Adult education in Estonia - success factors and challenges

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ESTONIA (EESTI)
population: 1.3 million
45,339 km²
National language - Estonian
EU, NATO member (since 2004)
99% of public services online
Estonian population in 2023

- Estonians: 925,892 (68%)
- Russians: 306,801 (22%)
- Other nationalities: 122,413 (9%)
- Nationality unknown: 10,778 (1%)

In total: 1,365,884

Other nationalities:
- Ukrainians: 55,675
- Belarusians: 11,562
- Finns: 8,518
- Latvians: 4,094

Other...

Unemployed 6.3%, equal for men and women

Average monthly salary about 1,500 EUR (neto = received)
The strength of the tree depends on its roots.

According to the PISA 2022 survey (Programme for International Student Assessment), Estonia is consistently among the best in the world.
The goal is that 90% of people aged 20-24 in Estonia acquire secondary or vocational education.
Some facts about Estonian education:

- Education is FREE-OF-CHARGE from basic to higher education (incl. vocational education for adults).
- Teachers are highly educated. A teaching qualification requires the completion of a Master's degree.
- Digital solutions are in everyday use:
  - E-diaries for schools and kindergartens;
  - Digital learning materials and platforms;
  - Student admission systems;
  - Estonian Education Infosystem EHIS
Lifelong learning has become a lifestyle in Estonia

Estonians within the age group of 25-64 actively participate in learning at almost double the rate of the EU average (21% vs 12%, Eurostat 2022).
The adult participation rate in lifelong learning in Estonia, % (participation in formal and non-formal education and training, the population aged 25-64)

Statistics Estonia
Participation rate in education and training (previous 4 weeks), 2022
% of the population aged 25-64
Education Strategy 2021-2035

GENERAL OBJECTIVE:
To equip the population of Estonia with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare people to fulfil their potential in personal, occupational and social life and contribute to promoting the quality of life in Estonia as well as global sustainable development.

INDICATORS:

- Baseline level 2019 – 9,8%; target level 2035 – 7,5%
- Baseline level 2019 – 73%; target level 2035 – 80%

- Baseline level 2019 – 20%; target level 2035 – 25%
- Baseline level 2019: reading 13,9%; math 15,5%; science 12,2%; target level 2035: reading 20%; math 25%; science 20%

- 18 to 24-year-olds with low educational attainment not in education or training
- Adults with professional qualification
- Adults in lifelong learning
- Top performing students in the PISA test

Learning opportunities and the organisation of education
Teachers, learning environments and approaches to learning
Education, society and the labour market
Adult education

... is divided:

• formal education,
• nonformal work-related training and retraining and popular adult education.

Coordination of Adult Education Policy

National Council for Adult Education participates in forming adult education policy, monitors the implementation and outcomes of the policy and gives counsel on planning, funding and organization of adult education in Estonia.

Members include: ministries, strategic partners - associations of employers and training institutions.

Local governments are not obliged to deal with adult education; they are expected to share information about learning opportunities.
Study opportunities for adults in formal education

Basic and secondary level education is provided by adult secondary schools (8), vocational education institutions (7), general upper secondary schools (20).
• E-learning adds to flexibility
• Possibility to study only some subjects
• Curricula similar to that of young students

Vocational education institutions (31 + 5)
• Work-based apprenticeship learning
• Flexible study opportunities
• Ca 35% of all students are adults older than 25 years

New trend: integration of adult gymnasiums with vocational schools (or state gymnasiums) - the state takes responsibility.

Higher education institutions (universities 6+1; other HEIs 8+5)
• Flexible part-time studies possible,
• Proportion of adult students older that 30 years has risen.

Studies in state funded institutions are free of tuition for adults (in higher education this applies for full-time studies).
In addition to formal education, institutions of vocational education and higher education + other continuing education (training) institutions are providing increasingly more continuing education courses and retraining courses.

These courses allow adults to acquire and improve their professional, occupational and speciality knowledge, skills and experience as well as to retrain themselves. Some training is linked to people’s interests and hobbies.

On the 1st of March 2024 1185 training institutions had been registered.

The largest are (number of adult learners, 2022):

- University of Tartu - 37345
- Tallinn University of Technology - 18184
- Tallinn University - 11459
- Education and Youth Board – 10520
- Juunika Koolitus – a private company
There are about 400 000 learners taking part in trainings (courses) every year. There are officially provided about 85 000 different courses per year.

Most popular fields (based on the number of participants):
• Teachers` trainings incl. pre-school teachers (conditionally mandatory) – 28 800;
• Occupational health and safety (mandatory!) – 28 000;
• Management and administration – 25 000;
• Personal skills and development – 25 000;
• Computer use – 18 500.
Types of institutions offering non-formal studies

- Adult education secondary schools
- Vocational education institutions
- Universities and professional higher education institutions
- Private and non-profit training institutions
- State and local government continuing education institutions

State funding allocated for prioritized target groups (supported by European Social Fund), employers and learners contribute.
Financing of training courses:

• Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund is a major contributor to upskilling adults skills by financing courses for the unemployed, but working people also have the opportunity to acquire new skills with their support.

• The state finances teachers’ training (also with the support of the European Union Social Fund).

• Free trainings for working people (with the support of the Social Fund of the European Union). The main target group is people with a low level of education and no professional education or people whose professional skills are outdated.

• Employers are financing.

• People pay themselves.
Legislation:

The Ministry of Education and Research develops draft legislation for the implementation and development of the educational, research, youth, language and archive policies.

The Adult Education Act is the central act of the adult education system. It stipulates the right of every person to constantly develop their knowledge and skills, the obligations of the state and local governments in the coordination of adult training, and the obligation of employers to grant study leave to learners engaged in distance learning, evening courses, external study or part-time study.
Non-formal education for adults

Since 2015 we have the renewed Adult Education Act and Continuing education standard:

- In order to receive public funding registration in Estonian education information system is required;
- Requirements for curricula;
- Requirements for the documents certifying the passing of and participation in continuing education;
- Curriculum should be based on the learning outcomes and achievement of the learning outcomes to be assessed.
Prioritized target groups

- Participation rate in education and training is not similarly high for different groups of adults.
- Adults with higher levels of education and younger age-groups are much more active.

Target groups in Estonia:
- Adults with lower levels of education, early school leavers;
- Adults without professional qualification;
- Adults whose professional skills need to be updated;
- Adults whose digital skills need to be updated.
Support systems

- Recognition of prior learning and work experience.
- Career counselling offered by Unemployment Office for unemployed and employed adults.
- Study leave - up to 30 calendar days per year; in order to complete one’s formal education, one can apply for a supplemental study leave (15 days):
  - when participating in work-related training or formal education, the student will also be paid the average wage for 20 days;
  - during supplemental study leave, the student will be paid the minimum wage.
- Tax incentive:
  ✓ the expenditures made by private persons are not subject to income tax, if the curricula is based on occupational standard and for Estonian language class.
OSKA

Coordination system for monitoring and forecasting the labour market needs, based on the existing occupational qualifications system.

Answers to the following questions:
- How many people and which skills are needed in our labour market today and tomorrow?
- Where and how to acquire those skills?
- What should be changed in today’s educational system and in lifelong learning system to meet the future needs?

The results of analysis are used as input to the career counselling, curriculum development of educational institutions (incl. in adult education) and for financing.
Estonian education information system EEIS is a state database that brings together all the information related to education in Estonia.

Continuing education institutions have to be registered there (not individual learners).

They have to submit overview of their activities. The information includes number of learners, courses and length of courses.

INNOVATIONS – DEVELOPMENTS:
  - e-certificates for continuing education (at the end of the courses, when the learning outcomes have been acquired);
  - micro-credentials.
Quality evaluation/quality label framework in development for continuous education institutions offering non-formal training.

Curriculum group-based quality assessment system - Estonian Quality Agency for Education evaluates the quality of adult training institutions (in cooperation with Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund)

There are four assessment areas: 1) study programme and study programme development 2) learning and teaching 3) teaching staff 4) resources.

Adult educators` profession:
- Development of skilled adult education workforce.
- Professional qualification standard, over 400 adult educators awarded professional qualification.
- High professional esteem among adult educators.
- Active community of adult educators.
Building blocks for success - raising awareness

National awareness raising campaign since 2017:

- features popular singer who returned to studies as an adult
- campaign covers television, radio, online media, posters on street etc.

Activities on local, regional and national level - Adult Learners Week since 1998.

- Within the framework of ALW, outstanding people and organisations are recognized: Adult learner of the year, educator of the year, education-friendly organisation and learning promotion deed are a few of the award titles given.
A highlight of the opening event is the recognition of the Learner and Educator of the Year, and also the Education Friendly Organisation, Learning Promotion Deed of the Year, Adult Educator of the Year.
Empowerment of cooperation networks:
- Adult education networks + county coordinators in each 15 counties: representatives of adult education institutions, local municipalities, Unemployment Insurance Fund, other organisations;
- Adult educators’ networks in 10 counties;
- Librarians and museum staff;
- In the near future: activities for employers.

EPALE - Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe

FORMS:
- conferences
- seminars
- workshops
- discussions
Thank you!

Photos used in the presentation (except slide 7): Ena Drenkhan