CITIZENSHIP, POLITICAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

FACT SHEET

Citizenship

The last quarter of century has brought strong changes in the citizenship status of the population who are from other ethnic backgrounds. 85% of people in Estonia have Estonian citizenship, the proportion of people with undetermined citizenship has decreased from 32% to 6%.

Most people with undetermined citizenship (55%) wish to obtain citizenship of the Republic of Estonia, approximately every fifth person (18%) is satisfied with their present status and 8% wish to obtain citizenship of the Russian Federation. There have been no remarkable changes in the level of interest for obtaining Estonian citizenship in comparison to the monitoring that was carried out in 2015. Yet, a slight drop in the interest towards obtaining Estonian citizenship can be observed as a longer-term trend (60% in 2011, 57% in 2015, 55% in 2017).

According to the monitoring, one of the main reasons why people are not applying for Estonian citizenship is that its absence does not prevent them from living in Estonia: this has increased from 19% to 47% in approximately 10 years. Another argument by many respondents in the monitoring survey is that it is easier to travel to CIS countries with the citizenship of the Russian Federation, or with an undetermined citizenship (increase from 23% to 44%). The previously most popular responses, namely the lack of Estonian language proficiency or fear of the citizenship exam, are starting to fall to the background.

Those who do not have Estonian citizenship consider the main reason for this to be the difficulty of the citizenship test (46%, a ten percentage points’ reduction in comparison to 2015), inability to attain proficiency in Estonian language (39%) and the fact that this does not prevent them from living in Estonia (41%). Thus, people with undetermined citizenship and Russian citizens consider the main obstacles for applying for citizenship a set of legal conditions, which they in their own opinion consider too difficult to meet. From a more pragmatic perspective, many find that it is possible to live in Estonia without acquiring the citizenship of this country.

The willingness of Estonians to simplify the conditions for acquiring citizenship are at a similar level to previous monitoring, but a certain decline can still be noted. Most people living in Estonia, including half of Estonians, support the issuing of Estonian citizenship on simplified terms and without additional requirements to children who were born in Estonia (other ethnicities – 76%, Estonians – 50%) or to all people who were born in Estonia regardless of the citizenship status of their parents (other ethnicities – 73%, Estonians – 45%).

People’s attitudes towards having multiple citizenships at the same time were examined for the first time in this monitoring. 40% of the population were against the legalisation of dual citizenship, regardless of their own citizenship status.

“Integration of Estonian Society: Monitoring 2017” final report and more information here: www.kul.ee/et/EIM2017
Should Estonian citizens be allowed to simultaneously have citizenship of another country?, based on citizenship, % (Integration Monitoring 2017).

Participation in politics and society, trust and attitudes towards the state

Interest in internal politics of Estonia is higher amongst Estonians (69%) than other ethnicities (54%). In comparison to 2015 monitoring results, there has been a slight increase in the interest among Estonians and a decrease amongst people from other ethnic backgrounds.

Participation in elections is at a relatively equal level across all ethnicities and this trend has not changed in comparison to the last monitoring. Non-citizens and the youngest group of participants (18-24 year olds) tend to be more passive in the local municipality council elections – this applies both to Estonians and people from other ethnicities.

Levels of union- or association membership are equally rare across all groups in the society – 83% of Estonians and 87% of Estonian citizens from other ethnic backgrounds are not members of any associations. This indicator is even higher amongst those with an undetermined citizenship: 92% do not have membership of any unions or associations.

Estonians are more active than people from other ethnicities in terms of almost all areas of non-institutional or informal political participation (participating in demonstrations, signing petitions, collecting signatures, picketing etc). Compared to previous monitoring though, participation in informal political activities has declined regardless of participants’ ethnicity or form of participation.

Estonian state institutions are most widely trusted amongst Estonian citizens who are Estonian, followed by Estonian citizens from other ethnic backgrounds and Russian citizens. People with undetermined citizenship have the least trust in state institutions. A similar ranking order can be observed from previous years’ monitoring.

Whilst people from other ethnicities find that ethnicity is not important regarding the position of Estonian Prime Minister, or have a rather positive attitude towards the possibility of having a Russian–Estonian Prime Minister, then over a half of Estonian respondents (52%) have a negative attitude towards this possibility. The overall trend has moved however towards more openness: in comparison to 2011 (12%), there has been a threefold increase in the proportion of Estonians (34%) who think that ethnicity of the head of the government is irrelevant.

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