



Latviešu valodas
aģentūra

The guide for teachers working with children of return migrants

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Latvian Language Agency

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The recommendations included in the guide are designed as practical tips for teachers. Relevant issues are addressed from the perspective of students' feelings and needs. We hope that the guide will be useful for anyone who wants to deal positively with situations related to the inclusion of the children of return migrants in the Latvian school environment. A caring attitude, cooperative action and professional responsibility are the values that help achieve the desired result.

Ērika Pičukāne, *Dr.paed.*

Project Manager

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FOREWORD

According to an article included in this guide, “about 800 families return to live in Latvia annually. The number of return migrant students in Latvian education institutions is growing: in the academic year 2015/2016 there were 664 such students, in 2017/2018 – 835, and in 2019/2020 already 1,680. In the last three years children of return migrants have been studying in more than 75% of Riga municipal schools. The majority of return migrants are from the United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, Russia, Norway and the USA.”

Suggestions, reflections and useful information for how to integrate and support children who return to Latvia and start school and how teachers can work with return migrant families can be found in this guide for Latvian school teachers. The content of the guide is designed in a way that the recommendations, firstly, will help the children of return migrants to integrate more easily in a new learning environment and, secondly, will help teachers who want to understand their students and learn more about them and their experience.

Among the experts who participated in writing the guide there are university lecturers and researchers, people who deal with problems of return migration on a daily basis, a psychologist, a student who has returned and goes to school in Latvia, people living in the diaspora, as well as those, who have already moved to Latvia, for example, from Arab countries. The materials have benefited from the support of researcher Daina Grosa, whose life experience in Australia and Latvia allows her to look at the process of integration of the children of return migrants from the perspective of both teachers and parents.

We look forward to a friendly conversation with teachers.
We hope this information will facilitate their everyday work.

Ērika Pičukāne, *Dr. paed.*

Methodologist

Latvian Language Agency

I.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. HALLO, TEACHER!

I have recently returned from abroad and there are many like me

Every year about 800 families return to live in Latvia.

The number of return migrant students in Latvian schools is increasing:

- in the academic year 2015/2016 there were 664 such students,
- in the academic year 2017/2018 – 835 students,
- and in the academic year 2019/2020 – already 1,680 students.

In the last three years, children of return migrants have been studying in more than 75% of Riga municipal schools.

The majority of return migrants come from the United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, Russia, Norway and the USA (countries are listed in descending order, by the number of return migrants).

Return migrant students can have various backgrounds, so I may be

- a person who has lived abroad very shortly (up to a few years);
- a person who has lived abroad for a long time, up to more than ten years;
- a person who was born abroad (a citizen /a permanent resident of Latvia) and whose return is the first meeting with his/her native country;
- a person whose mother tongue is Latvian, Russian, English or some other language;
- a person whose family uses two or even more languages in everyday communication;
- a person whose language of instruction at school has been different from the language used in family communication.

However, we are all united by:

- feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, anxiety and fear from the unknown;
- embarrassment when encountering differences in the behavioural culture of society and traditions (those learned in the country of residence and the new ones in Latvia requiring another set of social skills in building relationships);
- insufficient knowledge of the peer group's communication culture and habits, youngsters's slang and the rules of conduct governing their relationships;
- the lack of Latvian language knowledge and skills causes difficulties to understand the terms and concepts used in the school curriculum.

In addition to learning, adapting to a new environment creates an emotional burden:

- adapting to new teaching and learning styles;
- understanding learning requirements and establishing cooperation with a teacher;
- understanding the link between study subject standards and curriculum;
- understanding assessment criteria of preparedness and performance levels;
- adapting to communication with schoolmates and teachers;
- perceiving the difference between the need to learn Latvian and the specific teaching methodology at school;
- discovering the proportion of knowledge and skills in a foreign language and the mother tongue.

I expect a teacher will show interest in my situation and will:

- support me and be friendly;
- listen to me and trust me, will allow me to take responsibility;
- tell me what awaits me in the new class and school;
- know at least a little about my country of residence;
- want to find out more about my learning experience, interests and the life in my country of residence;
- engage in conversation and try to understand my views and values;
- understand that my knowledge and skills of the Latvian language cannot be perfect and will be tolerant of shortcomings (in the use of grammar, vocabulary and stylistics).
- pay extra attention to my learning and allot time for individual work with me;
- tell me about unwritten norms of public behaviour and youngsters's communication culture;
- cooperate.

I know that sometimes our different manners can be annoying to people and it may seem to them that we

- ask too many questions;
- are spoilt because we argue and express a different opinion;
- point out in an offensive way about what can be improved at school or in the process of learning and upbringing;
- require a special attitude, approach and allowance in the assessment;
- take on more responsibility than we can accomplish;
- know a foreign language so well that we do not have any difficulties with grammar or translation.

However, our learning aspirations do not differ from those of our classmates.

**Embrace
Support
Listen
Understand
Admit the
differences**

It will be easier for me to participate in the process of learning if the teacher:

- recognize the differences in comparison with those students who have grown up in Latvia and are integrated in the society;
- introduce me to learning gradually by giving individual and appropriate tasks;
- for some time since my return in Latvia, while adaptation is taking place, use the formative evaluation system (also for the assessment of my competences in a particular study subject);
- tell me about the school system and its specifics, assessment criteria, variety of lessons and school activities as well as other important everyday issues;
- help me become familiar with and give me the textbooks and materials my classmates are working with even if I do not have to use them at the beginning;
- help me with various organisational issues: explain where and what things are available, what can be found in the library, where, when and what should be written or marked, what happens in which lesson, etc.;
- use my foreign language skills as a teaching resource, for example, allow me help my classmates or schoolmates;
- be ready to work bilingually (in Latvian and in the language of my or my family's country of residence, for example, in English, German or Russian) or use the support of a bilingual assistant (a mentor);
- facilitate the improvement of my Latvian language skills in all possible ways;
- use my strong points as a basis for my further development. There is a wide range of study subjects in which language skills are of secondary importance – visual arts, music, sports, housekeeping and technologies, maths;
- offer tasks requiring my previous experience and knowledge; for example, in geography, when the class learns about the corresponding country or region invite me to take the role of an expert;
- inform the canteen staff about my eating habits.

Introduce
Encourage
Explain
Make sure
Accept

Integration in class and school will be easier if the teacher:

- think carefully of how to introduce me to the new classmates and schoolmates. For example, instead of stressing my ignorance or shortcomings by saying: "He cannot speak Latvian", the teacher would say: "He speaks Persian and English, and is still learning Latvian.";
- upon introducing me, tell my classmates something about my previous country of residence;
- introduce me to the school staff – people on duty, canteen staff, security guards, school psychologist, other teachers;
- involve other education professionals who can support me: school psychologist, social teacher, special teacher, assistant teacher and career adviser. The more interested people there are, the better are the chances of my successful adaptation in the new environment;
- find students (friends, assistants) who know the language of my country of residence and want to help me integrate faster in the new environment, among my classmates;

- emphasise the benefits of having a classmate who has lived in another country;
- encourage me to work in a group and develop projects together with schoolmates;
- explain to my classmates that it is not so easy to learn Latvian if one has spoken another language – a foreign language – for a long time, not even being acquainted with the Latin alphabet;
- encourage my classmates to learn a few words (such as hello, thank you, etc.) in the language of my previous country of residence;
- involve my classmates in my Latvian language learning process.

I will manage to reduce anxiety and stress if the teacher:

- demonstrate a positive attitude and create the feeling that I am accepted;
- build a dialogue with me through positive emotion, trying to understand my experience;
- find out how I want to be addressed and use this form of address;
- speak slowly, clearly separating words, emphasizing the most important points, repeating what was said, using body language (gestures, facial expressions), varying the speed and intonation of speech, and using a variety of other aids, if necessary;
- engage in a dialogue about my cultural identity and find out what my needs are living in the social and cultural space of Latvia;
- highlight my skills, making it clear that there is something that I know and/or do very well;
- explain the school rules, for example, when and how to arrive at class and school, how to greet people, how to behave in class, what is and what is not an acceptable behaviour in a Latvian school;
- show me the school building and traditional routes – to the canteen, gym, music room, etc.;
- before school holidays, make sure that I have understood when to resume learning;
- always keep me in their sight and involve me in even small tasks (personal attention is especially needed at primary school level);
- accept my period of silence and give me time to get used to the new situation;
- gives me an opportunity to express my concerns about extracurricular activities and ask questions. We need more information on hiking, participation in clean-ups, festive events, etc.;
- in class lessons and social studies, include activities on diversity, belonging and intercultural issues that help understand that everyone can have multiple identities made up of ethnicity, native country, religion, social roles and other aspects.

I can get assistance from a school psychologist who:

- after psychological testing, can recommend the necessary support measures for teachers and parents to implement the teaching/learning and educational process; provide psychological support to help the child integrate in the class;

The more people who are interested, the better the chances of successfully adapting to the new environment.

-
- inform and advise the teacher on the actions needed in a particular case to facilitate the return migrant student integrate more successfully in the class and peer group, to foster cooperation with peers and to build positive relationships with schoolmates;
 - advise and support the child's parents and/or legal representatives on the issues related to the child's integration into the school, class or group;
 - help reduce and/or prevent emotional, cognitive, behavioural or communication difficulties in the teaching/learning and educational process, and promote the student's development;
 - cooperate with parents and/or legal representatives, teachers and other experts involved in solving the problems at hand.

My parents will be able to help me better if the school:

- inform parents about the Latvian education system, the teaching/learning and educational process at school in a clear and easy-to-understand way;
- give parents the opportunity to observe teaching/learning process and, if necessary, participate in lessons at the beginning of the adaptation phase;
- arrange for parents to meet with the class teacher and subject teachers before the child starts school;
- organises a 'meeting each other' party with the class teacher, the return migrant student's family, his/her classmates and their parents;
- holds regular meetings with parents to keep them informed about their child's progress;
- explain to parents the starting and ending times of lessons, the organisation and requirements of learning, the process of examinations and testing, homework requirements, marking system, and what learning materials are necessary;
- helps parents to navigate through the wide range of proposals interest-related education offers and to choose the area that best suits the student's interests; help parents to navigate through the wide range of interest-based education on offer and to choose the area that best suits their student's interests;
- provide internet links to additional materials and resources for learning Latvian;
- involve my parents, e.g. in interest-related education activities, etc.;
- show interest in my special needs.

Teacher, you will understand me better through

- improving your professional competence at intercultural communication courses;
- learning about the socio-cultural and linguistic forms of verbal communication of my country of residence;
- learning about the culture, eating habits, clothing, traditions, religion, perceptions of gender roles, attitudes towards authority figures (including teachers, administration), perception of time and punctuality, understanding of a polite distance between speakers, use of sign language and facial expressions, etc. in my country of residence.

Please, understand that

- school support – cooperation between education staff – is key to the inclusion of return migrant students;
- the class teacher has to take into account extra time and emotional resources involved;
- the teacher must see in the student the desire to learn, promote motivation and interest in learning;
- sometimes both parties lack knowledge and understanding of each other's culture, traditions, behaviour, environment, lifestyle;
- positive communication experiences between the return migrant students and other classmates should be encouraged;
- the ability and willingness of the teaching staff to work inclusively with the return migrant student are of great importance;
- during the adaptation period it is necessary to involve a school psychologist.

SUPPORT MATERIALS ARE AVAILABLE ON THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES:

Education Development Centre:

- <https://www.integration.lv/uploads/files/informativie-materiali/iacgramatal.pdf>

Latvian Language Agency:

- <http://maciunmacies.valoda.lv/>
- <http://maciunmacies.valoda.lv/metodiskie-materiali/diasporai-un-imigrantiem>
- <http://www.sazinastilts.lv>
- http://valoda.lv/Izglitiba/Egramatas/1159/mid_725

Information Centre for Newcomers of the NGO Shelter Safe House:

- <http://www.integration.lv/en>

Education, Culture and Sports Department of Riga City Council:

- <http://www.iksd.riga.lv/public/58606.html>

Society Integration Foundation:

- http://www.sif.lv/images/files/SIF/starpkulturu_kom/2013/infografika/imigranti_gala.pdf
- http://www.sif.lv/images/files/SIF/starpkulturu_kom/2013/STARPKULTURU_KOMUNIKACIJA_lv.pdf

National Centre of Education:

- http://visc.gov.lv/specizglitiba/dokumenti/metmat/metiet_atb_komanda_skola.pdf

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2. HOW TO INTEGRATE RETURN MIGRANT STUDENTS IN THE CLASS

Different life and learning environments, different experience

At school the children who have come from other countries are exactly the same as those who have lived here for all their lives, only their life experience is different. They can be the children of ethnic Latvians and they can also be the children of mixed families (Latvian and Russian or of some other ethnicity), they can be children from families who speak Russian and have returned after a period of life spent outside Latvia.

1. They are children who were born in Latvia and have spent their first years in Latvia but may have partially forgotten this life experience. Their contact with Latvia has been visiting relatives and friends during their parents' leave. Latvia associates to them with summer, joy, pleasure and fun. Everyday routine in Latvia, a school and interest groups have not been part of their reality yet.

However, the children who were born in Latvia usually have better Latvian language skills than those who were born in another country. The Latvian language is more deeply rooted if the child has spent some time at a Latvian pre-school education institution or at school. When living outside Latvia, not always is the Latvian language regularly and consequently used in the family therefore the children who were born in Latvia might return with poor Latvian language skills or scanty vocabulary.

They started to go to school in a country where everyday life can be noticeably different from the life in Latvia. The environment, routine, making friends – all the little things in life are much more different if compared to the experience acquired outside Latvia.

2. The children who were born and raised in another country (or several countries) have not yet had any contact with daily life in Latvia. But, also in this case:
 - a) for some children, their return migrant parents were born and have spent their childhood in Latvia,
 - b) for other children, their return migrant parents were themselves born outside Latvia (or their grandparents, or one of the grandparents was born in Latvia). The representatives of this group are officially considered repatriates, **but the needs of repatriate children in Latvian schools are the same as those of children of return migrants.**

Factors that cause confusion

What is so different in Latvia that can cause confusion, uncertainty, discomfort and can make a student whose family has returned to Latvia feel depressed?

One might make a sufficiently comprehensive list of causal factors (surprising, unprecedented) that, taken together, can cause discomfort or even stress.

- **Character, resilience, family.** Every child is unique and what can cause anxiety to one child is ignored by another. The child's characteristic features, vitality and resilience play a great role, and just as

important is the family's ability to support him/her at difficult moments. Ideally, the family can work together to help their child or youngster talk through issues with them, encourage them to identify and name what is bothering them, and try to work together to solve what is troubling or upsetting them. However, if problems cannot be solved at home, seeking help from a professional psychologist, psychotherapist or even a psychiatrist is the preferred, but not always available, solution. A child, or a youngster, perhaps will not wish to go to a psychologist to discuss his/her problems for various reasons. His/her wishes must be respected even though parents themselves are unable to help their child, to understand their child's thinking or what is disturbing him/her. With time (age, maturity) the child may reconsider the proposal of help and develop an understanding that a conversation with a professional who is able to comprehend the situation, will make sense.

Complications can arise from a family divorce. If the divorce is painful for families living in Latvia it may be even more difficult in the situation of moving from another country. Due to the distance, one of the parents is either no longer actively involved in family life, or children may travel from one country to another, from one parent to another. There are cases where one parent stays outside Latvia while the other returns with the children to live in Latvia (as opposed to a situation where children stay in Latvia with their grandparents and the parents go abroad for work). Separation – in whatever form – will be traumatic for the family because the child misses the family members who are no longer living with him/her.

In cases of migration it is necessary to delve a little into the family situation in order to understand what is really going on. A lot of things can disguise the true cause of negative psycho-social well-being. Definitely it should not be overlooked if a child has any special needs that have not been diagnosed yet. Perhaps the child has started to attend school abroad but some developmental disorders that determine special needs and attitude have not been observed yet. Relocation to Latvia also means a new environment and a language barrier, and it is difficult to understand why, for example, behavioural problems have arisen or why a child cannot follow others in learning. There can be several reasons that need to be addressed to reveal the true causes.

A youngster who has arrived as a teenager can come across additional difficulties caused by age-related peculiarities determined by physical, cognitive and socio-emotional maturation. The youngster has to cope with new environment and friends, another language, new study subjects, and there are also skin problems, mood instability, lack of self-confidence, rapid growth, sexuality, hormonal imbalance and other problems characteristic of puberty. They can lead to confusion, depression, aggression or even worse, social isolation.

So a teacher perhaps sees the effects of this 'cocktail' in class and finds it difficult to understand why the child is not feeling well or has adaptation problems. It may also happen that nothing is noticeable at school. The youngster is calm, introverted, is learning well enough, but no one has noticed what is happening emotionally. Gradually the child or youngster can become depressed but, if the problems are set aside, they can escalate and lead to a range of unwanted and even dangerous actions or behaviours. Stress-induced behavioural disorders can occur that often lead to mobbing situations at school; more severe anxiety symptoms may also appear.

Certainly, it is difficult to notice all this when the class is large and there are a lot of students. Besides, local children have the same problems. This is more of a prompt to think about the fact that children of return migrants may have many different emotional, psychological and other reasons (which are hard to imagine) that can affect them and prevent them from adaptation, fitting into their new environment.

- **The Latvian language.** If a student has poor Latvian language skills, it is difficult to understand what's being said in the class: it is difficult to follow what is said during a lesson, difficult to adapt to the classroom environment with other students. If a child comes from the country where he/she has learned English, classmates may use their English language skills and contact will be made through

a foreign language. If there is no common language, the situation is more complicated. Younger children find it easier to communicate even with minimum common language skills. Older students (12+) may feel embarrassed in communication even if their Latvian language is at a sufficiently good level. The accent, lack of Latvian slang words, different intonation, etc. can cause inconvenience. At secondary school, youngsters are acutely aware that they have different pronunciation, different vocabulary – even if they are openly not picked on.

- **Learning subjects.** Curriculae vary from country to country: subject topics can be studied in a different order or different calculation methods can be used, etc. The student might have not studied the foreign language (often it is the Russian language that causes problems) offered at school in Latvia for several years and now has to learn it at a striking pace, e.g. during additional summer studies. It may be necessary to learn the subject material of the whole academic year in a short time. However, to learn what the other students already know may be a very difficult task. If the child's performance has been very good or excellent at school abroad, now his/her self-confidence may be destroyed by feeling (at least at first) that he/she is a failure and will be a failure for the rest of his life. The student should be encouraged that this is only a transitional phase, that, with time, he/she will catch up, get to know the learning system, nothing will seem unfamiliar, he/she will get used to it.
- **Making friends, building relationships in the class.** Finding friends in the class is not easy, and it may be harder for children of return migrants than locals. It is not easy for a youngster to find common language with classmates. Topics that seem interesting and exciting to classmates, may seem unfamiliar and uninviting to a newcomer. Most likely, the new student will engage in conversations with classmates but often only superficially; on a deeper level, it is almost impossible for a newcomer to find someone to be frank with, to talk to, to feel heard because no one in the class has such life experience, no one can even imagine how a newcomer feels. This can make him/her feel like 'from another planet'.

A study on the integration of return migrant Latvian youngsters in the school environment of Latvia [Lulle, Kļave red. 2015] revealed that classmates' jokes and witticisms are incomprehensible to them or do not seem funny because they are used to a different kind of wit, a different level of sarcasm or irony. (If you have watched French comedies or English black humour shows you have probably asked yourself – what is there to laugh about?) As a result, the youngster stays away, does not disclose his/her personality and character because he/she does not see any sense in doing so (no one will listen, no one will understand).

- **Differences in the organisation of learning.** Outside Latvia, already with the first grades, learning can be organised differently. Latvia is currently undergoing reforms in education [School2030] – there is a movement towards group work, broader concepts of learning from the socio-emotional point of view, the emphasis is more on formative and less on summative assessment, etc. In most countries, where children of return migrants live before relocation to Latvia, this study approach was introduced a long time ago, and children and their parents have accepted such a school system as the norm. Returning to Latvia, they have to deal with the system that prevailed in schools when their parents were studying. It often causes discomfort and stress to parents because, when relocating, parents want to give their children what they themselves did not receive in their childhood.

Situations vary, and each has its own solutions. The different experiences lead to conclusions or, more precisely, recommendations.

It is desirable to organise discussions on values at school (also at primary school) where the point of view of a newcomer is heard and considered as important as that of his/her classmates: about sharing, respecting the others, politeness, etc. It is important the school implement socio-emotional learning sessions to develop the skills like understanding and management of emotions, empathy and relationship building, resolution of conflicts and responsible decision making.

It is also advisable to organise discussions among parents, teachers and children, all three participating, on peer violence.

- This is an issue that can be tackled from primary school age. In other countries, large public campaigns are aimed at making it clear that picking is not acceptable and schools will turn strictly against it. Such situations are resolved by inviting the parents of the involved children, teachers and the children themselves to participate in the conversation so the cases when children persecute one another for a long time will not become a norm. Such behaviour must be stopped; everyone, including the children who have not been involved in the situation, must understand that mobbing is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.
- **Movement and fresh air relieve tension.** A school must look for opportunities to engage children in activities during the breaks, allowing them to run as much as they want, perhaps even letting move about during a lesson by offering some interesting activities. In this way they discharge the accumulated negative energy and stress. There is a movement in Great Britain called The Daily Mile that encourages students to run one mile every day for improving health and wellbeing.
- **Pro-social activities.** School and/or class reunification events involving families promote familiarity. A school becomes a community centre where teachers and parents jointly organise various types of activities for the benefit of children.

While living outside Latvia, parents often arrange play dates for children and their classmates already at primary school stage. If interest group activities are not available, there is still an opportunity for children to meet classmates and at the same time be supervised. In Latvia it is different because both parents usually work and often a child at primary school age is expected to go home immediately after school (“not to wander in the streets without reason”). However, a child who has returned to Latvia, may miss these afterschool meetings with other children. Parents also want to meet other moms and dads, but usually both parents have started working and the speed of life is completely different than it was outside Latvia. Perhaps classmates do not meet one another outside school and it is difficult for the newly arrived family to understand what’s the system – children simply do not meet, or the child of the return migrant family is not invited to participate?

Schools can organise a language club for the newly arrived children. In England, for example, there is an interesting method to improve the language skills of such children. It’s called Breakfast club, and there new-coming children with poor English skills are invited to breakfast together in the morning before classes, helping them to expand their vocabulary for school. These are words and phrases that are useful at different ages: how to ask where the toilets are, where to find the nurse or, for example, the room of grade six, how to start a conversation with other children in the yard (vocabulary for all study subjects), etc. This frequently applied lexical minimum is useful in a variety of situations. Latvia could also adopt this experience (an after-school lunch could be organised) where role-playing could be done in a relaxed atmosphere, using the vocabulary learnt.

- **The involvement of parents.** In foreign countries parents (at least in junior grades) are usually involved in learning process, for example, parents help their children learn reading (parents listen, children read). Children are calmer when parents are invited to school and to class and are involved in learning process, and, at the same time, their parents have the opportunity to see what is happening at school and feel useful because their contribution is appreciated.

Parents can be mentors to the families of newly arrived students. The school can act as an intermediary to introduce these families.

- **Children’s interests and talents.** It is valuable for teachers to learn about a child’s abilities and talents. Every student (even if their level of Latvian is low) has skills that others do not have. If the child doesn’t talk about it, parents can let the class teacher know what the child knows so that the teacher has

a chance to start a conversation about it, maybe even give the child a chance to show off his/her talent (if the child wants to). In this way, the student emerges as a full, multifaceted person, rather than just someone with poor Latvian or maths skills and knowledge. By discovering everyone's talents, we build everyone's confidence (not just newcomers).

- **Getting ready for the admission of children from return migrant families in the class.** Before the student starts to attend school, its administration should ensure that the child and his/her parents meet with the teacher and have a look at the classrooms to get acquainted with school premises and the new environment. The teacher who will be responsible for involving the child of a return migrant family in the learning process needs to understand and find out not only what who the child and where he/she has come from but also what the family's background is and what their story is. By acquiring this basic information the teacher can become an important link in the student's relationship with the new world, becoming the first person of security who can highlight both the strengths or the pillars of the newcomer's integration, as well as identify possible problems.

There are three steps to help new families settle into their new, or well-forgotten, changing environment.

1. Developing contacts – a two-way road when the student gets to know his/her class, the process of learning and teachers, and learns 'the unwritten rules' (self-evident to those living in Latvia, but unknown to newcomers). During this period, the teacher gathers information about the previous experiences of the new student, assesses his/her knowledge, Latvian language skills, interests, etc.
2. Identifying problems – after the first weeks at school the teacher gets a notion what kind of difficulties the new student is facing in the class. The child may have already realised this and the family has discussed it. At this stage, a conversation with the parents should be held to identify the difficulties and discuss possible solutions. Even if the child speaks excellent Latvian, has good adaptation skills and is able to prove himself/herself at a high level in study subjects, he/she may still experience a greater or lesser shock during the first months. Not only is the school a new environment, but his/her whole world has changed at every level. Cooperation of parents and teachers is essential here to support the child and help overcome difficulties making the transition to the new environment as gentle as possible.
3. It is one thing to agree on possible solutions to overcome difficulties, but another one to implement them so that the child can adapt more quickly. The 1:1 discussion between parents and class teacher should be repeated to find out which problems have already been solved and which need further work.

The teacher must be able to see both the personality traits of the child of the return migrant family and the consequences of move, as well as to link the two – how the child copes with all stressors that have arisen at the same time. From the child's point of view, one should take into account that Latvian education institutions are not ready to adapt completely to the needs of children of return migrants (for example, learning is organised in the Latvian language regardless of whether the newcomer speaks it or not, forms and approaches to organising teaching and learning are not immediately adapted, nor do the attitude of teachers' and classmates' attitudes change immediately, etc.). This means that the one who has to undergo changes is the child of the return migrant family – he/she is put into a box called Latvian education system. In this process, the teacher is probably the most influential person in shaping the child's new world. It can be harsh, very frustrating but it can also be open, warm and welcoming. Teachers possess more powerful tools than they realise.

**Class as
a support
team**

Assistance to the teacher who hasn't found the tools to act yet:

1. The school psychologist must not ignore the first indications that the new student needs help. Support staff must be involved at the right time.
2. Classmates can be involved to tackle a variety of problems quickly and successfully. Perceiving the class as a support team, fellow students can share responsibilities: to be a lunch companion, to help with homework, to accompany to sport classes, etc. The involvement of classmates does reduce exclusion and rejection, and facilitates the newcomer's feeling of being an insider and accepted. It is definitely necessary to think about how much and how to promote the engagement, taking into account the individual needs and personality traits of each child, as well as the overall attitudes of classmates, so as not to have the opposite effect.
3. Find a topic in school curriculum to involve the new student. E.g. in sports classes one may train a kind of sport that the new student has done extra and can share his/her success; in geography, the student can tell more about the country he/she's from, a parent may be working in a profession that can be explored with their help, etc. If marks are falling because of language skills, it can be helpful to build confidence in another area the child is good at, balancing the negative and positive effects. These involvements should be developed carefully being aware of the limits of the child's individual abilities and his/her feelings. It may be that the student does not want to be singled out in any special way.
4. If assessment, including marks, is falling, this should be discussed with the child in the first place, to help them emotionally. Secondly, it should be explained to the newcomer's classmates that it does not mean he/she knows less. This student needs time to learn the things his/her classmates have already learned. A sudden fall in assessment can affect not only student's self-confidence, but can also cause the loss of motivation and create a feeling of being an outcast. Talking about and explaining this to the class in a timely manner can create a supportive environment. One example is a case where a child whose language skills were not good at the beginning of the school year was asked to read a passage from the "Harry Potter" series of novels in front of the class in her mother tongue. Classmates were surprised and started to respect the student who, as it turned out, was able to read fluently in another language. Such situations show the new student in a different light – not as ignorant.
5. The teacher must neither be left alone with problems, and other teachers can offer help and good advice. They can be from the same school or from, for example, a Facebook group.
6. A child of return migrants can also be a good adviser. Sometimes it is useful not to try to come up with complex solutions, but to ask the child how he/she thinks this particular situation can be solved. The class can be involved in finding a solution to the situation. The teacher may not know all the correct answers.

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3. STUDENTS FROM ABROAD IN LATVIAN EDUCATION

According to the information of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), the number of students who have studied in education institutions abroad is increasing [MES 2020]. Students with school experience abroad have studied or are studying in 2/3 of Latvian schools, and the number of these students in the academic year 2019/2020 was 1,680.

This means that a number of teachers have already been in contact or in the near future will be in contact with children and youngsters who have different knowledge and skills, and who need a comprehensive support to integrate successfully in the class and school environment. Thereby this article summarizes not only the requirements specified in the legal acts and policy planning documents of Latvia concerning the support to students from abroad, but also provides recommendations for teachers on how to cooperate with students and their families.

The practice of several Latvian schools proves that a more successful integration of students from abroad in the education system is possible if student's parents or other persons have contacted (most often electronically) the particular school and teachers before arrival in Latvia. In this case it is possible to inform the prospective student and his/her family about the requirements of education programme, the organisation of learning and other essential conditions, including the documents necessary for starting learning in Latvia. Teachers, in their turn, can find out the level of the Latvian language skills of the prospective student, his/her views about Latvia, identify previous educational experiences, send study materials, sometimes organise study visits or participation in holiday camps organised by the school to facilitate the student's understanding of learning in Latvia, allowing him/her to prepare for studies in Latvian, etc.

It should be noted that the first and second paragraphs of Article 15 of the Diaspora Law stipulate the obligation of the state and municipalities to support the reunification of the Latvian people and to take measures to facilitate the return or resettlement of members of the diaspora to Latvia, including the possibility for members of the diaspora to register their children in Latvian general education (including pre-school) and vocational education institutions in time before their return migration. Permanent and systemic support is provided for the integration of diaspora children in the education system of Latvia. [Diaspora Law] Additionally, according to section 3, part one of Education Law everyone has the right to qualitative and inclusive education. [Education Law]

Guidelines for the Development of Education in 2021–2027 specify that inclusive education is “a process that meets the appropriate and diverse needs of all students by increasing the opportunities for each student to participate in the process of learning, culture and different communities, as well as to reduce opportunities for exclusion from education and the process of acquiring education”, by providing support for the integration of children of return migrants in education institutions in all education levels. [GDE 2021–2027]

The admission of students from abroad to general education schools in Latvia is carried out in compliance

with the procedures specified in paragraph 24 of Cabinet Regulations No. 11 adopted on 11 January 2022 “Procedure for enrolling students in and discharging from general education programmes, as well as minimum requirements for moving the students up into the next grade”. The school’s administration, in cooperation with teachers, is accordingly required to evaluate the previous study experience of students, including the documents issued by their previous education institution, and to enrol them in a grade appropriate to their age, to ensure the continuity of the previous curriculum, as well as to set the support measures to be implemented during one till two academic years for the acquisition of study subject “Latvian language” or “Literature”, or “Latvian language and literature”, and the improvement of the state language proficiency in other study subjects on the basis of the determined level of student’s Latvian language proficiency and the level of the acquired content of learning. [Cabinet Regulations No. 11].

It should also be noted that, in addition to students from abroad, other students who have a learning experience in a foreign country and need special support, may also study in education institutions, since, according to Paragraph 41 of the aforementioned Regulations, students who have accompanied a parent sent on diplomatic service for up to four years, are not excluded from the education institution [Cabinet Regulation No 11]. When a student from abroad starts learning at an education institution, its administration and teachers should agree on mutual cooperation in order to make the integration of the student as successful as possible. The experience of several education institutions and the results of studies [Kolčanovs, Tūna, Zankovska-Odiņa 2014; Report 2014] have proved that it is important to observe several conditions in practice.

- First of all, the student should be introduced to the details of the school’s daily work, for example, explaining how to acquire a student card or electronic public transportation ticket, where to get textbooks, what learning process supplies are needed, requirements for presence in the school, catering system, how tutoring is organised, etc. The task of a class teacher is to introduce the newcomer to the class, to encourage them to support their new classmate, as well as to explain everything unclear or unknown, if necessary, to translate the unknown terms, etc. Some schools try to provide the student from abroad with a mentor, choosing the latter from classmates or senior students.

In accordance with educational guidelines, a school “should respect the individual characteristics of each learner’s development, differences in religious, linguistic, cultural, and socio-emotional background, different abilities, educational and special needs” [Cabinet Regulations No. 480]. However, there are cases where psychological difficulties, ignoring the different experiences of a learner from abroad and poor relations with classmates or schoolmates are the problems that hinder integration into Latvian education more than, e.g., learning difficulties in learning [Report 2014].

- It is advisable to designate a teacher (who may or may not be a class teacher) to whom the student can turn to solve everyday problems or for brief advice on various issues of social life. It is advisable to designate a teacher (who may or may not be a class teacher) to whom the learner can turn to solve everyday problems or for brief advice on various everyday issues. If the teacher knows the foreign language that the student has used in everyday life, or a pivot language – it facilitates mutual communication and cooperation.

A student from abroad must be enrolled in the grade fitting his/her age.

Differences in the previous curriculum or insufficient knowledge of the state language cannot be a motivation, e.g. for an action like admitting a ten-year-old in the first grade.

Although the special support measures are primarily intended for learning study subjects related to Latvia, it is necessary to test the student's knowledge and skills¹ in other study subjects as well. This raises the issue of cooperation between teachers and coordinated teaching action [Recommendations 2019b], in order to reach a teaching effort in line with the goals and strategies of the school, a shared vision of teaching and learning, overcoming differences in curricula and gaps in student knowledge, as well as to have clear rules for cooperation between teachers and students from abroad, and to have reasonable scope and timing of the work to be done.

- Parents often point out that the education institution does not value the return migrant student's knowledge of foreign languages (and not only foreign languages), respectively, the emphasis is on what the return migrant student does not know rather than what he/she does know and can offer to classmates [Report 2014]. But at school, the student should also be encouraged by positive examples of inclusion. Every child of compulsory school age should be learning. It is therefore unacceptable that a student suspend learning (usually until the new school year) or not start learning immediately after returning from abroad. If such a situation is foreseen or observed, it should be addressed in cooperation with the local authority. Education institutions should involve support staff where necessary. Quite often students from abroad benefit from working with a psychologist (with written parental permission, except in the case of first-time counselling, or self-referral by a student who has reached the age of 14) [Psychologists' Law]. A psychologist can also give support and advice to teachers and student's parents concerning their child's integration in the class or school. In some cases the help of a speech therapist is also required; students in the last basic school grades may need the support of a special or social teacher. If the school has the capacity, a teaching assistant can provide significant support for the integration of the student.

The resources of the European Social Fund project No 8.3.4.0/16/I/001 "Support for the reduction of early school leaving" (PuMPuRS) can be used to organise additional activities and to finance the involvement of support staff. Currently, more than 470 students, who have returned from abroad, are receiving support for various needs in the framework of the project.

- One of the conditions for a successful involvement of a new student is regular, constructive communication and cooperation with the student's parents (usually they are active and supportive of their child. However, sometimes, for various reasons, a lack of parental interest can be observed, too), which allows for a prompt exchange of information, clarification of unknown and unclear issues, and monitoring of the changes in the student's learning achievements and behaviour.
- Participation of a student from abroad in interest-related education should be facilitated. Usually students participate in the activities of artistic groups with pleasure and interest, they go in for sports, and sometimes interest-related education may serve to faster level out differences in education as well as improves Latvian language skills.
- In order for a student from abroad to integrate in the class and successfully master the curriculum, each teacher needs to adapt his/her work (which means, first of all, individualisation and differentiation of learning) [Step by step 2020; Recommendations 2019b] according to the

Every child at a compulsory school age must go to school.

A situation when a student suspend learning or do not start learning immediately after returning from abroad, should be not be permitted.

¹ Studies reveal that differences in curriculum are in almost all study subjects. Exceptions include sports, English and arts-related subjects. Interestingly, even English sometimes presents difficulties: although the learner may be relatively fluent in the foreign language, there may be insufficient knowledge of grammar or problems with translating texts. [Report 2014]

student's knowledge and needs by creating special tasks, helping to learn terminology, providing additional counselling, etc. (For this purpose materials from the website *Māci un mācies latviešu valodu* (Teach and learn the Latvian language) can be used.)

It should be noted that, according to the provisions of section 51 of the Education Law, the obligation of teachers is to participate creatively and responsibly in the implementation of curriculum, as well as to be responsible "for their work, methods, techniques and results" [Education Law]. Responsibility means the teacher's ability to choose the most appropriate solution, the most appropriate teaching tool, method and approach for the student's prior knowledge, needs, specificities and interests, to keep up to date with the latest teaching and subject knowledge, to be ready and able to justify and explain his/her actions when necessary, to analyse and reflect on his/her actions. In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the integration of a student from abroad into the Latvian education system is not possible without the support and encouragement of the teachers [Ose 2015]. Only through cooperation between teachers, the student and his/her family can the difficulties be overcome and it can be ensured that the student from abroad is happy to go to school, is active and interested in learning proving it by his/her achievements.

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4. TEACHER, PUT YOURSELF INTO OTHER PERSON'S SHOES!

Are you familiar with the dazzling yellow splendour of dandelion meadows under the blue sky and the calling of birds of passage in the clouds? Do you know the honey-sweet scent of linden flowers and the invigorating taste of rye bread or recognize the first wet touch of snowflakes on your cheek in a way possible only in Latvia? You will say, yes, of course! And it seems simple and self-evident because this is your home, your life, your routine and holiday.

But how would it feel to be asked about the scorching sun in Spain or the glaciers of Norwegian mountains, or the vast expanses of America, or the hustle and bustle of Philippines streets? Would it be just as self-evident and easy? Probably not, if you haven't experienced it all and felt it in your daily life.

The same is true for children and their family members who return to live in Latvia. Gone are the familiar things and feelings, the experiences of another country, childhood friends and schoolmates, the traditions of the host country's people and the country itself. Here we have different weather, different flowers and different animals. What is customary, usual and traditional in Latvia has not been the same in their countries of residence; now everything is a surprising novelty and seems like a miracle. It is often incomprehensible even though has been heard from parents' stories and seen during rare visits to Latvia or read in books, even though the child's parents were born, raised and educated in Latvia and they (or one of the parents) are the citizens of Latvia.

We become an integral part of the children's daily lives, new friends and advisers, inspirers and confidants, companions in their new lives here in Latvia. Children and youngsters are facing new situations, demands, events, are acquiring new experience that is certainly not self-evident or previously met.

One of the best tips in personal relationships is the well-known one – to put oneself into someone else's shoes. **Teacher, put yourself into the child's and his/her return migrant parents' shoes, and the problems or disagreements, misunderstanding or objections will become easier to perceive and resolve. Let's give children and their parents the joy of welcome and reunion, love and respect! School is a place where we teach and learn to accept and understand others, – yes, others who are different, unusual, from another country, sometimes overwhelmed by worries, concerns and resentments hidden in the soul, and harsh in communication.**

Imants Ziedonis once wrote: "There must be a place where you arrive full of worries and suddenly – your heart leaps with beauty." Let us create and cultivate the beautiful flower of relationship and understanding, let us help the families of return migrants and their children to restore (or start) a valuable and purposeful life in Latvia!

It is important to remember that not only a child but also his/her family members find themselves in a new life and learning situation. Latvia can be a country of new revelation also to the child's parents or family members. They can be just as ignorant and insecure. By helping a family to adapt and to get to know Latvia, its traditions and values, you will give a feeling of security for the child.

Often parents do not dare to ask, to find out, to express their thoughts or concerns – what if no one will understand them, what if doing so they will hurt their child? Encourage and address them, ask how they

feel in Latvia, ask whether they need any assistance or advice. Parents' hearts will open, too, and smile will appear on their faces. The good drives the good.

Parents and children already have their own experience of learning at school in another country, the experience of cooperation between school and family, which is different in every country. Parents and children want to transfer their previous experience to the new situation in Latvia. It is not always possible, nor useful. Tell, explain, listen to them!

It is not new that parents often want to realise their unfulfilled dreams and aspirations in their children, to give what they think is best for their children, to send them to schools where they themselves have studied and gained childhood and youth experiences. They want to guide their children on paths they already know and have experienced. But the life and situation are no longer as they used to be – the school, traditions, teachers have changed, and this can be disappointing. Discuss it with parents to make them understand that the present time cannot be measured by yesterday's standards.

Knowledge and proficiency in Latvian is the basis for successful learning of curriculum, and for communication that can be learned and improved not only in Latvian language, maths, geography and other classes, but also during breaks, by saying hello in the morning and goodbye in the afternoon, asking: "How are you?", learning a new phrase or expression every day. Language can also be enriched in conversations with the family. It is a joint effort of parents and the school to help the child learn the language.

People have left Latvia for various reasons and there are just as many reasons they have returned – they are not always the stories of success or positive experience. There are also unfulfilled dreams and disappointments, family tragedies, emotional failures. People become reserved, every suggestion or reprimand is sometimes perceived as an insult; they look at everything with disbelief and do not really want to talk to people. Even the most favourable advice or encouragement can cause frustration for a child cause the family. Even the most favourable advice or encouragement from a school can cause frustration for a child or family. So, teacher, take a step towards them, find out, speak up!

A child arriving in Latvia learns about the Latvian school system only after starting school. If it's first grade, then with classmates, but what if it's secondary school? Learn about the school's values, traditions and rules in different situations over time. A "New Student's Book" would be a great help for new children and families, describing the school's rules of behaviour, requirements, facilities, routines, culture, traditions, classroom location and contact details in simple and easy-to-understand language. Receiving such a guide on the first day of school could avoid many questions later (not always the child or parents dare to ask to find out what they don't know).

Students are mostly happy to welcome new classmates. Why not devote the first few lessons to getting to know each other, to exchanging ideas about the subject? A classmate could be a good mentor. Children are emotionally enriched by communication with each other, and all students would benefit.

Families return to Latvia from all over the world – countries with different traditions, geography, culture, history, religion and language. Children often have better knowledge and skills of English or the language of some other country of residence. Let's use children's experience in conversation evenings at school or class, in peer group communication, in lessons (in games, tasks, creative activities).

When returning to Latvia, families need support, simple conversations, advice and understanding. The first excitement of return is gone, everyday life begins, and with it – the fear of asking someone, of showing one's ignorance or inability because part of society has developed the idea that return migrants are 'different', they are 'fortune's favourites'. If there are children from several return migrant families in a class or school, the school can organise parent meetings, exchange of ideas, joint activities. A school will also benefit from the trust and cooperation of the parents. For the most part, the division into levels

Ask: "How are you?"

**Develop a new
student book**

and stages of education and their correspondence to the age of students abroad and in Latvia do not coincide. It may happen that a child has been in a higher grade in his previous country of residence but in Latvia, given his/her age, he suddenly finds himself one or two years behind. This is a surprise and disappointment for the child and the parents who see it as an assessment of their level of knowledge and skills, believe that the child has been left to repeat a year. This can lead to first misunderstandings, disagreement, loss of motivation to learn and cooperate. In such situations, it is necessary to explain and give examples about the division into grades according to age in different countries, emphasizing that the child will now be with peers (how will a student two years younger, for example, feel if his/her ninth grade classmates are talking and discussing their experiences at last weekend's party or concert, and will the others be interested in what is happening in the life of a 12-year-old?).

Parents often worry that child used to do very well, but here in Latvia, most marks are not good enough (but the child studies and studies, is tired of it all, is not getting anywhere, has lost motivation, has a bad school and teachers...). Parents and children should be told from the very first meeting that at the beginning there may be learning setbacks, marks may drop, but this is natural because when entering a new learning environment, achievements usually are not immediately high. Overcoming the difficulties together, the path gradually leads to good results.

For teachers and class teachers, the beginning is also difficult, requires extra work and time, and creativity. Find support and like-minded people in return migrant families, talk to them, keep them informed on everyday things, even if they are not school-related! **Teacher, you are the first to extend a hand for cooperation!**

Mutual communication is the key to understanding and cooperation: talking to parents, to the child outside compulsory contact hours, talking to colleagues in your own and other schools, talking to municipality professionals and experts in different organisations. We often hear that it is easier for newcomers to integrate in schools of foreign countries because there are teaching assistants, the curriculum is made easier and the assessment system is adapted, parents are given detailed reports, and special programmes are developed for newcomer families. But there is also the opposite experience – no support or facilitation, no special programmes, a student has to deal with everything on his/her own.

Every country has its own traditions, vision and opportunities, and a different history of education system development. For Latvia, the integration of children from return migrant families into the education system is a new experience with many unprecedented challenges. **We all are learning and perfecting ourselves.**

May the good radiance of the school spread!

II.

Education
experiences in
Latvia and
abroad

5. MY EXPERIENCE: RETURNING TO LATVIA*

My life story started in Australia. I was born there and lived there the first years of my life. Then my family decided to move to Latvia, and so the next five years I spent in Latvia where I attended a kindergarten. Then we moved again to Australia where I spent seven years. In Australia I finished primary school and started secondary school. After six years in Australia, we decided to go to Latvia again, so I started learning Latvian and maths remotely to make it easier for me to integrate into the new school.

When I was 13, we returned to Latvia where I still live. I have to admit, all circumstances considered, I was optimistic and positive. We arrived in the middle of May so I started school in the new academic year (in September). We had planned I would go to the seventh grade although I was a little older than other students in that grade. The school however offered me the opportunity to attend the eighth grade appropriate for my age.

In this grade the focus was on languages so during summer I was trying to learn the curriculum for the seventh grade in two languages: German and Russian. I was also learning some basic things to know in other study subjects, for example, in maths and biology. This way I spent my summer getting ready for the new period in my life. And, ultimately, I appreciated it because, in my opinion, what I had done helped me to adapt more easily to Latvian education system.

My first impressions of the new school were quite neutral, there were not so many things that surprised me. When I got used to everyday life and routine set in, I started noticing differences at school and in the teaching methods used there. I immediately realized that **teachers wanted the students to have the same level of success and understanding in almost all study subjects**. I think it is wrong. I was used to a teacher ready to help those who were not doing so well, and to allow those who had understood everything to learn additional issues. I felt that **a teacher here was not ready to a compromise**: to give more support to students who were not as successful as their classmates. Moreover, these students were often humiliated, called shameful names even in front of the class. If the class or most of the students had failed a test, instead of motivating them to learn or providing support to prepare for the next test, everyone was humiliated. I even remember a case when the teacher said perhaps it would be better if the poorly performed tests were simply thrown in the dustbin. In my opinion, the results of tests reflect the study process (what and how has been taught).

I quickly realized the curriculum offered to students was monotonously retold word for word from a textbook. Tests mainly checked students' memory – their ability to remember the study material they had been reading for several hours in succession the previous evening, mechanically memorizing it to write a test the next day, and then quickly forget everything that has been memorized. In the process of learning I was used to testing one's understanding of an issue; and most importantly, the results were an indicator for the teacher of what to change (teaching methods or the level of curriculum complexity), how to better support students further. Each test also had tasks that differed from those performed during the classes allowing a student to find the solution independently or to explain it according to his/her understanding.

This approach better reveals the level of understanding of the class and each student on certain issues and topics. It allows the student to think creatively, outside the box. In the end, I think it gives the student

* At the author's request student's anonymity is maintained.

more motivation to study and do some research, to find out, to be interested in this or that subject. As a result, the student broadens his/her knowledge, achieves better, and most importantly, this kind of learning allows the student to find his/her passion, which can play an important role in the choice of a career.

This type of learning is not an ideal solution for all children and students but it would definitely help me. **During these few years that I have been learning in Latvia, I have lost desire, inspiration and motivation to dug deeper into the issue or topic which fascinates me and could be useful for my future profession. In my opinion, I have developed a bad habit – to learn for a test, not for myself.** To learn to be able to finish school successfully, not to find something I would like to do. To learn only during lessons and try to forget learning as soon as I can, just to be free.

Over time I have also realized that children, whose families have returned to live in Latvia for a long or a short time, do not get any additional support if, for example, a child does not have sufficient Latvian language skills or his/her knowledge in some study subject is different. I had learned other topics in maths and science than those students who were educated in Latvia. In addition, when we learned a subject, for example, in maths, it was my responsibility to acquire the necessary background knowledge (when I asked the teacher for help, I was told it just had to be something I already knew). It was also surprising that in the science subjects the problem had to be solved the same way as it was done during the class. So many times in control or test papers I lost points and got a lower mark, just because I had used a different way of solving even though the answer was correct. The school taught me to live only by the 'the textbook'. And in tests I was only allowed to repeat what was written in the textbook – word for word.

Over time, I learned to get on with this system, it did not change my evaluation of learning drastically but I knew students who had come from other countries and were not prepared sufficiently for Latvian education system. These students had difficulties to follow up with their learning and, left without any support, they could hardly finish the academic year successfully.

From a social point of view, I have to admit I am more introvert than extrovert although I was active in several kinds of sport in Australia and actively participated in public life. When I started learning here, I immediately saw the difference in the school's social life. Students were reserved, reluctant to approach the newcomer (me and other newly arrived students). It was more difficult to join some group of friends and it took more time. My social life narrowed so I actively continued to keep in touch with my friends in Australia through social networking sites. This became my social life here. However, over time I made friends with the school's students and was accepted in their friend circles but it was difficult to develop closer ties of friendship.

I also noticed the majority of students had negative attitude towards school. I felt there was no desire to be at school, to do homework, to participate actively in lessons and to perceive school as an important period of life. A hostile attitude towards school dominates here which is one of the reasons why an unfriendly learning environment has developed. It negatively affects the motivation to learn, the desire to be at school and to show even a slight interest in school, to estimate its importance in one's life. A pessimistic emotional atmosphere develops and, to speak frankly, **being at school creates gloomy feeling.** According to my experience, while staying in such environment, students try to find a way 'to bypass the system', for example, to copy something from another student, to crib in tests or not to do homework. **There is no respect for teachers. The student's intellectual and emotional potential is not used.**

During these years, while I am going to school in Latvia, I have become accustomed to the teaching methods and forms of work (although I am not satisfied with them), in fact, over time I have got used to the system. However, I still lack motivation to learn, interest in curriculum, and also desire to participate in school life.

6. TREAT OTHERS THE WAY YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED YOURSELF

We have frequently heard the suggestion: „Treat others the way you would like to be treated yourself.” But is this respected in everyday life?

At the end of 2019, Latvian television showed the award ceremony for the best athletes – Sports Award of the Year. The best sports teachers also got awards. A video material about each of the three candidates had been prepared. In one of them a teacher used the phrase – “hanging like a frankfurter”. At that moment I thought – a teacher who allows herself to say that, at best, is no longer working at school, and at worst goes to trial. You cannot imagine how big my surprise was when the winner was announced. In Latvia, the best sports teacher was someone who talks disrespectfully about children.

Be that as it may. But – comparing someone to a frankfurter IS calling names. How would the teacher feel if children called her a sausage?

If a student, who has attended a school in Ireland, is going to school in Latvia, he/she certainly will be very surprised that **people are criticized for the things they cannot affect – the colour of skin, physical abilities, body composition, the colour of hair, etc.** We are each born the way we are, and it is wrong to criticise or disparage that.

It has often been heard that in Latvian schools children of return migrants are laughed at when they speak Latvian. A teacher is someone who should set an example, but, unfortunately, the case that was shown in the TV story, shows the opposite – a teacher shows that you can ridicule, to criticise and call others names.

We should also talk about shouting. I know a few cases when children of return migrants have had unexplained health problems. As it turned out later, the reason for this was raising of voice during the conversation with them. It was the first time in the children’s life to encounter someone (a teacher) who was shouting at them. **Do you adults like to be shouted at?**

If people, also adults communicating with children, lived and acted according to the principle mentioned in the title, things would be much more pleasant and simpler. Yes, it is not easy but it is something to strive for! **A child is just as human as an adult**, and it is a misconception that a child may be treated differently from an adult.

If a teacher demonstrates composure, sets a good example and tries to understand the student everyone will benefit – not only children of return migrants but also children living in Latvia. **One of the preconditions is clear and strict rules of conduct and a consistent response to violations thus reducing situations when a teacher loses patience.**

In Irish schools, for example, mobile phones are not allowed and everyone knows what will happen if this rule is violated: there are schools where a phone is taken away until next Monday, in other – for a week or even a fortnight. Although the rules differ, they work even without saying a word – in case of violation a telephone is taken away and it is clear to everyone.

Another example – cosmetics are not allowed in Catholic schools. How is this achieved in modern days? Quite simply – at the entrance to school, girls are met by a teacher who keeps wet wipes ready. If a schoolgirl has violated this rule, she is given wet wipes and asked to go to the toilets to remove cosmetics.

It is not even a story about children of return migrants in Latvian schools. If kind-hearted and understanding teachers worked in schools everyone would benefit and a generation would grow up in Latvia that neither physically nor morally harmed their children.

I really like the way communication with parents takes place in Ireland. In primary school, where most subjects are taught by a class teacher, each parent is allotted a specific day and time for a conversation with the teacher. In senior grades, the same model of communication is followed by all teachers. Every subject teacher can be found in a certain meeting point and parents approach each of them or the teacher they want to talk to. Joint meetings are held only on the issues that refer to all, for example, about curriculum and rules of a transition year or the procedure of Holy Communion, etc. but child's behaviour and achievements are never discussed in the presence of other people.

It should be added that children are never criticized. Even if something less positive has to be said, it is done in a very polite way. In Ireland no one is criticized for poor achievement because children take study courses according to the chosen level (there are three of them). Students in Latvia will also benefit when they can choose the level at which to study this or that subject.

It may seem not so important if someone has been called a frankfurter... But believe me, being an adult who has lived in Ireland for 20 years, I also often feel offended by what people say in Latvia – whether it is a doctor or a shop assistant. **Let us treat others the way we would like to be treated ourselves and a lot of problems will be solved.** The 'formal smile' observed abroad has often been criticized. However, life would be more pleasant if we smiled at each other when greeting (instead of crossing for the other side of the street). People should not be burdened with your problems: if your back aches, go to a specialist and, instead of complaining about your troubles, wish a nice day to the neighbour! It is fashionable now to say that we should learn all our life, until old age. **Human compassion is surely something that can and should be learned throughout life.**

Some examples of personal experience at a students' camp in Ireland

- A teacher from Latvia taught a lesson at a language learning camp for Latvian children in Ireland. The children play a game where the loser is 'rewarded' by a finger flick. As a result I receive a call from a very worried mother who asks: "What is going on? The children are hitting each other!"

Conclusion – although giving a flick probably still is a common thing in Latvia, children who learn or have learnt at schools in Western Europe firstly, will find it unacceptable that someone is touching them and secondly, that this touch is unpleasant. Also in adult environment touches are strictly determined by etiquette – both for greeting and hugging. An adult will participate in the game with flicking if he/she has decided so. Therefore the essence of the game first should be explained to children and then those, who have no objections to the rules, can take part in it. However, it is better not to offer such games.

- The same camp, the same teacher. A game with pawn giving, which caused great consternation among the children, as they were deprived of things they had in their pockets, most often an iPhone worth thousands.

Conclusion – the rules of the game should be explained, a student should understand what a pawn means. But it's better to avoid games in which things (personal belongings) are taken away, even if only temporarily.

Children of return migrants will certainly not have the Latvian language skills at the same high level as their peers in the class, therefore it is important to explain the meaning of words that we normally do not

use every day, such as a flick (*knipis*) or a pawn (*ķīla*). Children of return migrants are not slow-witted or in some other way inferior, they have simply grown up playing other games. So it is necessary to explain the rules of the game or play even if they seem self-evident.

One very clear example of what is self-evident for a student in Latvia but not for child of return migrants. It is the first school day, the 1st September. Ask any person in Latvia, old or young, when the first school day is. Everyone will tell you that it is 1 September, but in Western Europe, school does not start on that date. Often, even within the same country the first school day may not be at the same time because the decision on when to start the new school year is made by administration of each school.

Several things in a Latvian school that may surprise return migrants from Ireland:

- Sometimes a teacher entrusts some of his/her job responsibilities to children. In Ireland teachers do not make other people, especially children, do their job.
- In Ireland a subject teacher or a teacher of an interest group does not take a student in his/her car if no other adult is present.
- In Ireland children are never left alone. If a teacher does so, he/she will lose the job and will no longer be able to work in the profession.
- In Ireland the job of a teacher is well-paid and prestigious. A lot of men work in schools.
- Irish schools have strict rules that everyone follows. Rules do not exist only on paper, they have to be followed: if there is a definite school uniform, it must be worn, etc. Each violation is subject to concrete and unequivocal punishment.
- Irish schools regulate relationships between students, and any deviations from the rules are dealt with and a decision is made on how to resolve the problem. A child does not have to fight alone for a place under the sun.

Respecting one another makes the world better! A child is a personality who deserves to be treated with respect.

7. PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

The age for starting school and applying for school

In England the compulsory school age is from 5 till 18 years. According to law children must start school or home-learning in the semester immediately after the fifth birthday. However, a large proportion of children receive formal education from the age of three, at the choice of their parents they attend a kindergarten, a playgroup or a pre-school class in a primary school. Most children from the age of four (the age of four must be reached by 31st August in the year when a child starts school) go to a reception class at a primary school.

Children's education usually is divided into two stages: a primary school for the children at the age of 5 to 11 and a secondary school from the age of 11–12 to 16–18. These stages are taught in two different types of schools. Primary schools are usually closer to home and are smaller (one to four parallel classes) but secondary schools are much larger (six to nine parallel classes) and provide services for a wider geographical region. This information applies to most state schools. Private schools often offer education for children of both stages: starting from 4–5 years of age until 16–18 years old students in one school.

To obtain a place at school it is necessary to apply to the municipality. A place in a primary school and in most secondary schools is granted depending on the distance of home from the school but in some of the best state secondary schools study opportunities are also granted on the basis of the results of entrance examinations.

Academic year

Learning starts in the first week of September and lasts for 39 weeks (until July). The academic year is divided into three (or six shorter) semesters: September–December, January–March, April–July. The main school holidays are summer (six weeks), Christmas (two weeks) and Easter (two weeks). In addition, there are three one-week holidays: at the end of October, in mid-February and at the end of May. School attendance is compulsory and children do not go to school only during official holidays. If a child has not attended school during the academic year, parents may have to pay a fine.

Tuition fee

About 90 % of children in England attend state schools where the tuition fee is covered by taxes paid by population; a school is attached to a definite municipality. In primary school parents usually have to provide for children's school and sports uniform, everything else is provided by the school. A fixed fee can be applied for additional music lessons, excursions and extra-curricular activities. If parents are short of money, no child is left out of activities: the fee is covered from the school fund or from support financing of the local/state government.

All children, from reception class to second grade, have free lunch. If parents wish their child to have lunch at school at later grades, they pay for it. The children from families with financial difficulties can apply for free lunch also after the second grade.

School uniform

In almost all primary schools in England school uniforms are compulsory. Each school has its own colours. The school uniform with a badge can be bought at school or ordered in a special shop. Most supermarkets also sell school uniforms, but without a school badge. Boys can choose trousers or shorts (usually black or grey) and shirts with a jumper in school colours. Girls can wear skirts, trousers or pinafore dresses, as well as shirts and jumpers in school colours. Girls also have summer dresses in school colours. All school shoes are black. The sports suit is part of the school uniform but it can be purchased separately.

School day in England

In most schools the day starts between 8.00 AM and 9.00 AM, classes end between 1.00 PM and 4.00 PM. Usually children walk to school or ride scooters or bicycles if they live close to school. Parents bring some children by car. Parents always have to accompany their children to school and meet them after classes. Teachers usually meet children and parents at the school playground or sports ground where each class is allotted its own place. In the morning the headmaster or the deputy headmaster is also often in the school square to greet children and their parents, and to answer their questions.

Then a teacher on duty or a mentor blows a whistle, children line up and go to the classrooms. When entering the classroom, they take their homework or reading books from the bags and every student places them in his/her own drawer or on a special pallet. Then they put their bags and outdoor clothes on hangers (each class has its own cloakroom).

School attendance is recorded every morning and every afternoon. Usually the teacher calls out a student's name and the child has to answer: "Yes, Miss/Mrs or Mr (and the teacher's surname)."

In the morning the school or separate classes or age groups come together for a meeting to discuss a definite issue, for example, about the rights and responsibilities of students, the values of inclusive school, the activities of the Book Day, the election of students' council, getting ready for some event and other practical issues. Morning meetings last an average of 20 minutes. Learning starts after the meeting and takes place in blocks, each one lasting for 20–40 minutes (there is no class division of 40 minutes as it is customary in Latvia), longer study subject blocks are divided into shorter activities. For example, within 10 minutes a teacher introduces the new topic, then students work in groups or individually, performing various tasks and activities related to the issue under consideration. The total learning time set by the Department for Education is 23.5 hours per week.

The minimum duration and number of breaks are specified in curriculum. Children aged 4 to 7 have at least two 20 minute breaks but children aged 7 to 16 have at least one 20 minute break. During breaks children play outdoors and this happens in almost all weather conditions. All students have an hour-long lunch break. Lunch is provided at school but children can also bring lunch from home.

Various other activities take place at school. Once a year there is a school Sports Day, a Christmas performance and an end-of-year celebration. Christmas, Easter and summer school fairs, which are often organised by parents' association, are also attended by members of local community. Each class goes on an excursion on average once a semester. Usually excursions are thematically related to some issue to be learnt within a study subject.

School layout, interior

Each class in primary school has its own room where students spend the largest part of the day. The school building is divided into two or three parts where classes are located close to one another and they have a common playground. Most often pre-school classes, reception classes and grades one and two are

located separately in the building; the students of grades three to six have a common playground and often also a separate entrance to school.

Learning mostly takes place in the classroom and children from the same grade spend most of the day together. In some schools pre-school class and reception class or reception class and grade one work together for some time and use the same room and materials in cooperation with all teachers and mentors in that room. Students from senior grades (grades five and six) often come to play with a reception class and grade one children, helping them to read and write.

In primary school each class has their own teacher with whom they spend most of the day and who is responsible for all their learning. Teachers change every year. Sometimes there are separate teachers for special study subjects: science, music, health or foreign languages. They come to work with a class once a week when the class teacher is having planning time.

Children can either work together as a whole class – usually when a teacher is explaining the new study material, or in smaller groups when they are performing tasks. In each class there is also a mentor, in junior classes there are often two mentors. Children with special needs often have their own mentor.

The children of a reception class and grade one have a more flexible learning structure. They do not spend long time at the tables and a lot of activities take place on the floor. There is a time in the day (10–20 minute intervals) when a teacher determines the type and direction of activity but there is also a time when a child can choose what he/she wants to do from the range of activities that have been offered. In senior classes learning is more structured but students are rarely doing the same kind of activity and sitting still for 40 minutes.

Each class has a corner for reading with a lot of books available for children. Children's pictures are posted on the walls in each classroom and there are also several special thematic boards with materials related to the topics to be learnt at a definite period of time. The information on these boards is changed once or twice a semester.

Study subjects

All primary schools in England focus on core subjects: maths, writing/reading and science. The national curriculum also includes such subjects as history, geography, art, music, sports, design, religious education, physical education (sexual education is a compulsory part of it) and information technology (computer science).

Study subjects are often not strictly separated as the emphasis is on learning skills and applying knowledge. For example, history and geography are studied by discussing a definite topic every semester. Children can learn about Egypt and at the same time learn maths by calculating the height of a pyramid or writing by composing a letter to a Pharaoh of Egypt, and religion by reading about the death and burial rituals of Egyptians.

Topics of core subjects repeat in a spiral way which means that higher and more complex skills are acquired in each subsequent age group. The return to the previously learnt matter can take place even every semester.

Reading, and later writing, is central to learning in English schools. It is the main focus of the reception year (though maths is important, too).

Teaching aids and homework

There are no special textbooks in English primary schools, teachers prepare all materials themselves. Various types of explanatory instruction sheets, work sheets and PowerPoint slides or similar presentations

are usually developed. The national curriculum specifies only the subjects, as well as the skills and competences to be acquired at each stage. How to organise the learning process, what teaching aids to choose – this is the competence of each school and teacher.

At school children have exercise-books or notebooks for various study subjects. There students make notes of the new study topics, paste in worksheets and complete various exercises. Teachers also often paste photos in students' notebooks to show how they are working. Notebooks are often combined to reflect what has been learned. For example, English and history can be written in one notebook, maths and science – in another but computer science and design – in the third.

Homework is given once a week, usually in maths or in English, sometimes in another study subject. Parents are encouraged to help their children especially in learning reading and writing skills from a very early age. However, homework does not have a central place in primary school; in secondary school it is more important. Much more attention is paid to reading – it is considered that parents should read together with their child at least three times a week or a child himself or herself at least for 20 minutes. Reading should be recorded in a special register. Once a week there is also a multiplication tables 'check' and a spelling test (5–10 words).

Examinations, assessment, marks

The national curriculum determines the knowledge, skills and abilities to be acquired by each age group in every stage of education. These learning results are linked to the state examinations where it is checked whether students have met the attainment targets. At the end of reception class the teacher assesses the child's skills in 17 areas. The assessment is divided into three groups: assessment of expected results, assessment of emerging results and the exceeding. At the end of grade one reading skills are assessed by using phonics screening test. There is a standardized test in English and maths at the end of grade two and a similar test at the end of grade six. There is a multiplication tables 'check' at the end of grade four.

There are no marks in the daily school routine. Descriptive assessments are sent to parents three times a year. Maths, reading and writing skills, as well as mastering of science subjects are assessed in all grades; in senior grades the mastering of other study subjects is also assessed. Every student can get one of the three assessments mentioned above. These assessments can be discussed during a conversation with parents (these take place concerning each individual child from one to three times a year and last for 10–15 minutes).

Involvement of parents

In English primary school parents have a relatively high level of involvement in their child's education and school life. They have to attend parent meetings. Schools often organise various workshops or seminars to introduce parents to a new approach in learning, changes in the process of learning or new materials used by the school. Majority of schools also have a parents' association which organizes various events to raise money for the school to cover additional expenses. Parents can also participate in the administration of school.

It must be acknowledged that schools in England are very different and their operation is influenced by geographical, cultural and economic conditions. The article gives an insight into the general structure and environment of school, and describes the organisation of learning process. It is important to remember that families with children, who have come to Latvia from England, can have a very different experience, therefore individual approach, discussions with each family to find out their education experience and learning needs can be very useful.

8. EDUCATION IN GERMANY

In Germany education opportunities are extremely wide, and the offer is so diverse that parents can quickly become confused. In order to understand where to start and what direction to choose for a child from an early age, a lot of research work is needed and parents themselves should understand what things they are interested in not to get lost in the large offer. Germany is home to well-known pedagogical trends – Montessori and Waldorf schools, free alternative schools, religious schools (Protestant and Catholic), classical German schools, as well as various international schools from other countries – American, British, French, Italian, etc. Conditions of education are not the same for the whole country, but are different for each federal state, which means that there are slight differences depending on where you live. They affect the beginning and the end of academic year, holidays, etc.

Kindergartens are called 'kitas' (KITA – a kindergarten) and as in many countries, you have to apply for them in good time. Another option is to use the so called *tagesmütter* – services of women who are officially registered as babysitters. This offer is mainly chosen for the youngest children – about the age of one, and if parents want their child to spend the day in a smaller group of children. Another aspect – childcare is usually organised in these women's homes. Like kindergartens, babysitters are also partly co-financed by the state until a child is three years old (the fee is calculated taking into account the income of parents). A fully paid childcare starts from the age of three (except meals and additional costs).

In Germany the work of teachers is well paid and valued. Teachers are quite obliging and delve into various issues pertaining to school and each child. Children are given great attention individually – concerning their interests and also in emotional aspect. Parents are also involved in the process of education – everyone has the opportunity to make friends, to attend joint activities of the education institution, as well as to meet teachers for individual conversations, organised once every six months. These discussions cover the child's achievements and difficulties, identify what has been learnt and set goals for the next half-term.

It should be noted that Germany has a highly developed inclusive environment. Education institutions have extensive experience in tackling various problem issues. For example, pre-schools and schools try to employ as many male teachers as possible in order to balance the huge proportion of women in education institutions. Children with learning disabilities or any illnesses are provided with assistant thus giving them opportunity to learn and integrate among children. It should be noted that children from other countries with language and/or integration difficulties will also be successfully supported.

Germany is one of the countries where it is believed that learning letters, numbers and similar knowledge should not be rushed – children will learn them in any case. **Emphasis is put on socio-emotional learning, interpersonal relationships, world exploration and similar skills and competences.** Teachers and administration of school responsively participate in any problem-solving and develop a kind of support system for children and parents.

Education institutions are divided into three levels. The beginning is the same for everyone – *Grundschule* is an elementary school for children from the age of six (grades 1–4). The second level is already more difficult. Although the principle of equality is strongly emphasized in Germany, unfortunately it does not apply to the division of schools. When children have finished elementary school teachers write recommendations which are based on child's learning achievements – marks. Parents at this point face a big choice deciding on their children's future.

Students with higher marks have the opportunity to learn in some of the so-called schools for talented or smart children – *Gymnasium*. If the aim is to continue studies at a higher educational institution, the goal of this school will be to prepare a child for follow-up studies. The final examinations will be more complicated, two foreign languages and a higher level maths and science programmes have to be studied.

For children whose results are lower, *Realschule* (grades 5–10) is considered more suitable for follow-up education. This type of school is the most popular (~ 40% of students).

Children with bad marks have to go to *Hauptschule* or main school (grades 5–9). In recent years, though, to change schools has become easier and there have been attempts to combine all three types of schools.

Mittelschule, or secondary school, (grades 5–10) which also belongs to the second level, has been established only in some federal states of Germany. It is a combination of *Realschule* and main school. *Gesamtschule* (grades 5–12 or grade 13) – a combination of all three first secondary educational institutions can be found only in certain federal states. *Sportschule*, or sports school, is an education institution where, in addition to academic studies, it is possible to go in for some kind of sports. *Forderschule* is a special school for children with some disabilities.

Gymnasium graduates are offered to follow up studies in the third level of education: at *Hochschule* or higher education institution, at *Fachhochschule* or vocational higher school, as well as at university (some German universities are among the best in the world). It should be noted that traditionally there is no tuition fee in Germany and studying among Germans is very popular.

Educational institutions in Germany and Latvia: some observations

1. The academic year begins in the middle of August or in the second half of August and is not celebrated as it happens in Latvia on 1 September.
2. Summer holidays last only six weeks, winter holidays – two weeks, there is another free week in spring and in autumn. Part of parents are happy that summer holidays are so short, they do not have to think what to offer their children during these three months while they have to work.
3. Extracurricular education is really extensive. Most schools and kindergartens have the usual interest groups: choir, dancing, theatre, art, languages but often also something more unusual is offered, for example, yoga classes, martial arts, ballet, chess, robotics, music, science, geography and similar interest groups. If there is a desire to acquire one of the fields (for example, a definite kind of sports or music) more seriously, the student should look for opportunities outside school.
4. School often starts very early, at 7:30 AM and lessons end at about 1:00 PM in the afternoon. Students have their lunch at home or go for a snack in a café. But recently, there has been a trend towards canteens being set up on school premises, providing students with hot lunches prepared on site.
5. A lot of parents admit curriculum in Germany is easier if compared to Latvia. However, it is also necessary to take into account which secondary level school youngsters study in. This does not mean that the quality of education is lower; teachers simply have found ways to teach more effectively. Homework is also rarely given, students try to do everything during classes.
6. The biggest difference, pointed out by the majority of parents, is the attitude and the level of interest of teachers, they work with every child. A teacher in the classroom takes care of a positive emotional atmosphere and children's well-being.

9. WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE A STUDENT WHO HAS LIVED AND STUDIED IN ARAB COUNTRIES

Is it possible that a student, who has been studying in Arab countries, comes to my class?

Yes, but the possibility is small. Return migrants from Arab countries are very rare, although there have been a few cases. The majority of students from Arab countries that come to Latvia are the children of asylum seekers. These two groups of students (and especially their parents) are extremely different, therefore the recommendations for teachers working with these children cannot be similar to those previously described. It should also be said that each case is completely different, however, it is possible to offer some guidelines and general recommendations.

General recommendations if a student has come from an Arab country

1. **Is the student's family multicultural (one of the parents is a citizen of Latvia, the other was born in a different (Arab) country or, perhaps, parents went abroad to work and both are the citizens of Latvia)?**

If a family returns to live in Latvia, there is no culture shock when integrating into Latvian society. A child usually feels that he/she returns to the native country even if having been born and raised abroad, because parents have maintained their native language and culture, have been talking about returning home and life in Latvia. However, if a family is multicultural, a child may happen to have a good command of the Latvian language (he/she has spent the childhood in Latvian cultural environment at least at home and has visited relatives in Latvia) or, the other extreme – a family may have fully embraced the Arab culture of the particular country (for example, the mother has lived in her husband's parents' home and felt shy to talk to her five children in her mother tongue, so her children can say only a few greeting words in Latvian). Judging by experience, families that have completely converted to the Arab culture rarely return to Latvia, especially because of children who, according to their parents, would not be able to learn in Latvian schools. Certainly, due to war and other unforeseen circumstances, the families that have never planned and are not ready, nevertheless may happen to return to Latvia.

A number of other issues follow from the above.

- **Has the student had any contact with Latvian culture? Has the family cooked Latvian food, watched Latvian films together, read Latvian books, got acquainted with Latvian nature and folklore?**

Certainly, a student who already knows Latvia and loves Latvian culture will integrate into Latvian school much faster and more successfully than someone who is completely unfamiliar with Latvia.

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- **In what language (Latvian, Russian, English, Arabic, other) does the student communicate at home? Perhaps several languages of communication are used in the family?**

In multicultural families, parents may communicate with children in their own language or an intermediate language (e.g., English, French, Russian), or the language of the country in which they live (even if they do not know it well), or one of the parents speaks a broken language which is not their mother tongue. As a result, the student has a peculiar linguistic environment and may not even be used to speaking Latvian – just understands Latvian and uses it in limited daily communication even if one of the parents is Latvian. In some cases, the child has only mastered the language spoken outside the home and at school because he/she is able to pick up fragments and mixtures of languages at home.

- **What is the Latvian literary language proficiency level, how good are the writing skills, what is the experience of using the language to study different subjects in Latvian? Is the student used to reading or listening to fairy tales in Latvian? Has he/she watched films, animations, TV shows in Latvian?**

A child who has not attended a Latvian school or who has been taught in Latvian, may be able to converse in Latvian in everyday life, but the vocabulary of the literary language, and the skills related to school and the learning process are insufficient to enable them to follow their studies at an age-appropriate level. In this case, additional Latvian lessons should be organised. It will probably take a year or two to learn Latvian as a language of instruction, as a language for writing essays and expressing opinions. Watching children's films and programmes, reading and listening to children's books will help a lot.

2. What is the parents' religion?

Unlike in Latvia, in Arab countries, family religion often plays a decisive role. Religious affiliation is stated in documents (e.g., birth certificates), is very difficult to change and affects both personal life (marriage) and professional career (where you can work, what you can't do). One example is Lebanon where by law only a Maronite Christian can be elected President, only a Sunni Muslim can be Prime Minister and only a Shia Muslim can be Speaker of Parliament. Each large family or tribe has its own religious affiliation which also influences political views and other areas of life.

Multicultural families in which an Arab father is living in the father's home country, are more likely to adapt to the religion and lifestyle of the father's parents which is a determining factor in the choice of where to live and where to send their children to school. This adaptation may also occur if the family has lived in a country with a strong, cohesive diaspora of the father's nationality and/or if the father's relatives live there.

Christian families have a very similar lifestyle to any European family, but religion is usually given importance high priority: fasting, going to church, celebrating church festivals and observing the sacraments.

Muslim families' lifestyles vary depending on the mashab (form of Islam) and the parents' beliefs, and the recommendations are similar to working with Muslim return migrant families from any country and Muslim families of any origin who have never even left Latvia. Some of these families live almost like any 'ordinary' Latvian family, whereas others follow special rules and restrictions. For example, the family's religious affiliation might influence whether a student participates in sports, especially swimming; whether girls of a certain age follow special dress rules (covering the head and the whole body, or just wearing longer, loose-fitting clothes, not wearing make-up); whether boys attend events with girls; whether they attend religious education classes, if any. Sometimes religious affiliation also influences which events the student attends. For example, in some Muslim families it is considered normal and natural to participate in Christmas and Easter celebrations, school events,

dance and drawing groups, folklore groups, choir classes, etc., but others consider these activities forbidden.

Religious affiliation can even affect the student's choice of food as some dishes (for example, pork, in other cases – any meat dishes that are not halal¹) are prohibited. If the student cannot choose vegetarian or fish dishes, he/she does not go to the canteen and is left without lunch or brings food from home. Sometimes the student may feel shy and hide the real reasons for not participating in the activities or not eating with other students. The class teacher should find out the situation in an open, friendly conversation with the student and his/her parents, and should take into account these restrictions or else the student's participation in school life will be limited, and conflicts with the child and his/her parents will arise. The younger the child is, the less his/her life will be influenced by religion, so it should be understood that as he/she grows up, there will be more rules and prohibitions to follow.

A teacher can get an idea of the attitudes towards religion and the atmosphere in a Muslim family by observing a mother or her daughter who is at least nine years old – how they dress, how they behave. If they wear a headscarf or even a niqab (covering the face), gloves, black clothes, if they do not shake hands with men, if they try not to communicate with men at all – it indicates conservative Islam. Students from such families, especially girls, follow strict prohibitions. In these cases, the teacher has to be creative: how to involve these children in school life of school without breaking religious rules.

3. In which Arab country (countries) and in what conditions did the parents live?

Arab countries differ greatly in terms of their system of government, culture and education. Some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, segregate boys and girls, strictly follow Sharia² law and teach Islam compulsorily at school. In other countries, like Lebanon, everything is determined by the parents' religion and beliefs (it is possible to live like in Saudi Arabia, like in the US or like in France). In Lebanon, there are not only Islamic schools, but also Christian and even secular schools of various denominations. In Egypt, there are even special Al-Azhar³ religious schools where boys study from the first grade and go on to university to become Islamic lawyers or imams. These circumstances should always be clarified.

4. Did the student attend a public, private or international school?

In the Arab world, private schools are different from state schools and there is a wide choice of such schools, both in terms of tuition fees and curriculum. Many are founded and maintained by religious organisations, others are animated by the French spirit of free speech and secular education. Certainly, there are also international schools chosen by parents who are diplomats or who are internationally mobile for work. Private schools are expensive and usually teach English and/or French at a high level. An international school student has less contact with the culture of the country where he/she lives and is likely to feel at ease in an anglophone environment. Parents should then consider the possibility of their child to continue studies at an international school in Latvia (possibly combining them with interest-related education related to the Latvian language and culture) so as not to lose one or even two years of schooling.

5. Has the student got used to the Latvian climate?

If the student has just arrived from a country with a hot climate, he/she may feel cold at first, both indoors and outdoors, even in summer. It will look like this: in a very hot summer, when we locals are sweating, drinking water and feeling overheated, this student will be lively and happy. But in cooler

¹ A tradition of cooking in accordance with the requirements of Muslim religion.

² Religious law of Islam seen as the expression of God's command for Muslims and, in application, constitutes a system of duties that are incumbent upon all Muslims by virtue of their religious belief (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shariah>).

³ Al-Azhar University (founded in 970 CE), chief centre of Islamic and Arabic learning in the world, centred on the mosque of that name in Cairo, Egypt. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/al-Azhar-University>).

weather, he/she will be freezing, even if everyone else is warm. A teacher should understand that this child really is freezing if he says so because he is used to a different climate; in temperatures where his classmates will be walking around in shorts and T-shirts he will be wearing a jacket and warm trousers, his nose, ears, fingers will be cold, he will be shivering. In the classroom or gym he will feel the way we would feel in a potato cellar or in unheated warehouse in winter. The water in which other children are happily swimming, will be to him what a hole in the ice is for us in winter. A child who has grown up in warm lands will need a long time to be able to enjoy walking in the winter forest or picking leaves in the autumn rain. He/she will probably also catch all the local viruses (which he will not have encountered yet) and he will catch cold very often.

The good news is that he/she will soon get used to colder temperatures and the younger he/she is, the sooner this will happen. There is no need to fear that this child spends all day running in the hot sun without a hat, he/she is usually not at risk of overheating.

The short, dark days of late autumn and winter can also cause “winter depression” in this child because of the lack of sunlight. He/she/she will feel exhausted, depressed, irritable and no one will know what is with him/her. In the Arab countries, there is almost always strong sunlight, days are longer in winter, the sun is strong like it is here in spring. The problems caused by lack of light can be alleviated by looking at a bright, colourful computer screen, by activities in warm, colourful, well-lit rooms and by listening to soft music.

6. Does the student know Latvian nature, agriculture, food?

It should be remembered that a child who has grown up in a different climatic zone knows Latvian seasons and Latvian nature, from picture books and parents’ stories, in the best case. He/she may not know how to dress for the seasons and the particular conditions, he may not know how to predict changes in the weather; he/she has not yet have the intuition of a local. He/she does not expect that on a warm summer day it may suddenly start to rain cold rain or even hail. Therefore, it is necessary to remind and check once again that he/she has brought the necessary items such as gloves, scarf, hat, umbrella and has appropriate footwear on.

When walking in the forest, remember that this child is unlikely to recognise local edible and poisonous plants, berries, mushrooms. Therefore he/she must be instructed not to touch or eat anything without the teacher’s knowledge, and introduced to the different plants in nature. Students may not recognize bogs and boggy places because they have never seen any and think it is safe to run about on this green grass. These students, however, do not need to be taught to beware of snakes; there are many and in great variety in Arab countries.

Also, the fruit and vegetables available at definite seasons are unknown to this student, the same refers to gardening and farmwork in Latvia which are also unknown (at least in practice). In Lebanon, for example, parsley and radish are sown in October, after dry season, and cucumbers, melons and tomatoes in February. Vegetables are sown in beds sunk into the ground, not raised, and when the garden is watered, these beds are filled with water like ponds. The garden is full of fruit and vegetables that we consider exotic – dates, guavas, papayas, bananas, pomegranates, olives, molokhia leaves (edible jute leaves), Syrian oregano. Even the fruit we are familiar with ripens at a different time, such as strawberries in April.

If Latvian food is not prepared in the family, many dishes may seem strange, bland or fiddly at first, but they will get used to them and even like them. It does not mean that a student is choosy or stubborn. The child should be allowed to taste the dish and asked if he/she likes it and why. If the child doesn’t like it the same food should be offered again after a while. Most often children are not used to eating herring, rye bread, cottage cheese, lingonberries, wild mushrooms, sauerkraut, etc.

The return migrant student should be gradually introduced to the Latvian school system with the support of at least one parent (who went to school in Latvia). Misunderstandings and conflicts should be resolved with the help of this parent. Latvian language skills should be improved in additional classes and consideration should be given to revising the content of the academic year: in the first year the student focuses on learning Latvian for learning purposes, rather than learning subjects; he/ she is just adapting to learning in Latvia.

- **If the student comes from a family of asylum seekers (refugees, persons with alternative status), knowledge of the Latvian language and culture is not expected. Moreover, misunderstandings about intercultural communication are more likely with the parents than with the child if he/ she is still young. In this case, the parents' intentions should be taken into account: whether they intend to stay in Latvia or move to another country. This will determine the student's motivation to learn Latvian and the parents' support for their child's integration into Latvian society.**

Where this motivation has been present, children have succeeded in their studies. Of course, the younger they are and the more quickly they fit into the learning process according to their age, the better the chances of making friends in Latvia and getting involved in school life and activities. Several interviews with such families have been published in the Latvian media, as well as with staff from education and other institutions working with these families⁴. In any case, it is advisable to establish and maintain contact with the parents as soon as possible (mentor social worker may be needed). A qualified interpreter who is fluent in both languages and knows both cultures and can recognize the reasons for misunderstanding is also needed, as local staff are not always able to do this. Parents' plans may suddenly change suddenly and a family that was planning to leave may stay in Latvia for longer period (or vice versa).

Often the children of asylum seekers in the younger grades have never been to school in their home country because their parents have lived in different countries, moving from one refugee camp to another. Some have traumatic experiences, such as the whole family crossing borders on foot, hiding from persecutors, while others remember fearful hours in an inflatable boat at sea. Still others recall wars at home or their parents talking about the devastation and victims. These negative experiences affect a child's readiness for school and ability to concentrate during classes. In the worst cases, a primary school student cannot read or write because the parents have struggled to cope with the extreme conditions and have not had time to study with the child.

It is also possible that a child born in an Arab country is not Arab but belongs to an ethnic minority – for example, Kurds or Berbers – who speak their own language at home but have no country or official curriculum in their mother tongue. This hinders learning an Arab school curriculum, as the child learns in a foreign language.

- **How does the education system in Latvia differ from that in Arab countries? How do schools and learning processes differ?**

Let us start with what **we have in common**. We can say that everywhere there are schools where students, teachers, deputy headmasters, headmasters, school technical staff meet, where there is training, where students are in classrooms and where they learn the curriculum as defined by the Ministry of Education. Grades are generally organised according to age, the academic year is divided into semesters and terms. School is generally divided in two basic stages – compulsory basic school for grades 1 to 9 and non-compulsory secondary school for grades 10 to 12, the first three grades are considered primary school. Another common feature is that a pre-school prepares children for the first grade. Students have textbooks, workbooks and worksheets, they do classwork and homework, they have regular tests and final exams. All receive a certificate when they leave school.

⁴ See, for example, Dzērve, L. (2018) Kā bēgļiem Latvijā palīdz iejusties īpašs atbalsts. Četri stāsti no Jelgavas. (= How special support helps refugees to adapt in Latvia. Four stories from Jelgava [online]. *Īstenības izteiksmē 15 minūtēs*. (= Expression of reality in 15 minutes) LSM.LV (= Latvian Public Media website) [accessed 30.01.2021]. Available at: <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/zinu-analize/ka-begliem-latvija-palidz-iejusties-ipass-atbalsts.-cetρι-stasti-no-jelgavas.a264448/>

- **The rest varies, and most of it significantly. Some of the differences might seem unexpected to our teachers.**

The first is the family's relationship with the state (education institutions) and the role of the father in the family. The state does not normally intervene in family matters except cases of serious injury to the child. There are no orphans' courts or their equivalents, but instead the authority role is played by extended families or tribal elders and more influential members, such as grandparents, who handle all conflicts. If this is insufficient, religious organisations such as Sharia courts, Christian pastors (parish representatives), etc. step in. The father officially takes the lead and is considered the child's official representative (if the father is dead, he is replaced by the father's father). It should be noted that the mother usually follows the children's school life, attends parents' meetings and communicates with teachers, but this is done as if with the father's unofficial permission 'by default' (automatically, without any other options being offered), which he may revoke. In the event of divorce children usually stay with their father or the father's parents and only in exceptional cases – with their mother. In many countries the perception of children's rights is different than in Europe, for example, different understandings of violence, different views on the role of corporal punishment and different limits to the intervention of schools or social services in the upbringing of a child. Many countries have different ideas about children's rights from Europe, different understandings of violence, different views on the role of corporal punishment and different limits to the intervention of schools or social services in the upbringing of a child.

Here we can also talk about the emotional atmosphere in the school, the relationship between the student and the teacher. In Arab culture, the teacher is highly respected by both parents and students. The teacher's orders are obeyed without delay or hesitation. The teacher is trusted as the leader of learning process and the keeper of knowledge. Informal, friendly conversations or calling a teacher by the first name is unthinkable. Distance is always maintained and it is a prerequisite for respect in Arab culture. The teacher may be friendly, but always remembers his superiority in terms of knowledge and status. The emotional atmosphere in Arab schools is also not as relaxed as in Europe: there are strict rules, a large amount of study material, regular tests and exams from the first grade onwards, and the school uniform is compulsory. Lessons are longer than in Latvia, even up to 55 minutes without breaks, with one 20–30 minute break for breakfast in first grade. It is very rare for schools to have canteens offering hot food (not even in pre-school) so students take sandwiches and a bottle of water from home. Students usually arrive at school and go home on the school bus, all grades at the same time, so lessons also start and end at the same time. The younger grades usually wait for the older grades to finish, spend time on the playground or watching cartoons.

The second major difference is the intensity of learning and exams. At the end of each term, there is usually an exam week, for which students prepare at home and during which they write tests on all the term's material. There may be tests in several subjects on the same day. Even first-graders complete worksheets in each subject (probably to get used to the routine). Exams and even tests may not be rewritten unless the student has been ill. Marks may not be corrected; the assessment is from 0 to 10. At the end of the term, the student receives a school-report where the marks are converted into percentages and the student is given a certain attainment category (for example, category A would be between 90 % and 100 %). The first, second and third best students in the class and at their level receive a school-report with a special mark of which they are proud of and for which they fight.

Those who want to complete grades 9 and 12 have to pass very serious exams. The whole learning process is geared to this goal. The exams are usually held over three days, with three or four exams each day and short breaks in between. Exams are at the end of June. The second examination session for 9th and 12th graders, who have not passed or attended the first session, takes place in September. Students sit exams in almost all subjects. In preparation for the exams, students do a lot of studying by heart and solve problems from previous years' exams.

Students have to learn a large amount of study content. For example, in many Arab countries, derivation is taught in maths classes already in primary school, and integration, even basic differential calculus and analytical geometry, at secondary school. This knowledge is applied to science problems. Some countries have school systems where some subjects are taught in a foreign language, for example, maths and science are taught in English or French. Students who can't keep up 'drop out' at primary school and help their parents in the family business, farm work or at home. Many boys become apprentices to a master craftsman (e.g., painter, car mechanic, etc.). As they grow up, they work in their trade (everyone 'knows' they know the trade, but they do not receive any official proof of their qualifications).

The third major difference is the role of religion in schools and society. Religion plays a very important role and many schools are either founded and maintained by religious organisations, give great importance to religious lessons, take religious affiliation into account in school rules, and celebrate religious festivals.

The fourth major difference – Arabic literary language is very different from the colloquial language. Arabic, the literary written language and the language used in official or academic communication, has not been learnt at home since birth. It is the language of books, which has remained almost unchanged since the sixth century. A dialect is used at home and in informal communication. To read textbooks and write, children must first learn the literary language, whereas the dialect is not taught at school. Therefore students, especially in primary school, face additional difficulties, because they actually have to learn in a foreign language. It helps a little that children learn literary language by watching broadcasts and cartoons.

The fifth major difference is the different start and end times of academic year and holiday times. In many Arab countries, academic year starts in late September or early October, there is no celebration of the Day of Knowledge. In some countries, each grade starts at a different time: first the older grades, then the younger. The academic year usually ends in June. School holidays are generally aligned to religious festivals, and weekends to Islamic or Christian holy days – Friday and Sunday – on which mosques or churches are visited. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the holidays were Thursday and Friday until 2013, and Friday and Saturday thereafter, thus aligning with holidays in other Arab countries. In Lebanon, on the other hand, where there is a large Christian population, public schools have Friday (under Islamic influence) and Sunday (under Christian influence) as holidays.

In any case, teachers should remember that even children who have grown up in different environments appreciate being treated warmly and understanding that they are cared for. A student who is trying to do everything right: to adapt to a new environment, to meet the sometimes conflicting demands of school and family, to make friends, live a full life, needs the help of a teacher as an older, experienced and understanding friend.

If you have a student who has studied in Arab countries or comes from a Muslim family and you have any doubts about the best way to proceed, please contact: ingrida.kleinhofa@lu.lv.

THANK YOU, TEACHER!

Excerpts from the experiences of return migrant families and their friends

“We came from England and we are very grateful to the teachers. The English lessons were the most interesting ones: my children played the role of expert or helper. It helped to gain respect in the class and to make friends.”

“We came back with our eight-year-old who only knew a few sentences in Latvian. He started second grade. Everything went very well and within a few months he had settled into the rhythm of learning and daily life of the class.”

“In August we returned to Latvia with our two children (aged four and seven), both children almost did not speak Latvian.

When our little boy started to go to the kindergarten but our daughter – to school, there were no problems, the teachers were very understanding.

Six months have passed; both children are already able to express their thoughts in simple sentences in Latvian despite the fact the first language we speak at home is still English. I think if we spoke more Latvian at home, it would be even better.

At the beginning children in the class liked speaking English with my daughter. The school provided an assistant who helped my daughter to learn the Latvian language and maths.

All in all, I have a very good experience of returning.”

“I know three families who have returned from Ukraine, Belarus and China with pre-teen and teenage children. All these children integrated very quickly into school life, learned Latvian within a year and speak Latvian without any problems – one girl even took part in rhetoric competitions.”

“My daughter has been attending one of the schools in Riga for already two years. I can only say the best. There are additional Latvian language lessons, speech therapist classes, and everything is free of charge. I know this school also has experience in working with immigrant children who do not know Latvian at all.”

The guide for teachers working with children of return migrants

2022

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