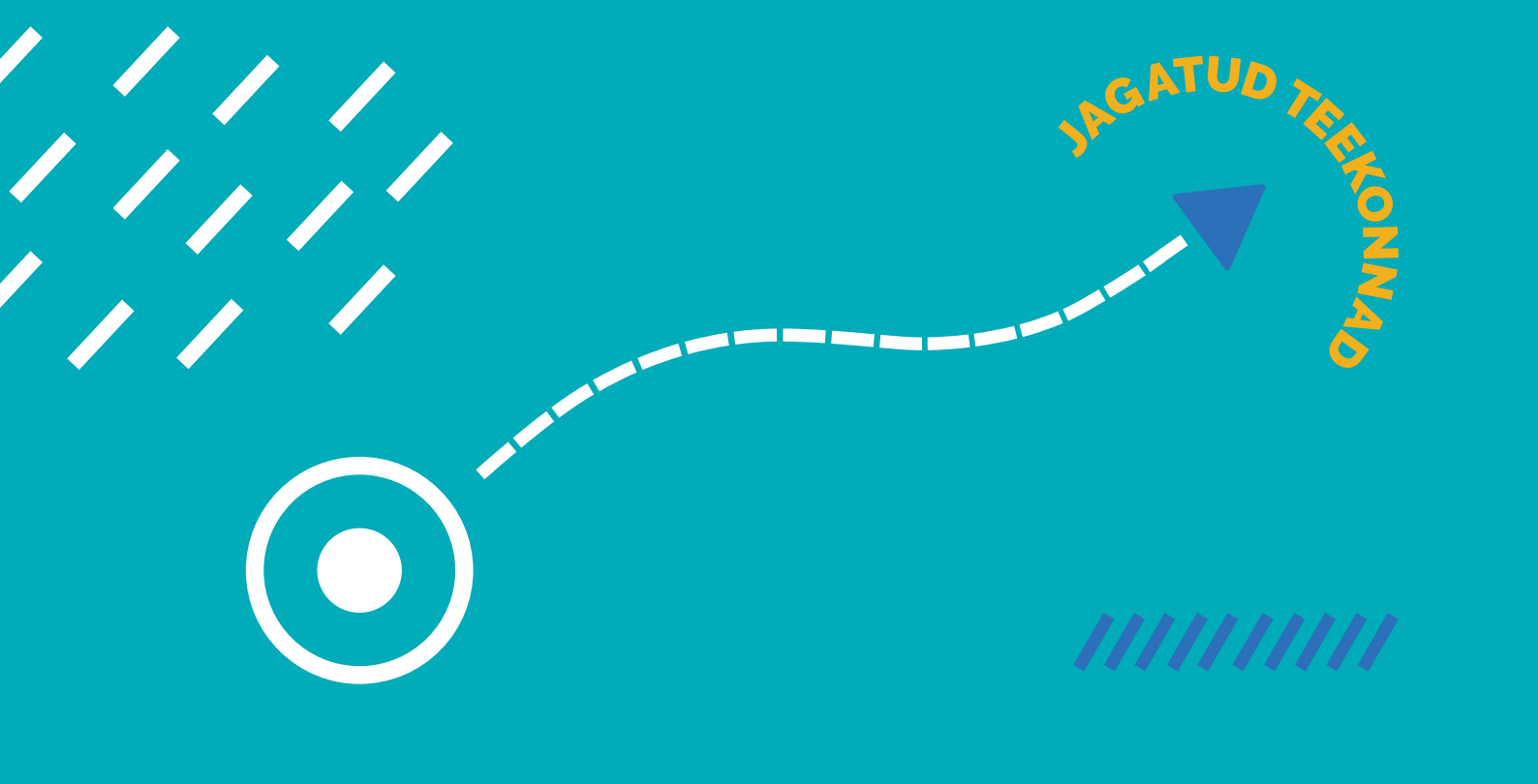




TEXT FROM ONLINE COURSE “RÄNDEKOOL”

MAAILMAKOOL.EE/RANDEKOOL



JAGATUD TEEKONNAD

10. THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON SOCIETY

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The impact of migration doesn't always translate into money and, in addition to the economic impact of migration, it is important to analyse how migration affects society. In this chapter, you will find answers to the question of why some people perceive migration more positively or negatively. We will also discuss the relationship between the labour market and migration, the spatial location and migration of people, and the population pyramid and migration.

In its complexity, society is comparable to an ecosystem. Both are built on biodiversity and equilibrium. Rapid change and imbalances create stress in the ecosystem. Of course, this is not always bad; stress is often also a driving force that helps make leaps in development.

If you are asked whether migration affects society more positively or negatively, what would you answer? Migration never affects society at large in the same way; there are always those who experience more of the positive effects of migration and those who endure more of the negative effects of migration. Therefore, we can assume that your answer may deviate in either direction.

Migration as a for resilience booster for societies

Many people see migration as a phenomenon that makes the world broader, more cohesive and more diverse. Migration makes societies more dynamic and doesn't allow them to lose resilience, because leaving the original state of equilibrium creates the need to adapt, and it isn't only the migrant who has to adapt.

Cultural diversity brings new tastes and new cultural experiences – which is why we travel to distant countries as tourists, for example. Migration creates bridges between different societies. These bridges are crossed by not only financial remittances but also experiences, traditions, skills and knowledge. Thanks to migration, we learn to cook differently, work or spend leisure time in a different manner. For example, Estonians who have worked in Finland have brought a different work culture to the Estonian construction sector, such as the more consistent habit of using safety equipment. Sometimes, migration experiences can change the world much more fundamentally. For example, how was the billion-dollar money transfer platform Wise born? Of course, from a context well known to many migrants, where banks charged a hefty service fee for transferring money between their bank accounts in Estonia and England. Today, such financial technologies no longer only affect the lives and finances of migrants; they also impact on many others who operate in international business, use foreign services or goods, and indirectly all customers of traditional banking.

However, a migrant is not merely a bearer of his/her national culture or traditions. Nor is a society divided solely based on what one eats for breakfast or whether one celebrates Christmas, Ramadan or Diwali. Migration is also associated with the broader growth of diversity in society, the emergence of a so-called intersectional society, where a person has many different bases for belonging to different small identity groups. The concept of intersectionality is used to talk about diversity within

groups, but also about inequality. Society is not just divided into a few large groups, such as men and women, young and old, immigrants and locals. There are overlaps and significant internal differences between all these groups. So we can say that some Estonians and Indians share a much larger common ground than with some of their compatriots. They may have similar life experiences or, for example, similar higher education, work in the same sector and, in addition, follow the same series on Netflix.

To put it simply, migration is perceived more positively by people whose identities are based on what they do.

Migration as a challenge to communitarianism

But there are also people with a different outlook on life: those who value *belonging* somewhere over *doing* something. Many people, both migrants and non-migrants, are communitarian in their way of life and attitude towards life: their self-identity is based first and foremost on where they belong. Above all, it is important for them to be surrounded by the usual language, culture, customs and people they consider their kin. Such a model of society also has important advantages: [research](#) shows that in a more homogeneous society, trust and solidarity are easier to develop. For these members of the community, multiculturalism is a disorder in the usual social pattern and an unpleasant source of stress, rather than a mediator of resilience.

By the way, not only those who consider themselves indigenous want to belong to their community. Many migrants abroad do the same. Migrants seek a familiar cultural environment for exactly the same reasons: habit, community support, reducing stress from a foreign environment. True, different communitarian views tend to collide here. While liberal communitarians tend to value different communities and communitarianism equally, national communitarianism is based on the premise that the world is divided into different national communities with their settlements, where one national culture has a clear privilege over another and so-called other cultures do not have such a privilege in the same territory.

It is also not uncommon for conflicts and prejudices to arise between different minority groups. For example, the fear of immigration in Estonia has been even greater among the Russian-speaking population. Public opinion polls conducted in [2014–2016](#) on the attitude of the Estonian population towards refugees indicated that non-Estonians, who generally consider migration and open borders as positive, perceived the settlement of refugees (from the Middle East) in Estonia as a threat to the state and security. They were more fearful than Estonians of the ghettoisation of refugees' living areas and the non-integration of refugees, and the potential contribution of refugees to Estonian society was assessed to be lower.

Reasons for xenophobia

Xenophobia is known to have roots other than deeper core values (which you will learn more about in **Chapter 13, "Migration and Public Opinion"**). One reason is psychological: xenophobia can result from prejudice, which in turn stems from ignorance. Psychologist Gordon Allport has formulated a [contact hypothesis](#), which assumes that when social contacts arise between different social groups, prejudices

disappear. But these contacts must be substantive: for example, working in the same team, friendships, joint activities in an apartment association. And it is also influenced by general social attitudes. Seeing a cashier of a different skin colour in the store usually doesn't break down prejudices alone.

Another possible explanation is related to social stratification. Segmented labour market theory says that the labour market is broadly divided into at least two categories. The jobs in the higher category ensure greater social mobility, i.e., the opportunity to climb the career ladder. These are often white-collar jobs or jobs that require qualifications. In these occupations, you can make a career or run a successful business and earn a decent salary.

In the lower segment of the labour market, there are simpler and less prestigious jobs that do not guarantee much social mobility: when working in this category, it is generally not possible to advance your career or climb higher in the social hierarchy. With the development of technology, there is also a greater risk that such jobs will one day disappear altogether.

A segmented labour market creates a stratified society. There is nothing strange about that in itself. Some inequality is inevitable in societies; one might say it's even natural. But it is equally inevitable that such inequality of opportunities will lead to conflicts.

Everyone would like their descendants, if not themselves, to end up in the upper segment of the labour market. Recent immigrants do not usually compare themselves in the host society context, but those who have lived in the host country for longer certainly do. And so there is a close race: those who are already in the upper segment try to stay there, and those who are in the lower segment try to climb up.

The segmented assimilation theory points out that immigrants merge into their specific labour market so to say, and it is very difficult to move on, even for the next generations. As a significant part of migration is related to the filling of jobs in the lower segment, and stratification significantly affects the attitudes of both immigrants and the main population. And, as discussed in **Chapter 9, "The Economic Impact of Migration"**, migration affects local people at the lower end of the labour market more negatively than other groups in society.

Perhaps that is why xenophobia is more widespread among people working in the lower segment of the labour market. Sociologist [Arlie Hochschild](#), in her book *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, has explained xenophobia by the fact that these people feel that although they have toiled and worked hard their entire lives (i.e. have been waiting in line for a better life), they are somehow falling behind and begin feeling that all kinds of minorities, including immigrants, are cutting the line. Minorities who have always been regarded as inferior are suddenly seen in the midst of Hollywood glamour or as top executives of big companies. And so some people question what right the minorities had to reach the higher labour market segment, while their own standard of living has even deteriorated. And in many advanced economies, such as the United States, this gap in the well-being of the upper and lower segments of the labour market has indeed widened significantly.

Migration and spatial segregation

A segmented labour market can easily produce a spatially segregated society and influence where immigrants move. It has been observed that while locals, wherever possible, tend to live in more upmarket and more desirable living areas, immigrants – especially when coming from a lower-income country and doing easier work – value cheaper housing. Therefore, locals move away from less prestigious neighbourhoods and new immigrants take their place. If such regional inequalities are not consciously reduced, the result will be spatial segregation and spontaneously emerging immigrant neighbourhoods.

Of course, this picture can change over generations. If social mobility allows, and if the second generation of immigrants, for example, are able to move up in the socio-economic hierarchies, they will usually move elsewhere as well. However, they will be replaced by the next new immigrants. And tensions between different immigrant communities will grow. For example, many Estonians living in Finland are hostile towards intercultural immigrants, probably much more hostile than the majority of local Finns (or even Estonians living in Estonia). It is because they perceive them as competition for the same territory.

Migration and the population pyramid

One area that expects to reap the benefits from migration is connected to the aging population and the declining population of people of working age.

Many highly developed countries are struggling with declining birth rates and an aging population, leading to a shortage of working-age people to help offset the costs of retirement benefits. Immigration seems to be a very favourable solution here, because in essence the country can import labour and taxpayers, who themselves – as people of the best working age – bring along very little social costs for the host country (no need to pay for their upbringing and education, and healthcare and other costs are also low). In this way, the social tax deficit of the host society can be compensated for over the years, or even a few decades. However, it should not be forgotten that these immigrants will also one day be old and someone will have to pay their pensions as well. And [studies](#) don't show that immigration increases birth rates in destination countries.

Thus, migration can affect society in many different ways at the same time, and certainly never affects society as a whole in the same way. But are there also ways to minimise the negative effects of migration? This will be discussed in **Chapter 11, "Integration and Adaptation"**.

Discussion points

- Discuss what Estonian society as a whole gains and/or loses from immigration. Who is more on the side of the winners and what do they win? Who sees migration from the losing side, why and what do they lose?
- In your opinion, to what extent is the segmented labour market theory valid in Estonia, and can segmented assimilation be seen here as well? Can you draw parallels between Estonia and the United States?

Further reading

The topic of the social impact of migration was reflected in several areas in the *Estonian Human Development Report 2016/2017*: <https://www.2017.inimareng.ee/>. Read, for example, Allan Puur's chapter on demographic change, Kadri Leetmaa's chapter on the spatial location of linguistic communities living in Estonia, Ellu Saar's and Jelena Helemäe's chapter on labour market segregation, Kaire Pöder's, Triin Lauri's and Leen Rahnu's chapter on immigrants' school choices, and Anastassia Zabrodskaia's chapter on the identity of Estonian residents.



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