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Actual situation of Adult Education in Estonia

Municipalities Support Adult Education



IO#1 of the project made by Association of Estonian Adult Educators Andras

Table of content

Brief Economics Data Analysisi about Estonia.....	2
Structure of inhabitants in Estonia.....	4
Age groups.....	6
National groups	6
Existing practice of adult education	7
Existing support to adult education	10
The information about adult education possibilities of different target groups in cities and rural areas.....	11
Support from EU funds, state, and local governments	12
Estonian SWOT on adult education.....	13

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Summary

This report on adult education situation in Estonia was produced as one of the outputs of Erasmus Plus Strategic Partnership project funded by the European Union under the Erasmus + programme. The project is entitled “Municipalities Supporting Adult Education” (MSAE) and is implemented between 2020 and 2022.

Local authorities are the closest support institution for local people, working closely with local adult education providers. This determines the special role of local governments in adult education. Aim of the project is to develop and increase the role of local governments in supporting adult education, in order to promote greater participation of adults in education.

This report provides an overview of the adult education situation in Estonia. Similar reports are prepared by all project partners, what allows to compare the situation in Estonia with situation in Lithuania, Latvia and Italy.

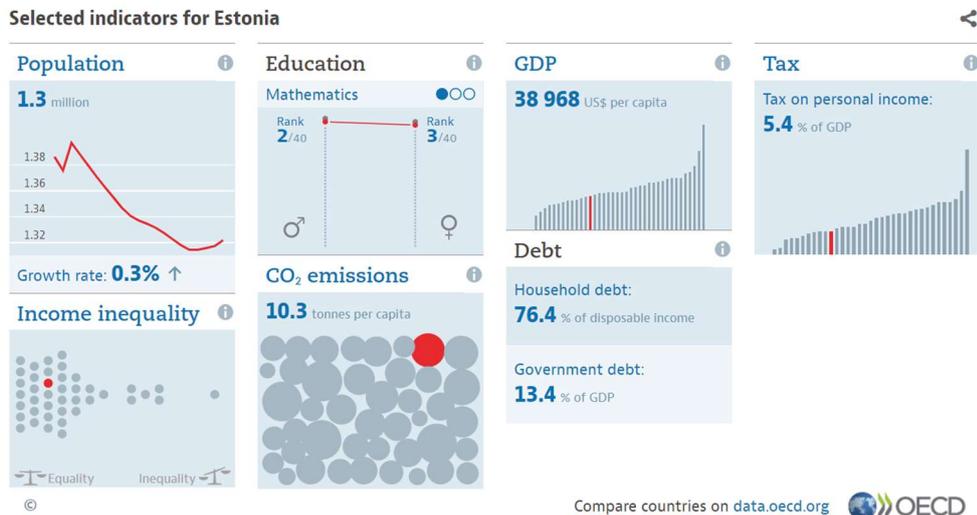
This report is presented in several chapters. The first four chapters characterizes structure of inhabitants, age groups, national groups and density of population, as it influences the education system, the education offer and demand.

The fifth, the sixth and the seventh chapter look at adult education practice, support and different opportunities to participate in adult education in Estonia. Chapter characterizes work of different adult education providers.

In last chapters you can read how is education funded and what kind of support is available for adult education in Estonia and SWOT analysis, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to adult education.

Brief Economics Data Analysisi about Estonia

Some data of the Estonian Republic.¹



Structure of inhabitants in Estonia

Estonia is a small country, the population of Estonia is 1 328 976 people (decreasing). Total area is 45,336 km² (17,504 sq mi). Population density 30 inhabitants per km² (75 inhabitants per sq mi). The capital city is Tallinn. Official language Estonian (English, Russian, Finnish and German are widely spoken as well.)

There are 79 local government units in Estonia among which there are 15 towns and 64 rural municipalities. All local authorities decide and organize independently all local issues and all local authorities have to implement same tasks and provide the same range of services to their inhabitants regardless of their size.

Local Government System in Estonia

There is a one-tier local government system in Estonia since reforming and restructuring of legal and financial basis for local self-government in 1993. All local government units – towns (*linn*) and rural municipalities (*vald*) – are equal in their legal status.

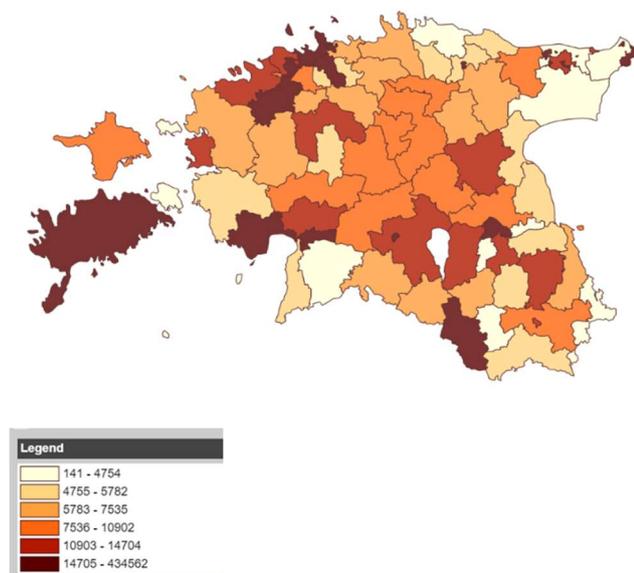
¹ <https://data.oecd.org/dashboard/EN/EST>

All local issues are resolved and regulated by local governments, which operate independently in accordance with law. Duties may be imposed on local governments only pursuant to law or by the agreement with the local government. In addition to the municipal towns, there are 37 towns (as settlement units within a municipality) that are not administrative units.

For decentralizing local power local authorities may form rural municipality or city districts with limited authority. The composition and operations of a rural municipality or city district is regulated by the statute of the local authority. Currently there are city districts in Tallinn and also in Hiiumaa (as of after the local government reform).

All local authorities are a part of a county. Local authorities can be members of a regional association of local authorities and national association municipalities (Association of Estonian Cities and Rural Municipalities).

In addition to the administrative units (town, rural municipality, county), the territory is also divided into settlement units: either villages, small towns or towns and cities without municipal status. Village is generally sparsely populated or densely populated rural area with less than 300 inhabitants. Small towns, towns and cities without municipal status are densely populated urban areas, of which small towns and towns generally have at least 300 inhabitants and cities at least 1000 inhabitants.

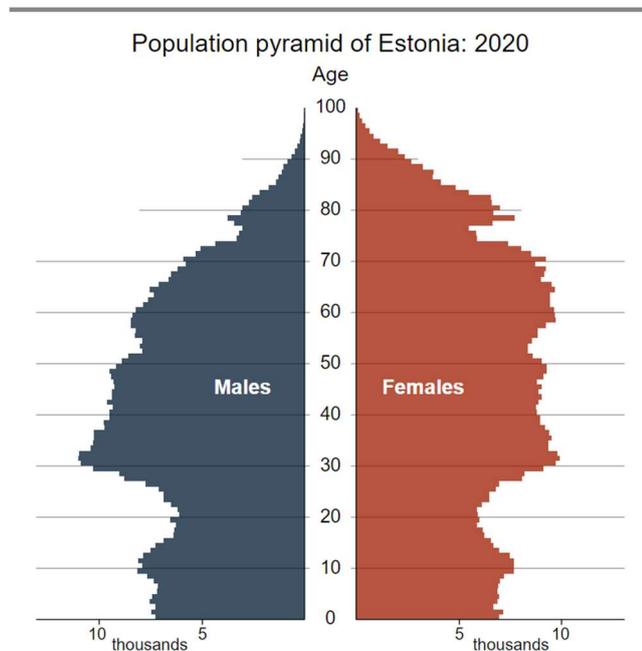


Graph 1. Population density²

² <https://estat.stat.ee/StatistikaKaart/VKR#>

Slightly more than 600 thousand people live in Tallinn and Harjumaa, approximately 96 thousand people live in Tartu, which is the second largest city in Estonia. People generally live in bigger cities.

Age groups



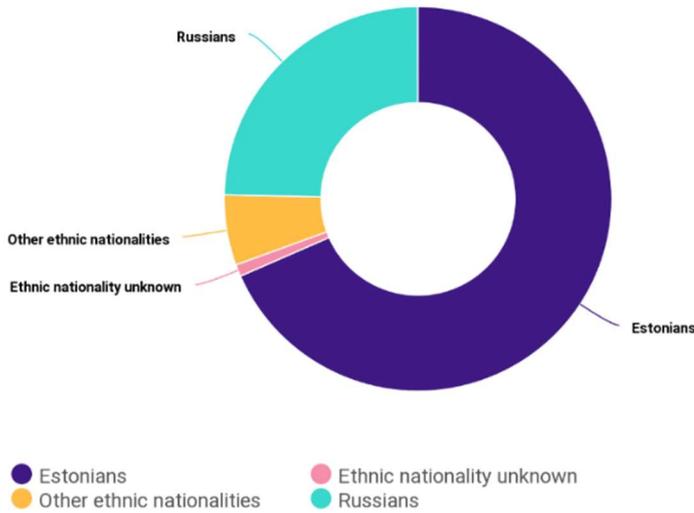
Graph 2. Population pyramid³

Estonia's population is ageing in the same way as other European countries, and this change is reflected in the total population, which means that the share of older people is increasing and the share of those who are working age is decreasing.

National groups

The major ethnic group in Estonia are Estonians, approximately 68% of the population. The second largest nation living in Estonia is the Russians, approximately 25% of the whole population. The remaining 7% of the population consists of ethnic nationalities like Ukrainians, Belarusians, Finns, Latvians and several other minorities.

³ <https://www.stat.ee/rahvastikupyramiid/>



Category	Males and females
Estonians	909552
Ethnic nationality unknown	13235
Other ethnic nationalities	78387
Russians	327802

Graph 3. Population distribution by ethnic nationalities 2020⁴

Existing practice of adult education

Adult education means organised studies pursued for the acquisition, retention or development of knowledge, skills and experience. Studies may be pursued at any stage and according to any methodology. Adult education can also replace or continue initial education acquired in general education or vocational school, or an institution of higher education.

Adult education is targeted at adult learners, studying while working, being engaged with family life or other activities. For adult learners studying is not their main activity. Adult education is divided into formal education, informal work-related training and retraining and popular adult education.

Flexible study opportunities have been created for adult learners: distance learning and evening courses, external study and part-time study, as well as participation in various courses.

⁴ <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/population/population-figure>

Adult education is also divided into: formal education, informal work-related training and retraining and popular adult education.

Flexible study opportunities have been created for adult learners: distance learning and evening courses, external study and part-time study, as well as participation in various courses.

The organisation of **formal education** is governed by the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Vocational Educational Institutions Act, Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, Universities Act and Private Schools Act. Adults have an opportunity to acquire basic education and general secondary education in the form of non-stationary studies or as an external student, and to pursue studies in any type of vocational training and at any level of higher education.

Continuing education means targeted and organised studies conducted under a curriculum outside the formal education, which comprise both continuing education with the purpose of professional development and informal education.

Continuing education is governed by the Adult Education Act⁵, which sets out terms for obtaining the right to organise continuing education and the requirements for the activities of continuing education institutions, organisation of trainings and disclosure of information. The act primarily governs the activities of the institutions that organise continuing education financed from the state or local government funds or from the European Structural Funds, and trainings to which additional requirements set out in the respective legislation apply.

The Adult Education Act also provides for the right to study leave. Study leave can be granted for the participation in both formal and continuing education. In order to participate in a training, an employer shall grant an employee or an official study leave for up to thirty calendar days in a year. During the study leave granted for pursuing formal education or continuing education with the purpose of professional development, an employer shall undertake to pay to the employee or official the average wages for 20 calendar days; with the participation in hobby education, such obligation does not apply. For the completion of formal education, at the request of an employee additional study leave of fifteen calendar days shall be granted for which the employee or official shall be paid the established minimum wage.

⁵ <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/523052019003/consolide/current>

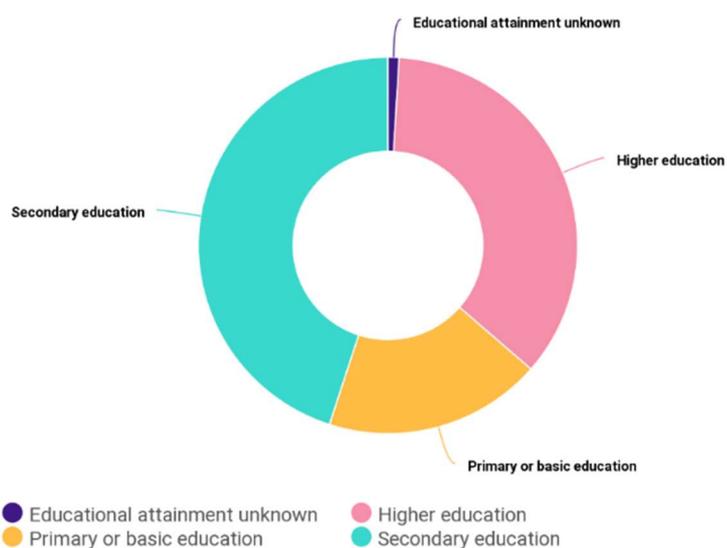
Legislative References⁶

- Adult Education Act
- Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act
- Vocational Educational Institutions Act
- Universities Act
- Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act
- Private Schools Act

Educational attainment

Population by educational attainment | 2020

Source: Statistics Estonia



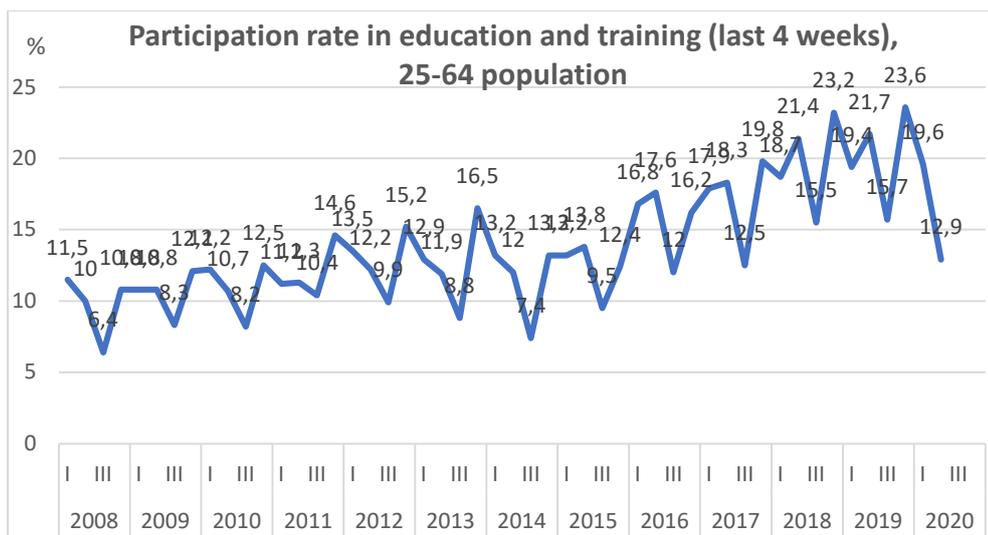
Category	Males and females
Educational attainment unknown	10483
Higher education	393796
Primary or basic education	206417
Secondary education	499578

Graph 4. Population by educational attainment 2020⁷

Participation rate in education and training has constantly increased but due to corona virus the life long learning percentage has fallen in the last year.

⁶ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-24_en

⁷ <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/population/population-figure>



Graph 5: Participation rate in education and training 2008-2020

Lifelong learning target for year 2020 was 20%.

Existing support to adult education

The Estonian government and the Ministry of Education and Research are responsible for education policy and overall strategy. The Ministry of Education and Research also has responsibilities in the areas of curriculum and funding. The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy (2012-2020)⁸ has provided the guiding principles for education policy development throughout the system. Municipalities have an obligation to ensure pre-primary and compulsory education provision for every child within their jurisdiction. They also have responsibility for monitoring attendance, hiring school leaders, establishing school supervisory bodies, and implementing county plans for educational development.

The Lifelong Learning Strategy outlined five strategic goals for the entire education system, and set out measurable targets to track progress in each area:

- 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.

⁸ <https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/strateegia2020.pdf>

- Developing competent and motivated teachers and school leadership: Including efforts to increase teachers' salaries and to make the profession more competitive. There were also measures to improve teacher and school leaders' professional development.
- Alignment of lifelong learning opportunities with the needs of the labour market: Including efforts to improve the use of labour market data to inform educational provision, improving the quality of career guidance, and promoting work-based learning in VET and higher education.
- Placing a digital focus on lifelong learning: Improving the digital skills of the population, for example, by upgrading the digital infrastructure of schools and higher education institutions and incorporating a digital culture into the learning process.
- Ensuring equal opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning: For example, through measures to increase access to ECEC and initiatives to improve the labour market participation of groups with lower competitiveness

Strategic planning for Smart and Active Estonia 2035⁹ has also involved input from a range of different stakeholders. Three expert working groups set out the overall vision and goals for the strategy. The Ministry of Education and Research established further working groups to develop more detailed development plans. These working groups included partners from local government, young people, parents, researchers, and entrepreneurs. The development plans were due to be finalised during the year 2020 for implementation in 2021-24. Key goals of the strategy include providing more flexible pathways for learners, promoting Estonian language and culture, a focus on skills development and collaborative processes in learning, and improving the quality of higher education and research.

The information about adult education possibilities of different target groups in cities and rural areas

In Estonia, there are different opportunities to participate in adult education. Several providers of learning opportunities are concentrated in county centers or larger cities, which is understandable because people nowadays increasingly live in cities or larger county centers.

⁹ <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/et/valitsuse-toetamine/strateegia-eesti-2035/materjalid>

There are 15 adult gymnasiums in Estonia where adults can continue their education.

Support from EU funds, state, and local governments

Funding for formal education by state

The acquisition of basic and general secondary education through evening courses, distance learning and external study is free for the adult learner.

In the field of vocational education, many flexible forms of vocational training and forms of study have been implemented for adult learners, with part-time study provided for the learners free of charge.

Part-time study is usually not free for students in the field of higher education. In order to be able to obtain a state-funded study place, the learner must apply for a full-time study programme. Free part-time higher education is provided in nationally prioritised fields, e.g. for teachers without a higher education.

Work-related training

Work-related training and retraining provided as courses were generally not free for learners until 2007. The state funded the training of unemployed people and certain specific groups (e.g. teachers, officials).

Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, and Ministry of Social Affairs have developed a three-pillar division of spheres of responsibilities in the state financing of professional training of adults.

Ministry of Education and Research – the target group consists of employed adults whose training is financed through education and training institutions.

Ministry of Social Affairs – unemployed people and persons seeking work, whose training is financed through the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication – the target group consists of employed adults

whose professional training is financed through companies. The ministries are trilaterally responsible for creating work-related training opportunities for the adult population with the help of financial support from the European Social Fund.

Since 2015 promoting adult learning and expanding the range of learning opportunities for adults have been funded by ESF.

In addition to direct financing, the state also supports the funding of training by employers and learners through tax incentives: work-related training financed by the employer is not viewed as a fringe benefit and income tax exemptions only apply to the expenses of private individuals.

Estonian SWOT on adult education¹⁰

Strengths:

1. Participation of adults in lifelong learning is high.
2. The award of the profession of adult educator has been implemented.
3. Adult education is diverse - there are different learning opportunities and different sources for financing adult learning in Estonia.
4. Public funding is targeted at lower competitive groups, for whom there is a reason to believe that their participation in learning is too low due to market failures.
5. Employers' participation in financing non-formal learning is high.

Weaknesses:

1. The division of responsibilities between the state, local government and the private sector is unclear.
2. There is insufficient cooperation and coherence between levels and types of education.
3. The sustainability of public funding for non-formal adult education is not guaranteed.
4. Although the participation of adults in lifelong learning has increased significantly over the last ten years, not all the target groups (eg elderly men, people with a mother tongue other than

¹⁰ https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/haridusvaldkonna_arengukava_2035_eelnou_29.10.2020_riigikokku.pdf;
https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/1.elukestva_oppe_strateegia_vahehindamise_aruanne.pdf

Estonian, people with a lower level of education, etc.) are sufficiently prepared to improve their skills.

5. Almost a third of Estonia's working-age population has no professional training, a third lacks minimal digital skills and the digital skills needed for work are insufficient, and the participation of low-skilled people in lifelong learning is low.
6. It is difficult for adult educators and schools providing adult secondary education to find people in the target group and also to motivate them to take part in learning.
7. The differences between what is offered in lifelong learning and what is needed in the labour market are too large - educational institutions and the world of work do not cooperate actively and sufficiently to develop a system of lifelong learning.
8. There is a widespread perception that learning is for young people. In addition to limited financial opportunities, self-improvement is also hampered by a lack of interest and motivation of adults.

Opportunities

1. It is important to support adult further training, retraining and career development opportunities and the entry of young people into the labour market, in particular taking into account the economic changes resulting from the coronavirus epidemic, skills needs and the digital and green revolutions.
2. Increase the responsibility and cooperation of educational institutions and stakeholders.
3. Take into account knowledge and skills acquired outside the school, e.g. through professional experience, in formal training, without relinquishing the quality of education.
4. Provide learning opportunities according to the needs of the learner, support different learners, taking into account their gender, age and specific needs.
5. Get those adults whose participation in lifelong learning is modest involved in learning activities.
6. Design learning opportunities to meet the needs of society and the labour market, and to ensure that employers continue to contribute to education and skills forecasting, and that growth areas and areas of national importance are prioritized.
7. Reduce the proportion of people without professional education or outdated skills.
8. Ensure adequate digital literacy for all age groups.

Threats

1. By transforming the Unemployment Insurance Fund into a so-called gateway to learning for the entire population, in order to ensure a workforce with the competence that meets the needs of the labor market, it can mean a conflict of interest, because the Unemployment Insurance Fund has a primary interest. Thus, the goal is sometimes at odds with the more thorough development of people's skills and knowledge, which may be necessary in a situation where a person does not have a basic or secondary education.
2. An ageing population and an increase in the number of people with outdated skills do not allow to offer flexible learning / self-improvement opportunities for all in limited conditions of resources.
3. The state is not able systematically and quickly support people of risk groups (low level of education, the elderly, special educational needs, etc.), including in the event of changes in economic sectors.
4. Formal education, training and retraining do not sufficiently meet the development needs of society and the labour market.