



Estonia

Education for All 2015 National Review

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**Education for All
National EFA 2015 Reviews**

ESTONIA

2014

Ministry of Education and Research

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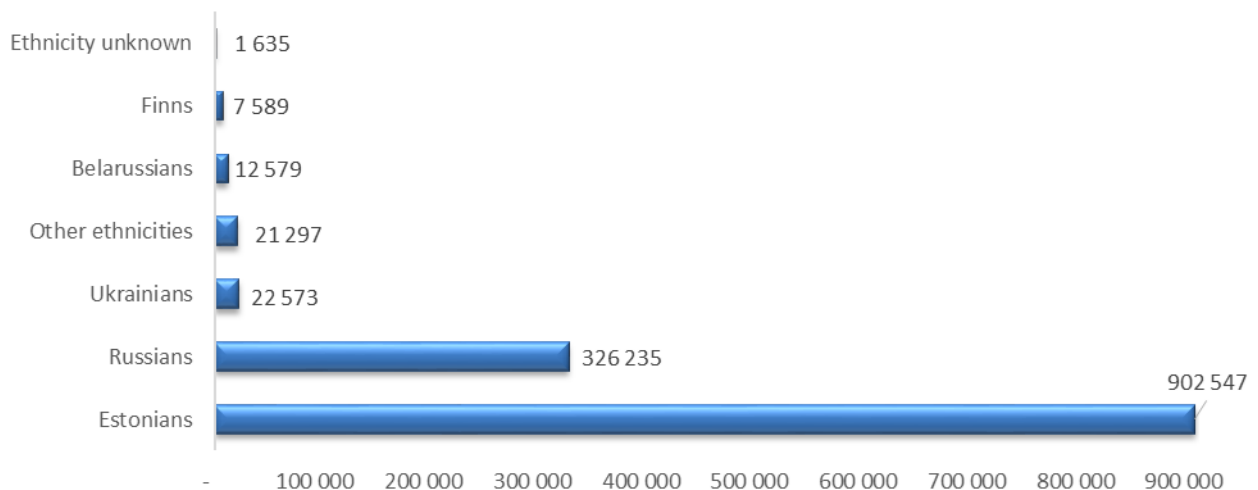
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Introduction

The republic of Estonia was proclaimed on 24 February 1918. In 1940 Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union, the independence was restored in 1991. Estonia, which is located by the Baltic Sea, is one of the smallest countries in Europe, both in area (45,200 km²) and population (1.32 million). Estonia is situated on a busy trading route between East and West and foreign trade and transit have been important to Estonian economy.

According to the most recent (2011) census in Estonia, there are 1 294 455 permanent residents in Estonia. The main ethnic group is Estonians who made up 69.7% of the population according to the 2011 census (the 2000 census yielded 67.9% and in 1989 the figure was 61.5%). In 2012, the share of Estonians among births was 72.4%. The next largest ethnic group is Russians who made up 25.2% of the population according to the 2011 census. In addition to Russians, the other three larger ethnic groups are Ukrainians (1.7%), Belarusians (a little under 1%) and Finns (0.6%), but their share in the population is very modest compared to Russians. Other ethnic groups account for 1.6% of the population, whereas 0.1% of the population could not define their ethnic nationality.

Figure 1. Ethnicities in Estonia¹



Estonia is divided into 15 counties (*maakond*), 207 rural municipalities (*vald*), and 47 towns (*linn*). The population density of Estonian is rather low, as on average 30 persons live on one square kilometre, though the regions differ greatly by their population density: 132 persons per kilometre in Harju county and 8.4 inhabitants per square kilometre in Hiiu county. Most of the people (68%) are living in the cities².

The Estonia's population number has been on downtrend since 1991 and according to the population projection, the population of Estonia is going to age and decrease in the next decades, including steady working-age population decrease³. [2] The life expectancy at birth was in 2013 for men 72 years, for women 81.

The decrease in the number of population (including children) has had impact on the educational system. Closing municipal educational institutions particularly in the peripheral areas has made many

¹ Based on census of population 2011 by Statistics Estonia.

² Eesti arve ja fakte 2014 (www.stat.ee)

³ Regional Development in Estonia 2014 (www.stat.ee)

parents decide to send their children already in an earlier age to schools at large centres, prolonging their way to school or causing the parents' moving to areas where educational opportunities are more favourable for their children. Such a decrease in the number of students according to school stages has a direct influence on the school network, state-commissioned teacher training, the need for in-service training and retraining of teachers, the whole higher education system and also on the labour market.

The Parliament (*Riigikogu*) approves the laws regulating education, through which the main directions of education policy and the principles of school organisation are defined. It also approves tuition fees. The Government of the Republic (*Vabariigi Valitsus*) decides the national strategies for education, approves the national curriculum for educational institutions, establishes salary scales for educational staff and draws up rules for registering children in compulsory education.

According to the Constitution, education in Estonia is supervised by the State. The Acts on Pre-School Child Care Institutions, Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools, and Private Schools stipulate that national supervision of their activities must be carried out in line with rules established by the [Ministry of Education and Research](#).

By the year 2014, the following **strategies** have been approved on the state level in Estonia in all areas of education:

- *Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020* (approved in 2014)
- *Strategy „Knowledge-based Estonia 2014-2020“* (approved in 2014)
- *Youth Field Development Plan for 2014-2020* (approved in 2013)
- *The Strategy of Integration and Social Cohesion (to be approved in 2015)*
- *Higher Education Strategy for 2006-2015* (approved in 2006)
- *Higher Education Internationalisation Strategy 2006-2015* (approved in 2006)
- *Development Plan of the Estonian language 2011-2017* (approved in 2010)
- *Estonian Foreign Languages Strategy 2009-2015* (approved in 2009)

Although there is no single document for managing the areas of education, research, language and youth, the development plans approved so far cover the whole area. These development plans are closely related and their principles are guided by the idea of the full development of the lifelong learning system.

In order to increase the coherence and coordination between the fields, the Minister of Education and Research has approved the development plan for the area of governance of the Ministry of Education and Research *Smart and Active People 2015-2018* which combines the goals of the development plans in the area of governance into a whole and covers all sectoral strategies and source documents concerning the use of Structural Funds for 2014+. Six general goals are:

1. All Estonian people have been provided with educational opportunities throughout their life according to their needs and abilities to ensure that they, as people, have dignified opportunities for self-actualisation in society, work and family life.
2. Favourable conditions for the increasing of productivity and the quality of life, good education and culture, for the continuance and development of Estonia.
3. That young people have extensive opportunities for development and self-actualisation, which support the formation of a cohesive and creative society.

4. Estonian is a continually developing cultural language and that multilingualism in Estonia is valued.
5. The preservation and use of society's documentary memory, the assertion of citizen rights.
6. An organisational culture that supports completing strategic goals and missions and following values in the domain of the Ministry of Education and Research, that is orientated towards cooperation and inclusion and creates trust in employees, partners and the public.

Overview of the education system in Estonia⁴

In Estonia, the structure of the educational system and education standard create an opportunity for everyone to transfer from one level of education to another. Levels of education comprise **preschool education** (ISCED level 0), **basic education** (ISCED level 1), **upper secondary education** (ISCED level 3) and **higher education** (ISCED levels 6, 7 and 8).

Irrespective of the language of instruction, studies are conducted in Estonian preschool child care institutions, general education schools and vocational schools under **uniform national curricula**, on the basis of which schools compile their own curricula. General requirements for higher education studies, curricula and teaching staff are established in the framework document the Standard of Higher Education.

The **obligation to attend school** applies to children who have attained 7 years of age by 1 October of the current year. Children up to 7 years may attend preschool institutions. The obligation to attend schools lasts until basic education is acquired or until a student attains 17 years of age.

The data on the Estonian educational system is gathered into the web-based national register [EHIS](#) (the Estonian Education Information System). EHIS contains information on educational institutions, students, teaching staff, curricula, rights to conduct study and documents certifying acquisition of education.

Preschool education is managed by local authorities. Local governments are obliged to provide all children aged from 1.5 to 7 years permanently residing in their catchment area with the opportunity to attend a preschool child care institution in the catchment area if the parents so wish. It is not obligatory to attend a preschool child care institution.

Basic education is acquired in a basic school or upper secondary school which has basic school classes. Basic school includes grades 1–9. Successful completion of the curriculum and passing three basic school final examinations is the condition for acquiring basic education. Acquisition of basic education gives the right to continue studies at upper secondary education level.

Secondary education is based on basic education and is divided into **general secondary education**, which is acquired in upper secondary schools, and **vocational secondary education**, which is acquired in vocational schools. The length of general upper secondary education is 3 years. In order to graduate from upper secondary school, students have to pass state examinations, school examination and a student investigation paper or practical work. Studies according to the vocational secondary education curricula last a minimum of 3 years. Successful completion of the curriculum, taking necessary tests and passing all required assessments, practical training and the final examination is the condition for graduating from a vocational school. The final examination may be replaced by professional qualification examination.

Vocational education may be acquired also after graduation from upper secondary school. The duration of vocational education on the basis of secondary education (post-secondary non-tertiary education, ISCED level 4) is from 1 to 2.5 years (from 40 to 100 study weeks).

⁴ <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Overview>

Acquisition of secondary education gives the right to continue studies at higher education level.

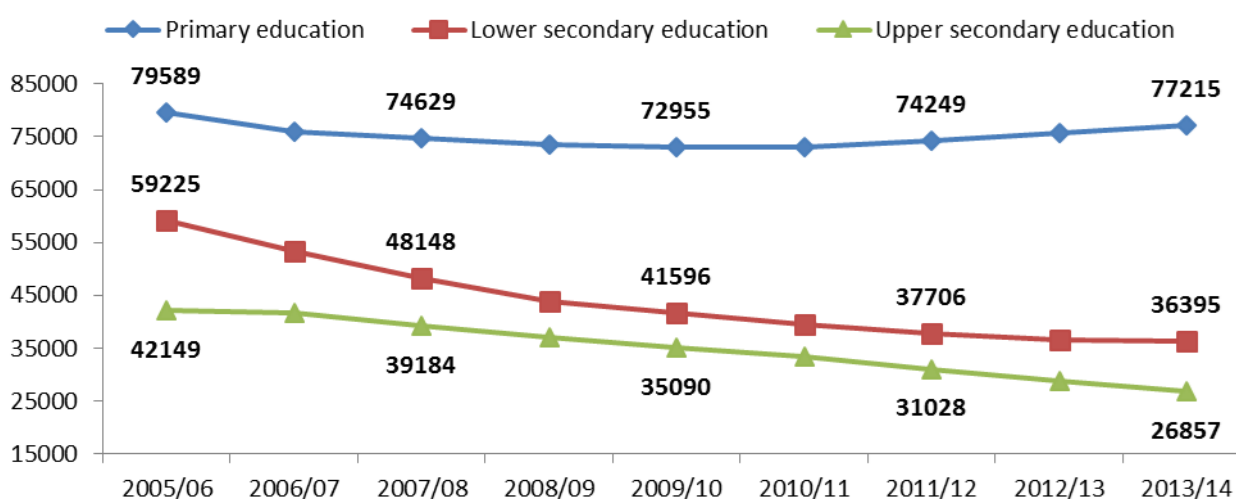
Higher education may be acquired as **professional higher education** (in a vocational school, institution of professional higher education, educational institution belonging to the structure of university) or **academic higher education** (in a university). The general structure of academic study has three levels or cycles. The first level is **Bachelor's study** and the second level is **Master's study**. The third and the highest level is **Doctoral study**. All persons with upper secondary education or foreign qualifications equal thereto have an equal right to compete to be admitted to the above educational institutions.

The standard period of Bachelor's study as well as of professional higher education study is three to four years. As an exception, the standard period of study in obstetrics is four and a half years. The standard period of Master's study is one to two years. The standard period of Bachelor's and Master's study combined must be at least five years in total. The standard period of Doctoral study is from three to four years.

Adult education enables acquiring formal education at all levels of education, participating in professional education and training as well in non-formal education.

The vast majority of preschool child care institutions and general education schools are municipal schools. Vocational schools are mostly state owned and universities – institutions in public law. Half of institutions of professional higher education are state owned and the other half are institutions in private law.

Figure 2. Number of students on different level of education⁵.

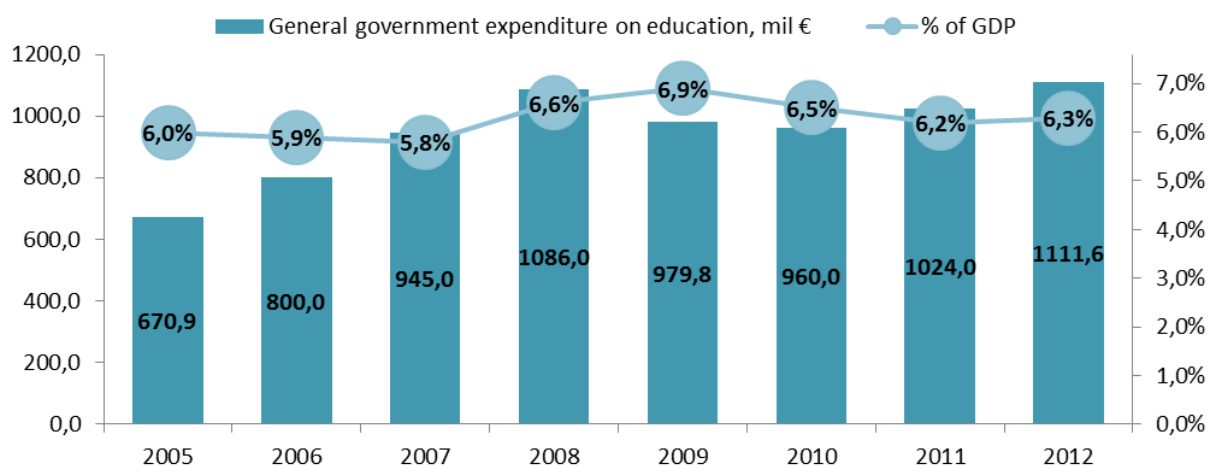


⁵ Source: HaridusSILM, <http://www.haridussilm.ee/>

As regards the **financing of education**, general government expenditure on education as a share of GDP is relatively high in comparison with the EU average: in 2012 it was at 6.4% compared to the EU-28 average of 5.3%. It has only slightly decreased throughout the period 2008-12 (see Figure 1).

The Draft Budgetary Plan (2013-15) forecasts public spending on education to decrease at 5.9% of GDP for 2013 and to remain stable in 2014⁶.

Figure 3. General government expenditure on education, 2005-2012⁷



During recession the general government's expenditure on pre-school, general and higher education decreased. While the number of children in pre-school child care institutions increased in those years, the expenditure on pre-school education decreased the most in comparison with 2008. Compared to 2008, the general government's expenditure on vocational education and other education costs did not decrease. During this period (2009-2012), there was quite big proportion of investments in general government's vocational education expenditure⁸. Investments were made to renovate vocational institutions buildings and studying environment. These investments were almost in full financed by EU structural funds.

Table 1. Change in the general government's expenditure on education by level of education after the beginning of financial crisis.

Level of education	2008. expenditure, mil €	2009 expenditure, % change compared to 2008	2010 expenditure, % change compared to 2008	2011 expenditure, % change compared to 2008	2012 expenditure, % change compared to 2008
Pre-primary	208,7	-20,1	-22,0	-21,7	-10,4
General	471,6	-8,9	-18,2	-15,2	-13,4
Vocational	92,0	9,9	8,6	23,3	30,5
Tertiary	254,5	-20,6	-15,8	-2,8	14,3
Other education costs	58,8	22,1	65,8	71,8	79,6

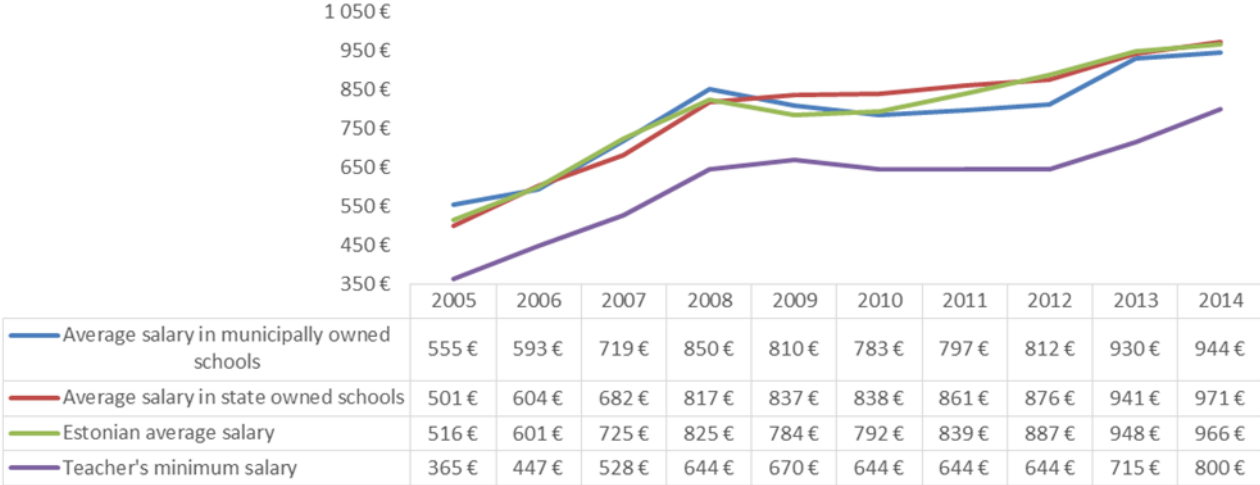
⁶ See also: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/economic_governance/sgp/pdf/dbp/ee_2013-10-15_dbp_en.pdf

⁷ Source: Statistics Estonia

⁸ Proportion of investments in expenditure in 2009 19,2%; in 2010 31,2%; in 2011 36,5%; in 2012 39,8%.

Given the relatively low level of teachers' salaries in Estonia, a specific effort was made to save teachers from a cut in salaries that had been decided for other public sector employees. In addition, the recently adopted national Lifelong Learning Strategy foresees the gradual alignment of teacher salaries with the national average salary by 2020.

Figure 4. Teachers' average salary per month 2005-2013⁹.



To determine the average monthly gross salary, the sum total of monthly gross salaries is divided by the average number of employees converted to full-time equivalents.

To increase the efficiency of public spending in education, Estonia has embarked on consolidating the upper-secondary school network. In parallel, it has launched an investment programme in this sector, including through EU structural funds. This major initiative is aimed at adapting educational provision to Estonia's adversely evolving demographic situation (e.g. with one state-owned upper-secondary school per county). To this end, existing infrastructure and resources may be re-allocated. At the same time its objective is also to raise the quality of provision, to obtain relevant key competences, and to match educational outcomes with the needs of the job market.

⁹ Source: Teachers' salaries data from www.haridussilm.ee; Estonia average salaries data based on Statistics Estonia. Data for 2014 is based on first quarter of a year. We do not have data about average teacher's salaries in private schools.

Table 2. Key indicators and benchmarks¹⁰

Europe 2020 headline target			Estonia		Trend	EU 28 average		Europe 2020 target/ Benchmark
			2010	2013		2010	2013	EU target: 10% National target: 9.5%
1. Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)			11.0%	9.7%	▼	13.9%	12.0%	
2. Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)			40.2%	43.7%	▲	33.6%	36.9%	EU target: 40% National target: 40%
ET 2020 Benchmarks								
3. Early childhood education and care (4-years-old until the starting age of compulsory education)			96.1% ^{09, d}	90.0% ¹²	▼	92.1% ⁰⁹	93.9% ¹²	95%
4. Basic skills Low achievers (15 year-olds; Level 1 or lower in PISA study)	Reading		13.3% ⁰⁹	9.1% ¹²	▼	19.7% ⁰⁹	17.8% ¹²	15%
	Mathematics		12.6% ⁰⁹	10.5% ¹²	▼	22.3% ⁰⁹	22.1% ¹²	15%
	Trend		8.3% ⁰⁹	5.0% ¹²	▼	17.8% ⁰⁹	16.6% ¹²	15%
5. Learning mobility	Initial vocational training (IVET)	a. Students participating in Leonardo da Vinci programmes as a share of vocational students at ISCED 3	2.6%	3.5% ¹²	▲	0.6%	0.7% ¹²	
	Higher Education	b. Erasmus inbound students as % of student population in host country	-	1.6% ¹²	:	-	1.2% ¹²	
		c. Inbound international degree mobile students as % of student population in the host country	1.8%	2.3% ¹²	▲	6.0%	6.9% ¹²	
6. Employment rate of recent graduates (age 20-34) having left education 1-3 years before reference year	ISCED 3-6		64.5%	76.8%	▲	77.4%	75.5%	82%
	ISCED 3-4		48.7%	66.8%	▲	72.1%	69.5%	
	ISCED 5-6		76.3%	85.4%	▲	82.7%	80.9%	
7. Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)			10.9% ^b	12.6%	▲	9.1%	10.5%	15%
Other ET 2020 Indicators								
8. Investment in education and training	a. General government expenditure on education (% of GDP)		6.7%	6.4% ¹²	▼	5.5%	5.3% ¹²	
	b. Annual expenditure on public and private educational institutions per pupil/student in € PPS	ISCED 1-2	€ 4 ,129	€ 4,143 ¹¹	▲	€ 6,063.74 ^e	€ 6,297.16 ^{11, e}	
		ISCED 3-4	€ 5 ,381	€ 5,137 ¹¹	▼	€ 7,022.35 ^e	€ 6,650.87 ^{11, e}	
		ISCED 5-6	€ 5 ,063	€ 5,929 ¹¹	▲	€ 9,764.30 ^e	€ 9,474.80 ^{11, e}	
9. Transversal competences	Digital competences	a. Pupils in grade 4 (ISCED 1) using computers at school	: ⁰⁷	: ¹¹	:	60.7% ⁰⁷	64.7% ¹¹	
		b. Individuals aged 16-74 with high computer skills ¹	28.0% ⁰⁹	32.0% ¹²	▲	25.0% ⁰⁹	26.0% ¹²	
	Problem solving in technology rich environments	c. Low achievers (no or insuff. computer experience) ²	:	13.3% ¹²	:	:	16.9% ^{12, EU17}	
		d. High achievers (PIAAC level 2 and above)	:	27.6% ¹²	:	:	33.2% ^{12, EU13}	
	Entrepreneurial competences	e. Individuals aged 18-64 who believe to have the required skills and knowledge to start a business	:	40.0%	:	:	42.3% ^{15, EU18}	
	Foreign language skills	f. ISCED 2 students at proficiency level B1 or higher in first foreign language ³	:	61.0% ¹¹	:	:	43.5% ^{11, EU13}	
		g. ISCED 2 students learning two or more foreign languages	:	90.6% ¹²	:	60.6%	63.0% ¹¹	
10. Basic skills of adults	Literacy	Low achievers (< PIAAC proficiency level 2)	:	13.0% ¹²	:	:	19.9% ^{12, EU17}	
	Numeracy	High achievers (PIAAC proficiency level 3 and >)	:	52.3% ¹²	:	:	43.3% ^{12, EU17}	
11. Skills for future labour market Projected change in employment 2010-2020 in %	High qualification		:	+0.8%	:	:	+12.4%	
	Medium qualification		:	-0.2%	:	:	+2.1%	
	Low qualification		:	+4.8%	:	:	-13.2%	
12. Teachers	a. Teachers aged >50 teaching in public and private at ISCED 2-3 - as % of total teachers teaching in ISCED 2-3 ⁴		46.6%	49.0% ¹²	▲	:	: ¹²	
	b. Percentage of teachers who undertook some professional development activities in the previous 12 months		:	93.0%	:	:	84.6% ^{EU19}	
13. Vocational education and training	Percentage of vocational students at ISCED 3		34.2%	34.1% ¹²	=	50.1%	50.4% ¹²	

¹⁰ Source: [Education and Training Monitor 2014](#), Estonia/Cedefop: 11 / EAC: 5ab / European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC): 9f / Eurostat (COFOG): 8a / Eurostat (ISS): 9b / Eurostat (LFS): 1, 2, 6, 7 / Eurostat (UOE): 3, 5, 8b, 9g, 12a, 13 / Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: 9e / IEA TIMSS: 9a / OECD (PIAAC): 9cd, 10 / OECD (PISA): 4 / OECD (TALIS): 12b

Notes: 07 =2007, 08 =2008, 09 =2009, 10 =2010, 11 =2011, 12 =2012, a= unweighted average, b= break, d= definition differs, e= estimate, p= provisional. 1= having carried out 5-6 specific computer related activities. Caution is advised when interpreting comparability over time, due to developments in the implementation of questions related to computer skills, 2= results cover people who have no computer experience or failed the ICT test, 3= average of skills tested in reading, listening, writing, 4= in some Member States, ISCED 3 includes level 4 (CZ, EE, ES, IE, NL, FI, UK), while in others (IT, LU, NL) only public institutions figures are reported.

GOAL 1: Expanding early childhood care and education

The general objectives of the early childhood care and education (ECCE) are presented in the [Child Protection Act](#), the [Pre-School Child Care Institutions Act](#) and the **national curriculum for pre-school child care institutions**; specific objectives and activities are laid down in the **development plan for general education system 2007–2013**.

The **Child Protection Act** of the Republic of Estonia establishes that every child has the right for education, which develops the child's mental and physical abilities and forms an integrated personality. Instruction must not involve physical violence or mental abuse, be ideologically biased or promote hate or violence. Instruction must focus on the individual, take into consideration the differences between sexes and be based on the recognition of students' achievements.

The **Pre-School Child Care Institutions Act** regulates issues related to the organisation of pre-primary education.

The [national curriculum for pre-school child care institutions](#), which entered into force in 2008, establishes the principles of preparation of a children's institution's own curriculum, the objectives, principles and organisation of learning and educational activities, the presumed general skills of children aged 6–7, the objectives and content of learning and educational activities of different fields, the presumed results of a child's development at the age 6–7 and the principles of evaluation of a child's development. The national curriculum provides that the primary principle of learning and teaching is to take into account each child's individual needs and development potential. Learning and teaching activities are prepared and carried out by taking into account the individual development: abilities, linguistic and cultural background, age, gender, health, etc.

Proceeding from the Government Regulation "**Health protection requirements for pre-school child care institutions' buildings, premises, furnishings, internal climate and maintenance**", a child care institution is required to have safe and secured buildings, premises, furnishings and land which are suitable for providing pre-school education and care for children. Requirements for child care institutions' health promotion activities and timetable are established by a decree of the Minister of Social Affairs "**Health protection requirements for pre-school child care institutions' health promotion activities and timetable**". Requirements for catering of children in pre-school child care institutions have been established by the regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs "**Health Protection Requirements for catering at pre-school child care institutions and schools**".

Deriving from the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act, local governments are obliged to provide all children aged from 1.5 to 7 years permanently residing in their catchment area with the opportunity to attend a pre-primary institution in the catchment area if the parents so wish. This obligation includes children with physical, speech, sensual or intellectual disabilities or those who need special help or special care (children with special educational needs).

Pre-primary institutions are mostly (over 90%) municipally owned and they are therefore financed from the budget of the local government.

Local municipalities may support private kindergartens, for example if a municipality or town does not have its own kindergarten or there is a shortage of kindergarten places.

In 2013/2014 academic year, nearly 77% of 1.5 - 3-year-olds and nearly 95.5% of 4-6-year-olds were attending a pre-school childcare institution. In order to promote the availability of kindergarten places,

amendments to the Preschool Childcare Institutions Act have been prepared. The objective of these amendments is to specify the responsibilities of local governments in offering the kindergarten places, to make the forming of kindergarten groups more flexible, to stipulate the adult/children ratio in kindergarten groups.

For children under 3, who reside in the rural municipality or city administrative territory, the local government/municipality may replace a kindergarten place with child-care services. The cost for parents will be capped to 20% of the minimum wage (the same rule applies to pre-school institutions). The new act also stipulates that children from the same family should have access to the same institution.

The development concept for pre-school education is under preparation in cooperation with partners. The concept gives an overview of the present situation regarding the pre-school system and its shortcomings, specifies the needs for modification, principles for future trends and activity plan for the years 2014-2020.

In 2007–2013, the Government of the Republic supported local governments in creating new kindergarten places and renovating the existing ones from European Structural Funds to the extent of approximately 49 million euros. For the period 2014-2020, the support will be in total of 40.5 million euros.

Based on the Government of the Republic's plan of action for 2011-2015, support will be provided for local governments to create kindergarten places and to improve the energy efficiency of child care institutions with the help of the EU Structural Funds KOIT plan and the funds received from the sale of Kyoto pollution quotas.

Within the framework of the “**EFA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2009–2014**”, resources of about €1.9 million are planned for the further development of national general education, including pre-school education, and the counselling system; for the support of organising involved education in pre-school child care institutions and schools; for the support of the transition from child care institutions to schools; for training support specialists and educators; for the development of instructional materials.

In pre-school child care institutions the school-readiness of children is assessed. A children's institution issues a child that has passed the national curriculum for pre-primary institutions a school readiness card that describes the results of the child's development from cognitive, physical and social aspects. A parent submits the school readiness card to the school where the child will begin to fulfil one's obligatory school attendance.

A parent may apply to a counselling committee for postponement of the obligation to attend school. The conditions and procedures for satisfying an application are established by the Minister of Social Affairs.

In Estonia, offering of education is under state supervision (Constitution, § 37). The organisation and conduct of state supervision in pre-school child care institutions is regulated by the **Pre-School Child Care Institutions Act**. The task of state supervision is to check the fulfilment of requirements deriving from legal acts regulating education and schooling activities and to analyse problems in implementation of legal acts regulating education and schooling activities.

Supervisory control over the lawfulness and efficiency of an educational institution's activities is initialised and carried out by the **owner** of the school (in municipal schools by the local municipality,

in state schools by the Minister of Education and Research), involving experts of the field, where necessary ([Government of the Republic Act](#); [Local Government Organisation Act](#)). In addition, pre-school child care institutions and schools are obliged to carry out internal evaluation. The objective of internal evaluation is to ensure conditions that support the development of children and continuous development of the educational institution. An educational institution can use counselling service.

The Ministry of Education and Research annually prepares an overview of external evaluation of the education system. The overview includes a summary of results of state supervision in children's institutions, general education schools, vocational schools and higher education institutions. Overview is given of the results of internal evaluations and counselling in educational institutions, national education surveys and other projects related to evaluation. The overview is available both as a printed version and on the [webpage of the ministry](#).

Pre-school aged children are guaranteed national health insurance and deriving from that they are eligible for general and special health care. General practitioners, nurses and healthcare workers are responsible for conducting regular health checks on children during which their physical and mental development is assessed. Noticing child's special needs at an early age and supporting them throughout pre-primary education is vital for the prevention of future educational, social, and health problems and for reducing the dropout rate.

Recently a new state funded childcare service for children with severe and profound disability was created. In recent years the number of users of the service and financing has both been continuously increasing.

When it comes to childcare services it is important to note that only childcare services for children with severe and profound disability are state funded. All expenses related to childcare services for children who are not part of this target group are divided between local municipalities and individuals. During the period between 2014 and 2020 and with the help of EU structural funds the state is planning to create more childcare services and kindergarten places for children aged 0-7, offer childcare services and support services (personal carer, support person etc.) for disabled children aged 0-17, support youth work and children's extracurricular education, decrease youth unemployment (aged 15-24), develop labour market measures and develop services related to health and children's risk behaviour.

In custody situations the service is 100% funded by the state. Substitute home service is 90% state funded. The substitute home service (on the request of parents) for children with severe or profound disability is 62% state funded and 31% is funded by local municipalities.

Development of the family benefits and services concept as an action concerning family policy is included in the Government of the Republic action programme for 2011–2015. Within the framework of preparing the family benefits and services concept, benefits and services offered to families are analysed to develop and establish, if necessary, measures to foster the subsistence of families. In developing a general family benefits system, the objective is to support more those people who actually need the help most (for example, single parents and families with many children).

GOAL 2: Universalization of primary and basic education

In organisation of study, the state, school owners and schools follow the principle that quality general education must be equally accessible to all persons irrespective of their social and economic background, nationality, gender, place of residence or special educational need.

According to the [Constitution](#) of the Republic of Estonia, everyone has the right to education. The point of departure of education is the recognition of basic human and national values and freedom of personality, religion and consciousness.

According to the [Child Protection Act](#), every child has the right for education.

According to the [Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#), education is compulsory for school-aged children and is free of charge in state and local government general education schools. The provision of education is supervised by the state. In order to make education accessible, the state and local governments must maintain the requisite number of educational institutions. Other educational institutions, including private schools, may also be established and maintained pursuant to law.

A person who has reached the age of seven years before October 1 in the current year is subject to the duty to attend school (including a person having foreign citizenship or unspecified citizenship; excluding the child of a representative of a foreign country or international organisation accredited to the Republic of Estonia who resides in Estonia). A person is required to attend school until they acquire basic education or attain the age of 17 years.

School attendance may be postponed due to the child's health condition and this duty can be fulfilled by educating at home. No students are relieved from compulsory school attendance due to their disability or low level of ability. As for students with intellectual disability, simplified curricula have been developed for students with mild learning difficulties, students with moderate learning difficulties and students with severe and profound learning difficulties.

A new Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act entered into force in 2010, setting out several provisions which specify the duties of various parties (parent, school, and local government) for securing the fulfilment of the duty to attend school. According to the Act, a parent must enable and facilitate the performance of the duty to attend school, create conditions facilitating learning at home and the prerequisites for participation in studies for a student subject to the duty to attend school, and cooperate with the school. In the case of problems which prevent the performance of the duty to attend school, a parent is required to take measures offered by the school or local government, and where necessary, request that the school or local government take measures of ensuring the performance of the duty to attend school.

If a parent fails to perform the above duties, the local government will take the required measures to protect the rights of the child. A parent will be punished by a fine of up to 200 fine units (approx. 800 euros) if their child who is subject to the duty to attend school has not been enrolled in any school or has been absent for more than 20 per cent of the lessons during a quarter of the academic year without a reason. A parent will not be punished if they have applied to the school or local government for measures ensuring the performance of the duty to attend school, consent to the application of the measures to be taken and actively participate in their application. Reasoned, relevant and proportional support measures may be taken and sanctions may be imposed with regard to a student with the aim of influencing students to abide by the internal rules of the school, respect others and perform the duty to attend school.

Students will be provided with the services of at least a special education teacher (including a speech therapist), psychologist and social educator (hereinafter support specialists). The owners of the schools will create and the heads of school will organise the opportunities for implementation of the services of support specialists.

The head of a school may, upon the consent of the owner of the school, form long day groups in the school for students acquiring basic education. Supervision, pedagogical instruction and guidance in spending spare time, doing homework, pursuing hobbies and developing interests is offered to students as extracurricular activities organised in a long day group. On the basis of a proposal of the board of trustees, a school will organise the formation of a long day group jointly with the owner of the school.

A school may have boarding school facilities where extracurricular activities ensuring the learning, living and education conditions that comply with the needs and interests of students as well as with the security and health protection requirements are organised.

At the request of the owner of a school and with the approval of the governor of the county of location of the school, the Minister of Education and Research will designate a municipal or private school whose existing boarding school facilities or whose boarding school facilities to be formed contain state supported places for the basic education-acquiring children of families who have difficulties for the purposes of the Social Welfare Act (hereinafter state-supported place in boarding school facilities) and establish the number of state-supported places in the boarding school facilities in these schools.

A reasoned application of the rural municipality or city government of the place of residence of the student, the approval of the governor of the county of the place of residence of the student and the location of the boarding school facilities, and the consent of the student or a parent of the student who has limited active legal capacity serves as the basis for the admission of the student to a state-supported place in the boarding school facilities.

A student admitted to a state-supported place in boarding school facilities is, at least until the end of the current academic quarter, allowed to go to the school in whose structural unit the boarding school facilities are.

The state budget contains support for covering the school lunch expenses (hereinafter school lunch support) of students acquiring basic education in the stationary studies in municipal and private schools.

Compulsory school attendance may also be fulfilled by **studying at home**. Studying at home may be conducted on the wish of parents or for health reasons. The school together with the person carrying out instruction prepare an individual curriculum for the student on the basis of school curriculum. The school assesses subject-related knowledge and skills and their correspondence to the objectives determined by the curriculum at least twice a year.

Study carried out outside school at the request of a parent is organised and financed by the parent. Studying at home for health reasons is carried out by the school where the student is registered. The student will be given consultation for at least 8 hours a week.

Students who are under hospital treatment can receive guided study starting from the first hospital day for indicatively 8 hours a week.

A rural municipality or city shall provide persons aged 17 years or older, who have not acquired basic education and whose place of residence is located in the rural municipality or city with opportunities for the acquisition of basic education by way of **non-stationary studies**.

For better arrangement of study of **students with special educational needs**, special schools may be founded and operated. The state guarantees the operation of schools for students with visual and hearing impairments, for students with movement disabilities who also have an additional special educational need, for students with emotional or behavioural disorders and a class for students with moderate or severe and profound learning difficulties acquiring basic education.

In order to support education acquisition and to prevent **early school leaving (ESL)**, the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act guarantees educational support services to all students, enabling them to get psychological counselling, speech therapy and study counselling.

Estonia performs better than the EU average for the early school leaving rate (9.7% compared to 11.9% in 2013). The rate has decreased by 0.8 percentage points between 2012 and 2013 and is already very close to Estonia's national target (9.5%). The high early school leaving rate of boys has fallen significantly in recent years, but still remains more than twice as high as the rate for girls. The analysis of sub-indicators suggests that the reasons for the good performance are strong and increasing investment in education and favourable parental environment. The participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is at 90%.

Estonia does not have a dedicated ESL strategy. The Estonian authorities have however adopted a major legislative proposal to improve access to early childhood education and care as well as pre-school, which can be important in terms of preventing early school leaving. The new Pre-School Child Care institutions Act (covering 1.5-7 year-old children) introduces an obligation for local governments to provide for childcare service where there is a shortage of places in municipal care centres. It also defines a ratio between staff and the number of children they care for. The cost for parents will be capped to 20% of the minimum wage (the same rule applies to pre-school institutions). The new act also stipulates that children from the same family should have access to the same institution. Presently about 1/3 of local governments have shortages mainly for the age group up to 3 year-olds, in particular in major urban areas.

Drop-out rates from vocational education are considerably higher than in general education. The main reasons for discontinuing vocational education are: wrong choice of profession, mismatch between abilities and requirements (lower average performance than in those who enrol in upper secondary schools), economic reasons (because studying at a vocational school means higher costs for families, students often prefer to start working if an opportunity presents itself).

To reduce drop-out rates, more effective career and professional counselling already in basic schools is required. We need to continue developing career studies and other career services and to improve the availability of such services. According to the providers of career services and teachers, both adult learners and students need more assistance and support in particular regarding the labour market information, i.e. they need counselling to enter and compete successfully in the labour market and information about the labour market situation, changes and future prospects.

GOAL 3: Meeting the learning needs of youths and adults

Adult education

The Ministry of Education and Research coordinates the general organisation of the sphere of adult education in Estonia. The Ministry of Social Affairs together with the public-law institution Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund are responsible for the training of the unemployed and jobseekers.

The sphere of adult education is regulated by a number of legislative acts.

The [Adult Education Act](#) provides the basis for adult education and the legal guarantees, the definition of adult education institutions, the terms of provision of learning opportunities, classification of adult education depending on its objectives, and regulates the financing of adult education. The provisions of the Adult Education Act mainly apply to people who study in non-stationary, part-time or evening study or distance learning, as an external student or who participate in work-related and non-formal education.

Possibilities to acquire formal education are regulated in the **Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act**, the [Vocational Educational Institutions Act](#), the [Universities Act](#) and the [Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act](#).

Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act regulates acquiring general education (basic education or general upper secondary education) by adults: general education may be acquired in the form of non-stationary study in general education schools for adults (adult gymnasiums) or in specific adults' departments established in general education schools for the young and also as an external student. Studying in the form of non-stationary study is available only for people who have acquired basic education or are past the age of compulsory school attendance (17 years of age).

Also studying of individual subjects is possible: a student chooses his/her study load in cooperation with the school, one or many subjects may be studied at once, and an individual curriculum is compiled for a student or group of students with similar needs.

In the academic year 2013/2014, there were 16 adult gymnasiums and 30 educational institutions where, in addition to general education studies for the young, adults also have the opportunity to acquire basic and general upper secondary education.

The **Vocational Educational Institutions Act** regulates the offering of vocational education either in stationary or non-stationary form of study. The **Universities Act** and the **Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act** govern, among other things, studying in full-time and part-time study and as external student as well as organization of work-related training.

There are no limits to enter vocational schools on the basis of learners' age or education level. **Vocational education without the requirement of basic education**, where only the profession is acquired, was implemented for persons without basic education who have exceeded the age of compulsory school attendance (17 years) in the 2006/2007 academic year. After completing their vocational training, such persons can continue their general education studies with the aim of obtaining a basic education if they wish to do so. Most of the graduates from basic school start their studies in VET at the secondary level, where they can obtain secondary education and professional competencies. Statistics shows that 1/5 of the graduates from VET schools continue their studies instantly either in higher education or some other field of vocational education. Flexible options have

been created in the vocational training centres to offer professional education to older workers who do not have any professional education.

Work-related training of adults (in-service training and retraining) is offered by vocational schools, professional higher education institutions, universities and private training institutions; it can take place also in enterprises and at the workplace.

The Estonian authorities aim to increase VET participation at upper secondary level to 40% by 2020¹¹, provide more work-based learning, including apprenticeships¹², and to increase the proportion of VET students in apprenticeships from the current about 2.3% to about 7% by 2020¹³.

To meet these objectives, a new structure of VET programmes was introduced in September 2013 by the VET Institutions Act. The new VET programmes are based on the national qualifications framework, the introduction of the learning outcome principle in designing study programmes (with i.e. a possibility for employers to take part in the elaboration of curricula), modernised management principles for VET schools as well as new accreditation requirements. In addition, the Basic School and Upper Secondary School Act of September 2013 aims at putting general and vocational education at an equal footing, and providing basic school graduates with a clear choice between the two paths.

Non-formal education is offered by private schools, funds and non-profit organisations located in all Estonian counties.

Adult training is accessible in all counties through some type of educational or training institution (non-formal education centre, adult gymnasium, private non-profit educational institution, vocational school, higher education institution). It is noteworthy that formal education institutions increasingly offer courses for adults. The role of vocational schools, institutions of professional higher education and universities in offering study opportunities for adults is increasing. Vocational schools exist in all counties of Estonia and there are centres offering non-formal education (folk universities, cultural centres, etc.) in all regions of Estonia.

The Adult Education Act also regulates the possibilities to apply for study leave. It is possible to receive study leave with regards to studying in formal education, work-related training and non-formal education. In order to participate in training, employees and civil servants have the right to receive 30 calendar days of study leave in one year from their employer. In case of formal and work-related training, an employer must pay an employee or civil servant their average salary for 20 calendar days. For people participating in non-formal education, there is no such obligation. For graduation from formal education, an employer must grant an employee the opportunity to receive 15 additional days of study leave with minimum salary established on national level, if the employee wishes so.

Until the end of 2013, the general objectives of the sphere of adult education are stipulated in the **Development Plan for Estonian Adult Education (2009–2013)** approved by the Government of the Republic.

¹¹ See also the Development Plan for the Estonian Vocational Education and Training System 2009-2013, more on www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=10227

¹² In its Partnership Agreement (PA) under the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF, 2014-20) Estonia also indicated that its objective is to steer 35% of primary education students to VET instead of lower secondary general education by 2020, in comparison to 28.8 % at present.

¹³ See 'Apprenticeship supply in the Member States of the European Union' report from 2012, ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7717&langId=en

The development plan had three main goals. The first of them was the same as that of the lifelong learning strategy for the years 2005-2008 – the implementation of the development plan gives adults better access both to formal education and non-formal education in order to improve the knowledge of people and the level of education of the population and to increase the percentage of people aged 25-64 participating in lifelong learning to 13.5% by 2013.

The other two goals of the development plan added more qualitative indicators in addition to the measurement of the participation rate – to decrease the proportion of people aged 25-64 with general education (general secondary education, basic education or a lower level of education) and those without professional or vocational education to 32% in the population and to create the preconditions for obtaining a single tier higher level of education or qualification through high-quality education for as many people as possible. In order to fulfil the three general goals, the development plan has specified indicators, measures and activities that have been divided under five targets.

The **strategic planning for 2014-2020** is based on Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy, which is a document that guides the most important developments in the area of education. It is the basis on which the government will make its decisions for educational funding for the years 2014-2020 and for the development of programmes that support the achievement of necessary changes.

In the years 2001-2006, the participation of Estonian adults in lifelong learning (LLL) ranged between 4-7%. A breakthrough took place in 2008 as the Estonian indicator exceeded the EU average level. During last two years, the adults' participation rate has been growing approximately one percentage per year. In 2010 the adults' participation rate was 10.9%, it rose to 12% in 2011 and reached the highest level ever in 2012 – 12.9 %. In 2013, adult participation in LLL was still above the EU average of 10.5%, with a clear increase from 6.5% in 2006 to 12.6%. The government has set the goal of reaching the level of 15% of adult participation rate by 2015 and by 2020, Estonia's objective is to increase the lifelong learning participation rate to 20%.

Although the participation of adults in lifelong learning has generally improved, older people and those with lesser levels of education still participate less in lifelong learning than do younger people and those with higher education; also fewer non-Estonians than Estonians participate. However, looking at the growth rate of participation among adults with different levels of education during 2010-2012, the biggest increase has been among adults with lesser levels of education, it has grown from 2.0% in 2010 to 4.2% in 2012.

A large percentage of Estonia's workforce (age group 25-64) has only a basic or general secondary education and does not hold a professional education (vocational or higher education). In 2012, 30.3% of 25-64-year-olds met this description. In this age group, 28.3% had higher education and 41.4% had vocational or secondary specialised education. The number of people who lack a professional education is highest in the youngest age group, although the percentage has decreased during the last years among those 25-34 years of age 34% in 2011 and 32.4% in 2012.

People with lower levels of education and without specialised education are clearly in a weaker competitive position in the labour market. The unemployment rate in 2012 was 10.2%, but among people only with basic education unemployment was more than double – 23.5%. People with vocational or specialised education held a slightly better position compared to the people who had general secondary education – accordingly the unemployment rate was 10.2% and 10.8%. In 2011 and 2012, unemployment rate has decreased and the share of those unemployed with vocational education has decreased more in comparison to the unemployed without a specialised education. In

addition to the greater probability of becoming unemployed, it is important to point out that people with less education are also unemployed for longer periods.

Estonia has worked out several measures to increase adult participation in LLL and to reduce the share of adults without any professional education:

- **Widen the access and flexibility both in the formal education and non-formal and informal education and training** – adults with low educational levels, who need to acquire a basic or secondary education, can study free at adult gymnasiums in order to acquire basic and general secondary educations. Flexible study opportunities have been created for adult learners both in **vocational education and training** and **higher education: e-learning tools, support schemes**, part-time study, **study counselling and career service systems**. In non-formal education a wide range adult learning and training courses are supported from the European Social Fund (ESF programmes “Development of e-learning in VET” and “Popularisation of VET”).
- **Raising the quality of adult learning** - the new Adult Education Act is expected to be adopted in 2015. It mainly focuses on non-formal and informal learning settings, the aim is to raise the quality of the adult education providers and study courses and to make shift towards learning outcomes based curricula. The new Act foresees all adult education providers who want to apply for public funding need to register at Estonian Education Information System database (EHIS). In EHIS the data about the adult learning providers will be made available for the wider public in a more transparent way.
- **Raising awareness and motivation to participate in LLL** – different initiatives have been launched (TV and radio shows, newsletters, adult learners’ week) that were supported from the ESF programme “Popularisation of adult education”. After the programmes’ end in 2012, the most important initiatives e.g. adult learners’ week, newsletters etc. are funded from various sources.

[The Association of Estonian Adult Educators ANDRAS](#) and the Ministry of Education and Research have been organising the adult learners’ week every autumn since 1998. The objectives of this week are to value education, learners and educators, and introduce learning opportunities. The activities of the adult learners’ week have expanded over the years and events are organised throughout the entire year, in addition to the main event, which lasts a week.

- **ESF programmes** - in 2008, the Minister of Education and Research approved the programme titled “[Training of adults in non-formal education training centres](#)” financed from the European Social Fund and the Estonian state budget; the main objective of the programme was to improve adults’ key competencies for lifelong learning. The programme came to an end in summer 2013. The Estonian Non-formal Adult Education Association, a national umbrella organisation of non-formal adult training centres was the manager of the programme. In the framework of the programme, 33 900 people were offered training on key competencies for lifelong learning in approximately 45 non-formal adult training centres and folk universities. The competencies developed included: communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civil competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression. Courses were free of

charge for students. Training was carried out in all counties. The training could be received by adults who were at least 17 years old. The programme was initially targeted only at working people but since 2009, also the unemployed were included in the target group.

- **KUTSE programme** (co-financed by ESF (1.6 million euros), total budget for the programme was 1.9 million euros) was set up in 2010 for drop-outs who have left school over the last ten academic years to complete their studies in vocational education. Programme was extended in 2011 and in addition to the vocational school drop-outs also adults without any professional education or qualification can participate in the program and obtain a vocational education. The programme run until the end of 2013, and enabled about 400 people to complete their studies.
- **Exemption from fringe benefit tax on work related studies.** As a result of recent change, expenses on degree level education related to employees' work will no longer be viewed as a fringe benefit. The reform will promote investments by companies into raising employees' qualification and thereby promote increase in productivity and general competitiveness.
- **Recognition of prior learning and working experience (VÕTA)** - Estonia has taken many steps to take the knowledge and skills acquired during non-formal education into account in formal education, with the goal of supporting the acquisition of key competences by non-formal education as well as in school environments. In the framework of an extensive ESF project, Estonian VÕTA principles that are by now regulated by higher education and vocational education legislation were developed. The VÕTA principles are generally in use also in the system for awarding professional qualifications. In 2008, a Youth Work Quality programme was initiated, which foresees the development of an instrument for describing the knowledge and skills acquired by young people outside of formal learning. All necessary information about VÕTA is available for wider public online.
- **OSKA system** - by a decision of February 2014 of the Government of the Republic it was agreed to develop a coordination system for monitoring and forecasting labour needs and for skills development in order to better match labour market demands and education/training offered by the educational system (OSKA system). The system will be based on the existing qualifications system and launched by using the ESF funds. The Minister of Education and Research will be responsible for the implementation of the system, while the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications and the Ministry of Social Affairs will be involved in the implementation on equal grounds. The activities under the OSKA system will be organised by the Estonian Qualifications Authority. The draft Professions Act Amendment Act, which is a prerequisite for establishing the OSKA system is expected to enter into force in 2015.

Youth policy

Youth policy forms a part of the broader youth affairs. The main activity areas of youth policy include youth work, social, employment, health, cultural, family and crime prevention policy. The area of administration of the Ministry of Education and Research also contains the development of youth policy.

In 1999, the [Youth Work Act](#) was approved by the Parliament and 2001 the Estonian Youth Work Concept and the Estonian Youth Work Development Plan for 2001-2004 were prepared. In 2006 the

Government of the Republic approved the [Youth Work Strategy 2006-2013](#). The objective of the Youth Work Strategy 2006-2013 was to develop and implement coordinated and purposeful actions following the actual needs and challenges of young people in different spheres of life, i.e. the integrated youth policy.

As of 1 January 2013, Estonia had 288,492 young people at the age of 7–26, which forms 22.4% of the Estonian population. As in many other countries, the proportion of young people among population is decreasing. According to the forecast of the Statistics Estonia, the proportion of youth among total population continues to decrease until 2022 when it will gradually start to increase again. The growth trend prevails until 2039 and then the share of youth among the total population will start decreasing again.

Negative trends, such as the growing emigration of youth, high unemployment rate of youth aged 15–19, the number of young people not studying or working, high relative poverty rate, problematic health behaviour, incl. in particular the risk behaviour of young men, require special attention. Attention must be paid to the causes of such trends, prevention of potential consequences and reduction in undesirable influence. It is also necessary to promote the continuation of positive trends.

At the end of 2013, the Government of the Republic approved the **Youth Field Development Plan for 2014-2020**. The situation of youth and changes therein, developments in society and challenges faced by the state, situation of youth affairs and trends in Europe and all over the world serve as a basis for the development plan. The general goal of the development plan: young people have wide opportunities for development and self-realisation, which supports the formation of a cohesive and creative society.

The development plan will be carried out on the basis of the implementation plans. In addition to the Ministry of Education and Research, other ministries and institutions and associations of youth affairs, local authorities and county governments will take part in the implementation of the development plan in terms of their area of responsibility in the activities set out in the implementation plan of the development plan. The [Estonian Youth Work Centre](#) and [Estonian National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme of the Archimedes Foundation](#) play a crucial role upon implementing the plan within the area of administration of the Ministry of Education and Research.

The total cost of the development plan is 90 million euros. 47 million euros of this amount is formed of external support where the share of [Erasmus+: the EU programme for education, youth and sport](#) constitutes 24 million euros, structural funds of the European Union EUR 19 million and the Norway and EEA grant 4 million euros.

The youth work is **financed** from the local government budget according to the priorities approved in the development plan of the municipality and tasks and activities related thereto.

Usually the local government finances local youth programmes and projects, such as youth camps, sports events and hobby activities of the schools, and supports youth associations. Open calls will be carried out or contracts will be signed with the promoters of the activities.

A local government often also maintains hobby schools (music, sports, art, nature, etc.) and youth centres, funding the management costs of buildings and personnel costs as well as the participation of youth in the activities.

Activities pursuing wider national impact in the youth work are financed from the state budget. Some of these funds are allocated through county governments, e.g. grants for juvenile committees, youth information centres and open youth centres.

Annual grants from state budget are allocated to the youth associations that involve at least 500 members and run high quality activities at least in 5 counties and youth work associations that represent larger sectorial stakeholders.

A separate programme has also been created to support youth councils. Small-scale initiatives and projects are financed through the calls for proposals of the Council of Gambling Tax.

The Estonian National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme of the Archimedes Foundation implements the Erasmus+ programme by means of the funds of the European Union. New development programmes of youth affairs are planned for 2014-2020 on account of the funds of the European Social Fund.

The Children and Youth at Risk, which is the EEA Grants support programme, improves the situation of youth of up to 26 years of age. The programme is implemented by the Estonian Youth Work Centre.

GOAL 4: Improving adult literacy level

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) defines literacy as the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society".

Traditionally literacy skills combine both the skill of reading and writing. When researching more distant historic periods it is correct to also consider people who only knew how to read as literate, because the number of people who possessed the skill of writing was very low. Once a relatively extensive school system was developed and education began to spread, people began to distinguish between fully literate (people who knew how to read and write) and partially literate individuals. According to earlier population censuses a person was considered to be literate if he/she was able to read even very slowly.¹⁴

According to the 1934 population census, 96.1% of the population of Estonia knew how to read and write and Estonia was considered to be a completely literate country. 1979 population census states that 99.8% of the population was literate. In present day the share of people with a literacy skill is also 99.8%.¹⁵

International literacy skill surveys ([Programme for International Student Assessment \(PISA\)](#), (International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)) define reading literacy as the understanding, using, and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society.¹⁶

Within the framework of the abovementioned international literacy skill surveys the term "level of reading literacy" is used. IALS divides literacy into five different levels, the first level being the lowest and the fifth the highest level of literacy.¹⁷ Functional literacy skill corresponds to the third level of literacy. OECD's international surveys (PISA, IALS) show that there are individuals whose literacy skills are low in all countries.

As regards the **basic skills of 15 year olds**, the results of the 2012 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)¹⁸ are very encouraging for Estonia. Performance has significantly improved since 2009 in all three tested areas. Estonia now ranks first among the EU countries participating in the survey, with a very low share of low achievers: 9.1% in reading (compared to an EU average of 17.8%), 10.5% in mathematics (compared to an EU average of 22.1%) and only 5% in science (compared to an EU average of 16.6%). Estonia also shows small variations in student scores, proving that high performance is possible for a large number of students. The survey shows also that between 2009 and 2012 Estonia increased its share of top performers and simultaneously reduced its share of low performers, e.g. in science. Estonia also combines high levels of performance with equity in education opportunities: the country shows above-OECD-average mean performance and a weak relationship between socioeconomic status and student performance. Schools with Russian as the language of instruction have also improved considerably since previous PISA surveys. Students in both Estonian

¹⁴ Aarma, 1990

¹⁵ Eesti Inimarengu Aruanne, 2002

¹⁶ PISA, OECD, 2007

¹⁷ National Centre for Educations Statistics, 1997

¹⁸ <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results.htm>

and Russian language schools have shown improvement and the gap between the two language groups is decreasing¹⁹. Estonia also reports high levels of student satisfaction and a favourable learning atmosphere at school, which might as well explain the overall strong performance of the country in basic skills.

The overall good performance can also be attributed to the government's targeted support to weaker students²⁰, in particular at the basic (comprehensive) school level. Finally, Estonia is currently developing a new initiative called "*Huvitav Kool*" (interesting school) aimed at making the learning experience interesting to students, teachers, parents as well as the community²¹.

[The PIAAC survey of adult skills](#) broadens the definition of literacy to make it relevant to the information age, in particular, by including the skills of reading in digital environments. According to the survey, adults aged 16-65 in Estonia perform above the EU average in proficiency tests on literacy and numeracy. The same holds true for young adults (aged 16-24). In particular, young tertiary education graduates (aged up to 29) score much higher in literacy than the rest of the population. Younger people score better in literacy than the overall population, with a difference (equivalent to skills usually acquired with 1 to 2 years of education).

¹⁹ http://innove.ee/UserFiles/%C3%9CIdharidus/PISA%202012/PISA_2012_results_Estonia.pdf

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ <http://www.hm.ee/en/huvitav-kool>

GOAL 5: Gender parity and equality in education

According to **the Constitution, §12**, everyone is equal before the law. No one may be discriminated against on the basis of nationality, race, colour, sex, language, origin, religion, political or other views, property or social status, or on other grounds.

The purpose of the [Gender Equality Act](#) is to ensure the equal treatment of men and women as provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia and to promote the equality of men and women as a fundamental human right and for the public good in all areas of social life.

The purpose of [Equal Treatment Act](#) is to ensure the protection of persons against discrimination on grounds of nationality (ethnic origin), race, colour, religion or other beliefs, age, disability or sexual orientation.

To monitor compliance with the requirements of the Equal Treatment Act and the Gender Equality Act the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner is appointed to office by the Minister of Social Affairs for five years.

According to the Gender Equality Act, educational and research institutions and institutions engaged in the provision of education and training must ensure equal treatment of men and women in vocational guidance, acquisition of education, professional and vocational development and re-training. The curricula, study material used and research conducted shall facilitate the elimination of unequal treatment of men and women and promote equality. Education and training offers directed at persons of one sex only are prohibited.

In academic year 2011/12 the schools started to implement the new [National Curriculum for Basic Schools](#) and the [National Curriculum for Upper-secondary Schools](#). Gender equality is one of the basic social values stipulated in the curricula: *The values deemed important in the national curriculum derive from the ethical principles specified in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the basic documents of the European Union. General human values (honesty, compassion, respect for life, justice, human dignity, respect for self and others) are enshrined as core values, as are social values (liberty, democracy, respect for mother tongue and culture, patriotism, cultural diversity, tolerance, environmental sustainability, rule of law, solidarity, responsibility and gender equality)*(The National curriculum for basic schools, §2(3)).

At the end of 2014 the task about increasing the quality in practical learning process in schools was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Research. During 2015 expert groups are analysing the descriptions of learning process taking inter alia under attention also gender awareness.

The importance of gender awareness in general education is also pointed out in the new Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy.

The proportion of female students has been steady during many years. In schools providing general education the proportion of female students in academic year 2013/14 was 50.5%

Generally, many international indices consider it important to increase the enrolment of women. One of the targets of the EU education strategy titled Education and Training 2010 was to increase the percentage of women among graduates in the sciences. Estonia placed first, exceeding the European

Union average by 10%. In 2009, almost half (42%) of the graduates in the sciences were women (European Commission, 2011).²²

Increasing the percentage of women in higher education is a general trend, which is characteristic of all the OECD countries and of almost all specialities. Estonia is also the leader in this measure, with 156 women for every 100 men. As expected, the percentage of women also increased among the graduates of schools of higher education. In Estonia, 70% of the graduates of schools of higher education are women, which shows that there are more men among the drop-outs from schools of higher education (European Commission 2009). The gender imbalance is also noteworthy by field of study. In Estonia, women comprise over 90% of the graduates in the educational and welfare services fields, which is the highest indicator in the EU.²³

Compared to girls, more boys limit themselves to only basic education or even less. In the academic year 2013/14, the proportion of female students at the upper-secondary level was 57.7%. In Estonia, the difference of boys and girls drop out after completing basic school is almost double, to the detriment of the boys. However, in the period between 2004 and 2010, the situation in Estonia has improved, since the share of boys who drop out has decreased from 20% to 15%; about 8% of girls still drop out.²⁴

In Estonia, more than 60% of the young people study at general secondary schools (in 2013/14 – 65%); vocational education is less popular. The fact that there are always more females in general education (in Estonia even more than 20% more) lays the foundation for the predominance of women in higher education. At the same time, the statistics do not confirm a connection between poor vocational education and the high drop-out rate among boys.

²² http://www.kogu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/EIA2013_eng.pdf

²³ http://www.kogu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/EIA2013_eng.pdf

²⁴ http://www.kogu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/EIA2013_eng.pdf

GOAL 6: Quality of Education²⁵

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, offering of education in Estonia is under state and administrative supervision (§ 37).

In formal education, the organisation and conduct of **state supervision** is regulated by the **Preschool Child Care Institutions Act**, the **Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act**, the **Vocational Educational Institutions Act**, the **Private Schools Act**, the **Universities Act** and the **Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act**. The aforementioned acts form the basis for supervision of both state and municipal (administrative supervision) educational institutions and private educational institutions (state supervision); hereinafter – state supervision.

In order to ensure the lawfulness and expediency of the activities of state and municipal educational institutions, **supervisory control** is conducted under the **Government of the Republic Act** and the **Local Government Organisation Act**.

The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act establishes external evaluation of study results or, in other words, state level evaluation of study results defined in the national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools. This is carried out through upper secondary school state examinations, basic school final examinations and nation-wide standard-determining tests, the principles, organisation and other conditions of which are established by the respective regulation of the Minister of Education and Research.

Preschool child care institutions and schools are obliged to carry out internal evaluation.

The **Standard of Vocational Education** establishes the requirements for vocational training.

The **Standard of Higher Education** establishes the requirements for higher education studies.

Organisation of external evaluation and supervision of higher education institutions and higher education level is governed by the Universities Act, the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act and the Private Schools Act. In 2009-2012, Estonia adopted a new system of quality assurance in higher education and granting the right to conduct studies. The new higher education quality assurance system differentiates between supervision and quality assessment.

According to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act which entered into force 12 June 2013, an educational institution shall be granted a right to conduct studies according to a specific curriculum group and the quality of study shall be assessed through accreditation of curriculum groups.

Also a new Adult Education Act is being prepared, giving the Minister of Education and Research the right to conduct state supervision also in adult education institutions and establishing the requirement to conduct quality assessment in the institutions.

The Ministry of Education and Research annually prepares an overview of external evaluation of the education system. The overview includes a summary of results of state supervision in preschool child care institutions, general education schools, vocational schools and higher education institutions. Overview is given of the results of internal evaluations and counselling in educational institutions, national education surveys and other projects related to evaluation. The overview is available both as a printed version and on the [website of the ministry](#).

²⁵ https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Quality_Assurance

Quality assurance in pre-school and school education²⁶

State supervision in preschool and school education is exercised on equal grounds. The task of state supervision is:

- to check the fulfilment of requirements deriving from legal acts regulating education and schooling activities;
- to analyse problems in implementation of legal acts regulating education and schooling activities.

On the initiative of the ministry, supervision is conducted with regard to individual issues or through thematic supervision based on state supervision priorities. The priorities of state supervision are approved by a decree of the Minister of Education and Research for each academic year. Supervision priorities are related to topical education policy themes (e.g. in the academic year 2014/2015, it is a priority in teaching and education to consider the individual needs and capabilities of a child and a student.

Each year, at least 10% of educational institutions belong to the sample subject to supervision.

The results of supervision are formulated as a report and such reports are public documents. The Ministry of Education and Research analyses the results of supervision and publishes them in the annual overview of external evaluation of the education system.

In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Research established the obligation to conduct **internal evaluation** in preschool child care institutions, general education schools and vocational schools. The objective of the change was to support the creation of internal quality assurance systems and to enhance the independence and self-management of educational institutions. The objective of internal evaluation is to ensure conditions that support the development of children/learners and a continuous development of the educational institution. An educational institution can use counselling service. However, since 1 September 2013, counselling service has been covered from the school funds. Counsellors have undergone specific training. Preschool child care institutions can apply for compensation of counselling service by the Ministry of Education and Research.

The objective of counselling is:

- to analyse the internal evaluation of an educational institution;
- to give the head of the educational institution feedback on internal evaluation;
- counsel the head of the educational institution in the field of internal evaluation.

The objective of **external evaluation of learning outcomes** is to give the school, its owner and the state feedback that is as objective and comparable as possible about the level of acquisition of learning outcomes defined in national curricula and about the effectiveness of study at school, as well as to give the state necessary information for making decisions in the field of education policy.

External valuation of learning outcomes is performed through standard-determining tests, harmonised final examinations of basic school and state examinations. The Minister of Education and Research establishes the subjects, forms and time of standard-determining tests, the conditions and procedure

²⁶[https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Quality Assurance in Early Childhood and School Education](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Quality_Assurance_in_Early_Childhood_and_School_Education)

for preparing, drawing up, carrying out and assessing and the procedure for standard-determining tests and the conditions of and procedure for analysing harmonised final examinations of basic school and state examinations.

In 2014, the **conditions for graduation from an upper secondary school** were changed. Since 2014, an upper secondary school graduate has been required to take three compulsory state examinations, in Estonian, mathematics and a foreign language, in addition to the school examination and prepare a student investigation paper or practical work.

By the Decree of the Minister of Education and Research No 238 of 3 June 2014, the concept of general education external evaluation "[General education external evaluation tasks, principles and basis for development until 2020](#)" was approved. Focus in assessing the performance of a learner and an educational institution as a learning organisation has shifted onto formative evaluation. According to the concept, evaluation of learning results shall be guided by the following principles:

- to support the development of the student, the teacher and the school;
- to collect evidence necessary for taking decisions relating to the student and the school;
- to submit proposals for decisions on education at state level and to provide schools with an example of good practice in teaching.

According to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, the Minister of Education and Research shall grant the right to conduct study on the basis of a specific curriculum group of a vocational educational institution and ensure that curriculum groups shall undergo regular accreditation, a part of which is internal evaluation in school.

Prospects for post-2015

Mapping the future developments in the field of education takes place regularly in Estonia because they are considered to be of major importance for the society. Often, such initiatives are led by third sector organizations, social partners, and engage experts from different sectors. Last such discussions were conducted in 2009 led by the Estonian Development Fund and by the Estonian Cooperation Assembly in cooperation with the Education Forum and the Ministry of Education and Research for the period of 2010-2011. On the basis of the latter process, ["The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020"](#) was developed.

Estonian Development Fund's report "IT + Education" from 2010 focused primarily on issues around ICT and how it could be better used to take advantage of more interesting and accessible learning opportunities, in order to achieve greater coherence in curricula and quality of education which would lead to greater harmonization between schools, regions, and the families. The consultation process identified key trends that may affect the education sector in the coming years as following:

- Estonia's aging teaching workforce and the low prestige of the teaching profession in society;
- Topics related to society's openness vs. closeness (a growing need for creative approaches and solutions because the uncertainty of life and work is growing, increasing importance of post-materialist values, the need of additional workforce in the form of immigrants and in this respect the possibility of rising ethnic tensions, growing opportunities exposed by internationalization such as taking into consideration international best practices);
- The role of the state in shaping educational policy: whether dominant approach will be a long-term strategy or are short-term political objectives preferred.

The document that was designed in cooperation with the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, Education Forum and the Ministry of Education and Research was entitled "Five challenges of the Estonian education". The debates for this document took place during 2010-2011 in various Estonian counties. This document lists important trends that affect education as following: aging of society, opportunities and threats related to globalization and ICT resources and networks, changes in family type (increases in the importance of single parenthood), increases in economic and educational stratification, and new opportunities for education to increase integration with other sectors (manufacturing, services, agriculture, etc.).

This latter document was the basis for developing "The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020", which serves as a basis for planning activities and budget in the upcoming years.

Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 foresees five most important topics that must be consciously managed at the national level:

CHANGE IN THE APPROACH TO LEARNING. Implementation of an approach to learning that supports each learner's individual and social development, the acquisition of learning skills, creativity and entrepreneurship at all levels and in all types of education.

There are many different measures of how to work towards this goal - the *content and volume of studies* must be concordant with the objectives and learning outcomes outlined in curricula (including key competences), in *assessment practices* the emphasis should move towards formative assessment that supports learning and the individual development of each learner, an *in-service education system for the teachers and the heads of schools* should support creating an atmosphere in which attention

would be paid to the development of each learner, to the development of their potential, and to valuing individual differences.

COMPETENT AND MOTIVATED TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP. The assessment of teachers and headmasters including their salaries must be consistent with the qualification requirements of the job and their work-related performance.

CONCORDANCE OF LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE NEEDS OF LABOUR MARKET. The aim is to create lifelong learning opportunities and career services that are diverse, flexible and of good quality, resulting in an increase in the number of people with professional or vocational qualifications in different age groups, and an increase in the overall participation rate in lifelong learning across Estonia

One of the most important developments the new lifelong learning strategy foresees is the programme which should increase the capacity of anticipating education needs at the national level. Firms in Estonia are very small, ca 94% (2013) have less than 10 employees. Thus, very often, the future outlook on the firm level is limited, because sustainability is a major challenge and consequently there is little capacity to cooperate with education institutions. Therefore cooperation on a sectorial level to assess the future skills needs is the only viable way to go. In some sectors there are good examples and experience of working with education institutions – for instance in the ICT sector, where employers are strong vocal partners. However, in many other sectors the capacity to contribute is limited. Since spring 2014 the government is allocating funds to facilitate cooperation between different ministries to strengthen the system of sector skills councils and to make high-level broad-based expert committee work more sustainable.

A DIGITAL FOCUS IN LIFELONG LEARNING. The aim is to use modern digital technology for learning and teaching effectively and efficiently. It is expected that there will be an improvement in the digital skills of the total population and the access to new generation digital infrastructure is ensured. The strategic measures include incorporating digital culture into the learning process, supporting the availability of digital learning resources in schools, assuring the access to modern digital infrastructure and creating and implementing assessment models for digital competence.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND INCREASED PARTICIPATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING. The aim is to create equal opportunities to participate in lifelong learning for every individual. Support for more active participation in lifelong learning is foreseen by creating flexible opportunities for preschool education (the goal is to raise participation in early education from 89,1% (2011) to 95% (2020), also all children should participate in preschool at least one year before starting school), making supporting services available for people with lower level of competitiveness so they could participate in learning (this includes young mothers, the elderly, those who do not speak Estonian, people without secondary education, the unemployed, the disabled, new immigrants, etc., this way they can acquire a qualification and maximize their potential in their working life as well as in their family life). Other important actions include opening up education system by recognizing competencies acquired outside education system (a strong priority here is creating second chance opportunities in adult education upper secondary schools), universal provision of free meals and free study materials for all students in basic schools; and strengthening needs-based support system for university, vocational and general upper-secondary students to attend studies

A very important area of work is the restructuring of school network by creating quality opportunities for upper-secondary education in regional centres and good quality basic education in close proximity to home for all learners. According to the strategy, as a rule, upper-secondary schools should be separated from basic schools and reside under the State's competence, also the network of vocational education institutions and upper-secondary schools is developed as a whole.

Implementation of the strategy will be coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Research but there are many stakeholders whose involvement is important for the success of the strategy (other ministries, local governments, professional associations, teachers, school leaders, learners' and parents' organisations).

To monitor the application of the strategy, a 15 member lifelong learning steering committee is formed, which will include experts from the field of education and employment²⁷. Every two years, the steering committee will conduct an overview of the implementation of the strategy and, as needed, will make proposals related to the further implementation of the strategy. In order to reach the objectives of the strategy and to implement the activities, the Ministry of Education and Research will commission an independent assessment in 2018, where it will be analysed and decided whether appropriate measures have been applied to achieve the objectives that have been agreed upon, and what should be changed or adjusted due to changing conditions.

However the implementation of the strategy cannot be considered successful if it is perceived as important only on a national level. Discussions in local contexts are vital for better understanding of what does it mean to learn and teach differently and what is the new approach to learning. Those discussions and solution-seeking need to happen on local level involving all major stakeholders such as learners, teachers, school leaders, parents, school owners, local cultural institutions, representatives of private sector. The idea is to use practitioners as so-called change agents who introduce new approach to learning for to a wider public. Also, attention will be paid to practical approaches of providing teachers with opportunities to learn how to teach differently.

²⁷ Including representatives of employers and employees.

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