource for Society and Economy



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Objective

TCNs and diversity related policies in Estonia have mainly addressed the integration of the Russian-speaking minority population that forms about a third of the country's population. Yet, interest towards attracting highly skilled TCNs has emerged in recent years, too, because of labour market concerns. The aim of the current report is to find out how TCNs' skills, knowledge and competences are recognized in Estonia, reflecting the experiences of the organizations and TCNs themselves on Estonian diversity management practices, and shedding light on TCNs' participation in voluntary organizations.

Methodology

In addition to wide-ranging desk analysis of policy-documents and reports, in-depth interviews were carried out with policy-makers, experts, organizations, NGOs involved with the emerging field of diversity management in Estonia.

Main findings and policy options

Smart migration policy to solve labour shortages in Estonia. In light of diversity management practices, Estonia has fostered two distinct streams—firstly, the integration of local Russian-speaking population (Soviet-era settlers), and secondly, smart migration policy for attracting highly skilled TCNs. The latter, smart migration policy has been given strong support by different governmental offices as the way to solve current shortages in the Estonian labour market.

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In practice, especially profit-oriented organizations are the main carriers of a smart migration policy—their specific needs for highly qualified TCNs determines the scale and intensity of the smart migration flow to Estonia.

Estonia as a career catalyst country for highly-skilled TCNs. Estonia among talented TCNs is seen as a good place for gaining occupation-related opportunities, yet still in most cases it is merely a stepping-stone to the next place. TCNs value highly the working-conditions, career possibilities and the overall infrastructure, yet perceive the urge to move forward as better challenges emerge.

The limitations of a small country (the array of highly specialized educational programs, shortages at the employment market, etc.) can be levelled by fostering smart migration policy between the neighbouring countries. The closeness of Russia with excellent technical education provides a valuable input for many Estonian manufacturing organizations located near the border of Russia. Thus, the cooperation between the two countries can offer good career possibilities for highly qualified Russians, and at the same time helps to fill the shortage in Estonian labour market.

The (over)production of individuals with highly specialized and technology-oriented education (e.g. engineers) in many non-EU countries has developed intense competition over the available job positions. Yet for the countries like Estonia such (over)production fosters the development of smart migration policy. Being a country with a lot of well-known international companies (e.g. Ericsson, Skype, Playtech), Estonia can offer TCNs very good career opportunities which at their home-country would not come so easily.

The recruitment of TCNs does vary by the type of organization. When public and profit-oriented organizations seek for individuals with specialized skills not found from the domestic employment market, non-profit organizations seem to operate more as a support system for the TCNs already living and/or working in Estonia. For example, TCNs committed to church community, students, spouses of TCNs, etc. seek to work for non-profit organizations mostly on a part-time basis, as a support to their main engagement.

Work in non-profit organizations is a side-activity to the main responsibilities somewhere else. TCNs working in non-profit organizations are often spouses or single and below 30 individuals, in many cases students or part of some international communities (e.g. church), working on part-time basis. Work in a non-profit organization is often taken as a mission, as something that is taken upon in addition to the primary work or activity somewhere else (university studies and/or work, church, full-time housewife, etc.) Being engaged with different responsibilities allows TCNs to integrate better with the local community.

Main difficulties appear outside the working-life and thus are out of the control of the organizations. When organization makes a commitment to recruit a TCN, they also make additional investment to help the new employee during his or her settling-in period. Mentoring can vary from finding a suitable housing, schooling and kindergarten for the kids, work for a spouse, arranging language courses, etc. Yet, organizations can not prepare individuals for the challenges “outside the working hours”—street signs in a foreign language, communication (language) in immigration bureau, lack of international schools and national restaurants in the area, etc. Looking from the TCNs side, deeply personal aspects start to matter the most—these are often issues that fall out from the hands of the organization. During the interviews with the TCNs it emerged how in future both Estonia in general and also the organizations should facilitate an infrastructure that would foster TCNs with families to move here. For the organization, but also for the TCN it makes a difference whether to come with a family or as a single person.

Diversity management is not an end in itself, but a natural development of the organizations. As a rule, organizations do not take deliberate steps in diversity management.

Diversity has rather emerged due to the specific needs or developments in the organization—e.g. the need for highly specialized skills, the need to internationalize, the need for bringing in younger generation, etc. Organizations that by their field of activity are more internationalized, take the recruitment of TCNs as a natural flow of things. Thus, even the everyday work language, information flow and documentation tends to be in English.

Organizations willing to recruit international workforce are looking for specific skills and country of origin is not an issue. From the organization's side, it is the skills, not the cultural or national background that is appreciated. A person has to fit both the organization and the specific job. That said, organizations do not reflect the need for differentiating people by their nationalities—leaving aside the help given during the transition and settling in period, TCNs are in most part taken in same way as local employees.

Although diversity management is not taken as an end in itself, diversity at workplace is highly valued. Organizations that have recruited international workforce are highly proud of it. In addition, from some point individuals (including TCNs) themselves seek to offer their competencies to the organizations that have been known by recruiting international workforce. As a rule, organizations that have previously had experience with recruiting foreigners, or specifically people from the third countries, continue to do so. Such a welcoming and open attunement is also woven into overall organizational work-life. Existing employees are used to having new people, and it is considered as a normal flow when a company is expanding. Another point to be mentioned is that when the organization already has some international employees, new entrants are integrated more smoothly—people have developed some kind of know-how or natural sense of where and what might be the possible difficulties.

Estonia has a great potential to become a country with good career opportunities, yet as an immigration destination country it is still relatively unknown. The majority of the TCNs interviewed found Estonia through some personal contact—either visited a conference in Estonia and from there they got an invitation to apply, or some Estonian met a TCN abroad, and again introduced Estonia and possibilities here. Thus, the marketing of Estonia so far has been largely through the word to mouth channel. Another group of TCNs had no previous knowledge of Estonia as a country and the main reason for accepting the job position were the occupational challenges and future career possibilities.

The attractiveness of profit-oriented organizations in Estonia to TCNs is strongly related to expectations regarding the wages. What does emerge as a problem when recruiting international people are expectations regarding the wages. This is very acute issue especially in ICT field. Although Estonia is considered relatively affordable country to live in, international employees tend to compare wages across Europe when making their final decision. Organizations themselves consider the wages to be average or in most cases even much higher than the average of the field in Estonia.

TCNs engaged in science choose a country to work on the basis of the workgroup and supervisors. As science in general is international, the name of the country, nor the name of the university will gain priority over the prestige of the workgroup. Thus, the process of attracting highly qualified international scientists is highly dependent on whether Estonia has strong scientific workgroups.

Recruiting individuals outside EU bears is an investment to organizations, yet with a slight risk. Organizations considering to recruit individuals outside the EU region are faced to addresses the adequacy of actual motives of TCNs to come to Estonia. As organizations have to invest additional time and financial resources in recruiting people outside Estonia, they need to be sure that these individuals do not use Estonia merely as “an entrance ticket” to Europe, thus leaving the organization as soon as new position in some other European country opens up.

Diversity at workplace has a wide-ranging effect to the domestic employees. The recruitment of international personnel, also TCNs has wider effect also on the internal stakeholders in a sense that they start to look at their organization with a new and fresh perspective. It also means that things that sometimes it takes an outsider to point out at the good things that the insiders have for long taken for granted (for example, Estonia is known for a good infrastructure). In addition, working with different people from different cultural and language background gives local personnel a valuable opportunity of developing better skills in respecting differences and fostering overall climate of learning from each other. Mixing different people and different perspectives is often a valuable input for innovation and creative solutions that are highly sought by profit-oriented organizations.

Civic participation and volunteering have their roots in the sense of mission. TCNs in Estonia, both permanent and temporary residents, demonstrate willingness to be engaged in these activities. In order to preserve this willingness on the same level and possibly increase it, elimination of the hindering factors listed in the next sub-sections should be undertaken where possible.

Civic participation and volunteering are often the only way to acquire related practical skills for those who only have temporary residence permit in the country. TCNs studying in Estonia who do not have work permit often choose volunteering due to high barriers for being granted a work permit, complicated both for individuals and employing organizations. A possible solution would be granting a part- or a full-time work permit

Civic participation implies sense of belongingness and identification with the society of the country one lives in. In case of many TCNs the absence of those creates cognitive barriers to civic participation. Incentives for various organizations to establish closer formal and informal contacts with TCNs residing in Estonia may present a solution to this issue. Another method for increasing identification is adding a few place-based/localized connotations and slogans to the promotional materials of large pan-country civic initiatives.

Scarcity of information, especially in languages other than Estonian. Organizations should be encouraged and assisted in translating all relevant information into English and Russian. This is often one of the most important bottlenecks. The governments will soon launch on single entry port in the Web preliminarily entitled “Work in Estonia” in order to assist TCN is highly welcome.

Lack of strategies and training of foreign volunteers. The common principles of TCN volunteers’ engagement should be developed in cooperation with various NGOs and coordinating associations based on the accumulated experiences, and organizations should be assisted and trained in implementing them. Similarly, training program should be developed in cooperation with various NGOs and coordinating associations, based on the accumulated experiences, and organizations should be assisted and trained for conducting the training.

Lack of practice of contracts for volunteering. Incentives for various organizations to use volunteering contracts should be developed, if needed, in cooperation with insurance and lawyer companies.

Diaspora engagement. Xenophobia and conservatism in the society need attention, and citizen and general public education efforts should remain in the public policy and be constantly continued. The involvement of the sending countries institutions could be important but it largely depends on the political, economic and social situation in the sending countries. A possible solution to facilitate the activities of the ethnic cultural associations is including supporting local diasporas as the foreign embassies formal activity.

Need to overcome the language divide and better engagement of TCNs in public discussions. As a Soviet time heritage, Estonia is divided between “Estonian-speaking” and

“Russian-speaking” population groups. The outcome is the fact that Estonian-speakers and other Russian-speakers often participate in separate unrelated associations or civic movements. It might happen also with the new, mainly English-speaking TCN migration based associations. Therefore, it is important to facilitate mixed language associations based on common interests and objectives and diminish emphasis on language. Likewise, in order to avoid second and third generations of Russian-speaking TCNs becoming disappointed with the national integration model as the older generations, who tend to trust less the institutionalized forms of civic activity such as not-for-profit organizations and are less active in their activities, the official rhetoric could be changed from “integration of TCNs into Estonian society” to “integration of all members of the Estonian society”. The emphasis of the new Estonian integration policy towards tackling inequalities rather than integrating specific ethno-linguistic groups is highly welcome.

Voluntary work guidelines and training is needed. The associations coordinating volunteering do not have a specific policy or approach to their engagement, and the communication and problem-solving takes place on the *ad hoc* basis. In case of TCNs it is more important as they might not have the similar experience of volunteering and civic participation from their countries of origin that many European citizens have. It is necessary to support voluntary associations with guidelines and, if requested, training of TCNs engagement in voluntary work.

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