

Returning home 2022



Photo: Günther Küttis

RETURNEE!

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU

Our goal is to help people returning to Estonia to smoothly adapt to life here and to keep compatriots living abroad in close contact with Estonia.

SERVICES OF THE RETURNEE ADAPTATION PACKAGE

Counselling for returnees in our office or online, by phone, and via email, see information:

www.integratsioon.ee/en/information-those-returning-estonia

Return support:

www.integratsioon.ee/en/return-support

Support meetings:

www.integratsioon.ee/en/support-meetings

Estonian language studies for adults at the Integration Foundation:

www.integratsioon.ee/en/estonian-language-studies

Activities supporting the learning of the Estonian language at the Integration Foundation:

www.integratsioon.ee/en/events

FOR ESTONIANS LIVING ABROAD

Information gateway for Estonians all over the world:

www.globalestonian.com/en

Language camps for young Estonians living abroad:

www.integratsioon.ee/en/language-camps-2022-young-estonians-living-abroad

Allocation of grants to Estonian cultural societies abroad to contribute to the activities of Estonian cultural societies operating abroad and the formation of a sense of unity with the Estonian state in Estonian communities abroad:

www.integratsioon.ee/en/competitions-estonian



Integration
Foundation

Find out more about all fields and activities of the foundation on our website integratsioon.ee/en

Welcome to Estonia!

Returning to Estonia is a big step. Here is an overview of the informative part of this publication. You can use it as a starting point when adapting to life in Estonia.

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Photo: private collection

‘I row and row on the sea, looking for an island...’

(G. Suits)



The life of Elena (41) is a colourful combination of different languages and places. She was born and grew up in Saint Petersburg, studied French, and worked in Paris for a long time. She wanted to come to Estonia because of her childhood memories.

Her father is from Piiressaar – a small island in Lake Peipsi. Piiressaar is special place: an island on the border. The population of the island consists largely of Old Believers.

Elena's father was born into a simple family of fishermen, whose history on Piiressaar dates back to the seventeenth century. As a young man, he fell in love with a Russian woman, got married, and moved to Saint Petersburg. There, they had Elena.

Even though Elena grew up in Saint Petersburg, they visited Piiressaar every summer. Her brightest memories are from there. She remembers the glimmering lake, large onion fields, and a big, laughing family.

Even in Russia, Elena was constantly surrounded by Estonian culture. The library of her parents was full of Estonian literary classics and the family had sauerkraut with pork and barley (mulgikapsad) at Christmas.

Coming to Estonia was like coming home

In Saint Petersburg, Elena completed her secondary education and studied

French at the university. After graduating from university, Elena moved to France. She lived there for a total of six years: she wrote her Doctoral thesis and gave lectures on French literature at Paris 8 University.

While living in France, Elena received a job offer from Saint Petersburg. There, she taught French and humanitarian subjects to foreign students.

In Saint Petersburg, however, she began to feel that a piece of her identity was missing. She realised that she wanted to live closer to her relatives and learn the Estonian language properly. She took the first step towards moving at the Estonian consulate: she applied for an Estonian passport.

'As I am Estonian by birth, I received my passport very quickly,' says Elena. The ease of the process encouraged Elena to pursue her dream. In August of this year, she moved to Tallinn. Everything went smoothly because she only had a few suitcases.

Elena also saw a consultant of the Integration Foundation, which was a very pleasant experience for her. 'Together with the consultant I found out how to find a job and language courses,' she says. Elena quickly found a job without the help of the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

'I was surprised at how easy everything was,' she says. Even though her mother and father still live in Saint Petersburg, Elena has many relatives in Estonia.

'I also had the opportunity to apply for return support, but decided not to. I figured someone else might need it more,' explains Elena.

Estonia – a country of contrasts

Elena still uses her French language skills in Estonia – she is currently working as a French teacher at the Tallinn European School. Her students and colleagues are from different nationalities and Elena enjoys the atmosphere very much. 'I really love my job!' she states.

Elena has devoted a large part of her life to languages and teaching. Interestingly, many of her relatives are also language

teachers. Elena has noticed that teachers are highly respected in Estonia.

Poetry helps to understand the world

As Elena's roots are on an island, her favourite poem *Oma saar* (My own island) is noteworthy. The poem by Gustav Suits is about an island, but also about finding one's place in the world. For Elena, poetry and literature are an important way to discover her identity.

Elena has thought a lot about identity. Her background is like a puzzle with different pieces: her grandfather was a fisherman on Pärissaar, Elena herself was born in Russia, but is closely related to the French language. She writes poems in French and draws inspiration from her colourful life. This sometimes leads to funny incidents. For example, while reading *Purge* by Sofi Oksanen she

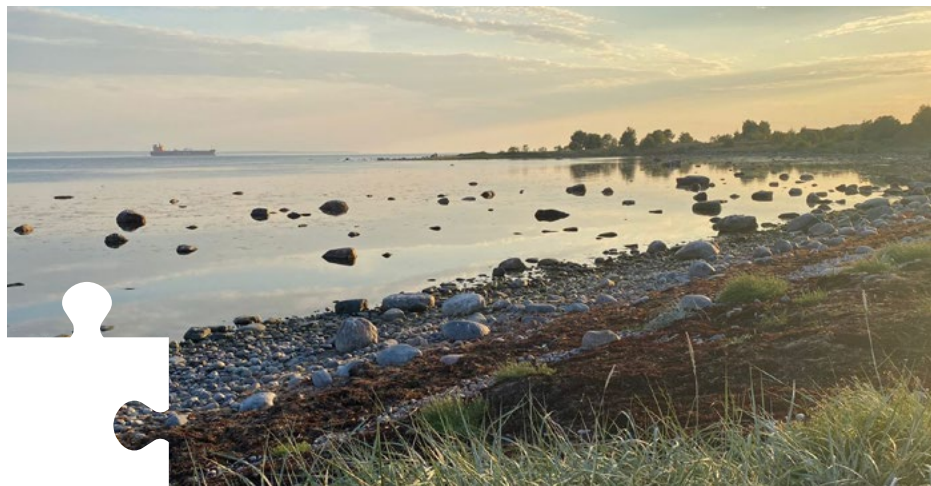


Photo: private collection

suddenly realised that she is reading a story in French written by a Finnish author based on events in Estonia.

Tricks for learning the language

The hardest thing for Elena is learning Estonian. 'When I was little, I spoke Estonian very well – my friends were Estonian,' recalls Elena. As a child, she also attended Estonian language classes at the St. Petersburg Society of Estonian Culture.

Elena still remembers her teacher and the poem *Meie kiisul kriimud silmad*. Estonian language courses are held in the organisation to this day. In addition, you can sing in a choir and learn folk dances.

When Elena moved to France, she no longer actively studied Estonian, meaning her language skills became a little rusty. That is why it was essential for her to move back to Estonia. Her current Estonian language teacher is also from the St. Petersburg Society of Estonian Culture – Elena meets them via Skype.

'Now, I am able to talk to my Estonian colleagues in Estonian,' she says happily. Elena also communicates in Estonian with her French co-workers, who want to live in Estonia and learn Estonian.

Elena believes that Estonian is a very interesting and rare language that needs to be valued. The most difficult thing

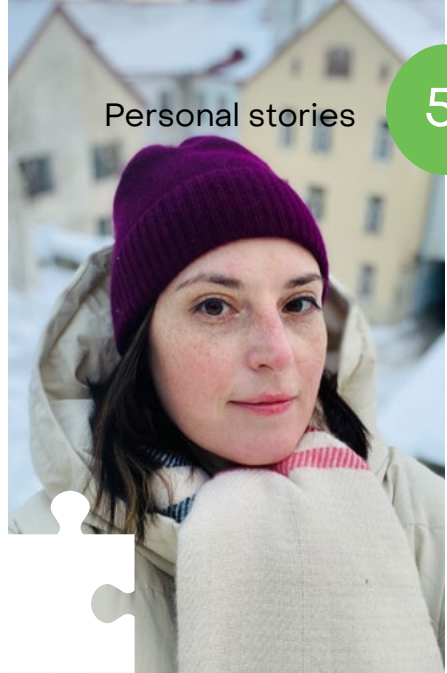


Photo: private collection

about learning Estonian is that there are a lot of grammatical cases. Elena dreams of translating: she would love to translate Estonian poetry in the future. She also dreams to write a novel based on the interesting history of her family.

Knowing the Estonian language is very important to Elena. She encourages other returnees, 'Learn Estonian and do not be afraid to talk to people!' The Integration Foundation offers various activities to learn the language: from ceramics to a choir. Visit the website to learn more.

Although many Estonians want to speak English or Russian, Elena knows a good trick: sometimes she says that she only speaks Estonian and French when shopping or going out. This way, she can practice her Estonian. 🧩

Moving to Estonia

Moving internationally is time-consuming and complicated. In order for the move to go smoothly, we recommend that you think it through and prepare in advance.



Photo: private collection

Registration of residence

Registering your residence is necessary so that your children can go to school, get health insurance, and see a family doctor. In addition, it allows you to use the services of the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund and apply for social benefits. The place where you live must be registered as your residence – for example, a rented apartment or a place where you are staying with relatives. For this, a notice of residence must be submitted.

Submit the notice of residence in the [e-population register](#) or at the local government.

If you are not the owner of the residence indicated in the notice of residence, attach to the notice a copy of the document certifying the right to use the premises (for example, a lease contract) or the permission of the owner of the premises. The permission can be signed document written in free form or a signature on the notice of residence.

Moving to Estonia with a pet

You can move to Estonia with up to five pets or birds, which cannot be sold or given away after arrival in Estonia. When moving with a pet, the following requirements must be met.

Microchip

Dogs, cats, and ferrets must be microchipped or marked with a clearly legible tattoo applied before 3 July 2011. The microchip must comply with the ISO standard and be readable using a microchip reader. The animal must be microchipped before vaccination against rabies.



Photo: Unsplash

Veterinary certificate of parasite control and vaccination

The animal must be accompanied by a veterinary certificate that complies with the implementing regulation of the European Commission and which has been approved by a veterinary officer or a veterinarian in the country of origin. The certificate must have the details of the animal.

When arriving with dogs, cats, or ferrets, the certificate must contain confirmation of parasite control, anti-rabies vaccination, and, in some countries, determination of rabies antibody titre.

When arriving with pet birds, the certificate must contain confirmation of vaccination against avian influenza subtypes H5 and H7, 14 days of isolation prior to the trip, and a negative result of the avian influenza test performed on the seventh day of isolation.

Declaration of non-commercial movement

The certificate must be accompanied by your name as the owner of the pet or a declaration of non-commercial movement signed by a person authorised by you.

Useful links

Submitting a notice of residence: www.rahvastikuregister.ee

Travelling with a pet:
pta.agri.ee/en/animals/travelling-pet



Photo: private collection

Fabian enjoys autumn in Estonia and friendly people

Fabian (41), born in Colombia, moved to Estonia with his wife Laura and their two sons. He took the life-changing step after receiving guidance from above. Namely, Fabian wanted to provide a better life for his family and asked God to give him direction. Soon after, a company in Estonia made him a job offer.

But how the little Estonia appeared Colombian family radar? Fabian had never been to Estonia and did not speak a word of Estonian. However, his grandfather Ferdinand was from Estonia. Like many Estonians, Ferdinand fled abroad because of the war. Fabian was close to his grandfather – they lived together for several years before his death.

Fabian became interested in living in Estonia and came across the website of the Integration Foundation. He talked to a consultant who gave him a lot of useful information about living in Estonia. Together, they explored the best options for finding a job. As Fabian was working as a production manager for a TV channel in Colombia, the consultant forwarded him information about a position in the same field.

Namely, an Estonian TV channel was looking for a production manager. Fabian contacted them and after less than a month, the company said that Fabian was the right person for them. 'You can say that moving to Estonia was only partly our decision,' Fabian laughs.

A hopeful but difficult move

First, Fabian applied for Estonian citizenship for himself and his sons. For that, he had to go to the US – there is no Estonian embassy in Colombia. In order to apply for citizenship, Fabian had to prove his origin. That was not difficult, because the record of Ferdinand was available in the Estonian archives.

However, the moving itself caused difficulties. While Fabian was in the US applying for citizenship, Laura had to deal with the sale of the house and their belongings. 'Moving was the biggest challenge our family has ever faced,' says Fabian.

It was hard for the children to leave their friends. They also had to leave behind their three cats because it would have been too expensive to bring them to Estonia. Fortunately, their relatives could take them in. They hope that they will soon find a way to bring the cats home.

Five days before the move, Laura's mother died. It was a shock to the family. 'Everything was extremely difficult. However, we now realise that our efforts and sacrifices were worth it,' Fabian describes. They feel good in Estonia and people have been very kind to them.

The return support from the Integration Foundation was a great help to the family. 'Applying for the support was easy, and the Foundation helped us throughout the process,' Fabian rejoices. The family received a support of 2,560 euros, which helped to cover most of the moving costs.

Immediately after moving to Estonia, they faced a new challenge. Laura developed a health problem that required surgery. Fabian is grateful that it happened in Estonia and not in Colombia. 'Even though we had health insurance in Colombia, we would have had to wait a very long time for the surgery,' he states. In Estonia, however, the problem was solved quickly and professionally.

Finding an apartment wasn't an easy task

However, the challenges were far from over. For example, finding a home proved to be very difficult. 'There were several apartment owners who only wanted Estonians as tenants,' states Fabian. It took four months before Fabian's family finally found a home in Mustamäe.

Finding a suitable school for the children, however, was even more difficult due to the language barrier. Until autumn, the children were taught at home by their mother. From this year, the sons started school at the Tallinn Art Gymnasium.

Learning a language requires patience

At the Tallinn Art Gymnasium, communication generally takes place in Estonian, but English is used when necessary. However, Fabian's younger son does not speak English, either. 'We just send him to school in the morning and hope for the best,' Fabian jokes. He is happy that his sons will be able to participate in special Estonian language lessons from November.

Like many people moving to Estonia, Fabian's family struggles with the language. They want to learn Estonian, but getting started is difficult. Fabian registered for Estonian language courses offered by the state in April, but is still waiting for a suitable course.



Photo: private collection



Photo: private collection

Searching for his Estonian roots

Fabian has discovered a lot of relatives in Estonia that he did not know about before. He found out that the family's roots go back to the Nissi rural municipality in Harju County. 'It was thrilling to meet other people whose last name is Ojasild,' Fabian laughs. 'In Colombia, I felt like I was the only Ojasild in the world.'

There are no seasons in Colombia, which is why Fabian enjoys them very much in Estonia. He most loves autumn, when nature is incredibly colourful and beautiful. The family loves hiking in nature and going to parks, even in winter. Laura is still learning English and Estonian. In Colombia, she worked as a journalist in a state institution, but due to the language barrier, it is difficult for her to do this in Estonia. However, she has a channel on YouTube, where others can see videos of the family's adventures in Estonia.

Differences must be taken into account

Fabian advises other people moving to Estonia to do their research. 'I have met many people from South America for whom it is too cold and dark, the food is bad, and the people are closed off,' describes Fabian.

According to him, however, it must be taken into account that all places are different. 'People have different ways of expressing their feelings,' Fabian remains realistic.

Fabian himself, however, enjoys Estonia very much – even the cold and darkness, different foods, and shy people. 'Everyone has been very friendly to us – both in grocery stores like Maxima and Rimi and in state institutions,' says Fabian. 🧩



Laura's YouTube channel is
@xpanziontravels4731.

Estonian language learning

Free Estonian language courses for learners of different levels

The Integration Foundation offers free Estonian language courses for learners of all levels. You can usually register for courses twice a year – at the beginning of the year and at the end of the summer.

Independent e-learning

You can find materials for independent learning on the [website of the Integration Foundation](#). Exciting information can also be found on the [Keeleabi page](#) of the Institute of the Estonian Language, [Sõnaveeb](#) and the [Dictionary of Standard Estonian](#).

Activities that support language learning

If you already know the language well enough, but want to develop your communication skills in Estonian, check out the [events calendar](#) on the website of the Integration Foundation. Register in the [self-service environment](#) to keep up to date with Estonian language courses and activities that support language learning. There, you can register for a suitable activity.

Language learning at the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund

You can participate in courses provided by the Unemployment Insurance Fund if your Estonian language skills need improvement.

If you are registered as unemployed at the Unemployment Insurance Fund, ask a consultant about language learning opportunities. The Unemployment Insurance Fund offers the unemployed possibilities to learn Estonian language at the level required for work. It is also possible to participate in the language courses if you have already found a job.

Scholarship programme to support the studies of Estonians living abroad in Estonia

The Education and Youth Board offers scholarships for Estonians living abroad to learn the Estonian language. The scholarship supports participation in an intensive Estonian language course during one academic year. You can find more information about the scholarship programme on the [website of the Education and Youth Board](#).

Language training for newly arrived immigrants

If your partner, with whom you are moving to Estonia, is a citizen of another country, they can also join the [adaptation programme](#), where they can take part in an entry-level Estonian language course.

Getting started with language learning

Check out the [recommendations for language learning](#) on the website of the Integration Foundation. You can also [assess your language skills](#) on the website.

In addition, the Integration Foundation offers the opportunity to [consult](#) with counsellors regarding language learning. You can also find answers to your questions on the [website of the Foundation](#).

Good luck! [Email us](#) if you have any questions.



Photo: Alvo Kallas

Useful links

Website of the Integration Foundation

Independent language

integratsioon.ee/en/independent-study-and-materials

Recommendations for language learning:

integratsioon.ee/en/whats-right-language-learning-format-you

Assess your language skills:

integratsioon.ee/en/language-proficiency-and-testing-language-skills

Counselling:

integratsioon.ee/en/counselling

Find answers to your questions:

integratsioon.ee/en/find-answers-your-questions

Language learning events:

integratsioon.ee/en/events

Self-service environment:

iseteenindus.integratsioon.ee/login

Questions about language learning:

info@integratsiooninfo.ee

Language learning scholarship of the Education and Youth Board:

harno.ee/en/scholarships-and-grants/scholarships-studying-and-working-estonia/scholarship-program-aimed

Adaptation programme and entry-level courses:

www.settleinestonia.ee/

Keeleabi: keeleabi.eki.ee/

Sõnaveeb: sonaveeb.ee/

Dictionary of Standard Estonian:

www.eki.ee/dict/qs/

There is time to think about dreams

Ilona (36) was one of those young people who left Estonia during the 2009 economic crisis. She did have a job working for the telecommunications company EMT, but wages were low in Estonia at that time. The chances of finding a new job were also poor. 'There was practically no work in Estonia,' Ilona recalls.

At first, Ilona planned to go abroad only for a while – her mother lived in London, and Ilona went to visit her for two weeks. Once she got there, she realised that working conditions were better in England. She decided to try to find work in London and found a job as a nanny in just a week. The first month was difficult: Ilona lived with her mother's friends and slept on the floor. Despite this, Ilona decided to keep trying. She saved up some money and was soon able to rent a room.

Ilona worked as a nanny for six years. After that, big changes took place in her life: Ilona had a son, rented an apartment with the father of the child, and learned

to become an eyelash and makeup technician. Last year, Ilona also studied regression therapy and started providing psychological counselling.

Changes in Estonia

Although her life was in England, Ilona still kept in touch with Estonia. She spent her summer holidays in Estonia and visited friends and family. However, she thought that the Estonian economy was the same as it was in 2009. To tell the truth, Ilona did not even think about the fact that life in Estonia had improved in the years she had been away.

Three years ago, her friends casually mentioned that life in Estonia has changed a lot. It turned out that some people live better in Estonia than people in England, where almost the entire salary is used to pay rent.

That was the first time Ilona considered moving back to Estonia. Everything seemed good, simple, and convenient in Estonia. Would it really be possible to live in her home country again?



Photo: private collection

The breaking point happened the following summer, during a seemingly normal car ride. A switch inexplicably flipped in her head: she suddenly knew she had to move. However, the thought was scary, as she already had a secure job and loyal customers in England. In Estonia, she would have to start all over again.

Her son helped to decide

Ilona's seven-year-old son was the one who ultimately convinced her. 'London is not a city for children,' explains Ilona. There are very few activities for children there: you have to walk a long way to get to the nearest playground or hobby group.

In Tallinn, Ilona feels that children have been taken into account. There are many playgrounds and opportunities to engage in hobbies. This July, Ilona moved back to Tallinn with her son.

Both are very happy with the decision: their family and friends are here. 'I had

friends in London as well, but I only saw them once a month. London is so big and it takes several hours to meet your friends,' Ilona describes. In Estonia, however, everything is comfortably close.

Ilona thought it was a good sign that several of her friends moved back to Estonia around the same time. Child-friendliness was important to them as well. Ilona feels that in Estonia, parents devote a lot of time to and really care about their children.

Together with a consultant of the Integration Foundation, suitable educational institutions were found – her son attended the Tallinn Art Gymnasium. The school accepts children who do not speak Estonian and teaches them Estonian in a friendly environment. From the fourth grade, all lessons are taught in Estonian.

Calm and child-friendly language learning

Ilona's son reached school age in Estonia this year, but the number of suitable schools and places was limited. Namely, her son does not speak Estonian yet. However, it is very important for Ilona that her son learns the Estonian language.

At the moment, Ilona's son is in the first grade, where they use a lot of Estonian. If necessary, English is also used so that all children can understand what is being said. The children really like that they get to play outside for an hour every day. In England, her son did not want to go to school at all. In Estonia, however, he is happy to go.

More opportunities to make something of yourself

As a young mother, Ilona decided to apply for return support from the Integration Foundation. She is currently in the process of preparing the documents to mitigate the cost of return.

She has not had time to apply for other supports yet because she is very busy. Namely, she started learning coaching two months ago. Ilona's mission in life is to support people overcome fears and limiting beliefs. For example, she would like to help other returnees whose mother tongue is Russian.



Photo: private collection

Ilona feels that the future of Estonia is bright: many top specialists from various fields are moving back to their homeland. According to her, there are more opportunities to make something of yourself here. 'In England, I did not even have time to think about my dreams – if I had to do something, it would take all day.'

In addition, Ilona is happy with how easy banking and other affairs are in Estonia. 'In England, you had to go from one place to another only to end up back at the first place again,' describes Ilona. In Estonia, everything is made simple and logical with the help of digital services.

Awareness-raising activities help you decide

Ilona is very grateful for the support and help she received. However, she'd like more awareness-raising activities to be offered to returnees. For example, there

are groups on Facebook for Estonians living abroad, where information about the return support could be shared.

'There could also be a list of documents that are needed when moving to Estonia,' says Ilona. She believes that when more information reaches people, the decision will be easier to make.


Ilona advises other returnees to trust their intuition. 'It is always worth opening a door, because there are new opportunities behind it,' she believes. 



Photo: Unsplash

Work



Photo: Rasmus Jurkatam

Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund

You can get information about job vacancies and the general situation of the labour market from the [Unemployment Insurance Fund](#). You can also contact a [career counsellor](#). If you register as unemployed, you will be able to thoroughly discuss your plan with a counsellor and, if necessary, also participate in appropriate trainings.

Looking for a job independently

The largest job portals in Estonia are [cvkeskus.ee](#) and [cv.ee](#). You can upload your CV or simply browse job offers there. Companies and state institutions publish job offers on these portals, from which you can choose the most suitable one and apply for it. Employers are increasingly using the social media network [LinkedIn](#) to publish job offers as well.

Finding a job through a recruitment agency

The consultant of a recruitment agency brings the job seeker and the employer together. Recruitment agencies are usually used by companies for targeted searches. If you are a recognised specialist in your field, be sure to send your CV to the recruitment agency. One

of the most well-known agencies is [Manpower](#).

Work in an English-speaking environment

There are many start-ups in the Estonian business environment whose employees speak English. You can find job offers for positions where the working environment is in English on the [website of Work in Estonia](#).

Work bits

If you initially want to find a temporary job, start by doing workbits. You can find a suitable job for a day, a week, or a whole season on the [GoWorkaBit](#) portal. You can do workbits if you are [registered as unemployed](#) for up to eight days a month.

Voluntary work

If you want to do voluntary work, check out the [Volunteer Hub](#).

Starting a business

Creating your own company in Estonia is easy. Grants for starting a business can be applied for from the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund and the State Shared Service Centre. You can find more information about



Photo: Rasmus Jurkatam

the grants offered [here](#). The [network of county development centres](#) supports the development of entrepreneurship by offering consultations and training for entrepreneurs. The development centres help to implement a business idea in cooperation with the entrepreneur. Consultations are offered to both entrepreneurs and people interested in starting a business.

Estonian working environment

The full-time workload in Estonia is 40 hours a week. By agreement with the employer, it is also possible to work part-time.

- When working full-time, you get 28 holiday days a year.
- In Estonia, 70% of people spend less than 30 minutes to travel to work by public transport (European Commission data, 2019).
- The average gross monthly salary in Estonia in the second quarter of 2022 was 1,693 euros.
- The Estonian unemployment rate in 2021 was 6.1%.
- As at April 2022, the biggest labour shortage in Estonia was in the following positions: construction engineers, nurses, speech therapists, psychologists, construction technicians, and builders.

Useful links

Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund:

www.tootukassa.ee/en

Career counselling:

www.minukarjäär.ee

CVKeskus.ee:

www.cvkeskus.ee

CV.ee:

www.cv.ee/en/

LinkedIn:

www.linkedin.com

Work in an English-speaking environment:

www.workinestonia.com

GoWorkaBit:

www.goworkabit.ee

Working while unemployed:

www.tootukassa.ee/en/services/job-search/temporary-employment-during-period-registration-unemployed

Volunteer Hub:

www.vabatahtlikud.ee/en/

Consulting in county development centres:

www.arenduskeskused.ee/en/consultations-and-trainings-for-companies

Grant for a start-up company:

www.eesti.ee/en/doing-business/financing-a-company/financing-a-startup-company

Estonia is the best place to raise a child

Ronald (32) is an actor whose career has taken him to both Hollywood and Moscow. His life is full of movies, glamour, and travel. However, he found real peace in our small Estonia.

Ronald was born in 1990. He spent his childhood like every other boy in Tallinn: he went to school, did visual arts, and watched movies in his spare time. His life took a turn when the young man studied in the eighth grade.

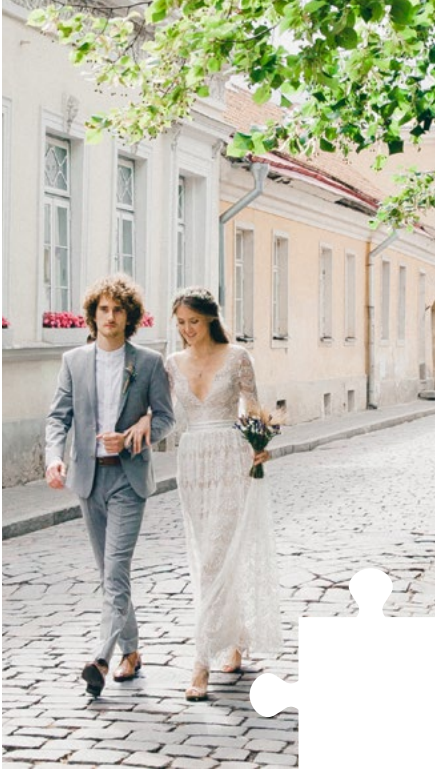
One day, director Anu Pennanen came to their painting class and invited young people to audition for the movie *Sõprus/Druzhba*, which was about Tallinn. As Ronald had always loved movies, he decided to try his luck. He got one of the main roles in the film, and some stories about his life were written into the script. This experience made Ronald realise that he wanted to become an actor. In the 11th grade, he auditioned for the acting hobby group of the Russian

Theatre and got in. After graduating from upper secondary school, he decided to study at the Moscow Art Theatre School, because the famous actor and director Konstantin Stanislavski had also studied there. Stanislavski and his methods have been praised by such famous actors as Robert de Niro and Meryl Streep.

The competition was fierce: more than 300 people applied for one place.



Photo: Anne Ling



However, Ronald was not afraid of failing: he knew that if he prepared well, the committee would see it. Ronald was right – he was accepted into the school. He also received a scholarship from the Ministry of Culture to study abroad.

The theatre stage was too small for him

Ronald, then 19 years old, moved to Moscow in 2009. His Bachelor's studies lasted four years, after which Ronald began working at the Ninth Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre. They travelled a lot: performances took place all over Russia, as well as in Europe. The theatre work was very intense, and Ronald stopped to think why he had chosen acting in the first place.

By looking deep within himself, he discovered that he actually wanted to act in movies. Ronald began looking at programmes at renowned film schools and stumbled upon the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute in Hollywood. In 2018, Ronald moved to Hollywood and was satisfied: the film school focused on acting in front of the camera. During his studies, Ronald also ended up on the set of Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. Ronald promised himself that one day, he would also be in a Tarantino film.

Having just moved to Moscow, Ronald had met Valentina, a Russian woman. Their relationship was strong enough to withstand his travels: film projects always took him abroad. Every year, he also visited Estonia a few times and was always amazed at how quickly Tallinn was developing. Ronald and Valentina got married in 2016 in the old town of Tallinn. The young couple often toyed with the idea of moving to Estonia, but that remained just an idea for a long time.

A young family needs a peaceful environment

At the beginning of this year, dreaming of having a child for a while, Valentina finally got pregnant. That was the decisive moment: it was now certain that they had to move to Estonia. 'Estonia is the place where we want to raise a child – it is quiet and comfortable here,' explains Ronald.

Another reason for the move was that home birth is officially allowed in Estonia. Ronald and Valentina wanted the birth to take place in a natural environment. In April this year, the young couple moved to Tallinn. The move was easy because they did not have a lot of things – moving everything only took a few car trips.

Ronald has Estonian citizenship, but Valentina had to apply for a temporary residence permit. As they are officially married, it was straightforward process. Within two months, Valentina had a residence permit. 'After that, it was very easy to get health insurance and go for check-ups at the hospital,' says Ronald. He praises the Pelgulinna Maternity Hospital, where everything was done quickly and pleasantly.

They had to find a home before the child was born. Searching for an apartment took Valentina and Ronald, who are rather demanding, quite some time. As Valentina is an interior designer, modern architecture was important to them. Therefore, many apartments were immediately cast aside. Finally, they found an apartment in a new development of North Tallinn, which the young couple is really satisfied with. 'Peace, fresh air, and the sea – this is the perfect place to raise a child,' says Ronald.

On the sixth of November, which was unexpectedly sunny in the middle of a rainy week, their beloved daughter was born. Valentina gave birth at home under the watchful eye of a midwife. 'It was





Photo: private collection

a dream birth for my wife,' says Ronald, who was by her side the whole time.

The future is certain

Currently, Valentina enjoys being at home with her child and does not think about going to work. Ronald, on the other hand, is in negotiations for various acting projects. He has not asked for help from the Unemployment

Ronald found out about the Integration Foundation only recently through an acquaintance. He decided to apply for financial support and has taken part in a telephone consultation. The Foundation provided him with the necessary guidelines and assistance to prepare the application.

Insurance Fund, because Ronald believes that he will find his dream job on his own. For example, he has already participated in the hit film *Kalev* and the soon-to-be-released films *December*, *Erik Stoneheart*, and *Õiglane*.

Ronald speaks Estonian well, but feels that his language skills became a little rusty while living abroad for a long time. Annual trips to Estonia and talking with friends here helped him. Valentina also wants to learn Estonian when their child is a little older. Right now, all the young couple wants to do is devote themselves to getting to know their daughter.

Ronald and Valentina are very satisfied with their life in Estonia. There is only one thing that worries Ronald. 'It is very windy here!' he laughs. 🧩

Education



Photo: private collection

In Estonia, school attendance is compulsory from the ages of 7 to 17. A place in a school or kindergarten close to home is ensured by the local government. Education is provided in Estonian.

Nursery school and daycare

Attending nursery school is not obligatory in Estonia. The local government ensures a kindergarten place at the request of the parents for children aged 1.5–7 years. A digitally signed application must be submitted to the local government for this. If there is an available place, the child will be accepted. If there are no available places in the requested kindergarten, it will be explained to the parent how the application will be dealt with.

Basic education

Basic education is compulsory in Estonia. Basic school has grades 1–9. When moving to Estonia, the parent can submit a written application to the local government. The local government, in cooperation with the parent, will find the most suitable learning opportunity for the child and prepare a study plan.

Secondary education

Secondary education is not compulsory in Estonia. After acquiring basic education, it

is possible to acquire general secondary education in an upper secondary school or vocational secondary education in a vocational educational institution. The duration of studies is generally three years. The student decides together with the school which curriculum and form is the most suitable for continuing their studies. A basic school graduation certificate is required to enter an upper secondary school. The [general conditions for admission](#) of a student to an upper secondary school are established by the Minister of Education and Research, while the more specific conditions are established by the head of school of the upper secondary school. Admission conditions are listed on the website of the school. Children can enrol in a regular upper secondary school until they turn 17.

Secondary education in adulthood

You can enrol in an adult upper secondary school from the age of 17 if you have graduated from basic school. The studies take place in a non-stationary form of study, with greater emphasis on independent work.

Vocational secondary education

You can enrol in a vocational educational institution if you have graduated from basic school. From the age of 22, you can enrol in a vocational educational

institution even if you do not have a basic school graduation certificate, but you have competencies corresponding to the level of basic education. The school will assess the required competencies.

Higher education

In Estonia, the general condition for enrolling in higher education institution is secondary education. Higher education institutions may also establish their own admission conditions. If secondary education was acquired in a foreign country, the [Estonian ENIC/NARIC Centre](#) will provide an assessment of it. Studying at a higher education institution is free for students if they study in an Estonian-language curriculum full-time, except in private higher education institutions, where tuition fees must be paid. If you want to start studying in Estonian, it is possible to complete a free one-year in-depth Estonian language study programme after successful admission.

Learning the Estonian language

The goal of Estonia is to integrate the child from another language or cultural space into regular education as soon as possible, to help the child adapt to the Estonian school culture, and to teach the Estonian language and their mother tongue.

Additional support for language studies

The [Ministry of Education and Research](#) offers support for the additional learning

of the Estonian language for students of general education schools.

Scholarship programme for graduates of higher and vocational education

The [Education and Youth Board](#) offers scholarships for foreign Estonians to learn the Estonian language. The scholarship supports participation in an intensive Estonian language course during one academic year.

Rajaleidja is a pan-Estonian network that offers free counselling for adults who support children in their education – parents, teachers, support specialists, etc.

Useful links

Academic recognition:

www.harno.ee/en/development-and-qualifications/qualifications/academic-recognition

Rajaleidja: www.rajaleidja.ee

Language learning support of the Ministry of Education and Research:

www.hm.ee/eesti-keel-ja-voorkeeled/eesti-keel/keeleoppetoetused

Language learning scholarship of the Education and Youth Board:

harno.ee/en/scholarships-and-grants/scholarships-studying-and-working-estonia/scholarship-program-aimed

The bravery of their great-grandfather secured the sisters' future



Annabella (20) and Ana Estefanía (18) were born in Venezuela. The young women are connected to Estonia by their missing great-grandfather, whom they have never met. He was the one who helped the girls move to a safe country with a secure future.

Venezuela is a beautiful country, but it has a socialist regime, a controlling government, and poor opportunities for education. The sisters did not feel safe there and did not see a future in Venezuela. Fortunately, their great-grandfather was Estonian. This meant that the young women had the right to apply for Estonian citizenship.

Their great-grandfather Eduard arrived in Venezuela after an incredible journey. He was born in Estonia, but in 1918, the Soviet army wanted to recruit him. Eduard fled his homeland, left his family behind, and never saw them again. At that time, Eduard was only 12 years old.

Little Eduard walked from Estonia to China. In China, he boarded a ship whose destination he did not know, and arrived in South America after a long voyage. There, he adventured in different countries until he arrived in Venezuela. In Venezuela, he realised that it was there that he wanted to get married and start a family. By that time, the young man had turned 18 years old.

A past not discussed

Unfortunately, Eduard died before Annabella and Ana Estefanía were born. The sisters' only link to their great-grandfather is their grandmother Rosa, Eduard's daughter, who has also passed away by now. Their grandmother was very interested in her family history, but her father never wanted to talk about it.

Eduard also did not want to teach the children Estonian. He was afraid that if anyone found out that they were Estonians, they would be handed over to the Soviet authorities.

Although Eduard did not want to pass on his sad story to his children, Annabella and Ana Estefanía got an Estonian citizenship thanks to him. To do this, they had to go to the Estonian embassy in the US and use their great-grandfather's passport to prove that they have Estonian roots.

Even after applying for citizenship, moving to Estonia was still just an idea. This year, the girls finally realised that they wanted to get an education outside of Venezuela. 'I finished upper secondary school, but we were not really taught much there,' Ana Estefanía says with regret. Annabella's university studies in Mexico were interrupted due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Consulting the Integration Foundation definitely helped in making the final decision, as they obtained more information about living in Estonia. Through video consultation, the girls received information about the climate, people, and job opportunities in Estonia. In May of this year, only a month after the decision was made, the sisters flew to Estonia.

Diving into the unknown

Arriving at Tallinn airport, the sisters faced the unknown. The girls had never been here, did not speak a word of Estonian, and did not know anyone. The only thing they could count on was an accommodation rented for 15 days, but when they got there, it turned out that their booking had been lost.

The girls stood in the middle of the street and thought about what to do next. When asking the family for help, it turned out that they have a relative in Estonia named Mait. The sisters contacted him and he helped them find a place to live, introduced Tallinn, and helped them settle in Estonia.

Annabella and Ana Estefanía are very satisfied with the work of all public officials. The guidance and information received from the Integration Foundation has also helped them tremendously. However, they point out that people should not forget that not everyone is as skilled in technology as Estonians.



Photo: private collection

'In Estonia, it is taken for granted that everyone knows how to use technology,' the sisters explain. 'We were given a link and told to do this and that. We did not even know what Smart-ID is and what a digital signature is.'

The girls spent the whole weekend trying to use their Smart-ID. When their relative Mait came to the rescue, it only took him a minute. The sisters feel that those moving to Estonia should be offered a couple of courses in the field of digital opportunities here.

Although everything new is scary at first, the girls consider digital development to be the most positive aspect of Estonia. In Venezuela, you have to go from one place to another and wait for hours. In Estonia, they feel that the state really wants to make life easier for people.

Work and studies go hand in hand

Knowing the Estonian language is very important to the sisters. However, language learning has its own challenges. For example, Annabella registered for Estonian language courses at the Unemployment Insurance Fund in summer, but had to wait several months for the group to fill up. She started language courses in November this year.

Ana Estefanía cannot take Estonian language courses at the moment because she just started her first job. She works in an online casino in shifts. Currently, the girls are trying to manage with Annabella attending classes and passing on what she learned to her sister at home.

Annabella worked as an administrator at a surgery centre in Venezuela. She would also like to find a similar job in

Estonia, but for now, she plans to devote herself to language studies.

Here to stay

Both girls see their future in Estonia. They really want to go to university: Annabella would continue her unfinished business studies, Ana Estefanía sees her career in the digital field.

Annabella and Ana Estefanía also have a little brother who stayed behind in Venezuela. The girls want their brother to move to Estonia too and get the opportunity to get an education in Estonia.


According to the sisters, Estonia is pleasantly small and convenient. 'We want to live here for a long time!' they say in unison. Right now, the girls are looking forward to winter because they have only heard stories about it before. 



Photo: private collection

Life in Estonia

Applying for documents

Identity documents are the ID-card and passport. When [applying for a document](#) for the first time, you need to prove your citizenship. To do this, you must submit an original document stating that one of your parents or grandparents has Estonian citizenship, and a birth certificate. If necessary, it can also be ordered from the [archive](#).

ID-card

The ID-card is a mandatory identity document for an Estonian citizen and a citizen of the European Union living in Estonia. The ID-card is valid as a travel document and is a digital means of personal identification. You can find more information about the use of the ID-card on this [website](#).

Passport

The passport of an Estonian citizen is a travel document in which the fingerprints of the passport holder are recorded from the age of 12. You can apply for a passport at the Police and Border Guard Board, where you will have to take a photo and provide fingerprints and a sample signature. Abroad, you can apply for an Estonian passport at the foreign mission of the Republic of Estonia..

Driving licence

If your driving licence was issued in a foreign country, check the requirements that need to be met to maintain the right

Digital services

Estonia is a digital state and almost everything can be done with an ID-card. If you want to give signatures and confirmations with a smartphone, you need to register a Smart-ID or Mobile-ID account.

to drive or to renew your driving licence on the website of the [Transport Administration](#). There, you can also find an overview of how long and under what conditions a driving licence issued in this country is valid in Estonia and how to exchange it for an Estonian driving licence.

Medical care

In Estonia, medical care is free for everyone with valid health insurance. You will get health insurance coverage when you start working or studying or register as unemployed. To get a family physician, you must have a registered residence. Getting on the practice list takes time. You can find the list of family doctors and information about the practice list on the website of the **Health Board** and in the article 'Medical care' on the state portal.

Personal identification code

When you move to Estonia, you will be issued an Estonian personal identification code if you do not have one yet. To apply for a personal identification code, you have to go to the local government in person.





Photo: private collection

Cost of living in 2022

	Average price
Milk (1 litre)	€0.95
Rice (1 kg)	€1.93
Eggs (12 pcs.)	€2.19
Cheese (1 kg)	€9.05
Chicken fillet (1 kg)	€7.10
Apple (1 kg)	€1.69
Potatoes (1 kg)	€0.95
Public transport ticket	€1.50
Petrol (1 litre)	€1.96
Utilities (electricity, heating, water, waste collection) per month for an 85 m ² apartment	€288.74
Nursery school fee (1 month)	€287.06
Monthly rent of an apartment (1 room) in the centre of Tallinn	€663.68
Monthly rent of an apartment (3 rooms) on the outskirts of Tallinn	€816.13
The price of a square metre of an apartment when buying (in the centre of Tallinn)	€4,024.72
The price of a square metre of an apartment when buying (on the outskirts of Tallinn)	€2,643.55

Data: Numbeo (November 2022)

Useful links

Applying for documents: www.politsei.ee/en/instructions/applying-for-an-id-card-for-an-adult

National Archives: www.ra.ee/en

Maintaining and renewing a driving licence: www.transpordiamet.ee/en/foreign-driving-licence

Entry into a family physician's practice list: www.haigekassa.ee/en/people/health-care-services/primary-health-care

Additional information about medical care: www.eesti.ee/en/health-and-care/health-and-medical-care/medical-care

Using an ID-card: www.id.ee/en

Smart-ID: www.smart-id.com

Mobile-ID: www.id.ee/en/mobile-id

Contacting the local government

Photo: Unsplash

The local government, i.e. the city or rural municipality government, is responsible for many tasks that concern your life in Estonia. For example, the local government deals with the following tasks:

- registration of a personal identification code;
- registration of residence;
- registering your child for nursery school or school;
- receiving and evaluating grant applications.

You can find the contact details of the local government on their website.

City governments

- Haapsalu city government
- Keila city government
- Kohtla-Järve city government
- Loksa city government
- Maardu city government
- Narva-Jõesuu city government
- Narva city government
- Paide city government
- Pärnu city government
- Rakvere city government
- Sillamäe city government
- Tallinn city government
- Tartu city government
- Viljandi city government
- Võru city government

If you live in a rural area, you can find the contact information of the rural municipal government where you live here: www.eesti.ee/en/institutions-contacts/local-governments/municipality-governments



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Back to your roots

