

**ESTONIA'S SIXTH REPORT
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION
FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES**

2024

Introduction

1. Estonia's sixth report on the implementation of the Council of Europe (CoE) Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (hereinafter referred to as the Framework Convention or Convention) focuses on the period 2019-2023, but important developments in early 2024 have also been discussed. Statistical data are presented depending on their availability in the period 2019-2023. The report covers legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights provided for in the Convention and comments on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee with respect to the fifth report of Estonia.

2. The topics covered by the Convention are in the area of administration of several ministries. The tasks related to integration policy, including the creation of conditions for the development of the cultural life of national minorities and their integration into Estonian society, are within the competence of the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Finance (Statistics Estonia), the Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs participated in the preparation of the report. The report includes the information provided by the Government Office, the Chancellor of Justice and the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner.

3. The Estonian authorities highly appreciate the ongoing dialogue with the CoE Advisory Committee and will continue their efforts to promote the wider implementation of the rights guaranteed by the Framework Convention at various levels, both in legislation and in practice.

Main national developments after the fifth reporting cycle

4. The 'Cohesive Estonia Strategy 2021-2030' (hereinafter referred to as the Cohesive Estonia Strategy), completed in 2021 and aimed at the development of a cohesive and inclusive society, can be highlighted as a significant development in the sixth reporting cycle. It constitutes a part of Estonia's long-term national integration policy and a logical continuation of Estonia's integration plan for the period 2014-2020. National minorities are an important target group for integration plans, and their representatives have been involved in the preparation and monitoring of integration plans over the years.

5. The Cohesive Estonia Strategy focuses on promoting integration, including adaptation, global Estonia, civil society, and the population census, which is primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but to which several other ministries contribute with their activities.

6. According to the Cohesive Estonia Strategy, Estonia is a sustainable nation state where everyone can live well. Estonian people are cooperative, share a common Estonian cultural space, value the Estonian state, and feel a sense of unity, irrespective of their native language, cultural background or place of residence. In a diverse Estonia, everyone shares democratic

values and carries a common Estonian identity. The activities of the state are people-centred and support the development of communities. Everyone feels valued and involved. Estonian people want to tie their lives to Estonia, they actively participate in community and social activities and contribute to the development of the state – they have many different opportunities to do so while living in Estonia and abroad.

7. Another important development is the continuation of the gradual transition to official-language education that began in 1992. In December 2022, the Riigikogu adopted legislative amendments required for the transition to official-language instruction in kindergartens and grades 1 and 4 in the autumn of 2024, with the aim of transitioning to a fully official-language based education system by 2030.

8. When making the decision to switch to instruction in the official language, the need to support the integration of persons with different native languages and nationalities living in Estonia into Estonian society, the labour market and the language and cultural space as a whole was taken into consideration. A unified education system creates the best conditions for this. The transition to official-language education does not concern private schools of national minorities.

9. The aim of the transition to official-language instruction is to offer all Estonian children, regardless of their native language, the opportunity to acquire a high-quality Estonian language education. The transition of all Estonian schools and kindergartens to learning in Estonian is in the interests of children and young people, as Estonian language education helps children and young people integrate into the Estonian cultural and value space so that they do not lose their identity but expand their opportunities. It also increases the cohesion of society and reduces both educational and socio-economic isolation.

10. In the transition to official-language instruction, both the education system and Sunday schools support pupils with a native language other than Estonian in learning their native language.

11. Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, which has shocked the international community, has also had a direct impact on Estonian society. A large number of Ukrainian war refugees fleeing from the horrors of war have moved to Estonia. In Estonia, 51,657 Ukrainian citizens have applied for temporary protection status and 6689 for international protection status. The Estonian state offers various support services to war refugees to help them adapt.

12. Other important developments both in legislation and practice are outlined in the various articles below.

II Implementation of the recommendations in the resolution of the Committee of Ministers: implementation of the provisions of the Convention, article by article

Article 3

Scope of application of the Framework Convention

The Advisory Committee strongly encourages the authorities to pursue an open and inclusive approach to the Framework Convention's personal scope of application and reiterates its call to consider extending protection under the Framework Convention to long-term residents without Estonian citizenship.

13. Estonia follows the recommendation of the Advisory Committee in the application of the Framework Convention, ensuring persons belonging to a national minority the opportunity to use the rights guaranteed by the Framework Convention. Since 2000, Estonia has implemented a national integration policy aimed at promoting social cohesion and integrating residents into society. See, for example, the information provided under Article 6.

Citizenship

The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to continue with their efforts to reduce the number of persons without citizenship by further facilitating access to citizenship for long-term residents and by making greater efforts to raise awareness of the benefits of citizenship.

14. Estonia implements a balanced citizenship policy that supports the acquisition of Estonian citizenship and the appreciation of citizenship status. Estonia will continue to implement measures to increase people's interest in applying for citizenship. Amendments to the Citizenship Act and various outreach activities have contributed to the achievement of that goal, as a result of which the number of people with undetermined citizenship continues to decrease.

15. Compared to the previous reporting period, the number of persons with undetermined citizenship has decreased significantly since the beginning of 2019. According to the population register, as of 1 May 2024, there are 61 401 persons with undetermined citizenship who have a valid residence permit or a right of residence and whose place of residence is registered in Estonia.

16. On 17 February 2020, amendments to the Citizenship Act entered into force, which expanded the range of minors who are granted Estonian citizenship on more favourable terms. According to the amendment, a minor who was born in Estonia or who, immediately after birth, takes up permanent residence in Estonia together with their parent or parents who are permanent residents of Estonia, and who has a long-term residence permit or the right of permanent residence, and one of whose parents is not recognised by any state as its citizen on the basis of valid laws and whose other parent is a citizen of another country, is granted Estonian citizenship at the request of their statutory representative, provided that a parent or grandparent of the minor was a resident of Estonia as of 20 August 1991.

17. The Citizenship Act, which entered into force on 1 January 2019, provided for the possibility of receiving free Estonian-language training and paid leave for the duration of language training; by the time of submitting the report, 1243 people have used this opportunity and 396 of them have submitted an application for citizenship. So far, the practice has shown that the need for and interest in language training agreements for acquiring Estonian citizenship is relatively high.

18. In the prefectures of the Police and Border Guard Board, constant awareness-raising work continues to be carried out, in the course of which officials explain to persons with undetermined citizenship, regardless of the purpose of their appeal, that they have the opportunity to apply for Estonian citizenship for themselves and their children and explain the advantages of Estonian citizenship compared to a stateless status. The Integration Foundation and Statistics Estonia also plan to cooperate in order to better inform and target state activities and policies aimed at reducing the number of persons with undetermined citizenship.

19. In order to promote social cohesion, value-based approaches that help people from different language and cultural spaces to acquire Estonian state identity and democratic values, including Estonian citizenship, are supported in cooperation among various authorities.

Data collection

The Advisory Committee recommends gathering population statistics regularly and engaging with minority representatives in analysing the results, taking into consideration the right of national minorities to self-determination.

The Advisory Committee asks the authorities to create the possibility for free self-identification on ethnicity and first language via an open list for the purposes of updating the population register.

20. The last population census was conducted in 2021 in Estonia (census moment: 31 December 2021). The census revealed that in Estonia, there are an estimated 41,960 people of dual ethnicity, i.e. 3% of the population, and 30,710 people with two native languages, i.e. 2% of the population. In terms of both ethnicity and language, the most common combinations are Estonian-Russian and people with Estonian and Russian as their native languages, respectively. Sixty-two per cent of people of dual ethnicity, i.e. 25,940 people, said that they are both Estonian and Russian. Other pairs of ethnicities make up a much smaller proportion – 5% consider themselves to be Russian and Ukrainian, while 3% consider themselves to be both Estonian and Finnish. Among those with two native languages, Estonian and Russian native speakers make up 59% (18,160), Russian and Ukrainian native speakers 12% (3810), and Estonian and English native speakers 4% (1220).

21. A person's ethnicity was treated as a register identifier. Every person has the right to determine their ethnicity in the register at any time. One part of the census was a sample survey to collect data on personal characteristics that are not found in registers. Nearly 45% of the

Estonian population responded to the sample survey, and the sample survey also included the possibility for respondents to determine their own ethnicity or ethnicities (up to two). Statistics Estonia publishes data on larger ethnic groups every year.

Determination of ethnicity in the register and in the census is not mandatory and is based on the person's statement.

22. According to the 2021 census, there are representatives of 211 ethnicities living in Estonia. 69% of the country's population are ethnic Estonians, 24% Russians, 2% Ukrainians, 0.9% Belarusians, and 0.6% Finns. There is also a small Roma community living in Estonia (676 people, almost a third of them (201 people) in Valga County).

23. In the 2021 Population and Housing Census, information was also collected about people of dual ethnicity and with two native languages. Analysis of the results: <https://rahvaloendus.ee/et/uudised/rahvaloendus-2-eesti-elanikest-raagib-kahte-emaleelt>.

24. The relevant tables of the 2021 Population and Housing Census show data by ethnicity and nationality. In addition, there are comparisons with previous censuses. For a comparison of three censuses by ethnicity, nationality and native language, see https://andmed.stat.ee/en/stat/rahvaloendus_rel_vordlus_rahvastiku-demograafilised-ja-etno-kultuurilised-naitajad.

25. Data concerning ethnicity are also published under various topics (e.g. employment and migration): https://andmed.stat.ee/en/stat/rahvaloendus_rel2021_rahvastiku-majanduslik-aktiivsus_hoivatud-ja-tooranne.

26. The results of the census have been described and analysed in press releases, in blog posts and on the census website at <https://rahvaloendus.ee/en/results/demographic-and-ethno-cultural-characteristics-of-the-population>. The Population and Housing Census received a lot of media coverage in both Estonian and Russian-language media as well as in English-language media (e.g. estonianworld, the English-language portal of Estonian Public Broadcasting, BNS). Press releases and the website of the census are available in Estonian, English and Russian, and blogs in Estonian and English. Statistics Estonia has presented the results of the census to various interest groups: researchers, ministries and politicians. Results and data have also been separately presented to the Integration Foundation.

Article 4

Protection from discrimination

The Advisory Committee reiterates its call on the authorities to consider broadening the powers of the Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment so that it can act more effectively against discrimination affecting persons belonging to national minorities. It further reiterates that measures should be taken to raise awareness of both the Commissioner and the Chancellor of Justice and their respective mandates, especially among persons belonging to national minorities.

27. The action programme of the Government of the Republic for the period 2023-2027 sets out the drafting of a bill that harmonises the protection of all characteristics related to discrimination in accordance with the Constitution. This would also extend the competence of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner. The bill is planned to be submitted to the Government of the Republic in the summer of 2024.

28. Discrimination disputes are resolved by a court or a labour dispute committee. The Chancellor of Justice resolves discrimination disputes in the conciliation procedure. In order to ensure the availability of legal aid that is necessary for the more effective exercise of the rights provided for in laws, the State-funded Legal Aid Act provides, among other things, that an application for state-funded legal aid can be submitted both in Estonian and in another language widely used in Estonia. Applications may be submitted in English by persons whose place of residence is in another Member State of the European Union or who are citizens of another Member State of the European Union.

29. In order to support diversity and social inclusion, the legal framework will be updated and the capacity of the institution of the Commissioner will be improved. Furthermore, the knowledge and skills of key target groups and stakeholders (including legal professionals, policymakers, employers, and educators) as well as social awareness will be increased.

30. In the case of suspicion of discrimination, people can turn to an independent and impartial expert for advice and assistance – the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner acting on the basis of the Equal Treatment Act.

31. In order to ensure and improve the capacity of the institution, the state budget funding of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner and their office has increased every year over the reporting period, ranging from 460,000 euros in 2019 to 527,237 euros in 2023.

32. The activities of the **Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner** (hereinafter referred to as the Commissioner) with respect to the Framework Convention are discussed below.

33. In the period from 1 January 2019 to 25 September 2023, the Commissioner was contacted on 1206 occasions. Enquiries related to ethnicity, citizenship, language skills, and/or race and skin colour were estimated to account for 10-20% of the total number of enquiries. However, it is important to note that in many cases the enquiries were not within the competence of the Commissioner and were mostly forwarded to the Chancellor of Justice.

For example, the Commissioner was approached 217 times in 2022. Among these enquiries, 22 were related to ethnicity, eight to citizenship, five to language skills, and four to race or skin colour.

34. The Commissioner's views and opinions

On several occasions, the Commissioner has been contacted in connection with job advertisements where candidates are expected to have Estonian as their native language. The Commissioner has adopted the position that the requirement that a candidate must have

Estonian as their native language must be removed from the job advertisement. It may be replaced by a requirement that the candidate must have a command of Estonian at whatever official language level that is required for the given position.

35. In addition, there have been enquiries concerning harassment based on ethnicity in the workplace. It is the responsibility of employers to ensure that employees are protected from discrimination. Based on the Commissioner's experience, employers' awareness of matters related to discrimination is still low.

36. Promoting equal treatment

There have been several subsequent editions of the publication 'Kirjad lapsevanemale' (Letters to a parent), first published in Estonian and Russian in 2017; the latest of these – 'Kirjad lapsevanemale. Kõige tähtsam seadus' (Letters to a parent. The most important law) – was published in 2022. With the war refugees from Ukraine in mind, a Ukrainian-language introduction was added to the publication and it was distributed through refugee organisations. The publication is divided into two parts, the first of which contains letters of a fictional nature to parents, each of which includes advice on how to act as a parent in different situations. The second part of the publication concerns the rights of children and parents in various fields, along with legislation and explanations. In addition, there is information on where to request help and advice. The information shared in the publication has been updated with the current legislation in each year of issue.

37. In 2021, the publication 'Ise oled vana' (You are old yourself) was published in Russian. This is a publication for older people to inform them of the rights that are guaranteed by the state pursuant to the law so that if they feel that they have encountered obstacles due to their age, they know who they should turn to in order to assert their legal rights.

38. After Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine and the subsequent arrival of Ukrainian war refugees in Estonia, the Commissioner has paid special attention to the protection of their rights; for example, the Office of the Commissioner has noticed possible unequal treatment of Ukrainians on the rental market. In a number of cases, advertisements for rental apartments indicated that 'the apartment will not be rented to Ukrainians'. In order to draw attention to the illegality of such behaviour, the Office of the Commissioner launched the campaign 'Rental accommodation – equal opportunities for all!'

Its aim was to point out that a dwelling rented in a public social media group or via a broker is a service offered to the public. It is forbidden to treat people unequally in relation to such a service. A tenant's solvency and reliability are not determined by whether they have children, their status as a war refugee or their skin colour.

39. In the autumn of 2023, the Commissioner carried out the study 'Equality needs and opportunities in the green transition', which also covered Ida-Viru County, which has a large community of people with Russian as their native language. The study looked at whether and how equality (including on the basis of ethnicity) has been promoted in the policies and measures of the green transition. It was concluded that the integration of equality is not

systematic and is often hindered by the lack of awareness and skills or resources. In order to achieve the objectives as effectively as possible, it is important to develop both areas in an integrated manner and to target and coordinate these activities centrally. The study made recommendations in four areas: strategic approach, empowerment of the parties of the green reform, decision-making that is science-based and proceeds from the needs of the target group, raising the awareness of and inclusion of the population.

40. Possible amendments to legislation

In 2023, topics concerning policy-making in the field of equality were transferred to the area of responsibility of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications. Preparations are underway for merging the Gender Equality Act and the Equal Treatment Act, which also aim to harmonise the scope of application of equal treatment.

41. Directives on minimum standards for equality institutions have been prepared in the EU legislature. Estonia has supported the adoption of the directive. These changes may impose additional responsibilities on the Office of the Commissioner. It is therefore important that the Commissioner's budget is increased accordingly if tasks are added.

42. An overview of the activities of the Chancellor of Justice and the inquiries submitted to them, which are related to the Framework Convention, has been provided below. A more in-depth overview of the activities can be found in the [annual reviews](#) of the Chancellor of Justice.

43. In the period 2019-2023, the **Chancellor of Justice** was approached on a number of issues that directly or indirectly concerned the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The majority of requests for explanation concerned the transition to Estonian language instruction, the working language of authorities, and the issue of residence permits and citizenship.

44. If the Chancellor of Justice found that the adopted legislation was not in conformity with the Constitution, they made a proposal to amend it. If the Chancellor of Justice found that unlawful implementing practice constituted the problem, they proposed to change the implementation practice. In some cases, the Chancellor of Justice advised a person to go to court if this was the best and most effective way to protect their rights. The persons who had submitted an enquiry were also given general explanations about their legal situation.

45. The Chancellor of Justice was also approached in cases of suspected discrimination. In the reporting period¹ 2019/2020, one application concerning linguistic discrimination was submitted to the Chancellor of Justice. In the period 2020/2021, the Chancellor of Justice received two applications concerning discrimination on the grounds of language and one application concerning discrimination on the grounds of nationality and ethnic origin. Of the

¹ The reporting period of the Chancellor of Justice covers the period from 1 September to 31 August.

applications sent in 2021/2022, three concerned discrimination on the grounds of nationality and ethnic origin, three on the grounds of race and one on the grounds of language. One of the applications submitted in the reporting period 2022/2023 concerned discrimination on the grounds of nationality and ethnic origin, and one on the grounds of language. No conciliation proceedings were initiated on the basis of these grounds of discrimination.

46. For example, the Chancellor of Justice was approached by the manager of a catering establishment who suspected that the Language Inspectorate was asking clarifying questions about the Estonian-language skills of an employee with a foreign name only because the employee might be of another nationality. The Chancellor of Justice concluded that the activities of the Language Inspectorate did not involve any discrimination but [advised](#) the Inspectorate to ask further questions about an employee's education only if such information is not available in the Estonian Information System for Education.

47. The Estonian School Student Councils' Union asked the Chancellor of Justice to assess whether students are treated equally when offering free preparatory courses for state exams in mathematics if such courses are only organised in Estonian. The Chancellor of Justice [found](#) that the state has a fairly broad margin of discretion in deciding how to offer preparatory courses to students as long as equal opportunities are given to students who are about to graduate. Students need to be supported primarily by their school. Upper secondary school graduates must have a command of Estonian at least at the B2.1 level, which means that they should be able to follow the course in Estonian. As this was a review course, the students must have been familiar with the material beforehand. Therefore, the state is not obliged to provide Russian-language preparatory courses to students in their final year.

48. The Chancellor of Justice was approached by a student whom the university wished to expel because their views (including on the causes of the war in Ukraine) did not coincide with those of their place of traineeship. Section 41 of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia guarantees everyone the right to their own opinion and beliefs. This provision also protects the freedom to be without opinions or beliefs as well as the right to change beliefs. The fact that a student's thoughts about a topical event differ from those of the school or its administration cannot serve as the grounds for their exclusion from the school. The right to education is a fundamental right that can only be restricted by law (sections 3 and 11 of the Constitution). The grounds for exclusion from a higher education institution are provided for in the Higher Education Act. For example, a school can exclude a student who has seriously breached the conditions of and procedure for the organisation of studies, has harmed other people with their behaviour, or has committed an indecent act. In its study regulations, the school may not establish grounds for exclusion from the school that are different from those laid down by law.

49. The Chancellor of Justice was asked for help by a Belarusian citizen to whom the bank had refused to provide banking services due to their citizenship. It was explained to that person that the bank must enter into a contract for the provision of basic payment services with a consumer lawfully staying in the European Union if such consumer has a justifiable interest in doing so. A bank must enter into a contract for payment services and open a bank account for a person who is not suspected of money laundering and terrorist financing and if the person and the contractual terms and conditions requested by them comply with the law and the general terms and conditions of service established by the payment service provider or the standard terms and

conditions for the provision of payment services. Furthermore, a bank may not refuse to enter into a contract for basic payment services with a foreigner who has an Estonian residence permit or the right to live here. A contract for basic payment services must also be entered into with an applicant for international protection (within the meaning of the Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens), regardless of the person's nationality or place of residence. If the bank refuses to enter into a contract for payment services, it must provide reasons for doing so.

50. A student asked the Chancellor of Justice to check whether the university had discriminated against them on the grounds of race in teaching and supervision, in the assessment of their Master's thesis and in their expulsion. The Chancellor of Justice explained that in such a case, the person could have recourse to a court to defend their rights. The Chancellor of Justice can make a recommendation to a university, but the university is not obliged to follow it. Unlike the Chancellor of Justice, the court's decision is binding on the university. Among other things, the grade of a Master's thesis and the decision concerning exmatriculation can be challenged in court.

51. Racial discrimination was also suspected by a person who was subject to proceedings of an application for international protection. A thorough investigation of the case and listening to the recordings of the court hearing did not confirm this suspicion.

52. The Chancellor of Justice was also asked whether [a landlord is unconditionally obliged to enter into a lease agreement with a person of any nationality](#).

53. The Chancellor of Justice highlights three areas related to national minorities that require special attention.

54. Right to vote of citizens of third countries

Under the leadership of the Minister of Justice, a new bill has been prepared, which plans to temporarily suspend the right of Russian and Belarusian citizens to vote in the elections of municipal councils in connection with the war of aggression initiated by Russia and supported by Belarus. For a similar purpose, the bill of the Act amending the Municipal Council Election Act ([594 SE](#)) was submitted to the Riigikogu for processing last year. According to the assessment of the Chancellor of Justice, suspending or withdrawing the voting rights of third-country nationals without amending the Constitution is in conflict with the Constitution.

55. The Chancellor of Justice has [explained](#) that, according to subsection 156 (2) of the Constitution, the permanent residents of a municipality have the right to vote in municipal council elections ("persons who reside permanently in the territory of the municipality"). This is a right of everyone and each person under subsection 9 (1) of the Constitution. Pursuant to subsection 9 (1) of the Constitution, the rights guaranteed by the Constitution extend both to Estonian citizens and to citizens of foreign states and stateless persons staying in Estonia, unless otherwise provided for in the text of the Constitution. According to the Constitution, the Riigikogu can establish the conditions for exercising the right to vote, but these may not render this fundamental right meaningless. The planned citizenship requirement for voting rights does not comply with the provisions of subsection 156 (2) of the Constitution because it deprives

some of the permanent residents of voting age with active legal capacity in a town or rural municipality of the right to vote rather than specifying the conditions for exercising such right.

56. Entry of data on ethnicity and native language in the population register

The Chancellor of Justice has been asked why it is not possible to enter data regarding the fact that a person has several ethnicities and native languages in the population register. For example, children with parents of different ethnicities may wish to do so.

The Chancellor of Justice [found](#) that the principle of legality and good administration had been violated in this case and made a proposal to the Minister of the Interior to allow people to submit data on several ethnicities and native languages to the population register. If the state collects data on the ethnicity and native language of its residents in the population register, people must be able to provide correct information. The Chancellor of Justice also noted that it was possible for people to indicate two ethnicities and native languages in the questionnaire of the 2021 census. There is no reasonable justification for not having the same possibility in the population register if data are collected in a personalised form for the population register and this register is also used for the census. This problem has not yet been resolved.

57. Active participation of national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in social affairs

Estonia has taken important steps to foster a culture of inclusion at all levels of government and to strengthen civil society. However, based on the applications received, the Chancellor of Justice has observed that the good practice of inclusion is implemented differently in different institutions. On a number of occasions, interest groups have not been involved in discussions regarding matters that concern them or have been included merely as a formality. The Chancellor of Justice has also noticed that there has not always been sufficient analysis of how proposed changes affect target groups. Cooperation with national minorities in the cultural field and in helping Ukrainian war refugees has improved. More attention must be paid to the meaningful involvement of interest groups and to hearing their views on other societal affairs as well.

58. The increase in the number of enquiries submitted to the Equality Commissioner and the Chancellor of Justice demonstrates people's awareness of opportunities to protect their rights.

59. The online 'Human Rights e-Guide' (<https://www.inimoigustegiid.ee>), which was created by the Estonian Human Rights Centre and its partners from other Baltic countries as a tool for detecting human rights violations and raising the general awareness of human rights in various fields, is still available.

Article 5

Supporting the culture of national minorities, cultural autonomies

The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to continue to foster good cooperation with the existing Cultural Councils, to facilitate the process for the establishment of new Cultural Councils by all the interested minority groups, and to proceed with the review of the existing

legislation in order to cover all relevant groups, clarify the functions of the Councils and make the procedure by which one is established fast and transparent.

The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure that all relevant groups are provided with the stable, sustainable and sufficient funds necessary to preserve, develop and promote their culture, to increase capacity building for national minorities to access funding application processes, and to support cultural activities to increase knowledge of national minorities and foster a positive attitude towards their participation in Estonian cultural life.

60. The state will continue to support cultural societies of national minorities in the preservation, development and wider promotion of national minority cultures. The main support measures for cultural associations of national minorities are divided into three categories: grants for umbrella organisations of national minorities, support measures for cultural societies of national minorities, and the application round for cultural autonomy of national minorities.

61. The cultural societies of national minorities are grouped under 17 umbrella organisations that receive an operating grant from the state budget. The Integration Foundation (hereinafter referred to as the INSA) supports umbrella organisations of national minorities on the basis of three-year framework agreements. The volume of the state budget support measure has steadily increased, from 320,000 euros in 2014 to 502,700 euros in 2022. Seventeen umbrella organisations (and 258 cultural societies through them) received an operating grant.

62. The cultural activities of national minorities are still supported, by way of project support from state budget funds, by the INSA, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Cultural Endowment of Estonia, the Estonian Folk Culture Centre, and the National Foundation of Civil Society. The preservation and advancement of the language and culture of national minorities are also supported by local governments through regular application rounds. Private funds and embassies also support the cultural activities of national minorities.

63. The Ministry of Culture supports two cultural autonomy bodies of national minorities to fulfil the objectives of cultural self-administration under the National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act (promotion of the culture of the national minority and organisation of education in its native language). In 2023, 151,598 euros were allocated to cultural autonomy bodies.

64. In Estonia, Finns and Swedes have cultural autonomy, but it is available to all national minorities who meet the conditions laid down by law. Dance and song festivals of Finns and Swedes take place in various parts of Estonia in order to introduce their culture to local residents, children are taught the language of their ancestors, their national heritage is studied and preserved, and attention is paid to cultural tourism in the areas historically inhabited by Estonian Swedes.

65. Since February 2022, the Ministry of Culture supports Ukrainian war refugees who have arrived in Estonia so that they can quickly adapt and manage on their own here until the opportunity to return to their homeland arises. From the beginning of 2023, a support measure was launched to ensure that young Ukrainian war refugees have the opportunity to maintain a connection with their language and cultural space.

66. Maintaining national identity is important in any case, both for the adaptation of Ukrainian youth in Estonia and for returning to their homeland. In 2023, 200,000 euros were allocated for this purpose. In addition, in 2022 and 2023, the Ministry of Culture allocated an operating grant in the amount of 10,000 euros to each of the umbrella organisations of Ukrainian societies for the inclusion of Ukrainian war refugees in community activities and for providing advice to war refugees. The umbrella organisations have been involved in the organisation of the reception of Ukrainians since the beginning of the war.

67. Support for cultural cooperation aimed at kindred peoples, the development of the kindred movement both in Estonia and between Finno-Ugric countries, and the activities of the Non-profit Organisation Fenno-Ugria continued. Finno-Ugric days are celebrated at the end of October each year with conferences, concerts, exhibitions, workshops, and film programmes.

68. The Ministry of Culture develops the integration policy in cooperation with the Cultural Council for National Minorities and the Roundtable of Ida-Viru County National Cultural Associations. Representatives of cultural autonomy bodies and the Roma organisation are also members of the Cultural Council. The Council and the Roundtable discuss and give their opinions on all issues related to integration and cultures of national minorities as well as on other topical issues, such as providing assistance to Ukrainian war refugees and preparing or updating development plans and programmes. In addition, advisory bodies operate at the regional and local government level.

69. In order to address Roma integration issues and coordinate information, an Advisory Committee for Roma Integration operates at the Ministry of Culture, which is involved in the development and updating of the Roma integration strategy and the programme (action plan) supporting it. The Advisory Committee consists of representatives of various ministries, so it has broad-based competence in dealing with Roma integration issues. Where necessary, experts from other fields can be invited to meetings.

70. The Estonian Open Air Museum's Centre of Multicultural Estonia introduces the culture, history and art of ethnic minorities living in Estonia. The Centre celebrates the folk calendar holidays of various nationalities, organises thematic days, workshops and fairs, etc. introducing different cultures. Integration cooperation activities are also coordinated by the Estonian Folklore Council.

71. National minorities' professional and hobby theatres (e.g. the Russian Theatre in Tallinn, the theatre 'Tuuleveski' operating in Jõhvi, the studio theatre 'Ilmarine' in Narva); concert and festival organisers (e.g. the Russian culture festival 'Славянский венок', the international Festival of Orthodox Sacred Music 'Credo', the Jewish Forum 'Jahad', the Ukrainian youth cultural festival 'Квіти України'); museums (e.g. the Russian Museum, the Estonian Jewish Museum, the Rannarootsi Museum introducing the cultural heritage of coastal Swedes, the Church Museum of Estonian Swedes); cultural centres (e.g. the Russian Cultural Centre, the Roma Cultural Centre); publishing projects and organisers of literary and other cultural events of national minorities continue their activities and have received state and local government support.

72. With the support of the state, newspapers and journals of national cultural societies of national minorities are published in their own languages, for instance, Inkeri in Finnish, Estlandssvensk in Swedish, the monthly electronic Рідна хата issued by the Ukrainian cultural society Vodogray and so on.

73. Other media in minority languages is covered in Article 9.

74. September 24 is traditionally celebrated in Estonia as the National Minorities Day, which commemorates the first gathering of the Estonian National Minorities Forum in 1988 and is dedicated to all the nationalities living in Estonia. Concerts, exhibitions, lectures and workshops dedicated to the National Minorities Day have been held in different parts of Estonia since 2005, introducing the cultural heritage of various nationalities. Since 2014, Tallinn has organised the National Cultures Week, while Jõhvi has hosted the 'Loomepada' festival of national cultures.

75. Roundtables and seminars, training and counselling activities are organised for representatives of national minority cultural societies, and cooperation with other civil society organisations of other member states is encouraged. The INSA organises cooperation days for associations of minority cultures and Estonian cultural associations.

76. In 2022, a cultural digital hackathon intended for national minorities took place, where national minority organisations and non-governmental organisations looked to each other for inspiration and methods to digitise their national culture. The best projects received a monetary award. The Estonian Folklore Council coordinates the work of the working group on national minorities, which encourages national minorities to engage with the heritage culture of their country of origin and helps create conditions and opportunities for their smooth integration into Estonian society.

77. In order to strengthen contacts between people of different nationalities, respective application rounds have been launched in the field of sports and culture. The INSA supports cooperation projects in the field of culture and sports, which help to create daily contacts between people with different cultural backgrounds, facilitate communication among them and increase their participation in Estonian culture and the Estonian information space. The volume of the application round in 2023 was 100,000 euros.

78. The application round for cultural and sports events in Ida-Viru County, implemented by the INSA, was opened in 2023 as a special application round with the support of the Ministry of Culture. Events include public programmes, concert and cultural series, film festivals, exhibitions, literary events, sports competitions and activities that support physical activity. The budget for the application round is one million euros; 11 projects received support in 2023 and their implementation period runs until October 2024.

79. In 2022, the Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with the Estonian Folk Culture Centre, prepared a cultural ambassador programme aimed at cultural education, which began to offer pupils in grades 6-12 at Ida-Viru County schools and their teachers opportunities to participate in Estonian culture in various parts of Estonia. The cultural ambassador programme enabled pupils in Ida-Viru County to see a diverse Estonia and culture from a broader perspective, also encouraging other residents of the county to discover exciting places in Estonia.

80. The Ida-Viru Creative Foundation (Ida-Viru Loomfond) is a pilot project initiated by the Ministry of Culture and organised by the Ida-Viru Entrepreneurship Centre Foundation (Ida-Viru Ettevõtluskeskus SA). The aim is to launch the activities of the Ida-Viru Creative Foundation, which would increase social cohesion in Ida-Viru County, strengthen communities, enliven cultural life and increase entrepreneurial activity in the cultural and creative sector in the region, attracting additional funding also from the private sector. A one-off state grant of 100,000 euros was allocated in 2023 to establish the Ida-Viru Creative Foundation, which will ensure the sustainable operation of the foundation in the coming years.

The Advisory Committee asks the Estonian authorities to consider ratifying the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

81. At present, the Estonian state does not intend to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Under the leadership of the Estonian Bureau of Lesser Used Languages (EstBLUL), Estonia analysed accession to the Charter in 2009 and has decided not to do so.

Setos

The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to maintain an open and constructive dialogue with the Setos regarding the status of their official recognition and continued access to minority rights.

82. Estonia considers Setos to be part of the Estonian ethnic group (like the speakers of Kihnu, Võro, Tartu, Saaremaa and other dialects). In the current Language Act, the Seto language is regulated as a regional variety of the Estonian language. In 2023, representatives of the Seto Congress turned to the Ministry of Education and Research, requesting the recognition of Seto as an independent language. The Ministry commissioned linguists to assess the treatment of Estonian dialects as independent languages.

83. According to linguists, the South Estonian language, the dialects of which are Seto, Võru and Mulgi languages, can be considered a separate language, and it is justified to grant the South Estonian language the status of a regional language, but discussions regarding the rights it will involve still lie ahead. Researchers explain that the recognition of the South Estonian language as a regional language is justified but it is still a political decision. Thus, the Setos can currently rather be considered a dialect group of the South Estonian region.

84. The status of regional varieties of South Estonia (including the status of Setos) is analysed by the Ministry of Education and Research in the course of the ongoing preparation of the legislative intent for the Language Act.

85. Setos are carriers of the distinctive Estonian intangible cultural heritage. The Estonian state supports the preservation of the Seto intangible cultural heritage by means of various programmes. The development programme of Setomaa is coordinated by the Ministry of Finance, the volume of the programme in 2023 is 240,000 euros.

86. The Ministry of Culture has supported Setomaa's heritage culture since 2003 with the help of Setomaa's national cultural programmes; the programme is implemented by the Estonian Folk Culture Centre since 2019. Each year, 6600 euros have been allocated from the budget of

the Ministry of Education and Research to support the study of heritage in the Setomaa Rural Municipality, and 10,750 euros have been allocated for three consecutive years (2021-2023) to support a Seto-language outdoor study group.

Article 6

Integration, including adaptation policy, and tolerance and intercultural dialogue

The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to intensify efforts to promote tolerance and intercultural dialogue going beyond the promotion of proficiency in the Estonian language, for instance by fostering multilingualism and knowledge of national minority cultures, mutual respect and understanding among all persons living in Estonia.

The Advisory Committee asks the authorities to ensure that the Integration strategy is adapted to meet evolving concerns and priorities of persons belonging to national minorities and that the initiatives under the Strategy are carried out in a manner that promotes and protects minority cultures as an essential part of Estonian society.

87. Estonia's integration policy, including adaptation policy, is implemented on the basis of successive development plans. The implementation of the development plan is continuously monitored on the basis of monitoring reports and metrics, the main source of which are Estonian Integration Monitoring data. Increasing social cohesion, promoting mutual tolerance and understanding between all residents of Estonia and creating equal opportunities for free self-realisation have occupied a central place in all integration development plans.

88. Estonia has implemented three national integration development plans: 'Integration in Estonian Society from 2000 to 2007', the 'Estonian Integration Plan for 2008 to 2013', and the sectoral development plan 'Integrating Estonia 2020'. Currently, the development plan 'Cohesive Estonia Strategy' for the period 2021-2030 is being implemented.

89. In order to prepare the Cohesive Estonia Strategy, an analysis was carried out in early 2020 and problematic areas were mapped. The Estonian Integration Monitoring 2020 constituted an important input. In spring and summer of the same year, meetings were held with partners, including representatives of the target group and non-profit organisations to analyse problems, set goals and agree on further cooperation. Following discussions with partners, researchers and experts, the drafts of the development plan and programmes were improved. In June 2020, a public consultation on the draft was held in the Government's drafting information system, and from October to December, a public consultation concerning the draft development plan was conducted and the plan was approved. The draft was submitted to partners, including national minority organisations, to hear their opinion.

90. The plan sets out six policies in the area of integration, including adaptation:

- Developing modern, smart and effective adaptation and integrations pathways
- A common, understandable and reliable communication and information space
- Promoting social contacts that support a sense of unity
- Supporting an innovative and responsible labour market

- Improving Estonian language proficiency and strengthening ties with the Estonian state and cultural space
- Supporting the local level and developing cross-sectoral partnerships

91. The objectives of the development plan are implemented through programmes (budgeted operational programmes). Programmes are approved by the minister for the relevant field and are updated once a year. The metrics are also confirmed in programmes. The current status of the achievement of objectives and the implementation of the development plan is assessed annually within the framework of the reporting of the performance area.

92. The Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with Statistics Estonia, is preparing publicly available dashboards that graphically display the implementation of the integration-related metrics of the Cohesive Estonia Strategy. These will allow the monitoring of the achievement of metrics, compared to target levels, over the period of implementation of the development plan and the evolution of context indicators over time. In addition to the development plan dashboard, Statistics Estonia will prepare a dashboard for migration statistics, which will allow anyone who is interested to graphically display migration information.

93. Every three years, the Ministry of Culture commissions an in-depth study, the Estonian Integration Monitoring, in order to monitor the results of the development plan. The last monitoring was carried out in 2023; its data were published in March 2024.

94. The monitoring indicates that residents of other nationalities in Estonia do not form a single 'Russian-speaking community' but are fragmented into smaller groups. Fifty-eight per cent of the population with other native languages have a positive relationship with the Estonian state and are integrated. The majority of the fully integrated cluster is made up of Estonian citizens, but it also includes half of the Russian citizens who are living in Estonia and were born here.

95. The share of people of other ethnicities who have an active command of the Estonian language has steadily increased over the past 15 years and has reached 46% this year, and the share of people who do not speak the language has fallen from 20% to 4%. The 42% who have a more negative attitude towards the Estonian state also includes Estonian citizens, but this group includes a fairly large number of Russian-speaking non-citizens as well. Integration is supported by generational change, the growing transnationalism of the younger generation and a virtual culture functioning across nationalities. Young people are generally more integrated than their parents.

96. According to 54% of Estonian residents, Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine has affected their relations with other people and exacerbated conflicts related to worldviews and culture. At the same time, Russian aggression has increased solidarity and the appreciation of security and has forced people to make clearer choices between Eastern and Western orientations, which may also speed up the integration processes. In the case of people of other ethnicities, an increase in contacts with the Estonian-speaking population in all spheres can be highlighted as a longer-term trend. On a daily basis, 34% of Estonians and 69% of people of other ethnicities communicate across nationalities.

97. Seventy-six per cent of new immigrants consider themselves well-adapted, while 6% do not feel that they have adapted well. In order to support the swift and comfortable adaptation of foreigners settling in Estonia to local conditions and the acquisition of the primary knowledge and skills required for a person to manage on their own, the adaptation programme 'Settle in Estonia' is offered to foreigners who have lived in Estonia for up to five years.

98. The programme, which is free of charge for participants, consists of adaptation training and language learning at beginner level. This is mandatory for beneficiaries of international protection or temporary protection; for others, participation is voluntary. The programme includes basic, work, entrepreneurship, study, research and family modules as well as an additional module for beneficiaries of international protection. In 2020, the volume of language training was increased to 100 hours at A1 level and to 150 hours at the new A2 level. The earlier child and youth module was replaced by a needs-based childcare service, which provides better opportunities for families with young children to join the programme. The availability of the modules online improved the availability of training outside larger cities.

99. With the support of the European Social Fund (ESF), the Ministry of Culture has been creating a support network for organisations that are in contact with new immigrants. Networking was focused on the exchange of information, sharing of experiences and development of new services related to the field of adaptation. Since 2023, the development of support networks at the local level has focused on the empowerment of municipalities. This is done in partnership with the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities.

100. A number of services of the support network for new immigrants have been developed during the reporting period, the most important of which are the migration counselling of the Police and Border Guard Board (PPA), the service of finding a family doctor, the implementation of migration coordinators at municipalities, the organisation of socialisation events, the facilitation of participation in voluntary activities, the service of crisis and victim support, and career and self-development group counselling in cooperation with the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund.

101. Special attention was paid to the empowerment of national minority organisations in order to raise their awareness of existing services (adaptation programme, migration counselling, Labour Inspectorate services, etc.) so that they could refer their compatriots to a suitable service where necessary. In order to ensure smooth access to the adaptation programme for new immigrants, a data exchange solution was developed between the register managed by the Police and Border Guard Board and the training register of the adaptation programme manager. The data exchange solution was completed in early 2022.

102. At the beginning of 2024, the 'Settling in Estonia' service was launched in the eesti.ee state portal, bringing together all the necessary information about services for new immigrants: registration of place of residence, finding a family doctor, the adaptation programme, exchange of driving licences, learning the Estonian language, basic and general education, and family benefits. The information service will be developed into a proactive government service in the future.

103. The Estonian state provides Ukrainian war refugees with various support services that assist them in adapting, including an adaptation programme that provides basic knowledge of the functioning of the Estonian state and society and the opportunity to learn Estonian at beginner level. The Ministry of Culture and the INSA provided 23,694 beneficiaries of temporary protection with training under the temporary protection module of the adaptation programme, and 13,517 people have participated in language training at the A1 level.

Multilingualism and learning of the Estonian language

104. Multilingualism is widespread in Estonian society: According to the 2021 census, 73.2% of the Estonian population speaks a foreign language (including Estonian). Among Estonians, 77.8% speak some (usually several) foreign languages, among Russians, this indicator is 57.3% (including Estonian), and among people of other ethnicities 83.3% (including Estonian).

105. Fifty-four per cent of Estonians, 28.7% of Russians and 37.7% of people of other ethnicities speak English as a foreign language. Estonian is mostly spoken by Russians (50%) and people of other ethnicities (43%). Russian is spoken by 54% of Estonians and 31% of people of other ethnicities whose native language is not Russian.

106. Dialogue and mutual understanding require a common language of communication understood by the entire society. According to all integration monitoring surveys carried out in Estonia, proficiency in Estonian as the official language provides the opportunity for free self-realisation: it is possible to receive the best education, to work in any field of life and to participate in politics. Here are some examples of activities carried out to support language learning during the reporting period:

107. The Estonian Language Houses in Tallinn and Narva, which were opened as INSA units in 2019, have organised free Estonian language courses and activities for people to practise the Estonian language and expand their Estonian-language communication environment. The Estonian Language House in Tallinn has expanded to the Lääne-Harju Rural Municipality (Paldiski city, Rummu, Klooga) and the one in Narva to Lügánuse Rural Municipality (Püssi, Kiviõli). Each academic year, various events and virtual chat rooms are organised in cooperation with partners. In 2022, a total of 360 public events took place in Tallinn and Narva, with 5393 participants.

108. Starting from 2021, anyone wishing to apply for Estonian citizenship can enter into a language training agreement with the INSA, which enables them to learn Estonian free of charge up to the level of B1 and to receive compensation if they have taken unpaid study leave from work for language training. The person entering into the agreement is obliged to submit an application for Estonian citizenship within one year of passing the Estonian language proficiency exam for the B1 level. In 2022, 981 people wished to participate in language training. The level of proficiency of the learners and their wishes regarding the form, region and time of study are taken into consideration.

109. In 2023, the study 'Organisation of Estonian language learning for adults in restricted language environments' commissioned by the Ministry of Culture was completed. It analysed the experience of permanent residents, new immigrants and beneficiaries of temporary

protection, their motivation and any obstacles in relation to language learning, in order to take the needs of these target groups into consideration as much as possible when providing language training.

110. A number of Estonian-language e-learning environments, such as Keeleklikk and Keeletee, are still available free of charge. The most popular programme that supports language learning is the Language Friends programme (2020), which offers learners of the Estonian language the opportunity to chat with volunteer Estonian language mentors via phone or e-channels. In 2023, 1216 people, 598 volunteer mentors and 618 language learners participated in the Language Friends programme. A total of 1940 conversation pairs have been formed and a total of 3728 people have participated over four years.

111. As an innovative language learning project, the INSA has produced the rap opera 'Karma' and the feature film 'Choice' where most of the actors were learners of the Estonian language from Ida-Viru County.

112. Since 2023, the NGO Etnoweb has been offering residents of Estonia who are speakers of other languages and want to learn about Estonian culture, nature, history and life free of charge a programme called 'Culture Key', which includes study tours, lectures, discussions and excursions. 'Culture Key' is similar to the Estonian Institute's training programme 'Culture Step' (from December 2020 to December 2021). Approximately 800 Russian-speaking and 150 English-speaking people join the activities every six months.

113. Since 2000, the Ministry of Culture has organised theme years that highlight various areas of culture. In 2024, the year of cultural diversity, the cultural space of the Estonian state is recognised and appreciated. Within the framework of the theme year, attention will be paid to the diverse culture and traditions of various ethnicities living in Estonia as well as to Estonia's own unique cultural spaces and communities.

114. Estonia has supported the promotion of multilingualism and the learning of different foreign languages for years. Multilingualism and the development of early foreign language learning are also set as priorities in the current Estonian-language development plan for the period 2021-2035.

115. The education system plays an important role in integration. Schools not only provide language training with the opportunity to learn the native language and culture of minorities, but they also shape values, providing the skills required for integration into society.

Roma

116. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Culture, together with the Ministry of Education and Research and the INSA, has continued to pay attention to Roma integration.

117. According to the 2021 census, 676 Roma (0.05% of the population) live in Estonia; their numbers are the largest in Valga Rural Municipality adjacent to the border with Latvia (202), and there are 65 of them in Tartu, 45 each in Pärnu and Narva, 47 in Tallinn, 30 in Kohtla-Järve, 17 in Kohila Rural Municipality, 15 in Peipsiääre Rural Municipality, and 14 in Paide. Fewer than 10 Roma live in the territories of other municipalities.

118. Specific measures to support Roma integration have been discussed in the Cohesive Estonia Strategy and the integration programme, including the adaptation programme, in order to increase the awareness of Estonian organisations of the Roma community, to empower members of the Roma community to increase their social inclusion and, with the support of the Ministry of Culture, to develop a Roma mentoring service. The latter largely focuses on improving access to education in Valga Rural Municipality (see Article 12).

119. The development of the Roma platform, initiated in 2017 with funding from the European Union's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme, continued in order to support Roma integration. The target group of the project included primarily Roma youth and women but also all of the other stakeholders, such as relevant ministries and municipalities, teachers working with the Roma and the Estonian society as a whole. The last, third project lasted 28 months and ended on 31 July 2023.

120. The Roma platform project focused on supporting more active participation of the Roma in society, promoting cooperation between Roma and non-Roma young people, developing cooperation between Baltic Roma and Roma mediators, increasing the involvement of municipalities in the Roma integration process, and introducing Roma history and culture.

121. In the period 2021-2023, the Ministry of Culture organised 17 training courses, several Roma Day concerts in cooperation with the Estonian Roma organisation, and two Roma Holocaust Day commemorative events and meetings in municipalities, supplemented the platform's website and ordered a statistical survey about the socio-economic situation of the Roma based on the data of the census and the Tax and Customs Board.

Protection from hate speech and violence

122. The Estonian Human Rights Centre has been a partner of the European Commission for years to monitor, together with other European NGOs, the occurrence of hate speech and the response of social media platforms in dealing with hate speech. In May 2016, the European Commission agreed with Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube that a Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech must be implemented to prevent illegal hate speech online and to combat its spread. TikTok and Instagram, for example, have since joined the initiative.

123. From the beginning of 2023, the Estonian Human Rights Centre is participating in the SafeNet project, which is led by the international network INACH that fights hate speech online. Twenty-one NGOs across Europe are involved. In the course of the project, the partners collect information on various forms of hate speech based on a common methodology and check whether and how social media platforms comply with both self-imposed rules and the agreement with the European Commission. The first three monitoring cycles of the project indicate that hostility is mostly directed at the LGBT+ community and refugees in Estonian-language social media. Further information: <https://humanrights.ee/tegevused/safenet/>.

124. In 2019, the guideline for the detection and recording of hate crimes was amended in Estonia and distributed to the police and prosecutors.

125. The Government of the Republic that took office in 2021 announced in its action plan that it intends to prepare legislation concerning hate crimes. In 2021, the Ministry of Justice

prepared an overview of criminal response to hate speech, stressing that subsection 58 (1) of the Penal Code provides that a ‘base motive’ includes a racist or hostile motive. It has also been used in case law (Tartu County Court’s judgment of 7 February 2019, No. 1-18-8341, p 19).

126. In 2021-2022, Estonia participated in the EStAR project. In February 2022, EStAR (Enhancing Stakeholder Awareness and Resources for Hate Crime Victim Support) organised a one-day online workshop on the evaluation of national structures and services for supporting victims of hate crime in Estonia. Estonian state authorities (Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of the Interior, Prosecutor’s Office, Police Board, Estonian Academy of Sciences) and civil society organisations took part.

127. In April 2023, the Government of the Republic, which assumed office, announced in its action plan that it plans to change the regulation of hate speech and hate crimes. The Ministry of Justice prepared a new bill to amend section 151 of the Penal Code. The bill amending the regulation of hate speech and hate crimes was submitted to the Government of the Republic and then to the Riigikogu in autumn. The purpose of the amendments to section 151 of the Penal Code (criminal hate speech) is to bring the regulation of hate speech and hate crimes into line with the requirements of EU law. At the moment, there are several gaps and shortcomings in Estonian law that have been identified by the European Commission and it has been recommended to comply with them in order to ensure adherence to the requirements of the Framework Decision.

128. The first reading of the bill has taken place in the Riigikogu and the discussion continues in the Legal Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu. As political parties continue to disagree on the issue, the discussions will continue and the adoption of the bill as a law has come to a standstill. The bill and the so-called package of amendments consist of various amendment proposals, the most important of which concern the Penal Code. Amendments to section 151 bring Estonian law into conformity with both EU law and the recommendations of the ECRI (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance).

129. The new wording of section 151 is significantly broader than the current one and the fact of causing an immediate threat to a person’s life, health or property is no longer a mandatory condition or element. According to the text proposed in the bill, it will be considered a criminal offence in the future if a person publicly incites violence, hatred or discrimination against persons or a group of persons on the basis of ethnicity, race, skin colour, disability, language, origin, religion, sexual or political orientation, property or social status in a manner that may lead to the commission of acts of violence or endanger the safety of society. Therefore, the threshold for the commission of a crime is significantly lower and the assumption that the act may lead to or entail an act of violence or a threat to the safety of society is considered sufficient. In addition, while this is a misdemeanour according to the current subsection 151 (1), according to the bill, subsection 1 also refers to a criminal offence.

130. The amendment to section 58 of the Penal Code concerns aggravating circumstances in the imposition of a punishment and adds a new clause to this section, according to which the commission of a criminal offence against a person based on their nationality, race, skin colour, sex, disability, language, origin, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs or property or social status is also considered an aggravating circumstance. Although the wording of

section 58 could already be applied, as it considers the commission of a criminal offence in self-interest or with other base motives to be an aggravating circumstance, the Ministry of Justice still wishes to supplement the list of aggravating circumstances with the above in order to ensure legal clarity. This would also meet the requirements of European Union law and recommendations.

Article 7

Freedom of assembly and expression

The Advisory Committee had no recommendations concerning Article 7 in the last reporting period.

Article 8

Religious freedom

The Advisory Committee had no recommendations concerning Article 8 in the last reporting period.

Article 9

Freedom of speech and of the press. Media in minority languages.

The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities, whilst respecting editorial independence, to promote increased high-quality broadcasting in minority languages and about national minority cultures and their current concerns in the publicly funded media. This should be developed with the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities and aim to raise general awareness about these aspects and counteract negative stereotypes.

131. There have been no significant changes in Estonian laws compared to previous reports. The freedom to receive and transmit television and radio services is provided for by law.

132. According to the database of the Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority (TTJA), there are 11 private television channels with a television service licence in Estonia in 2024. In addition to these, there are three TV channels of the public service broadcaster ERR, including the Russian-language ETV+. There are six Russian-language private TV channels.

133. Public radio and television are financed from the state budget. Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR) broadcasts television and radio programmes in Estonian and Russian as well as subtitled Estonian-language TV programmes. The online portals of ERR transmit news in Estonian, Russian and English.

134. The media channels of ERR (TV, radio and portal) have been the most important and reliable sources of information for residents of Estonia over the years. The increase in the popularity and reliability of the Russian-language TV channel ETV+, launched in 2015, among

the Russian-speaking audience must be considered a significant achievement of media policy. According to the media surveys of 2023, the reliability of ETV+ among the Russian-speaking population significantly exceeded the Russian TV channels that had so far occupied first place (55% and 25%, respectively). In 2023, 16% of the Estonian population (aged 4+, at least 15 minutes per week) watched ETV+ on a weekly basis. Among them, nearly 100,000 were non-Estonians.

135. The aim of ETV+ is to initiate and maintain a dialogue between Estonians and the population with another native language. ETV+ uses a cross-media solution that actively engages the audience. ETV+ offers more than 20 hours of its original programme per week, including news, discussion panels, entertainment and sports.

136. In addition to Estonian-language news, ERR broadcasts news in Russian (rus.err.ee) and English (news.err.ee) on its web portal. In addition to these publications, there are dozens of other websites that, in one way or another, provide readers with information about current events in Estonia in Russian.

137. On 2 March 2022, the European Union (EU) limited the broadcasting area of the Russian state media channels RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik and their subsidiaries: [EU imposes sanctions on state-owned outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik's broadcasting in the EU – Consilium \(europa.eu\)](https://consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/02/eu-sanctions-rt-sputnik/)

On 6 June 2022, the Council of the European Union adopted an additional Decision and Regulation, which added three further media outlets and their subsidiaries to the list of Russian media outlets prohibited in the EU (Rossiya RTR/RTR Planeta, Rossiya 24/Russia 24, and TV Centre International)

<https://merlin.obs.coe.int/article/9541#:~:text=On%206%20June%202022%2C%20the,2022%2D3%2F6>). The sanctions have been extended until 23 June 2024.

138. It is possible to subscribe to foreign-language channels via cable and digital television practically everywhere in Estonia. It is hard to estimate the number of available channels because it depends on the television package chosen and the technical means available. Due to Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine, Estonia follows the European Union's sanctions policy. In order to protect the information space and ensure the enforcement of sanctions, Estonia has restricted the availability of 307 websites and 53 TV channels so far. Sanction measures will remain in force until the end of Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine and until Russian media outlets and those linked to Russia stop propaganda activities aimed against the European Union and its Member States. Despite the sanctions, an estimated 10-15% of the Russian-speaking population watches prohibited channels via the Internet or STV-TV.

139. According to the TTJA database, there are 49 valid radio service permits in Estonia in 2024, 14 of which are nationwide. In addition to these, there are five radio channels of the public service broadcaster ERR, including the Russian-language Radio 4. The Ukrainian-language radio station DRUZI is also broadcast in Estonia.

140. There are a total of nine Russian-language private radio stations in Estonia: DFM, Narodnoje Radio, Narvskoje Semeinoje Radio, Radio 4, Radio Eli, Super Radio, Sky Radio, Jumor FM and Star FM Plus.

141. The most listened to and the largest in terms of original production is ERR's Russian-language public radio station Radio 4. Based on Kantar Emor's monitoring data regarding radio and music listening, an average of 31,000 people aged 12-74 listened to Radio 4 every day in 2023, and Radio 4 ranked first among Russian-language radio stations in terms of the number of listeners in 2023.

142. In addition to Russian-language programmes, Radio 4 broadcasts programmes in Ukrainian and Belarusian. Once a month, programmes are broadcast in Azerbaijani, Tatar and Chuvash, and a programme about Jewish culture is on air three times a month.

143. According to Statistics Estonia, 731 periodicals were published in Estonia in 2020, 82% of them in Estonian and 18% in another language, and 298 magazines, 85% of them in Estonian and 15% in other languages. Fifty-two newspapers in Estonian and 21 in other languages were issued the same year and there were eight daily print newspapers, all of them in Estonian.

144. All major media groups and institutions (ERR, Ekspress Grupp, Postimees Grupp) offer Russian-speaking consumers Russian-language services. Four periodic national private media e-publications are available in Russian: the news portal Delfi, the news portal Postimees, MK-Estonia (also in print), and the online publication Delovye Vedomosti.

145. The Estonian media landscape has undergone significant changes as a result of Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine. By decision of the Government of the Republic, four Estonian Russian-language private media channels (Postimees, Delfi, Delovye Vedomosti, and Põhjarannik) received additional state support in 2022 and 2023: 1.3 million euros was allocated to private media channels in 2022 and 1 million in 2023 and 2024 for the creation of high-quality Russian-language journalistic content.

146. Russian-language regional journalism is available everywhere in Estonia, including in regions where native speakers of Russian live. The largest publications are Narvskaja Gazeta, Gorod, Narva, Severnoje Poberezhje and Severnoje Poberezhje Ekstra, Sillamjõeski Vestnik in Ida-Viru County and Tshudskoje Poberezhje in Jõgeva County. The most popular municipal newspaper is Stolitsa published in the capital Tallinn. Local governments issue their gazettes in Russian in Ida-Viru County, Harju County and the districts of Tallinn. National cultural societies of national minorities also issue newspapers and magazines in their own languages.

147. The significance of Estonian Russian-language media channels increased during COVID-19, probably due to the provision of information of critical importance about local restrictions and support in Estonia and other information concerning coronavirus. At the same time, the share and reliability of Russian media began to decline. The operational availability of crisis information in Russian, which was provided by media houses and which strengthened the flow and versatility of Russian-language news, also contributed to this.

148. The majority of the younger audience prefers to obtain information and entertainment from the Internet. According to an international digital survey (We Are Social), 96.4% of the population used the Internet in Estonia in 2022.

The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to cooperate with the Press Council and the Council for the Public Word, whilst preserving their independence, to ensure the presence of national minorities within their boards.

149. Media supervision is carried out by TTJA and, on the basis of self-regulation, the Association of Estonian Media Companies (EML). Complaints of the population are processed by the working body of the EML, the Press Council, which is guided by the Code of Ethics for the Estonian Press in its decisions. The EML defends the common interests and rights of media channels on the basis of internationally recognised principles of democratic journalism.

150. The Press Council discusses complaints received from readers about materials published in the press. Anyone who finds that they have been unfoundedly portrayed in a negative manner in the media can turn to the Press Council. Compared to the court, the proceedings of the Press Council are swift and free of charge. Media outlets are obliged to publish adverse decisions of the Press Council. The decisions of the Press Council must be published unaltered and without editorial comments. ERR must broadcast any adverse decisions of the Press Council. All decisions of the Press Council are published on the Internet in the Press Council section of the website of EML.

151. A similar competence lies with the Council of Public Word set up in 1991, which is a working body of the NGO Avalik Sõna (Public Word) based on its statute. The members of the NGO Avalik Sõna are the Estonian Association of Journalists, the Estonian Media Educators Association, the Estonian Consumer Union, the Estonian Council of Churches, the Estonian Lawyers Union and the non-profit organisation Meediaseire, whose representatives belong to the Council of Public Word. The Council of Public Word offers the opportunity for a public discussion concerning the media and presents its arguments in specific issues of media ethics either as supportive or adverse decisions.

152. According to the Estonian Public Broadcasting Act, ERR has an ethics adviser who monitors the conformity of the operation of ERR with the professional ethics and good practices of journalism, reviews the objections and challenges submitted against the content of a programme or programme service of ERR and monitors the balance of the programme service.

The Advisory Committee is concerned about the obligation to translate and considers that this rigid approach may not be proportionate to the legitimate aim of promoting the Estonian language and making broadcasts available to a wide audience. It asks the authorities to adopt a more flexible approach to this issue.

153. The obligation to translate public broadcasting programmes into Estonian is sufficiently flexible. Subsection 18 (2) of the Language Act states that a translation into Estonian is not required for language-learning programmes or programmes that are immediately retransmitted or in the case of the newsreader's text of originally produced foreign language news programmes and of originally produced live foreign language programmes. According to subsection 18 (3) of the Language Act, a translation into Estonian is not required in the case of radio programmes aimed at a foreign language audience.

154. The Language Act provides for a sanction for violating the translation obligation, but since compliance with the requirement to add a translation, e.g. subtitles, is not excessively burdensome when using modern information technology tools, the Language Board has not initiated any supervision proceedings for failure to comply with this provision for a long time.

Article 10

Use of minority languages in communication with local authorities

The Advisory Committee reiterates its call on the authorities to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities, in areas where they reside traditionally or in substantial numbers, have the right and effective possibility to use their minority languages in relations with the local authorities.

155. In Estonia, it is possible to use foreign languages when communicating with state and local government authorities. The possibility to use Russian and English is common. The possibility to use Ukrainian has been added. The possibility to communicate with authorities in Russian is also widely available in municipalities where the share of Russian speakers is small. According to the 2021 census, 243 languages are spoken in Estonia; ensuring official communication in all languages would be disproportionate.

156. The law does not oblige the authorities to provide translation services; the official language of state agencies and municipalities is Estonian according to section 52 of the Constitution. Many state and municipal authorities, rural municipality and city governments, and ministries provide information in Russian and English, in addition to Estonian, on their website. A large number of private companies providing public services (telecommunications, banking, medicine) also provide information intended for the public in Russian and English alongside Estonian.

157. Most municipalities where the share of Russian speakers is higher in the population have a sufficient number of officials who speak Russian, mostly as their native language, and who communicate with speakers of minority languages in their native language. It is regrettable that in some municipalities with a larger Russian-speaking population, officials and employees are unable to communicate in Estonian. The state considers it important to improve the acquisition of Estonian language skills by such officials and employees.

158. As a large number of Ukrainian war refugees have settled in Estonia, many authorities have also started to share information on the protection of fundamental rights and public interests in Ukrainian in order to better inform them.

Activities of the Language Board

The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to review the approach taken by the Language Board, including its powers to impose fines, and promote the positive emphasis of the Language Board in supporting persons belonging to national minorities to learn Estonian and to consider further positive incentives, such as promoting multilingualism, and trust-building measures in this respect.

159. The Language Board's supervisory competence in the assessment of language proficiency is limited to whether the administration and owner of the school have ensured that employees who are required by law to be proficient in Estonian have a command of Estonian at the required level. The Language Board can only issue precepts to teachers with respect to acquiring a proficiency in Estonian at the required level, providing sufficient time for this on the basis of subsection 28 (3) of the Language Act. The law does not limit the time spent on language learning.

The Advisory Committee again calls on the authorities to lower the 50 per cent threshold contained in the Language Act.

160. The basic principles of communication in minority languages are laid down in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia. The amendment of the Language Act does not change the fundamental principles of language use in the Constitution. Subsection 51 (2) of the Constitution states: In localities where at least one-half of the permanent residents belong to a national minority, everyone has the right to receive responses from state agencies, municipalities and their officials in the language of the national minority.

161. Many Ukrainian war refugees have taken up jobs in the field of commerce, the service industry and the education system. The Language Board took the view that war refugees from Ukraine will be given enough time to acquire basic Estonian language skills, and within a year of their arrival in Estonia, all war refugees working in positions that require language skills will be informed of the possibilities of learning Estonian, but no supervision proceedings will be carried out in respect of them. Special attention is paid to refugees working in the education system in order to make their integration as smooth as possible.

162. The Language Board provides war refugees and their local employers with advice in Estonian, Russian and English with regard to professional Estonian-language proficiency requirements, adaptation to the Estonian-language environment, and opportunities for Estonian-language learning and preparation for language examinations.

Article 11

Patronyms

The Advisory Committee reiterates its call on the authorities to seek appropriate legislative solutions for the registration of patronyms in official personal documents in consultation with persons belonging to national minorities.

163. A person may apply to the authorities for the use of their patronym in official documents as a part of their name, i.e. as an additional name (e.g. Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov in the case of a Russian patronym). The use of names is regulated by the Names Act, subsection 3 (1) of which states that a personal name consists of a given name and a surname. This Act establishes the principles of and the procedure for the assigning and application of names of natural persons (personal name) and the bases for the uniform use of personal names of Estonian citizens and

aliens staying in Estonia. Patronyms have not historically been used as part of a personal name in Estonia, and they are not an official part of a person's name. In Estonia, surnames are used.

164. Nevertheless, there are no obstacles in Estonia for those who want to use their patronym in practice. The use of patronyms in private communication is not regulated or restricted in any way by law. A person may also freely use their patronym in communication with the authorities or local government authorities and when submitting various applications or letters, which will be answered pursuant to the general procedure. Therefore, failure to provide legal protection to patronyms does not prevent the factual use of such names, including in official documents.

Place names

The Advisory Committee reiterates its call on the authorities to expand the opportunities to introduce minority language place names and allow topographical indications in minority languages, alongside Estonian. The authorities should also take steps to raise awareness of this right among persons belonging to national minorities and assess the level of demand for such indications on this basis.

165. The Place Names Board of the Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture has repeatedly informed local governments operating in the area of a historical minority of the possibility to use place names in minority languages in addition to Estonian place names. This right is laid down in section 11 of the Place Names Act.

Article 12

Access to education and intercultural dialogue

Teacher training

The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to apply a flexible approach for a limited time regarding the state language requirements for the recruitment of teachers so that schools are able to remedy the shortage of minority language teachers, whilst more long-term solutions are developed.

166. Estonia has decided to gradually transition to a fully official-language based education by 2030. In December 2022, the Riigikogu approved subsection 36 (2) of the Act on Amendments to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act and other Acts: "A teacher specified in subsection 1 of this section shall be deemed to comply with the qualification requirements as of 1 August 2024 only if the teacher has acquired the Estonian language proficiency in accordance with the requirements established in the Language Act and on the basis thereof."

167. For years, Estonia has had a very flexible system of language requirements, where non-compliance with such requirements has not served as a basis for terminating or not entering into an employment relationship. The transition to official-language instruction has left the framework of language proficiency requirements for teachers unchanged: Requirement of B2 level if not teaching Estonian or in Estonian and C1 if teaching Estonian or in Estonian. In the framework of the transition to official-language instruction, language skills are a part of the

qualification, and it will no longer be possible to work as a teacher without meeting this requirement from autumn 2024.

168. The Ministry of Education and Research is planning to renew the career and salary model of teachers.

The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to provide more information about the positive contribution of persons belonging to national minorities to Estonian society and culture, as well as the history, culture, language, traditions and religion of national minorities in school curricula at all levels, and to more effectively pursue tolerance and intercultural dialogue through formal and non-formal education, including by promoting interaction between pupils from different linguistic backgrounds.

169. The provisions of language and culture teaching for national minorities and the minimum conditions for the provision of training by schools are laid down in the Regulation of the Government of the Republic '[Conditions of and procedure for the creation of opportunities for language and culture teaching](#)':

§ 3. Establishment of language and culture teaching

(1) The school organises at least two lessons of language and cultural education per week as an elective subject for pupils acquiring basic education if at least 10 parents (guardians) of pupils with the same native language have submitted a written application for this to the head of the school.

(2) If fewer than 10 applications have been submitted for the organisation of teaching of the same language and culture, the school decides on the provision of language and culture teaching in cooperation with the rural municipality or city government.

170. Minimum prerequisites are set as a general principle, with the flexibility to adapt to different circumstances. The Regulation offers opportunities to replace classes in the first foreign language (foreign language A) with classes in the learners' native language.

§ 5. Teaching of native language as a foreign language

(1) If the pupil's native language is among the languages taught as foreign language A or B at the school, a school with instruction in the Estonian language allows the pupil to learn their native language as foreign language A and a school with a different language of instruction as foreign language B.

(2) If a foreign language learning group includes at least 10 pupils whose native language is the relevant foreign language, the school may form a separate language learning group for them.

171. Due to the state's aim of supporting the right of learners who have a native language other than the state language to learn and use their native language, a framework and methodological materials will be developed in order to support the process of transition to Estonian language instruction and to organise the teaching of native languages in the best possible way.

172. The 2023 Integration Monitoring showed that only 4% of parents who speak a language other than Estonian at home want their child to acquire general education in Russian only. In recent years, the number of pupils with a native language other than Estonian has increased in

Estonian-language educational institutions (on average, more than 1000 pupils per year at basic schools). Therefore, national minorities are prepared for the transition to Estonian language instruction, which is confirmed, among other things, by the choices of parents. According to the monitoring data, Estonian-speaking parents also support the transition to Estonian language education: among Estonian-speaking respondents, 96% support the transition to Estonian language education, and 70% have an entirely positive attitude towards the reform.

173. The Estonian Association of Teachers of National Minority Sunday Schools is a strategic partner of the Ministry of Education and Research. The state provides operating grants to support the activities of national cultural societies' hobby schools that are related to the preservation and development of the language and culture of national minorities. In 2022, the Ministry of Education and Research supported the learning of the Arabic, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Belarusian, Finnish, Georgian, Kabardian, Korean, Mari, Roma, Russian, Tatar, Ukrainian and Uzbek languages and cultures. In 2023, the Ministry of Education and Research granted the full amount of the requested grant to 32 Estonian hobby schools. In addition, the state supports the importance of cultural and information spheres, while also being aware of the cultural activities and Russian-language outputs of Estonian media.

174. Pursuant to the Constitution, the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act, the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, the Private Schools Act, the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, and the Higher Education Act, all persons legally staying in Estonia and all beneficiaries of international protection or persons seeking international protection have the right to acquire education under the conditions provided for in the above Acts. Access to education is not dependent on a person's language, cultural or ethnic origin, background, or religious beliefs. The legal provisions regulating access to education have not been changed compared to previous reporting periods.

Roma education

The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to ensure effective and meaningful access to education for persons belonging to the Roma national minority, including through improving and updating teacher training on understanding Romani culture and traditions, reviewing the potentially discriminatory effect of the so-called 'simplified programmes', and consulting with Roma on the design, implementation and review of any future model to support Roma students in education.

175. Like all children living in Estonia, Roma children are guaranteed equal access to high-quality education and they are fully included in the Estonian education system. Roma children follow common national curricula with other students in their studies.

176. Pursuant to the Constitution, the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act, the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, the Private Schools Act, the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, and the Higher Education Act, all persons legally staying in Estonia and all beneficiaries of international protection or persons seeking international protection have the right to acquire education under the conditions provided for in the above Acts. Access to education is not dependent on a person's language, cultural or ethnic origin, background, or religious beliefs.

177. The pupil's native language or the language used at home, as reported by the child or parent, is entered in the Estonian Information System for Education. Since such data are based on statements, it is possible that the pupil decides to provide another native language (e.g. Estonian, Russian, Latvian) at later levels of study.

Form of studies	level of education	Native language according to EHIS	national curriculum for basic schools, upper secondary schools	simplified national curriculum for basic schools, simplified studies	Total
full-time study	basic education	Romani/Roma	3		3
full-time study	basic education	Romani/Roma	6		6
full-time study	basic education	Romani/Roma	5		5
full-time study	basic education	Romani/Roma	38	4	42
part-time study	basic education	Romani/Roma	1		1
part-time study	upper secondary school	Romani/Roma	1		1
Total			54	4	58

Students whose native language is Roma according to the form of studies, level of education and curriculum 2022/2023

178. In 2020, with the support of the Ministry of Education and Research, a Sunday school (non-religious) started to operate at the Tallinn Roma Cultural Centre where Roma children can learn the Roma language and culture. This is an important step, as the Roma language spoken in Estonia is oral and lacks written learning materials, which also sets limits to formal education in the Roma language and culture. In addition to this support measure, professional training on Roma culture is organised for teachers every year.

179. Since 2018, the Ministry of Culture has organised regular training on various topics for teachers working with Roma children as part of the Roma platform project. At each training session, Members of the Estonian Roma community have been invited to talk about Roma traditions and family culture, teachers have been given advice on how to better establish and maintain contact with Roma families, and the support services offered by various institutions

have been introduced. As there are few Roma children in Estonian schools, a large number of teachers who work with the Roma are involved.

180. In 2020, a Roma mentor service, funded by the Ministry of Culture and coordinated by the INSA, was launched in Valga Rural Municipality with the aim of bridging social gaps between the Roma and the rest of society and contributing to the integration of the Roma. Since 2022, the service has been funded by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Research. One part of the service concerns education; two paid Roma mentors are looking for solutions with families to help the Roma youth continue their education.

181. Where necessary, mentors support children with homework. As a result of the service, more children enter kindergarten every year and almost everyone who is obliged to attend school does so. There are more and more young Roma people who continue their education after graduating from basic school or upper secondary school. Mentors are assisted by Roma volunteers. During the free activity week in summer, a bus is chartered to visit a place or institution in Estonia – an opportunity to get to know Estonia that has been well received by Roma parents. In Valga and the surrounding area, children and young people are involved in helping the animal shelter, mushroom and berry picking in the forest, and more.

182. Since April 2023, the Valga Roma Youth Centre, which is part of the mentoring service, has been open as an INSA unit. The centre organises events, meetings and activities: Estonian language training for children and young people, Roma dance classes for children and young people. The dance ensemble Shukar Roma, which holds practices at the centre, is well-known in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Impact of COVID-19 on education

The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to analyse the impact of school closures and online education during the COVID-19 pandemic on pupils and students belonging to national minorities and to take resolute measures to address any negative trends identified in close consultation with pupils or students, parents and teachers

183. The effects of COVID-19 from the perspective of national minorities or pupils with other native languages have not been studied separately in Estonia. During the COVID-19 pandemic, coordinated efforts were made in the country to increase teachers' ability to use digital learning tools and platforms through additional in-service training. Schools and local governments also provided pupils with digital devices, where necessary. In those cases where schools failed to meet the demand, the ministry, in cooperation with the Estonian Union for Child Welfare, acquired more than 1200 computers, distributing them to 244 schools nationwide. A general study of the impact of COVID-19 can be found here: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2022-10/tlu_raport_distantsope_yldharidus_2810.pdf

Article 13

Private schools for national minorities

In the course of its review of the fifth report, the Advisory Committee has not made any recommendations on the implementation of Article 13.

184. Legislation that fully provides for the transition to Estonian language education is in line with Article 13 (1) (within the framework of their education system, the parties acknowledge that persons belonging to a national minority have the right to establish and manage their own private schools or further education institutions) and does not affect private education. In Estonia, the availability of private education in Russian is ensured and there are no obstacles to the opening of new private schools. Private schools are partly funded by the state.

Article 14

Education in Russian

The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to ensure access to Russian as a language of instruction at all levels of the public education system and intensify the related dialogue and consultation with representatives of the Russian minority. The authorities should also look into the causes of any educational disparities in academic performance from students in Estonian-language and Russian-language schools, assess and improve the quality of education with Russian as the language of instruction, and remedy any problems identified.

The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to intensify the dialogue with minority representatives on making education in other minority languages available at all levels and in different areas traditionally inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities and to support Sunday schools more resolutely and sustainably.

185. Estonia's transition to official-language education has also been discussed in the introduction to the report and under Article 12. Estonian language education supports the formation of the Estonian state identity, increases the cohesion of society and reduces both educational and socio-economic isolation.

186. Estonia has continued the gradual transition to a fully official-language education system, which must be completed by 2030. The latest reforms in the education system, which were also described in detail above, constitute the final step in a long and gradual process aimed at increasing the use of the state language in the education system. That process was set in motion with the adoption of the Constitution by means of a referendum on 28 June 1992, after Estonia regained its independence on 20 August 1991. According to section 6 of the Constitution, the official language of Estonia is Estonian. Subsection 37 (4) of the Constitution stipulates that everyone has the right to be taught in Estonian. It further specifies that the language of instruction is chosen by the national minority educational institutions themselves.

187. The primary objective of the transition to Estonian language education is to provide all children in Estonia with high-quality education in Estonian, regardless of their native language. An entirely Estonian-language educational environment also ensures better opportunities for

further education, success in the labour market and people's participation in the common Estonian information and value space.

188. The current changes are therefore based on long-term experience and constitute a part of the gradual transition process of the national education system. Over the years, all interested minority groups and individuals have been able to participate in various stages of this process, from the level of policymaking and implementation to specific decisions at the level of government and municipalities, including in challenging individual acts of national authorities in national and international courts. Therefore, over the decades, the education reform has provided minorities with ample opportunity to engage in dialogue with municipalities and state authorities and to express their viewpoints and concerns as well as to challenge the policies and measures of the state and municipalities.

189. By gradually increasing the share of the state language as the language of instruction in the national education system, Estonia has established a sufficient transition period for its implementation. This allows educational institutions, teachers, pupils and their parents to adapt and implement the changes appropriately in practice, thereby strengthening the overall availability, accessibility and adaptability of the education system and curriculum. Persons belonging to national minorities retain the right to preserve and develop their identity and culture.

190. The transition to official-language education is in accordance with international law, including the Framework Convention. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has (in *Valiullina and Others v. Latvia* 56928/19, 7306/20, 11937/20, 14.09.2023) concluded that the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities does not contain an unambiguous principle of providing native-language education to national minorities (sections 134, 211). In addition, the ECtHR found that the right to education (Article 2 of Additional Protocol No. 1 to the Convention on Human Rights) does not include the right to acquire education in a person's language of choice but guarantees the right to acquire education in the official languages of the state (section 135). The Court also ruled that the transition to official-language education in Latvia was justified in order to protect and strengthen the Latvian language and to promote proficiency in the state language, particularly considering its historically disadvantaged situation, to promote the unity of the education system, to facilitate equal access for all pupils, and to eliminate the consequences of the historical segregation of the education system. The transition to education in the official language did not violate Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) in conjunction with Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention (sections 190-215).

191. In recent years, school-age children that are Ukrainian war refugees have entered the Estonian education system. The Ministry of Education and Research has supported municipalities, schools and youth work agencies to ensure that Ukrainian pupils can continue their education in Estonia as smoothly as possible. School owners were supported in providing schooling places all over Estonia. In cooperation with municipalities, opportunities were created for pupils to participate in hobby education and youth work, assistant teachers were employed, and Ukrainian teaching materials and materials necessary for learning Estonian were compiled.

192. In Tallinn, which has the highest number of children from Ukraine, the state founded the Freedom School with places for 600 pupils in 2022. In addition to Estonian teachers and support specialists, the staff includes teachers and support specialists from Ukraine. The Freedom School is a school operating according to the Estonian national curriculum, which offers pupils who are Ukrainian war refugees the opportunity to acquire basic and secondary education. The aim is to support the integration of Ukrainian youth into Estonian society and at the same time to maintain and develop their native language skills and knowledge of Ukrainian culture. At the Freedom School, teaching is carried out using the language immersion method (60% of the studies are in Estonian and 40% in Ukrainian).

Article 15

Active participation in cultural, social and economic life and in social affairs

The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to expand their consultation structures with representatives of national minorities beyond the sphere of culture and provide adequate opportunities for persons belonging to national minorities to have their voice heard and have a substantial influence on all decisions and issues affecting them. Due account should be taken of the diversity of views within minority communities and of gender and age balance.

193. The Government Office implemented a measure for developing administrative capacity using the funds of the Operational Programme for Cohesion Policy Funds 2014-2020, one of the sub-activities of which was to support the inclusion processes. As most non-governmental umbrella organisations are not language- or nationality-based, there has been an attempt to take diversity into consideration throughout the processes. For example, in the case of Estonia's long-term development strategy 'Estonia 2035', the general part of which was completed in 2021 and the action plan in 2022, a number of co-creation opportunities were also used in Russian and English at the drafting stage: regional seminars were held, among others, in Ida-Viru County, where translation into Russian was ensured, and a nationwide opinion poll was conducted in Estonian, Russian and English in order to jointly set strategic goals for Estonia for the year 2035. The ESF+ administrative capacity measure has supported inclusion that supports the implementation of 'Estonia 2035', which served as the input for the renewal of the strategy's action plan in 2023.

194. In 2021, an Opinion Journey was organised for young people, where pupils in grades 7-12 could submit ideas on how to improve the living environment in Estonia. Over 500 young people, including from several Russian-speaking schools, took part in the Opinion Journey. In 2022, the 'Estonia 2035' Opinion Journey was carried out, where people from all over Estonia organised 147 discussions on topics important to the Estonian state on their own initiative. There were participants from all counties, and the language of the discussion was chosen by the organiser. The Government Office will also continue to support co-creation processes in the new budget period by supporting ministries to test co-creation methods and ensure the involvement of various stakeholders in socially important topics.

195. One of the key policies of the Cohesive Estonia Strategy is to make initiatives at the local level (i.e. co-creation and opportunities for participation) more welcoming to people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. To this end, there are plans to support local

authorities in defining local communities and involving people with other native languages in local initiatives to a greater degree; to support the participation of people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in different civil society organisations; and to support the active engagement of cultural societies of national minorities in the work of national Estonian-language umbrella organisations and representative organisations.

196. Representatives of national minorities have the opportunity to participate directly in governing the state by reviewing and expressing opinions on draft legislation in the state drafting information system (EIS). In Estonia, everyone has the constitutional right to form associations, unions and clubs, to protect their interests and freely express their beliefs. The current Non-profit Associations Act establishes rights and opportunities for cultural activities. The Act does not restrict participation in the work of the governing bodies of associations on the basis of citizenship or ethnicity.

197. In 2022, the National Foundation of Civil Society of the Ministry of the Interior organised an application round for investment support for NGOs in Ida-Viru County. The aim was to find capable NGOs whose activities have increased the attractiveness of Ida-Viru County as a living environment and improved the overall development of the region.

198. At the beginning of 2023, the composition of the supervisory board of the National Foundation of Civil Society was renewed. An open competition was organised to find representatives of the third sector. A representative of the Ministry of Culture was also included in the supervisory board to ensure the coherence of activities from the perspective of both the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of the Interior.

199. In 2024, there are plans to renew the composition of the government committee dealing with the development of Estonian civil society. It is also possible for organisations of national minorities to participate in the public competition. The task of the committee is to evaluate the implementation and performance of civil society action plans and to develop cooperation between civil society and the state.

200. In 2024-2029, special attention will be paid to workers in the oil shale sector in Ida-Viru County whom the green transition will affect the most. With the support of the European Union Just Transition Fund, new measures are implemented from January 2024 to support the smooth professional transition of oil shale workers. Measures include expanding opportunities for re-skilling and up-skilling, including new support for micro-qualifications and support for taking up employment.

See also the overview of the activities of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, Article 4

The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to intensify their efforts to address the high unemployment rate affecting persons belonging to national minorities and to take special measures to improve the position of minority women. The authorities should facilitate access to adequate training that is not limited to language proficiency and equips those concerned with the skills necessary in the current and future labour market. It further calls on the

authorities to ensure that the regions affected receive the support necessary to address the specific effects of the economic crisis at the municipal level.

201. According to the policy of supporting an innovative and responsible labour market, as set out in the Cohesive Estonia Strategy, the availability and needs-based nature of labour market services must be improved with respect to people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. To this end, the awareness of sectoral policymakers of the situation of people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the labour market will be increased and the efficiency of service providers will thus be improved; the awareness of people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Estonian labour market services and benefits will be raised and the recruitment of potential employees with other native languages in state and local government authorities will be supported.

202. In 2023, the Ministry of Culture together with the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (ELVL) initiated the activity ‘Supporting local governments in providing integration, including adaptation services’, which is supported by the European Social Fund+ (ESF+). The aim of the supported activity is to increase the capacity of the local level in dealing with migration, adaptation and integration issues. It also aims to ensure that municipalities take into consideration the needs of people whose native language is not Estonian in their main activities. Municipalities have good partnerships with other providers of adaptation and integration services and are aware of their own roles and those of other parties.

203. The support measure is used to support activities aimed at and supporting the integration, including adaptation, of new immigrants at least 18 years of age, people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and returnees to Estonia. ELVL has entered into respective partnership agreements with the cities of Tallinn, Tartu, Rakvere and Pärnu, and the Saaremaa Rural Municipality.

204. Since 2019, the Ministry of Culture has supported various NGOs in engaging new immigrants in voluntary activities. In partnership with the NGO Külaliikumine Kodukant, the Russian and English language environment of the online platform www.vabatahtlikud.ee, which offers opportunities to participate in voluntary activities, was developed.

205. In the framework of the ESF support measure, preparations are underway for cooperation with the National Foundation of Civil Society, with the objective of increasing the participation of new immigrants, people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and returnees in community activities.

206. The ‘Fostering refugee and immigrant integration’ project, initiated by the Nordic Council of Ministers’ representations in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and the representation of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in the Nordic and Baltic countries, gave local government representatives the opportunity to gain knowledge and inspiration through study visits and cooperation meetings in order to involve immigrants and beneficiaries of international protection more actively in community activities. As a result of the project, methodological materials aimed at increasing the competence of local authorities and other decision-makers in involving immigrants and refugees in strategy planning, co-designing and joint implementation were compiled.

207. The Integration Foundation, in cooperation with various public sector institutions, continued to offer a traineeship programme to students with other native languages who have a command of Estonian at the required level and are considering employment in the public sector. Applications for traineeships are accepted twice a year. Before the traineeship, an information day is organised where public sector employees with other native languages talk about their experience, and the requirements for applying for a job are introduced, which will be useful in the application process. There is a guided tour of the joint building of ministries (Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Social Affairs). In 2023, the Foundation carried out the programme for the fourth time, with more than 30 traineeship places.

208. An employee secondment programme is being prepared, in which an employee with another native language, who works in a predominantly Russian-speaking working environment, is sent to work in an Estonian-speaking team for the purpose of language practice and cultural immersion.

209. In order to help people of other nationalities enter the labour market and find work, the state will continue to provide labour market services. The Unemployment Insurance Fund provides labour market services based on individual needs and obstacles. One of the obstacles in the labour market is the lack of Estonian language skills, which is why Estonian language training is offered to improve the language skills of the unemployed and employees alike. In 2022, 4719 unemployed and 2194 employed persons started their Estonian language studies. In addition, 1935 employees learned Estonian through their employer, who received training support from the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

210. From 1 January 2024, the new employment programme for 2024-2029 is in force, which will improve the matching of the training offered with labour market needs, focusing on skills development and providing preparation for occupations with the greatest labour shortage. For this purpose, curriculum groups and curricula in which studies are financed by the Unemployment Insurance Fund are restricted and a requirement is established according to which the duration of funded training must be at least 26 academic hours.

211. Since March 2022, a new, fairly large target group of people of other nationalities has entered the Estonian labour market. Since then, 23,656 Ukrainian war refugees have registered as unemployed and receive labour market services on the same basis as permanent residents of Estonia. There is also a specific service targeted at refugees to facilitate their integration into the labour market – support for the employment of beneficiaries of international protection. This includes reimbursement of translation, mentoring, training and qualification costs. Since March 2022, Ukrainians have signed up for various services on 22,424 occasions. The most popular is labour market training (4888 participants, 2893 of them in Estonian language courses), followed by the employment support service for beneficiaries of international protection.

Participation of the Roma in the economy

The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to gather more disaggregated data about the economic participation of the Roma, in close cooperation with their representatives, in

order to adequately assess their situation and design appropriate measures to remedy their particular difficulties.

212. In July 2023, the regulation concerning open calls for applications entered into force, allocating funds of ESF+ for 2021-2027 for additional activities targeted at disadvantaged groups in the labour market, including to support new immigrants who have arrived in connection with family migration and the Roma. Among others, municipalities can also apply for support for activities aimed at them. Additional activities for women of other nationalities are also planned under ESF+ as well as the development of skills in areas with a greater need.

213. The Ministry of Culture has regularly commissioned a statistical survey from Statistics Estonia (most recently in 2022), which provides information on, among other things, the educational level of the Roma, their dwellings and technical equipment as well as their occupational status, employment situation and employment rate and their annual income and sources of income.

214. The highest completed level of education and employment rate of Roma over the age of 15 is one of the indicators among the metrics of the integration programme, including the adaptation programme, which are monitored regularly.

Health issues, including COVID-19-related aspects

The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to gather data and conduct research on the health outcomes of persons belonging to national minorities, and to target awareness-raising campaigns on health issues, including COVID-19 vaccination, to persons belonging to national minorities, also in minority languages.

215. Health statistics are collected by the National Institute for Health Development and certain data are also collected on the basis of nationality. The database can be found at:

https://statistika.tai.ee/pxweb/et/Andmebaas/Andmebaas__05Uuringud.

216. In cooperation with the WHO and the European Commission, a project is underway to assess the Estonian health system from the perspective of refugees and migrants, focusing in particular on access to primary care and mental healthcare. The corresponding survey is carried out from March to June 2024. The project aims to improve the availability of health services for war refugees (including increasing the degree of vaccination among war refugees and creating up-to-date health promotion programmes for war refugees) and the opportunities for Ukrainian healthcare professionals to work in the European Union.

217. Healthcare campaigns are available to all residents of Estonia and take into consideration the needs of various target groups.

218. A qualitative study is being carried out with respect to the vaccination coverage of Ukrainians in Estonia as required under the immunisation schedule. In addition, a qualitative study on flu vaccine coverage is carried out among Estonians, including a separate focus on Ida-Viru County. Work is also underway on a project for a tool to support the organisation of vaccination, which maps various measures to increase coverage and where focus group interviews will also be conducted with an expert on cultural dimensions.

219. Unlike Western European countries, it is not customary for older residents of Estonia to be vaccinated against influenza. Estonia's uneven vaccination coverage against COVID-19 has not been systematically studied, but Estonian experts have also referred to its necessity in their recommendations.

220. Information sessions for family doctor centres were launched in relation to the vaccination of national minorities against COVID-19 in Estonia. Family doctors, family nurses, receptionists and administrative staff were invited to participate in the information sessions. The goal was to share the latest information. A Russian-language information session concerning vaccination was organised, which was broadcast on ETV+, on the portals rus.err.ee, rus.delfi.ee and rus.postimees.ee as well as on the YouTube channel of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Nationwide campaigns were quickly developed to help people follow government recommendations. The same messages were reported in various channels and by different institutions.

221. With respect to the Roma community, there was cooperation with the Valga Hospital and municipalities. The coordinator of the Roma was involved. In Ida-Viru County, all family doctors and the local vaccination coordinator were involved in vaccination. A project was launched in which medical students called people who were in the risk group. In Lasnamäe District, Russian-language posters were manually placed on the doors of apartment buildings and information concerning the necessity and possibilities of vaccination was sent via direct post.

222. In 2023, a report on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis was prepared under the leadership of the Health Board (available in Estonian on the website of the Health Board: https://www.terviseamet.ee/sites/default/files/Nakkushaigused/Trukised/covid-19_pandeemia_analuus_2023.pdf). The report highlighted the following lessons.

223. In order to improve compliance with the recommendations and restrictions of the state among the residents, it is necessary to reach the Russian-speaking population and to work with them before new crises occur in order to make the information space more uniform. This requires long-term activities, in particular finding community leaders who are listened to and trusted (including thinking about Russian-speaking residents), as well as thinking about communication channels and formats. Traditional formats do not suffice when combating fake news; the facts must be presented in a way that is as attractive as the manner in which producers of fake news share their information.

224. Following COVID-19, a vaccination plan was drawn up for the period 2022-2023 (on the website of the Ministry of Social Affairs: <https://sm.ee/media/2818/download>), according to which new approaches and spokespersons need to be found, vaccination campaigns must be organised, and the private sector must be involved. The aim is to compile simple, repetitive messages that are appropriate for the target group in terms of their age and cultural background. The Health Insurance Fund, in cooperation with other parties, develops a systematic communication strategy that introduces the benefits of vaccination to various groups of the population.

225. Information on vaccination is available in Estonian, Russian and English on the website vaksineeri.ee. The family doctor's advice line provides additional advice and information about COVID-19 vaccination, among other things. Advice is provided in Estonian and Russian; the service is available in English daily between 15:00 and 17:00. The website

<https://vaktsineeriapteegis.ee/ru> is also available in Russian. The state helpline 1247 provides information in Estonian, Russian and English around the clock and gives advice in situations where life, health and property are not at risk.

226. Ukrainian war refugees who have been granted temporary protection are guaranteed, among other things, COVID-19 testing and COVID-19 vaccination. Information concerning this has been published in Estonian, Russian, English and Ukrainian: <https://kriis.ee/>. Vaccination-related information was distributed in reception centres, medical centres and by healthcare providers who were in contact with refugees. The necessary information was also translated into Ukrainian. A qualitative study on the vaccination coverage of Ukrainians in Estonia as required under the immunisation schedule will be completed in 2024. In addition, a qualitative study on flu vaccine coverage among Estonians is underway, including a separate focus on Ida-Viru County. Work is underway on a project for a tool to support the organisation of vaccination that maps various measures to increase coverage and as a part of which focus group interviews will be conducted with an expert on cultural dimensions.

Article 16

Impact of administrative reform

The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to ensure that the rights of persons belonging to national minorities are duly taken into account in territorial and administrative reforms. It further encourages the authorities to enter into a dialogue with representatives of the Russian minority about the teaching of Russian in the schools located in the areas concerned by the 2017 administrative reform and minimise any negative effects of this reform.

227. According to the Territory of Estonia Administrative Division Act, the effects on living conditions, the sense of cohesion of residents, the quality of provision of public services, and the demographic situation, etc. must be considered when altering territorial organisation. In the process of mergers of municipalities, the rural municipality or city governments concerned are obliged to find out the opinion of the population and to ensure that the negotiation process is transparent and disclosed to the public.

228. The merger agreement and its annexes must be made public in the required manner for a period of at least three weeks, which ensures sufficient time to view the terms and conditions of the merger. Therefore, when municipalities merge, it is ensured that information is shared with the residents and they have the opportunity to have a say (equally, regardless of ethnicity). Final decisions on the merger and further local government arrangements are made by the municipal councils of the merging municipalities and the council of the municipality formed as a result of the merger.

229. Russian-language education continues to be available in the areas covered by the 2017 administrative reform (e.g. the area around Lake Peipus) to this day. The administrative reform has not led to a decrease in Russian-language education in the region as a result of the merger of administrative units. This has been influenced primarily by the parents' wish for children to study more and more, at least partially, in Estonian and Estonian-language subjects. The

transition to Estonian language instruction will begin in autumn 2024 and all parents have the right to request native language and cultural studies for their child if there are at least 10 applicants per school. A national elective curriculum has been developed for this purpose, which can be adapted by schools based on the language the pupils wish to learn.

Articles 17 and 18

Cross-border cooperation

The Advisory Committee invites the authorities to cooperate more closely with representatives of national minorities regarding their cross-border contacts and ensure that any restrictions imposed on these contacts are proportionate and do not unduly prevent persons belonging to national minorities from accessing their rights.

230. In the period 2021-2027, Estonia participates in six European Territorial Cooperation/Interreg programmes, which are financed by the European Regional Development Fund. The programmes are divided into cross-border cooperation (Estonia-Latvia and Central Baltic), interregional cooperation (INTERACT, Interreg Europe, ESPON and URBACT) and transnational cooperation (Baltic Sea region) programmes. The Estonian-Latvian and Central Baltic programmes also finance so-called soft cooperation activities, which are eligible for funding. Applicants eligible for support are national, regional and local authorities; institutions equivalent to the public sector; public organisations; non-governmental organisations; and non-profit organisations and foundations.