

2nd Baltic Inter-ministerial Round Table on Migrant Education Policy Partnership

**Thematic focus: Inclusive education policy for children of returning nationals
and nationals living abroad**

3-4 November, 2014

This document summarises the discussions at the 2nd Baltic Inter-Ministerial Round Table that was hosted by Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science and Vilnius Lithuanian House in Vilnius, 3-4 November 2014. The topic of the round table was the *Inclusive education policy for children of returning nationals and nationals living abroad*.

The round table was one of the activities organised within the SIRIUS Network (European Policy network for education of children with minority and migrant background) by Hanna Siarova (PPMI), who also act as Sirius national coordinator for Lithuania. The round table was organised as a follow-up to the 1st Inter-Ministerial Round table in Riga where participants identified specific policy topics on which they could focus further.

The aim of Vilnius round table was to bring together different policy makers dealing with integration of returnee pupils in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania:

- To learn and exchange knowledge on approaches towards integration of returning nationals into education in the Baltic States and to support learning of Baltic nationals living abroad. Participants of the round table were able to learn more about Lithuanian approach towards integration of returnee pupils into Lithuanian schools and support of Lithuanian citizens who live outside Lithuania outlined in the state strategy 'Global Lithuania'. The participants also met practitioners, policy makers and coordinators of specific projects working with integration of returnees and discover good practice initiatives within Lithuanian approach, as well as assess challenges of the current policy.
- To identify strengths of national strategies and to assess transferability of good practice measures in the neighbouring Baltic countries. Participants provided feedback and reflections on the approaches/measures learnt based on Lithuanian example, as well as contributions of other Baltic countries and shared ideas on their possible improvements and transferability to Baltic countries context.

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- To elaborate concrete steps on implementation of certain measures/policies on education of returnees in Baltic countries.

The round table discussion was also an important contribution to the finalisation of policy paper on education of children with a migrant background in the Baltic States which was released in the second half of November this year (2014).

The round table consisted of three sessions. All sessions were moderated by Hanna Siarova (PPMI).

Session 1 (Nov 3, 14.00 – 15.30): Presentations

The first session aimed to introduce to the participants the Lithuanian approach towards education of children of returning nationals and nationals living abroad, as well as current gaps and challenges of its implementation.

At the beginning of the first session, Mrs Virginija Rinkevičienė, the head of the Division of Lithuanians living abroad, welcomed the participants and introduced them the division and the topic.

Following Virginija's welcoming words, Ms Hanna Siarova introduced the Sirius network and the rationale and background of the organisation of the 2nd Inter-Ministerial Round table (see [presentation](#)), as well as introduced the speakers and focus of the next presentations contributing to the understanding of Lithuanian approach towards returnees.

Ms Gintė Damušis, Director, Department of Lithuanians Living Abroad, Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs - '[Diaspora policy in Lithuania: building bridges and new connections](#)'

Ms Gintė Damušis talked about Global Lithuania strategy, which aims at optimising Lithuanian diaspora policy. Global Lithuania Strategy focuses on maintaining ties with Lithuanians living abroad, and through this preserving Lithuanian identity, which is crucial for their re-integration back into Lithuanian society upon their decision to return. The strategy was also a good tool to make different agencies within Lithuania and abroad working together towards achievement of one common goal. The main target audiences of the programme are professionals and entrepreneurs (to maintain economic ties and encourage investment into Lithuania), Lithuanian communities and organisations (to promote culture and language investment and trade, tourism, scientific and other

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cooperation) and youth (to encourage life-long learning and development). Educational and scholarship programmes are very popular among youth and often are a stepping stone to their relocation or reintegration in Lithuania.

Ona Čepulėnienė and Marytė Speičienė, Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science – ‘Lithuanian approach to education of children of returning Lithuanian nationals and Lithuanian living abroad’

Further, Ona Čepulėnienė and Marytė Speičienė presented specific strategies of the Ministry of Education and Science on providing education for Lithuanian children living abroad in order to facilitate their re-integration into Lithuanian schools when they return.

Education of Lithuanian diaspora abroad

Ministry of Education is responsible and funding Lithuanian education centres abroad, both formal schools and non-formal centres (like Sunday schools) established by communities and associations of teachers. Non-formal education of Lithuanians living abroad was transferred under the responsibility of MoE in 2013 (before it was the area of Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Ministry of Education is closely cooperating with Ministry of Foreign Affairs within Global Lithuania strategy and participates in the inter-agency action plan.

Ministry of education is fully responsible for supporting Lithuanian schools abroad (e.g., sending teachers and paying their salaries, providing CPD opportunities for teachers, supplying text books and other learning materials). MoE also organises (and sponsors) joint projects between schools – to strengthen partnerships (creating websites, acquiring teachers materials, teacher training). Teachers and pupils are also invited to summer camps in Lithuania.

Children abroad (especially those whose families plan to come back to Lithuania) have a possibility to obtain distant education from Lithuanian school (in Lithuania 5 general schools have the possibility to teach children from abroad using Moodle distant learning system). The main focus of this learning is Lithuanian language and history. This also facilitates re-integration.

Education of returning Lithuanians in Lithuania

The approach to integrate children of returnees in Lithuania is less systematic. First of all, there is lack of consistent data collection and information on the actual number of returning Lithuanian children in schools across Lithuania.

The state policy foresees an additional 30% of funding to the regular pupils' basket for each returnee, if he/she spent more than one year abroad. However, the number of funding applications cannot serve as an indicator for a number of returnee pupils in the country, since, firstly, not all the schools are applying for funding and, secondly, the funding statistics does not disaggregate applications based on nationality (new immigrants are also entitled for 30% extra funding for the regular pupils' basket).

Among other measures applied in Lithuania there is language support. There are a number of schools in Lithuania (such as Lietuviu Namai) that offer qualified language support through integration classes and/or groups for returnees that do not speak fluent Lithuanian. In addition, education plan foresees three extra hours in the curriculum for teachers to devote targeting children's additional needs. In Lithuania, for instance, there is no systematic preparation of language teachers working with non-Lithuanian speakers, with the exception of scarce random workshops and projects. A good practice example is the *Lituanistic* model for education being developed in cooperation by research and practitioners to support teachers dealing with diversity (mainly returnee pupils and new immigrants) through the online platform and methodological material.

Irma Budginaite, PPMI - ['Preliminary research results on measures used to integrate children of returning Lithuanians: returnees' and teachers' perspectives'](#)

Irma Budginaite presented the preliminary results of the research project¹ currently carried out in Lithuania, which aims (among others) to assess the state of integration of returnees' children in Lithuanian schools and the effectiveness of the applied measures. The main messages of the presentation were:

- Lack of reliable data. It is difficult to track returning Lithuanians, as many of them do not declare their moving. In addition, as was already mentioned by MoE schools do not collect the data on returning children.

¹ The research project 'Friends or Foes: The Integration of Return Migrants into the Labour Market and Society in Lithuania (Lithuanian Research Council, 2013–2015)' is being carried out by Public Policy and Management Institute. Main data collection methods used: survey of overall population, returnees, municipalities and schools; interviews with teachers, social workers and parents.

- One of the main reasons for Lithuanians to come back was stated as willingness to integrate their children into Lithuanian society (by means of obtaining Lithuanian education among others).
- Interestingly, big part of those who are coming back settle in small towns and villages, from which they originate. It means that children are also placed into small schools, which are less prepared for diversity.
- Half of those coming back did not know about the measures that MoE is implementing. But those who used the programmes were satisfied. According to the research results parents and children face different situations (but positive and negatives (challenges and confrontations) at school.
- There are additional challenges for teachers, which are not addressed yet. E.g., teachers do not use the advantages (e.g., language) of those coming back. The planning procedures is not optimised yet (e.g., application for financial support through pupils' basket is planned in spring, but many pupils can come right before September and therefore, schools may not receive additional funding for this year).

In the end of her presentation, Irma emphasized that Interviews and focus groups is still exploratory research. If one wants to help evidence-based policy there is a need for official data on returnees' children. In many cases additional funding is not requested (so the applications for additional funding does not represent the actual number). The major difficulty is that children are dispersed across Lithuania (1-2 children per school). Teachers need methodological guidance, trainings, and the programmes available (e.g., Lituianistic model) do not always reach remote schools and villages which face the greatest challenges.

Session 2 (Nov 3, 15.50 – 17.30): Reflections

Following presentations on Lithuanian approach towards integration of returning nationals, representatives of two other Baltic states reflected on their national strategies in the area of returnees' policies.

Estonia

The current estimate of Estonians living abroad is 150 – 200,000 people. Estonia has also developed some measures that could potentially facilitate pupils' transition to the Estonian education system (Compatriots' programme, the first edition started in 2004).

Compatriots' programme is not as wide as Global Lithuania (there is no professional and economic aspect). The main focus is education, which emphasise the learning of Estonian language abroad and teacher training (roughly there are about 100 Estonian teachers in about 80 schools abroad). The measures include: e-course called Keeleklikk designed to introduce Estonian history and culture, and support independent learning of the Estonian language at B level (supporting languages English and Russian). The Estonian diaspora programme also finances language and culture camps which introduce Estonia to young Estonians residing abroad (13–18 year olds). Participation in these camps can be helpful for smoother transitions into the Estonian education system. Another good example is a 10-hour Estonian language e-course for children aged 6–10 living outside Estonia based on the national curriculum. This free course is designed to maintain and develop the Estonian language skills among the community that resides temporarily abroad. The systematic study of the Estonian language, primarily targeted to children who may return to Estonia and wish to continue their education in Estonia, is offered by Miskike tutor paid service. Lessons with a tutor take place using Skype and a special interactive study platform with the aim of a child's Estonian language skills to correspond to the level of Estonian schools.

The Ministry at the moment is carrying out the survey on how the previous editions of Compatriots' programmes implemented in order to receive the feedback from the users.

Latvia

In Latvia, current political initiatives to target the problem of depopulation are devoted to re-emigration programmes, mainly targeting the Latvian nationals who have emigrated since the year 2000. In 2013 the Ministry of Economics of Latvia in collaboration with other ministries, NGOs and social partners developed a "Re-emigration Support Plan 2013–2016" to attract the return of at least 120,000 Latvian nationals by 2030. However, this plan is hardly realistic due to the unfavourable economic situation in Latvia at the moment. Among eight main support measures, two are focused on the Latvian language learning (support for learning Latvian after returning to Latvia for all family members of Latvian nationals, e.g. in Sunday schools; however, the half of the teachers in those schools are not professionals, but regular Latvian emigrants who would like to contribute to the preservation of Latvian culture, but the teacher have possibility to receive training courses from MoE), and (re)integration of returnees' children into the national education system (support for school children who return, to introduce to the Latvian education system (lasts for about half a year) and support to

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their parents – improvement and broadening of existing support mechanism). As the return policy is still at the development stage in Latvia, it is too early to evaluate any achieved goals and functionality of initiated actions.

The first day ended with the reflections of teachers on their experiences and good practices on working with returning nationals. The main challenges emphasized by teachers seconded the problems already voiced by the presenters and included:

- It is easier to re-integrate older pupils who have already studied in Lithuania before or at least those who use Lithuanian language at home;
- Differences in expectations of parents and teachers. Parents have a lack of understanding of diversity in the classroom.
- Lack of training for teachers on dealing with diversity.
- Difficulty to incorporate the knowledge of returning pupils that they obtained in foreign country. It all depends on the initiative of particular teachers.

Session 3 (Nov 4, 9.00 – 11.00): Discussion ‘Towards an inclusive policy approach in education of returning nationals’

The session started with presentation of the research group from Vitautas the great University (Dr Lina Kaminskiene and Arvydas Matuzonis) on the good practice model of building capacity of teachers dealing with returnees and nationals living abroad – [Lithuanistic model](#). The project aims to create a teacher handbook for teachers how to deal with different pupils – this includes materials, practices, and guidelines for teacher of Lithuanian as a foreign language. This also may solve the problem of incidental immigrant enrolment at school. When a teacher feels a necessity he/she can just apply to the programme and receive necessary support. Project is devoted for teachers teaching Lithuanian language for foreigners or Lithuanian children who are coming back from foreign countries and those who live abroad. The project has also created an online platform where teachers can share and exchange their practices. However, during project implementation teachers faced additional challenges that would need further training and solutions. Another issue was dissemination strategy – many remote schools were not aware of the project and training possibility and therefore, did not participate. The participants agreed that the model is useful and has lots of potential in the future, provided that it reaches more schools and teachers.

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The presentation was followed by the discussion on how the inclusive policy approach towards integration of returning nationals should look like and what are the areas and ways for Baltic countries to work together building this approach.

The discussion was held in two small groups, where participants attempted to answer a set of questions:

*How would you modify/improve your country's approach towards integration of returning nationals?
What parties and levels should be involved? What would be their role?
Can we introduce joint Baltic approach? What would be the first steps for joint Baltic action? What would be the advantages and risks?*

The results of the group discussions are presented below.

	Group 1	Group 2
Baltic approach towards integration of returning nationals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Definition of returnees in the law (to make the basis for policy measures and financing); - Forming the sense of identity (e.g., as foreseen in 'Global Lithuania'); - Using language advantages of returnees; - Central guidelines for schools with flexibility to adjust them – system of competent schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Central system needs to be introduced which includes both establishing partnership with returnee families before their departure (so they become aware of the opportunities upon their return and maintain contact) and guidelines for families upon their return -The systematic approach has to involve many various actors and set family as a primary beneficiary in the heart of the system
Levels and parties involved	<p>School level – managing parents' and teachers' expectations; teacher networks and exchanges.</p> <p>System level – support systems for schools; practical solutions – methods and trainings for teachers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A supportive school environment is the key to establish good contact between school staff and returnee family -One option is to have specific schools as competence centres; the experience should be spread among school colleagues -Teacher in-and pre-service training have to be connected and include multicultural competence foundation -Educational counselling system has to be flexible and target the needs of returnee families among others

<p>Format of joint Baltic action</p>	<p>-Communication – round tables on good practices and experiences; -Baltic discussions on specific topics, brainstorming; -Project-based cooperation – pre-service training model (project between universities); Baltic languages qualifications abroad (bilateral cooperation).</p>	<p>-Baltic partnership on state policy level, but also on local government and school level to learn from various measures and best practice and possibly create new initiatives together -Facilitation of teacher exchange in the Baltic States -Cooperation in teacher pre- and in-service training between the Baltic States</p>
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After the discussions the participants had a chance to walk around the school '[Vilnius Lithuanian House](#)' (Vilnius Lietuviu namai) and get to know the [school's approach towards education of returning Lithuanians](#). Lietuviu Namai (English: Lithuanian House) was a special school and the first measure to integrate returning Lithuanians established as far back as 1990 with an intensive focus on Lithuanian language instruction and teaching Lithuanian culture and history. Originally the school served the needs of children of Lithuanian exiles and political prisoners during the Soviet times. Now the Lithuanian house is open to all children of Lithuanian origin coming or returning to Lithuania and offer Lithuanian language support in integration classes.

Closing remarks

The second day ended by a round of feedback and further expectations of participants. Latvian and Estonian participants were interested to learn Lithuanian experience and get familiar with specific Lithuanian practices on integration of returning nationals, which could become inspirational ideas for the neighbouring countries. The participants agreed that it is a good approach to continue sharing ideas and experience between three countries in the format of Baltic round tables, and bring new knowledge and plans back to their institutions and circles. It is important to continue dialogues between different actors and levels: schools, teachers, and universities, agencies responsible for in-service teacher training and policy makers, as all of these actors together contribute to the development of inclusive education and construction of the systems of competent schools.

The next round table will take place in Tartu, Estonia on the 27-28th of January, 2015. The aim of this round table is to learn and exchange knowledge on educational counselling approach and services that support newly arrived immigrants. In addition

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the round table participants will try to identify strengths of national strategies and assess transferability of good practice measures as well as to elaborate concrete steps on implementation of certain policies on supporting newly arrived immigrant in the Baltic countries.

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