

COUNTRY SYSTEM MAPPING

Country Report: Estonia

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) is an independent and self-governing organisation. The Agency is co-funded by the ministries of education in its member countries and by the European Commission via an operating grant within the European Union (EU) education programme.



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.

The views expressed by any individual in this document do not necessarily represent the official views of the Agency, its member countries or the European Commission.

© European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2023

This publication is an open-access resource. This means you are free to access, use and disseminate it with appropriate credit to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Please refer to the Agency's Open Access Policy for more information: www.european-agency.org/open-access-policy.

You may cite this publication as follows: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2023. *Country System Mapping Country Report: Estonia*. Odense, Denmark

The information in this document was current in May 2023.

This country report has been drafted by Gareth Hughes for the Agency in co-operation with the Estonia Team:

Representative Board member: Piret Liba

National Co-ordinator: Gerttu Aavik

Country Analyst: Tiina Kivirand



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

You may not modify or translate this publication without the Agency's approval.

With a view to greater accessibility, this report is available in accessible electronic format on the Agency's website: www.european-agency.org

Secretariat

Østre Stationsvej 33

DK-5000 Odense C Denmark

Tel.: +45 64 41 00 20

secretariat@european-agency.org

Brussels Office

Rue Montoyer 21

BE-1000 Brussels Belgium

Tel.: +32 2 213 62 80

brussels.office@european-agency.org



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
SECTION 1. BACKGROUND TO THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM	10
SECTION 2. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM	16
SECTION 3. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK	27
SECTION 4. SYSTEM GOVERNANCE	40
SECTION 5. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY	47
SECTION 6. STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION, CO-OPERATION AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION	56



INTRODUCTION

The goal of the Country System Mapping (CSM) activity is to identify, map and analyse the key features that impact the effective implementation of inclusive education policy in practice in all Agency member countries' education systems. In a departure from previous thematic activities undertaken by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency), CSM considers the **whole** education system from the perspective of implementing policy for inclusive education in practice. However, within this system-wide view, there is a focus on the specific priorities Representative Board members (RBs) have already identified in relation to monitoring and evaluation, cross-sector working and quality assurance.

The main output from the CSM work is a systematic mapping of information on each country's education system.

Information from the individual CSM Country Reports has been analysed in two ways:

- **Thematic Analysis** to highlight issues (challenges and opportunities) emerging from the reports to use as the starting point for the Agency's Thematic Country Cluster Activities (TCCA).

Challenges for inclusion are defined as things the country needs to work on to reach an inclusive education system. Strengths for inclusion are things that encourage and reinforce inclusive practice in the country and could potentially be shown as an example to other countries.

- **Mapping** to inform TCCA groupings, based on the system structures and processes countries have (or do not have) in common.

The agreed goal for the mapping element of the CSM analysis work was to highlight parameters, or comparative factors, that indicate which country systems are structured and/or working in different – or similar – ways.

The information from the CSM work will be used within the remainder of the [Multi-Annual Work Programme 2021–2027](#) (MAWP). As of autumn 2024, country cluster activities will be organised which are closely aligned to individual country approaches to key issues for inclusive education, as well as system structures and processes countries have in common.



Work within a shared vision for inclusive education systems

All Agency work is aligned with the [position on inclusive education systems](#). This agreed position states that the ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that:

All learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers ([European Agency, 2022, p. 1](#))¹.

Agency work focuses on supporting the development of inclusive education systems in member countries to ensure every learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. This aim is directed at all learners. However, all aspects of Agency work clearly recognise that some groups of learners face obstacles and barriers that mean they should be considered **learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education in mainstream schools in their local community, alongside their friends and peers**.

UNESCO identifies the possible obstacles and barriers to education learners may face as arising from:

... gender, remoteness, wealth, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, incarceration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion and other beliefs and attitudes ([UNESCO, 2020, p. 4](#))².

Many learners may face a combination of these factors and the intersectional (inter-connected) nature of learners' needs must be acknowledged. Every learner has their own unique experiences of discrimination and/or barriers to learning. Everything and anything that can marginalise learners and increase their chances of exclusion from mainstream inclusive education must be understood and recognised.

All Agency member countries are committed to working towards ensuring more inclusive education systems. They do so in different ways, depending on their past and current contexts and histories. Inclusive education systems are a vital component within the wider aspiration of more socially inclusive societies that all countries align themselves with, both ethically and politically. However, all Agency work clearly recognises that countries have differences in their ways of thinking about, identifying and making provision for different groups of learners who may be considered vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

All countries have undergone key conceptual changes in their thinking and policy priorities for developments as they move towards inclusive education as an approach that ensures high-quality education for all learners. Across countries, the first shift was made from the concept of special educational needs to special needs education. This shift represented a focus away from the learner (identified as having special educational needs) towards a focus on the provision they receive (special needs education for learners who experience difficulties at school). The term 'special needs education' has also widened the focus

¹ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022. *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems*. Odense, Denmark

² UNESCO, 2020. *Global Education Monitoring Report: Inclusion and education: all means all*. Paris: UNESCO



beyond learners with disabilities to include learners who appeared to be failing in school for a wide variety of reasons.

It is worth emphasising here that there have never been agreed definitions of the concepts of special educational needs or special needs education that can be consistently used across countries. The groups of learners considered as having special educational needs which require additional provision largely differ across countries.

The most recent shifts emphasise a move away from a concern with types of special needs or the categories a learner may or may not fall into, towards thinking of inclusion and inclusive education as an approach for all learners. They emphasise the barriers experienced by learners and focus overall on learners who may be vulnerable to exclusion from educational opportunities for different reasons.

Agency work focuses on supporting the development of inclusive education systems in its member countries to ensure every learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. This aim is directed at all learners, while recognising the need to specifically address learners who may be vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

Overview of the Country System Mapping

The information collected in the CSM activity aims to provide evidence of and reflection on **where countries currently are** in their inclusive thinking, policy and provision for all learners, but in particular for those learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

CSM work focuses on the **whole** education system and how certain structures, mechanisms and processes may impact on the implementation of policy for inclusive education in practice. It aims to get insights into how the needs of all learners – including individuals or groups of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education – are being considered. Many questions refer to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education. Countries have opportunities to clarify what 'learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education' means for them and their systems.

However, it is acknowledged that it may not be possible for countries to provide information covering all learners and all learner groups.

The questions specifically focus on four priorities RBs have identified for wider future Agency work in relation to:

- Monitoring and evaluation
- Cross-sector working
- Quality assurance
- Effective policy implementation.

There are six main sections:

Section 1. Background to the inclusive education system

Section 2. Overview of the education system

Section 3. Legislative and policy framework



Section 4. System governance

Section 5. Quality assurance and accountability

Section 6. Stakeholder collaboration, co-operation and effective communication

In each of these sections, relevant information was collected covering International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 02 (pre-primary education) to 3 (upper-secondary education).

Each section has two subsections which require different types of country information, as outlined below.

All questions were rephrased into statements for the purpose of this report.

System description

Sections 1 to 6 include specific questions that aim to provide a factual description of key aspects of the legislation and policy framework for inclusive education in the country. The system information aims to accurately describe the relevant policy frameworks in countries.

Different types of questions are used to collect information that describes important system features – structures, mechanisms and processes – relating to governance, monitoring, quality assurance and collaboration. The descriptive information includes sources of original material and, where possible, is supported with quotes and citations from relevant policy documents and published work.

The descriptive information will be analysed to highlight parameters, or comparative factors, that indicate how countries are structured and/or working. This mapping will be used to inform country cluster groupings based on system structures and processes that countries have in common.

The descriptive information will also be used to prepare thematic cluster activities with Agency member countries. These activities will elaborate and collect even more detailed country information for the different priority areas from 2023 onwards.

Evaluative commentary

An important element of the questions is the evaluative, qualified and evidenced-based reflection on the factual information provided in sections 1 to 6.

The evaluative commentaries aim to provide a qualified reflection on the implementation of the legislation and policy framework for inclusive education in practice. They provide observations on and interpretations of the system factors that impact positively or negatively on inclusive education.

The evaluative commentaries reflect on **where and why the practice of inclusive education differs from or actively supports the stated policy intentions and goals** in the system description.



For the evaluative commentaries linked to each section, the following general questions are posed:

- What have been the perceived main challenges (barriers and hindrances) for inclusive education? Why do they exist and what are the consequences?
- What have been the perceived opportunities (support and ways forward) for inclusive education? What areas for development are identified and how can they be successfully implemented?

In addition, specific topic-related questions are also suggested.

The analysis of the evaluative commentary information will take a grounded approach. It will aim to identify issues that emerge as barriers to or supporting factors for meeting the needs of all learners in inclusive systems.

This analysis will be used to inform future Agency activities with member countries regarding country-specific and common system challenges and opportunities.



SECTION 1. BACKGROUND TO THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM

This section provides key background information in relation to inclusive education in the country.

1.1 Overview of the historical development of inclusive education

In Estonia, the principle of inclusive education was stipulated in the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act for the first time in 2010. The law stipulated that the organisation of the studies of a learner with special educational needs is based on the principles of inclusive education, according to which learners with special educational needs usually study in an mainstream class of their school of residence.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Research commissioned the [‘Inclusive education of SEN learners and the effectiveness of related support measures’](#) study to find out how the principles of inclusive education have been implemented in Estonia, what are today’s strengths and weaknesses, and how to move towards a more inclusive Estonia. The aim of the study was to find out how the current state education policy and funding system support the educational and social inclusion and the achievement of learning outcomes of learners with special educational needs.

The study showed that the implementation of inclusive education is hindered by attitudes as well as knowledge and resources for providing support services. Both the results of the study and the input from stakeholders indicated that categorisation based on medical diagnoses and the division of special classes do not support the principles of inclusive education, that support services are not always available to those in need, and that public funding does not support flexible learning arrangements. Based on the results of the study, the main recommendations for promoting inclusion were made.

Based on the study recommendations, a draft amendment to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act was developed in 2017. The changes in the study organisation of learners with special educational needs created greater opportunities for schools and school’s owners to organise learning based on the individual needs of learners and to implement support systems. The main changes that came into force in 2018 were:

- state budget education support was significantly increased;
- the rigid diagnosis-based classification of special classes and occupancy limits were abolished;
- the procedure and content of making recommendations for organising learning and implementing support services were re-organised;
- the role of state supervision was increased to better monitor the educational organisation of children in need of support;
- additional opportunities were created to value the work of support specialists (e.g. beginner’s allowance).



Currently, a repeat study of inclusive education is being prepared. The study's recommendations may provide input for new amendments to the law.

1.2 Legislation and policy definitions linked to key concepts within inclusive education systems

Inclusive education

§ 6. of the Basic School and Upper Secondary School: general education of good quality adheres to the principles of inclusive education and is equally available to all persons regardless of their social and economic background, nationality, gender, place of residence or special educational needs ([Basic Schools and Upper secondary Schools Act](#)).

Source: *European Agency*, [Country information](#)

European Agency, Legislative Definitions

1.1.1 According to the constitution of the Republic of Estonia, everyone has the right to education. According to the [constitution](#), parents shall have the final decision in the choice of education for their children.

1.1.2 According to the Basic Schools and Upper secondary Schools Act, Estonia has an inclusive education policy and every child has the right to attend a school in their residential area or study in a mainstream school with an adapted curriculum (national curriculum for basic schools, simplified national curriculum for basic schools) and to receive different kinds of support.

European Agency, CPRA

1.1.3 Upon organisation of the studies, the school relies on the principles of inclusive education. Depending on the individual needs of the learner, studies corresponding to the learner's abilities and the required support in co-operation between the teachers, support specialists, assistant teachers and other specialists are ensured for the learner.

Special needs education

In order to support learner development at school, teachers observe the development and coping of learners and, where necessary, adjust studies according to the individual needs and abilities of learners. Where it becomes evident that a learner needs support, a parent is notified thereof and the school arranges a pedagogical-psychological evaluation of the learner. Where necessary, co-operation with the specialists of other fields is pursued and additional surveys are recommended.

The school provides a learner who has difficulties in performing the duty to attend school or lags behind in achieving the study outcomes with general support, which involves individual additional instruction by a teacher, the availability of the services of the support specialists and, where necessary, the organisation of study assistance lessons individually or in a group. Where necessary, at least the services of a special education teacher, a speech therapist, a psychologist and a social educator are ensured. Where the general



support provided by the school does not produce the desired results for development of the learner, enhanced support or special support may be applied upon the recommendation of an external advisory team ([Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#)).

Learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

No definition is provided. The Equal Treatment Act ensures the protection of persons against discrimination on grounds of nationality (ethnic origin), race, colour, religion or other beliefs, age, disability or sexual orientation.

The [Education Strategy 2021–2035](#) refers to a bottleneck that the choice of educational path can be influenced by the learner’s place of residence, gender, origin and numerous other factors that hamper social mobility and exacerbate educational and socio-economic inequalities, resulting in segregation both in the labour market and in society at large.

One of the sub-objectives of Welfare Development Plan 2016–2023 is that efficient legal protection and high-quality personal assistance have improved people’s opportunities to cope independently, live in a community, and participate in society. It is emphasised that in ensuring the protection of fundamental rights, it is important to guarantee efficient protection against discrimination due to nationality (ethnic origin), race, skin colour, religion or beliefs, age, disability, or sexual orientation. Ensuring fundamental rights requires enhancing legislative protection, limiting the spread of negative prejudices and stereotypes, shaping more tolerant attitudes in society, as well as raising the awareness of relevant target groups about the principle of equal treatment and its integration in various other social sectors. Special attention is paid to ensuring accessibility and promoting a wider deployment of universal design.

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

At the moment, new Welfare Development Plan for 2023–2030 is in the preparation process.

Learners with special educational needs

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act § 46 (6), learners with special educational needs (SEN) are learners who, upon the recommendation of an external multi-disciplinary advisory team, receive enhanced support or special support ([GEM](#), p. 21).

Sources: [Basic Schools and Upper secondary Schools Act](#); *CPRA*, pp. 27–28)

European Agency, Legislative Definitions

People with special needs have the right to inclusive education and the state must guarantee that right (OoP, pp. 1–2).

European Agency, CPRA

The Estonian parliament ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012. Prior to ratification of the CRPD, Estonia reviewed its legislation and determined it to be in conformity with the requirements of the Convention.



1.3 Individuals or groups of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education focused on in the report

According to the [Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#), the school provides a learner who has difficulties in performing the duty to attend school or lags behind in achieving the study outcomes with general support, which involves individual additional instruction by a teacher, the availability of the services of the support specialists and, where necessary, the organisation of study assistance lessons individually or in a group. Where necessary, at least the services of a special education teacher, a speech therapist, a psychologist and a social educator are ensured. Where the general support provided by the school does not produce the desired results for development of the learner, enhanced support or special support may be applied upon the recommendation of an external advisory team. In such case, the learner is considered a learner with special educational needs.

1.4 Development of thinking around learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

The amendment to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, which entered into force in 2018, abandoned the diagnosis-based approach. A similar change is also being planned in pre-primary education. The new approach is based on the understanding that each learner may need support for a shorter or longer period of time at some point during their studies. The need for support is not defined on the basis of a certain characteristic, but on the basis of the learner's actual needs, no matter from what the need arises. Supporting each learner's learning requires identifying the learner's closest development zone and adapting learning to each learner's individual needs and abilities.

1.5 Future education system developments that may impact positively or negatively on inclusive education

A law on pre-primary education is being drafted. The draft plans to harmonise the principles and organisation of support with the regulation of the Basic and Upper Secondary Schools Act. This means that the organisation of providing support will become similar regardless of the level of education and will be based primarily on the individual needs of the learner, and not on the diagnosis or disability. The proposed change ensures greater coherence between pre-primary and primary education than before.

In co-operation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, a reform of support systems for children with special needs has been launched with the aim of eliminating duplication and fragmentation of services between different areas.



Evaluative commentary

This section provides a qualified, evidenced-based reflection on the **challenges, opportunities and consequences** of developments towards inclusive education. It specifically considers political decisions that have impacted (positively or negatively) upon the vision for and implementation of inclusive education in the country. It also considers how changes in thinking around learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education have impacted upon policy and practice.

In terms of educational policy, inclusive education has been a leading principle since 2010 in general education schools. On the one hand, the most important positive impact has been the fact that awareness of the principle of inclusive education and SEN learners' basic rights to study in their residential school with their peers increased. On the other hand, local governments and schools started to prioritise providing high-quality education for all learners, and state financial allocation to local governments in order to support SEN learners has increased significantly since 2018.

However, various studies conducted in Estonia show that the meaning of inclusive education is understood differently. In the school context, inclusion has been understood as learning in a regular class with peers, as well as learning in a special class in a mainstream school. Thus, with regard to the concept of inclusive education and its content, the focus is on high-quality educational opportunities, but different interpretations have remained for practical purposes. It may be explained by the fact that legislation provides different implementation options for schools in organising studies for learners with SEN, including composing special classes or groups according to learners' abilities or special needs (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act 2018). According to the Estonian Information System of Education Statistics, the number of learners with SEN in mainstream schools has increased since the law enacted the principle of inclusive education in 2010. However, with that, the number of learners enrolled in special classes in mainstream schools has also increased. Statistics show that the share of learners with officially defined SEN in special schools has decreased from 2.72 % to 2.17% in 2010–2020, while the share of learners with SEN in special classes of mainstream schools has increased from 0.99 % to 2.10% (Estonian Education Information, 2020). However, 'Smart and Active people 2021 results report' (in Estonian) indicates that the proportion of learners enrolled in mainstream schools and classes with enhanced and special support has increased in the last three years. In order to continue this trend, measures should be implemented at the national level.

Thus, the principle that learners with SEN should study in schools of their residence has been widely accepted in Estonia, but opportunities for organisation of studies for officially defined SEN learners is rather seen in small groups or in special classes most of the teaching time. The organisation of learning in a special class or a special school is often recommended by the external multi-disciplinary advisory teams, and with the consent of the parent, schools are obliged to implement it. Therefore, officially defined SEN learners do not have sufficient access to inclusive educational arrangements.

The main challenges in the national inclusive education policy are clarifying the meaning of inclusive education among different stakeholders, ensuring compliance with the inclusive education policy at all levels of education (pre-primary, general and vocational



education) and bringing the legislation into line with the principles of inclusive education in a meaningful way.



SECTION 2. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

This section provides information on the structures and features of the whole education system that influence the development and implementation of inclusive education in the country.

2.1 Overview of the education system

According to the constitution of the Republic of Estonia, everyone has the right to education (CPRA). Education for school-age children is compulsory and is free of charge in general schools established by the national government and by local authorities. In order to make education accessible, the national government and local authorities maintain a requisite number of educational institutions. Other educational institutions, including private schools, may also be established and maintained. Parents have the deciding say in the choice of education for their children ([Constitution of the Republic of Estonia](#)).

General education is divided to pre-primary education (ISCED level 0), basic education (ISCED levels 1–2) and upper secondary education (ISCED level 3).

In 2021/2022, there were 597 pre-primary institutions, of which 538 were municipal (90%) and 59 were private pre-primary institutions (10%).

There were 517 general education schools in Estonia in the 2021/2022 academic year: 48 primary schools (grades 1–3), 301 basic schools (grades 1–9), 158 upper secondary schools (grades 1–12 or grades 10–12) and 10 upper secondary schools for adult learners (non-stationary studies). There were 58 private schools (11%), 424 municipal schools (82%) and 35 state schools (7%).

Pre-primary education (ISCED level 0) is delivered to children between the ages of 18 months to 7 years. Municipalities are obliged to guarantee a place in a pre-primary institution of the child's residence for all children between 1.5 and 7 years of age. A pre-primary institution is an educational institution providing care and pre-primary education for pre-primary children. The organisation of learning and teaching in the pre-primary institution is based on the national curriculum for pre-primary child care institutions. A municipality may, with the parent's consent, substitute the place of a child from 18 months to 3 years of age in a pre-primary institution with child care provision. According to the law, the municipality has the right to ask an attendance fee of the child care institution from the parents, but not more than 20% of the national minimum wage rate established by the Government of the Republic. There is no compulsory early childhood education in Estonia (Pre-primary [Child Care Institutions Act](#)).

The obligation to attend school applies to children who have attained 7 years of age by 1 October of the current year. Basic education (ISCED levels 1 and 2) is the minimum compulsory general education, which is acquired in primary schools (grades 1 to 6) or in basic school (grades 1 to 9) and which gives the right to continue studies at upper secondary education level. Basic education is made available through two national curricula: national curriculum of basic school and simplified curriculum for basic school. Successful completion of the curriculum and passing final examinations is the condition



for acquiring basic education. Local governments are obliged to provide the opportunity to perform the duty to attend school and acquire basic education in compliance with the national curriculum for all children living in the territory of their municipality.

The obligation to attend schools lasts until basic education is acquired or until a learner attains 17 years of age. The Estonian education system is decentralised (Eurydice).

Secondary education (ISCED level 3) is based on basic education and is divided into general secondary education, which is acquired in upper secondary schools, and vocational upper secondary education, which is acquired in vocational schools. The length of general upper secondary education is three years (grades 10–12). To graduate from upper secondary school, learners must pass state examinations, a school examination and a learner investigation paper or practical work (Eurydice).

According to the Basic Schools and Upper secondary Schools Act, Estonia has an inclusive education policy and every learner has the right to attend a school in their residential area or study in a mainstream school with an adapted curriculum (national curriculum for basic schools, simplified national curriculum for basic schools) and to receive different kinds of support (CPRA).

At state level, the Estonian Education Strategy 2021-35 guides the long-term developments. The national standards (the national curriculum for pre-primary child care institutions, the national curriculum for basic schools, the national curriculum for upper secondary schools, the national curricula for vocational studies, the standard of higher education and the standard of vocational education) guarantee the quality provision of education; laws and regulations establish the principles of education funding, state supervision and quality assessment (Eurydice).

The Ministry of Education and Research ensures compliance with the national standard of education through supervision and the availability of high-quality education in the whole territory of the state, and co-ordinates and supervises local governments and other ministries of the Republic in the organisation of education (Republic of Estonia Education Act; CPRA).

One of the Estonian education system's main features is its decentralised governance and high degree of autonomy of local authorities (school owners): the state sets national standards and establishes principles of education funding, supervision and quality assessment. Within these guidelines, local authorities and schools have a high level of autonomy for resource allocation and curriculum ([OECD, 2016 – PISA 2015 Results](#)).

Local governments maintain pre-primary child care institutions, basic schools, the majority of upper secondary schools, and some of the VET schools (Eurydice). When managing a basic school, the owner of the school ensures the existence of qualified teachers required for the implementation of the national curriculum for basic schools, the existence of a learning and teaching environment that complies with the security, health protection and curriculum requirements, and the opportunities for supporting the development of learners.

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, learners, teaching staff, curricula, rights to conduct study and



documents certifying acquisition of education. In addition, the visual educational statistics database [Haridussilm](#) allows the comparison of schools based on a series of indicators.

2.2 Specific features that are present within the education system

Early tracking of learners into a particular educational pathway (i.e. streaming learners by abilities into different types of provision or school; this includes placing children into separate schools)

Not present. Generally, there are no restrictions to move between levels and types of education. However, Estonia has a separate national curriculum for learners with intellectual disabilities.

'Double-shift' patterns to the school day (i.e. learners attend for either a morning or afternoon session)

Health protection requirements for daily schedules and organisation of studies allow to organise the school's educational activities in two shifts, if the school does not have enough learner places in one shift. The daily schedule of a school is established by the head of the school. 'In most schools, children attend school in one shift; below 1% of schools have organised studies in two shifts' (Eurydice).

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Grade retention (i.e. holding learners back to repeat school years, instead of providing flexible support that enables learners to progress with their peers)

Basic school has three stages:

- stage 1 – grades 1–3;
- stage 2 – grades 4–6;
- stage 3 – grades 7–9.

Usually children of the same age go to the same class. However, due to the flexible organisation of studies – children younger than the age of compulsory school attendance may commence school studies; it is possible to postpone the commencement of performance of the duty to attend school; it is possible, based on an individual curriculum compiled for a learner, to either prolong or shorten the time for completing a grade, or on the basis of a decision of the teachers' council, learners may be required to repeat a grade), the age difference of learners in one class may be one to three years (Eurydice).

The term 'grade retention' has mostly been used to describe the repeating of a school year. Although this is not very common (due to the flexible organisation of studies as described above), the law in Estonia still allows learners to repeat a class course. According to the national curricula, by a reasoned decision of the teachers' council, a learner may exceptionally repeat a class if they have an annual grade of 'incomplete' or 'weak' in three or more subjects, additional study has not yielded results and it is not expedient to implement an individual curriculum.



The teachers' council involves the learner or their legal representative in making the decision and hears their opinion. The decision of the teachers' council must set out the considerations on the basis of which it is considered expedient to allow the learner to repeat the class course (Ministry of Education and Research of Estonia).

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Multiple languages of instruction

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, in municipal basic schools (grades 1–9) the language of instruction is Estonian. On the basis of a decision of the council of the rural municipality or city government relying on a proposal of the board of trustees of the school, the language of instruction may be any language. The Act defines the language of instruction to be the language in which more than 60% of studies are pursued.

In upper secondary schools, the language of instruction is Estonian. The permission to pursue studies in another language or bilingual studies is granted by the Government of the Republic on the basis of an application of a rural municipality or city government ([Basic Schools and Upper secondary Schools Act](#)).

In 81% of general education schools the language of instruction is Estonian, in 13% it is Russian, in 5% it is both Estonian and Russian, and the language of instruction in the rest (1%) is English or Finnish.

Specific policies on access to compulsory education in local schools (i.e. school selection policies)

It is the responsibility of the local government to provide a person subject to the duty to attend school with the opportunity to acquire basic education. For this purpose, local municipality establishes the conditions of and procedure for determination of the municipal school of residence. Material circumstances to be taken into account upon determining the school of residence include the proximity of the place of residence of a learner to the school, the enrolment of other children of the same family in the same school and, where possible, the requests of the parents.

8.1.6 A basic school is required to admit all persons subject to the duty to attend school who have expressed such desire and for whom the school is the school of residence. Parents are free to choose a school for a person subject to the duty to attend school, if the desired school has vacant learner places (Basic Schools and Upper secondary Schools Act).

Source: *European Agency, CPRA*

Other(s)

1.2.1 Estonia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in April 2012 (OoP p. 1).

Source: *European Agency, CPRA*



2.3 Public and private authorities responsible for different types of provision

The state and local governments shall ensure that everyone in Estonia has the opportunity to fulfil the obligation to attend school and the opportunity to engage in lifelong learning, under the conditions and pursuant to the procedure prescribed by legislation (Republic of Estonia Education Act; CPRA).

According to the Republic of Estonia Education Act, the education system shall be managed on the basis of the principle of reasonable decentralisation. The head of an educational institution shall be responsible for the activities of an educational institution, including for the organisation and efficacy of study.

The Ministry of Education and Research co-ordinates and supervises local governments and other ministries of the Republic in the organisation of education (Republic of Estonia Education Act; CPRA).

The Ministry of Education and Research directs and organises the preparation of study plans, study modules for public educational institutions (except universities) and study materials for learners with special needs, and establishes the requirements for educational literature in order to ensure conformity with the national curriculum (Republic of Estonia Education Act; CPRA).

State educational institutions are subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Research or to another body of executive power; municipal educational institutions are subordinate to the relevant local government; private schools are subordinate to the legal or natural person who established them.

Ensuring the possibility to take part in early childhood education and acquire basic education in compliance with the national curriculum is the responsibility of the local government, which involves the owner of the private school or the state, where necessary. Local government is responsible for creating a favourable development and learning environment in line with the needs of every child (CPRA).

Upon managing a basic school, the owner of the school ensures the existence of qualified teachers required for the implementation of the national curriculum for basic schools, the existence of a learning and teaching environment that complies with the security, health protection and curriculum requirements, and the opportunities for supporting the development of learners ([Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#)).

According to the law, a learner is provided with the services of a support specialist free of charge in order to support their development in the school and pre-primary institution – at least a speech therapist and a special pedagogue in the pre-primary institution, and at least a special pedagogue, a speech therapist, a psychologist and a social pedagogue in the school. The manager of a pre-primary institution or school creates opportunities for the implementation of support services, and the director organises the implementation of the services ([Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#)).

In order to provide the service of support specialists, the director employs the necessary support specialists at the institution or arranges the availability of the service in another way, for example by involving service providers from the private sector.



A local government must create an opportunity for performing the duty to attend school and a parent must ensure performance of the duty to attend school, i.e. a parent must choose a suitable school for the child, ensure that the child attends school and guarantee conditions facilitating learning at home. Law specifies the roles and responsibilities of different parties and the measures for ensuring performance of the duty to attend school (Eurydice).

Where it becomes evident that a learner needs support, a parent is notified thereof and the school arranges a pedagogical-psychological evaluation of the learner. Where necessary, co-operation with the specialists of other fields is pursued and additional surveys are recommended. The school provides a learner who has difficulties in performing the duty to attend school or lags behind in achieving the study outcomes with general support. Where the general support provided by the school does not produce the desired results for development of the learner, enhanced support or special support may be applied upon recommendation of an external advisory team ([Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#)).

Sixteen Educational Support Service Centres (external advisory team) are established at each county level, the task of which is to counsel and support learners, teachers and parents in organising study for children with special educational needs (CPRA).

According to the recommendation of the external advisory team and with written parental consent, the school provides the learner with:

- enhanced support or special support;
- studies at home for health reasons;
- non-stationary studies with regard to the learner who is under the obligation to attend school.

It may also:

- reduce and replace the learning outcomes provided for in the national curriculum in one or more subjects;
- recommend the application of studies for learners with mild, moderate, severe and profound learning difficulties;
- release the learner from having to study a mandatory subject.

Source: [Basic Schools and Upper secondary Schools Act](#)

A school has its own budget. The budget revenue of a school comprises allocations from the budget of the state and a rural municipality or city, allocations from private entities, donations and revenue obtained from the school's extra-curricular activities provided for in the statutes of the school. The expenses of a school are covered by the owner of the school.

Based on the number of learners of municipal schools, the support to be allocated to rural municipalities and cities for covering the labour expenses and continuous training expenses of the teachers, heads and head teachers of the municipal schools and the expenses relating to educational literature are determined annually in accordance with the State Budget Act. Additional support is granted for the purpose of covering the



operating expenses of the school regarding learners who receive enhanced support or special support ([Basic Schools and Upper secondary Schools Act](#)).

The owner of a private school will have a separate budget for the private school and it will be kept apart from the accounts of other agencies and undertakings of the owner. The expenses of a private school shall be covered by the private school and, in certain cases, support is allocated from the local government or state budget. The salaries of teachers employed in a pre-primary child care institution on the basis of a national curriculum for pre-primary child care institutions and the costs of acquiring teaching aids may be covered from the rural municipality or city budget. Support from the state budget is allocated to private general education institutions to cover labour expenses and in-service expenses of teachers and heads, and expenses of teaching and learning materials, boarding school places and the school lunch of learners (Eurydice).

In general education, compulsory school attendance may also be fulfilled by studying at home. Home schooling may be conducted on the wish of parents or for health reasons. A learner studying at home remains enrolled in the school. The learner is provided with textbooks, exercise books and other required learning materials on the same grounds and in accordance with the same procedure as the learners performing the duty to attend school in a school. The school, together with the person carrying out instruction, prepares an individual curriculum for the learner 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 (Eurydice).

2.4 Levels of autonomy open to educational institutions – schools, local authorities, school maintainers, etc. – within the system

At the level of legislative and administrative power, the Riigikogu (Parliament), the government of the Republic of Estonia and the Ministry of Education and Research administer the education system. A county, a local government and educational institutions have their specific roles in administering the education system. The Parliament has the exclusive authority to:

- determine the principles of the formation, functioning and development of the education system;
- establish tuition fees for public educational institutions and universities in public law;
- decide on the establishment, merger, division and termination of the activities of universities in public law.

The Government of the Republic has the authority to:

- adopt national education development programmes and provide guarantees for their implementation;



- establish the procedure for the establishment and re-organisation of public educational institutions and for termination of their activities;
- establish the tuition fees and rates for public educational institutions and universities in public law, and the procedure for remuneration;
- establish the maximum rate for study loans secured by the state;
- establish state concessions and benefits, including credit concessions, for learners and educators;
- establish the Standard of Higher Education;
- approve the framework requirements for teacher training;
- grant educational institutions the right for provision of instruction in higher education and for awarding the corresponding academic degrees and diplomas.

The main function of the [Ministry of Education and Research](#) is to ensure targeted and effective development of education, research, youth and language policy, and a high level and competitiveness of research and development.

For the achievement of its objectives, the Ministry shall:

- plan, organise and develop education, research, youth and language policy;
- develop national development plans in the areas of education, research, youth and language policy and ensure the compliance thereof with national and sectoral development plans; organise funding and implementation of development plans, and assess the outcomes thereof;
- exercise state supervision over teaching and education in educational institutions and the performance of national curricula and other educational standards;
- plan and develop national curricula and other educational standards, and organise development and accreditation thereof.

It is not determined in national curricula which textbooks schools should use – schools can choose textbooks by themselves (OECD, 2015, Country Background Report).

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

One of the Estonian education system's main features is its decentralised governance and high degree of autonomy of local authorities (school owners): the state sets national standards and establishes principles of education funding, supervision and quality assessment. Within these guidelines, local authorities and schools have a high level of autonomy for resource allocation and curriculum ([OECD, 2016 – PISA 2015 Results](#)).

Within their schools, school directors are given full responsibility for the quality of education, financial management, appointment and dismissal of teachers, definition of teacher salaries (above a minimum) and relations to the school community and the public. School directors are appointed and dismissed by the school founder.



2.5 General mechanisms for funding schools

The state has the long-term development strategy 'Estonia 2035' which is carried out mainly via development plans and programmes in the respective fields. The [Education Strategy 2021–2035](#), which sets out key educational goals for the next 15 years, is the follow-up to the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020. It is the basis on which the government will make its decisions for educational funding for the years 2021–2035 and for the development of programmes that support the achievement of necessary changes (CPRA).

The goals set in the development plans are implemented through programmes. The programmes are in line with the state budget strategy, the operational programme for the use of European Union structural assistance, the action programme of the Government of the Republic, the long-term development strategy 'Estonia 2035', and other development plans and strategic documents. The programmes are reviewed at the end of each calendar year and amended in accordance with the following year's State Budget Act.

Funding of educational institutions depends on the ownership of the institution. There are state, municipal and private educational institutions. All expenses of state-owned schools are covered from the state budget (central government as school owner). Municipal educational institutions are financed from the local government budgets, but the central government allocates support there. In addition, support from legal persons in private law, income from paid services, etc., may be considered both in the case of state and municipal educational institutions. Expenses of a private educational institution are covered by the owner of the private educational institution and, in certain cases, support is allocated by a local government or the state. Pursuant to an amendment to the Private Schools Act from 2018, the state pays operating expenses support to the owners of private schools to the extent of 100 per cent of the average operating expenses of municipal schools.

The state budget covers also the expenses of state-commissioned learner places in private vocational schools and private institutions of higher education. All private educational institutions are entitled to establish tuition fees; they are established by the owner of the private school and they must not be amended during an academic year.

Out of learners of basic schools and upper secondary schools, 88% study in municipal schools; 7% study in private and 5% in state schools. 82% of schools are municipally owned, 6% are state schools and 11% are private schools (2020/2021). The expenses of the schools are covered by the school managing body (generally the local authority, or for private schools, the legal person in private law); support from the state budget covering the labour and in-service training expenses of teachers and heads, and expenses of teaching and learning materials and the school lunch of learners is given to both municipal and private schools. Until 2015, support was granted also for investments. In addition, the state allocates money to support boarding school facilities. Since 2018, support from the state budget is also granted for the purpose of covering the operating expenses of the school regarding learners who receive enhanced support or special support. Out of the government sector's general education expenditures (EUR 664.2 million), 73% is covered by local municipalities and 27% from the central government (data from 2019).



In 2009–2019, the Estonian government expenditure on education as a share of GDP was between 5.6% (in 2014) and 7.2% (in 2009), while in 2019, it was 6.21%. According to the budget of 2020, expenses on education increased by 1% compared to 2019 (based on the budget, in 2020, the total education costs of the government sector amount to EUR 1,715.5 million). According to Statistics Estonia, in 2020, the household spending on education was, on average, EUR 53.4 million (Eurydice).

‘National grants to guarantee socio-economic access to education have been expanded’ as for instance, ‘grants for school food are guaranteed for the 1–9 grades’ or ‘free textbooks and teaching aids for the acquisition of general education’ ([UNESCO country profiles](#)).

2.6 Specific mechanisms for funding the inclusion of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

From 2018, state budget education support was significantly increased. The financial support provided to the school owner includes both a higher level of teachers’ salary support and operating expenses support for the purpose of the application of enhanced support or special support for learners, and for covering the labour expenses of support specialists.

Based on the number of learners (learners registered in the education information system as of 10 November in the year preceding the planned year), the support is allocated to local governments from the state budget. The manager of the private school and the Ministry of Education and Research conclude a contract of use of support ([Private Schools Act](#)).

Upon allocation of a support, no financial distinction is made based on whether the learner is in a mainstream class or a segregated special class (National Overview – Estonia).

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Evaluative commentary

This section provides a qualified, evidenced-based reflection on the **challenges, opportunities and consequences** of system features and structures for the implementation of inclusive education in practice. It specifically considers the impact of policy-making, structures and processes at national, regional, local and school levels on inclusive education practice.

The Estonian comprehensive education system has been quite successful in ensuring access to high-quality education for all learners at the level of compulsory education. However, there are debates among different target groups about the possibility of implementing an inclusive education policy. There are two somewhat opposing approaches/discourses or different understandings of inclusive education in the Estonian context: inclusion for some and inclusion for all. The idea ‘inclusion for some’ represents the idea that learners with SEN have a right to high-quality education, which can be



achieved by specially trained staff and special environment. The idea ‘inclusion for all’ expresses an idea that all learners, despite their needs or disabilities, should have the opportunity to learn together with the aim to ensure their right that needs to be served by the society in the same way as the rights of all other citizens ([Leijen, Arcidiacono & Baucal, 2021](#)). According to that approach, special schools and the possibility to learn in special classes has remained in Estonian education system for ‘some’ learners, which in turn does not take into account the equal rights and long-term perspective to cope in society. Therefore, one main challenge is to bridge these two discourses in order to make inclusive education real and move towards an inclusive society.

Although the state budget significantly increased from 2018 with the aim to provide enhanced support or special support for learners with SEN, the funding system does not take into account regional specificities in the Estonian context. This has created a situation where larger local governments receive enough financial support to create opportunities for special education in special classes or special schools, and this does not encourage the implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, the network of special schools in larger local governments has remained and does not show a trend of decreased number of learners in these schools. At the same time, smaller local authorities are struggling to ensure the implementation of the necessary support for SEN learners, regardless of whether the support is provided in a segregated or inclusive manner. Therefore, the national funding system supporting inclusive education should have measures to ensure that local governments and schools have incentives to implement inclusive education in inclusive classrooms. Moreover, studies conducted in Estonia have shown that school leaders’ perceptions towards inclusive education are connected to the support available for learners with SEN (Pedaste et al., 2021).



SECTION 3. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

This section provides information on the overall framework of legislation and policy governing the whole of the education system in the country.

3.1 Is there a single legislation and policy framework covering all learners in all educational settings?

No.

3.1a Description of the single legislation and policy framework

Not applicable.

3.1b Overview of the general education legislation and policy framework guiding the whole system

The policy framework is created by the [Education Strategy 2021–2035](#), which sets out key educational goals for the next 15 years. The strategy is based on studies and analyses, vision documents prepared by experts, the [Estonia 2035 Strategy](#), the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the results of the work of the education strategy working groups, feedback and input gathered through public consultations and engagement events, and the results of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 and its mid-term evaluation.

Definitions, objectives and levels of education and principles of organisation of education system are stipulated in the [Republic of Estonia Education Act](#).

Pre-primary education is regulated by the [Pre-primary Child Care Institutions Act](#).

[The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#) regulates the basis for the organisation of studies of basic schools and upper secondary schools, the rights and duties of learners and learners' parents or guardians, the rights and duties of school employees, the basis for management and funding of schools, and the basis for administrative supervision over the teaching and education activities of schools.

The legal foundations of a private school are regulated in the [Private School Act](#).

3.1c Overview of the specific education legislation and policy framework impacting on the inclusion of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

Law on the Ratification of the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). Estonia ratified the convention in 2012, thereby committing to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning for people with disabilities.

The obligations on ensuring the rights and well-being of children are provided in the [Child Protection Act](#).

The principles of equal treatment 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 are stipulated in the [Equal Treatment Act](#).



3.2 Is there a single curriculum framework covering all learners in all educational settings?

No.

3.2a Description of the single curriculum framework

Not applicable.

3.2b Overview of the general curriculum framework

There are three national curricula in Estonia: the national curriculum for basic schools, the simplified national curriculum for basic schools, and the national curriculum for upper secondary schools. On the basis of national curricula, the school draws up a school curriculum that is the underlying document of study in the school and sets out, above all, the choices within national curricula, which arise from the unique characteristics of the school. In addition, an individual curriculum can be prepared for the learner to take into account the individual abilities and needs of the learner (GEM).

Upon organisation of their activities, schools act on the basis of the expectations of society expressed in national curricula and the needs and interests of learners, taking into account the proposals of the learners and parents as well as the characteristics of the region (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act; CPRA).

3.2c Overview of specific curriculum framework(s) for different groups of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

In basic schools and upper secondary schools, the national curriculum is also valid as the framework curriculum for learners with special needs (CPRA). All schools have to describe the SEN policy and the organisation of instruction for learners with SEN in their own school curricula. This document should describe:

- common values and principles;
- the co-ordination system and responsibilities of teachers, school leaders, other staff, etc.;
- the system of identifying SEN, support measures, data collection and evaluation;
- co-operation and participation (parents, all learners at school, all teachers, other schools, community, external institutions, etc.).

Source: *GEM*

There are three national curricula in Estonia: the national curriculum for basic schools, the simplified national curriculum for basic schools, and the national curriculum for upper secondary schools. The simplified national curriculum for basic school establishes the standard of basic education for learners with intellectual disabilities who, on the recommendation of the external advisory team and with the consent of the parent, study in simplified, coping or nursing education. Simplified studies are applied to learners with mild intellectual disabilities, coping studies to learners with moderate intellectual disabilities, and nursing studies to learners with severe and profound intellectual



disabilities. The simplified national curriculum is implemented in all basic schools in the Republic of Estonia, regardless of the school's legal status.

By law, it is the teacher's job to observe the development and coping of learners at school and, where necessary, adjust studies according to the individual needs and abilities of learners. Depending on the individual needs of the learner, studies corresponding to the learner's abilities and the required support in co-operation between the teachers, support specialists, assistant teachers and other specialists are ensured for the learner. The Education Information System contains information on the learner's need for support and the services provided (GEM).

A school may change or adjust the time, contents, process and environment of study. Where the changes or adjustments substantially increase or decrease the weekly workload or intensity of studies in comparison with the school curriculum, or reduce or replace the learning outcomes provided for in the national curricula, an individual curriculum is drawn up for the learner (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act).

If the individual curriculum drawn up for a learner with special educational needs lays down reduction or replacement of the learning outcomes provided for in the national curriculum or exemption from learning a compulsory subject, the individual curriculum may be implemented on the basis of a recommendation of the external advisory team (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act; CPRA).

The learners or their parents – and, where necessary, teachers and support specialists – are involved in drawing up an individual curriculum (CPRA).

An individual curriculum will be drawn up for all learners with moderate, severe and profound intellectual disabilities (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act; CPRA).

If the special educational needs of a learner arise from their talent, the implementation of an individual curriculum and, where necessary, additional instruction by subject teachers or other specialists in the respective field, will be ensured through educational programmes or other educational institution subjects laid down for each academic year in an individual curriculum (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act; CPRA).

The school provides a learner who has difficulties in performing the duty to attend school or lags behind in achieving the study outcomes with general support, which involves individual additional instruction by a teacher, the availability of the services of the support specialists and, where necessary, the organisation of study assistance lessons individually or in a group. Where the general support provided by the school does not produce the desired results for development of the learner, enhanced support or special support may be applied upon recommendation of an external advisory team.

Enhanced support is applied to a learner who, due to a permanent learning difficulty, psychological or behavioural disorder, or another health condition or disability, needs at least one of the following services:

- A constant specialist support service and an individual curriculum in one, more or all subjects.
- A constant specialist support service and part-time studies individually or in a group.



- A constant specialist support service and individual support during studies in the class
- Studies in a special class.

Source: *GEM*

Special support is applied to a learner who, due to their severe and permanent mental disorder, intellectual or mental disability or multiple disabilities, needs:

- disability-specific organisation of studies, study environment, study methodology, study aids and a constant specialist support service combined with social or health services or both in order to be able to participate in studies;
- part-time studies individually or in a group, or constant individual support in a class or studies in a special class.

An external advisory team is competent to:

- assign a suitable curriculum for a learner with special needs;
- recommend that the learning outcomes prescribed in the national curriculum for basic schools be replaced or decreased, or exemption be given from studying a compulsory subject;
- recommend studies at home for health reasons;
- recommend the need for support specialists;
- make recommendations on creating the conditions necessary for inclusive study at school and for implementing such study.

Source: *GEM*

3.3 Is there a single legislation and policy framework for all teacher education and professional development?

No.

3.3a Description of the single legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development

Not applicable.

3.3b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development

Strategic focuses of teacher policy have been specified in the [Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035](#). The strategy emphasises the need to ensure a sufficient number of competent and motivated teachers, university teachers, support specialists and school leaders, and to guarantee that learning environments are diverse and learning is learner-centred. Teachers are considered key actors in planning, providing feedback and supporting the teaching and learning process in general, including vocational and higher education, as well as non-formal learning. Heads of schools are expected create a learning



culture and environment that supports learning and well-being, skilfully managing and implementing changes, and upgrading the role of support specialists and their co-operation with teachers (Eurydice).

The strategy proposes measures to tackle the problem of an ageing teacher community, and lack of teachers in certain regions and subject fields (especially STEM teachers), by increasing the supply of new teachers and increasing the retention rate of novice teachers (Eurydice).

Implementation of the Estonian Education Strategy takes place under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Research (Eurydice).

Professional standards form a conceptual basis for the initial and continuing education of teachers; continuing education of heads and teaching staff is based on competence models (Eurydice).

The [higher education standard](#) sets general requirements for academic personnel (Eurydice).

The [Estonian Education Information System](#) includes a sub-register of teachers and teaching staff, in which teachers, teaching staff, support specialists and heads of all educational institutions involved in the provision of formal education are registered (Eurydice).

The teaching staff and management of all educational institutions work on the basis of employment contracts, with the exception of the rector of the professional higher education institution related to national defence. Many education employees have been guaranteed a shorter working time and longer annual leave (Eurydice).

3.3c Overview of specific legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development and what and who this specific framework focuses on

Strategic focuses of teacher policy have been specified in the [Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035](#). The strategy emphasises the need to ensure a sufficient number of competent and motivated teachers, university teachers, support specialists and school leaders, and to guarantee that learning environments are diverse and learning is learner-centred (Eurydice).

Heads of schools are expected to create a learning culture and environment that supports learning and well-being, skilfully managing and implementing changes, and upgrading the role of support specialists and their co-operation with teachers (Eurydice).

Upon managing a basic school, the owner of the school will ensure the existence of the qualified teachers required for the implementation of the national curriculum for basic schools, the existence of a learning and teaching environment that complies with the safety, health protection and curriculum requirements, and the opportunities for supporting the development of learners (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act; CPRA).

In Estonia, the qualification requirements for all primary and secondary school teachers are a master's degree and teaching professional qualification. The teaching professional qualification is obtained at university after completing the teacher training curriculum, or



at the body that awards professions after proving the pedagogical competences necessary for the teaching profession.

Teachers' pedagogical competences are described in the teacher's professional standard, according to which the main role of the teacher is to empower the learner, to be their development partner, so that meaningful learning can take place and a learning path that opens up the potential of all learners can be formed. This requires the teacher to be able to notice the individual needs of the learners, including due to their special educational needs, to apply suitable teaching methods, to adapt the teaching material if necessary and to co-operate with support specialists and other participants (Qualification requirements for teachers, level 7, 2020).

A pre-primary institution's teachers are educated at the bachelor's level following a three-year curriculum (Qualification requirements for pre-primary teachers, 2022).

National in-service training programmes organise courses for teachers on how to deal with learners with SEN in the inclusive classroom (CPRA). According to the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), teachers' participation in in-service training in Estonia is high – 98% of teachers participated in at least one type of professional development in the 12 months prior to the survey (OECD, 2019, [TALIS 2018 Results](#)).

Competence centres of universities support and guide on how to implement new curricula, and current approaches to learning and inclusive education. The competence centres have provided training for the implementation of new methodology and support and give advice to teachers ('Competent and motivated teachers and school leaders 2016–2019' programme; CPRA).

One of the main priority topics of in-service training for teachers, school leaders and school members is inclusive education ('Competent and motivated teachers and school leaders 2016–2019' programme).

There are additional resources planned for supporting competent and motivated teachers and school leaders from the next structural funds period.

3.4 Is there a single legislation and policy framework to ensure support for all learners throughout their school careers?

Yes.

3.4a Description of the single legislation and policy framework that ensures support for all throughout their school careers

The basic values, principles for organising studies and general objectives of studies of a general education school, as well as in pre-primary institutions, are the same for all learners, regardless of their special educational needs or whether the studies are conducted in a regular school or in a school created for learners who need support (Eurydice).

One of the strategic goals of the [Education Strategy 2021–2035](#) is that learning opportunities are diverse and accessible, and the education system enables smooth



transitions between different levels and types of education. It is planned to reach this goal through:

- ensuring an inclusive and sustainable network and infrastructure of educational institutions providing high-quality education to ensure access to education for different target groups and a learning environment that supports contemporary approaches to learning and teaching;
- ensuring flexible learning opportunities, accessibility of high-quality education and supported learning to reduce drop-out and early school-leaving rates and to exploit every individual's potential to the fullest.

In Estonia, high-quality pre-primary education is available for most children (the share of children aged 3–7 in pre-primary education is 92%). This creates a good precondition for a smooth transition to school life. According to the International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study, children in Estonia have particularly strong self-regulation and social-emotional skills in addition to sound levels of literacy and numeracy (OECD, 2020, [Early Learning and Child Well-being in Estonia](#)).

According to the [Pre-primary Child Care Institutions Act](#), teachers in pre-primary institutions shall observe a child's development and coping, and adjust the learning and teaching according to their special needs if necessary. If necessary, the support services of a speech therapist, special education teacher or another support service shall be ensured.

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, a school must implement support measures to support a learner's development in a way that corresponds to the learner's special needs and adjust studies according to the individual needs or abilities of learners if necessary. When teaching a learner, a school may change or adjust the time, contents, process and environment of study. Studies corresponding to the learner's abilities and the necessary support in co-operation with teachers, support specialists, assisting teachers and other specialists are ensured for the learner. The availability of services of a special education teacher, a speech therapist, a social teacher and a psychologist must be guaranteed for all learners (Eurydice).

The support specialist co-operates with teachers and other support specialists to identify the learner's need for help and support, and evaluates the learner's development and coping in the learning environment. The support specialist supports and guides the learner in solving the problems that have arisen, supports and advises the teacher, the school management and other school employees in organising the education of learners with special needs, advises parents and the family on issues related to supporting the learner's development and coping. The implementation of the service, its amount and duration are decided in co-operation with support specialists, class and subject teachers ([Description of the support specialists' services and the procedure for implementing the service](#)).

The school provides a learner who has difficulties in performing the duty to attend school or lags behind in achieving the study outcomes with general support, which involves individual additional instruction by a teacher, the availability of the services of the support specialists and, where necessary, the organisation of study assistance lessons individually or in a group. Where the general support provided by the school does not produce the desired results for the development of the learner, enhanced support or special support may be applied for upon the recommendation of an external advisory team.



The education strategy 2021–2035 sets a target for 2035 that all learners have a right to high-quality and inclusive education. Accessible and available education, and supported learning and learning opportunities that meet the capabilities and needs of learners should be provided. The organisation of education should be arranged in a way that contributes to the development of a cohesive society, and a wide choice of learning opportunities have to be available in all Estonian counties.

Studies could be organised also outside the school premises. According to the [Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#), studies at home are applied where either:

- the health of the learner does not allow for participating in the studies prescribed in the school's daily schedule;
- a parent wishes to personally organise the education of a learner acquiring basic education.

Studies at home for health reasons are organised by the school at the request of a parent and upon recommendation of an external advisory team. Where studies are pursued at home at the request of a parent, they are organised and financed by the parent. Studies in hospital means studies pursued by a hospitalised learner who requires basic or general secondary education. The minister responsible for the field will establish the conditions of and procedure for home educating and in-hospital teaching (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act; CPRA; GEM).

3.4b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework that ensures support for the majority of learners throughout their school careers

Not applicable.

3.4c Overview of the specific legislation and policy framework that ensures support for learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education throughout their school careers

Pursuant to the constitution of the Republic of Estonia, everyone has the right to education. [The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#) provides for the implementation of inclusive education as the guiding principle for the organisation of education. According to law, general education of good quality adheres to the principles of inclusive education and is equally available to all persons regardless of their social and economic background, nationality, gender, place of residence or special educational needs. Inclusive education primarily means the basic right of a person to education of good quality (Eurydice).

The basic values, principles for organising studies and general objectives of studies of a general education school are the same for all learners, regardless of their special educational needs or whether the studies are conducted in a mainstream school or in a school created for learners who need support (Eurydice).

According to the [Republic of Estonia Education Act](#) local governments shall keep records of children of compulsory school age and ensure monitoring of compulsory school attendance, provide learners with material and other assistance in the performance of the obligation to attend school, organise transport to the educational institution and back, and ensure medical care and meals during school hours. In addition, it is also the



responsibility of local governments to keep records of disabled persons and organise teaching for them.

In 2012, Estonia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, pursuant to which persons with disabilities will be guaranteed with access to inclusive, high-quality and free general education at an equal level to the other members of their community. Since the universal obligation to attend school is applicable in Estonia, education must be guaranteed to everyone, also including learners with the most severe impairments. It is particularly important to take early notice of special developmental needs in pre-primary-age children and prepare them for school to allow them to acquire basic education that corresponds to their abilities, and creates possibilities for the participation in continuing education (Eurydice).

According to the [Pre-primary Child Care Institutions Act](#), local governments shall provide children who have physical disabilities, speech disorders, sensory disabilities or mental disabilities, or children who need special support or special care, with the opportunity to develop and grow in the pre-primary institution of their residence. Conditions for development shall be created for learners with special needs in integration groups together with other learners. If it is impossible for an integration group to be formed in the pre-primary institution of residence, the local municipality shall form a group for learners with special needs or establish a pre-primary institution for learners with special needs.

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, a learner with special educational needs is a learner who, upon the recommendation of an external multi-disciplinary advisory team, receives enhanced support or special support. This occurs when the general support provided by the school does not produce the desired results for the learner's development.

The principles of organisation of study for a learner with a special educational need are described in the curriculum of the school. The school head appoints a person whose duty is to organise co-operation between support specialists and teachers for supporting the learning and development of a learner with special educational needs. Upon identifying special educational needs, the co-ordinator of the studies of the learner with special educational needs supports and supervises a teacher, advises the parents, and makes proposals to the teacher and the head of school for further educational work, application of measures in school in support of the development of the learner or carrying out additional surveys and supporting the movement from one level of education to another.

According to the external advisory team's recommendation and with written parental consent, the school provides enhanced support or special support to the learner.

In order to support the participation of learners in studies that correspond to their abilities, learners are guaranteed education counselling services in public study counselling centres run by Foundation Innove called 'Rajaleidja' ('Pathfinder' in English) in all counties. External advisory teams of the centres perform independent evaluations, recommend the organisation and environment of studies and learning materials suitable for the child, as well as advise the parent and the school or pre-primary institution. Today in Estonia, the *Rajaleidja* network and services form a system based on a common



principle. At the local level, *Rajaleidja* plays an independent key role in creating a support network for a learner with special educational needs (Eurydice).

In Estonia, there is a specialist school for learners who need very specific organisation of study and resource-intensive support services. In addition, special classes have been formed in mainstream schools where the availability of special study for learners with special educational needs is guaranteed if necessary. Most schools for learners with special educational needs also have boarding school facilities. The number of schools for learners with special educational needs and the number of learners studying at these schools decreases year by year (Eurydice).

Currently, there are 41 special schools for learners in need of enhanced support or special support: 18 municipal schools, 17 state schools and 6 private schools.

Legislative references: *Republic of Estonia Education Act*; *Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act*. [Eurydice](#)

3.5 Is there a single legislation and policy framework to ensure support for all learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life?

Yes.

3.5a Description of the single legislation and policy framework that ensures support for all learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life

1.2.4 The structure of the education system, along with the national standards of education, shall provide opportunities for everyone to move from one level of education to the next (Education Act, p. 3).

Source: *European Agency, CPRA*

The [Pre-primary Child Care Institutions Act](#) states that pre-primary education is the set of knowledge, skills, experience and behavioural rules which provides the prerequisites for coping successfully in everyday life and at school. Pre-primary education is acquired at a pre-primary institution or at home.

According to the [Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#), the function of a basic school is to help learners become creative and versatile personalities who are able to effectively realise themselves in various roles: in the family, at work and in public life, and choose a study path corresponding to their interests and abilities. The main aspiration of teaching and educating in upper secondary schools is that learners find a field of activity that interests them and corresponds to their abilities in order to continue their studies in the field. The function of upper secondary schools is to create conditions where learners acquire the knowledge, skills and values that allow for continuing their studies in an institution of higher education or vocational educational institution without any impediments.

In the education sector, guidance is principally provided in the context of formal education. In particular, guidance is integrated within the national curricula across all levels of education (both general and vocational) in Estonia. It is provided by public and



private education institutions (such as pre-primary study institutions, basic and upper secondary schools and universities) with a view to supporting learners in the process of their career planning.

The basic school shall organise information for learners and parents about further education opportunities and ensure the availability of career services (career training, information or counselling) for learners ([The national curriculum for basic schools](#)).

3.5b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework that ensures support for the majority of learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life

Not applicable.

3.5c Overview of the specific legislation and policy framework that ensures support for learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life

The [Education Strategy 2021–2035](#) refers to a bottleneck that a systematic approach to at-risk groups (people with low levels of education, the elderly, people with special educational needs, etc.) is lacking, including readiness for possible changes in economic sectors. The transition of people with special educational needs to the labour market is not systemically supported (p. 10).

One of the important strategic goals of the field of education is that learning opportunities are diverse and accessible, and the education system enables smooth transitions between different levels and types of education. The targets to 2035 are learner-centered learning and teaching, diverse learning opportunities, and smooth transitions between levels and types of education.

By a decision of the owner of the school, additional studies may be offered to basic school graduates who, due to their special educational needs, need to be provided with additional preparation and support in order to continue with their studies or move to the labour market. The duration of additional studies is one academic year. Persons attending additional studies are provided with instructed studies which consist of general education studies, vocational training and development of social and self-related skills. Vocational training is carried out in co-operation with a relevant vocational education institution or employer.

A transition plan is drawn up for each learner, specifying the subject matter and daily schedule of their studies. The learner's knowledge and skills, the requests and needs of the learner and their parent(s), and the school's facilities are considered when drawing up the transition plan (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act; CPRA).

Evaluative commentary

This section provides a qualified, evidenced-based reflection on the **challenges, opportunities and consequences** of the legislative and policy framework for inclusive education in practice. It specifically considers the main challenges and opportunities for effectively translating policy into regional, local and school level practice.



Legislation acts (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary School Act, 2018; Education Act, 1992) do not focus on the marginalisation of learners who may be in vulnerable groups; instead, the focus is that high quality education has to be available for all learners despite any special needs in the Estonian context. However, one feature of the Estonian education system is the fact that there are two national curricula in the level of compulsory education: National Basic School Curriculum (2011) and National Simplified Curriculum (2010). Three different parts in the National Simplified Curriculum are distinguished: one is for learners with mild learning difficulties, the other ones are for learners with moderate learning difficulties and for learners with severe and profound learning difficulties. According to analyses connected by Tartu University, these two national curricula for basic schools differ largely in terms of the general competences, which in turn does not guarantee equal treatment and equal rights on education.

Moreover, these two national curricula differ in terms of the content of subjects and learning outcomes, which in turn on the one hand, limits potential development for SEN learners, and on the other hand, makes it difficult to teach those SEN learners who are assigned a simplified curriculum in an inclusive classroom. As composing individual learning plans or curriculum is a very common practice and stated by the law in Estonia, revising this situation should be considered and integrating these two curricula into one policy document. In addition, the main challenges of the coming years are to create opportunities and conditions for learners with SEN for supported learning in the school of their residence and to ensure smooth transitions from the general education system to the next levels of education (Smart and Active People 2021 results report).

As teachers are the key people in implementing inclusive education, universities who are responsible for teacher education in Estonia have paid a lot of attention to improving teachers' qualification on inclusive education in recent years. In the course of initial teacher training, all teachers receive training modules to prepare them for working with learners with SEN, including the compulsory basic module *Inclusive Education* (3 ECTS). The overall aim of this training course is to support the student's development as a teacher who has primary readiness to design a safe and inclusive learning environment and teach in an inclusive classroom. In-service teacher training on supporting SEN learners in inclusive classrooms are also very popular training courses in Estonia. In 2019, two leading teacher-training universities in Estonia (University of Tartu and Tallinn University) initiated a joint project '*Developing and enhancing the teaching quality of inclusive education curriculum*' financed by Norwegian and EEA financial mechanisms. This project is carried out with the close co-operation of Norwegian experts from the University of Oslo and University of Stavanger. In addition to developed and piloted long-term in-service courses on inclusive education (160 ECTS), as a result of this project a second master's degree curriculum *Inclusive Education* (160 ECTS) for teachers who have obtained a teacher's qualification and have worked at least five years in schools has been developed and implemented since 2020. After completing this curriculum, teachers receive a second master's degree and a qualification of master teacher. Nevertheless, further teacher training development activities should be in focus. Less than half of teachers feel that they have received the necessary preparation for teaching learners with SEN (Smart and Active people 2021 results report).



The main challenge is to prepare teachers to use inclusive classroom strategies and work to principles of inclusive pedagogy. The second big challenge is to integrate inclusive education principles into subject and didactic training courses.



SECTION 4. SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

This section provides information on aspects of governance across and between different system levels, bodies and stakeholders in the country.

4.1 Shared responsibilities across and between central and local government

The Authority of the Ministry of Education and Research co-ordinates and supervises local governments and other ministries of the Republic in the organisation of education (Republic of Estonia Education Act; CPRA).

The Estonian education system is decentralised, and the division of responsibility between the state, local government and school is clearly defined (Eurydice).

At state level, the Estonian Education Strategy 2021–35 guides long-term developments. The national standards (the national curriculum for pre-primary child care institutions, the national curriculum for basic schools, the national curriculum for upper secondary schools, the national curricula for vocational studies, the standard of higher education, and the standard of vocational education) guarantee the quality provision of education; laws and regulations establish the principles of education funding, state supervision and quality assessment (Eurydice).

Local governments maintain pre-primary child care institutions, basic schools, the majority of upper secondary schools, and some of the VET schools. Vocational schools are mostly state-owned and universities are institutions in public law. Half of institutions of professional higher education are state-owned and the other half are institutions in private law (Eurydice).

Financing of educational institutions depends on the ownership of the institution pursuant to the principles stipulated in the respective legal acts. The general education school's expenses are covered by its owner: the expenses of state schools are covered from the budget of the Ministry of Education and Research, those of municipal schools from the local municipality's budget, and private schools' expenses are covered by a legal person in private law. In order to guarantee the constitutional right to free general education to all learners, support from the state budget on equal grounds is allocated to both municipal and private schools to cover the expenses related to teachers' and heads' salaries and in-service training, textbooks and study aids, as well as the school lunch expenses of the learners. In addition, the central government allocates finances to cover the expenses related to boarding school facilities created at the school (Eurydice).

The teaching staff and management of all educational institutions work based on employment contracts, except for the rector of the professional higher education institution related to national defence. Pursuant to the Employment Contracts Act, the working time of educational staff shall be established by the Government of the Republic by a regulation. The standard workload for educational staff is a 35-hour working week. The annual holiday of educational staff is up to 56 calendar days, unless the employee and the employer have agreed on a longer annual holiday (Eurydice).



The initial training of all Estonian teachers is carried out at the higher education level and generally in universities. Pre-primary teachers are trained at the level of bachelor's study and master's level; class teachers and subject teachers both of general education schools and vocational schools, at the master's level.

4.2 Specific areas for shared responsibilities across and between central and local government

Policy development, implementation and co-ordination

Starting from January 2018, county governments do not exist as a separate institutions. Local authorities in a county may establish a county association of local authorities which is called 'county association'. According to the Local Authority Associations Act, the objectives of a county association are, through the joint activity of the local authorities in the county, to foster balanced and sustainable development of the county, to preserve and promote the cultural traditions of the county, to represent the county and the members of the association, to protect the common interests of its members, to promote co-operation between the local authorities in the county and to create possibilities for improved performance of the statutory functions of its members. The common interest can be offering support services in joint efforts.

The Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM) is a voluntary union established for representing the common interests and arranging co-operation of cities and rural municipalities. The Ministry of Education and Research is in close co-operative relationship with AECM in all topics related to local governments.

Source: *GEM, Country Background Report*

Identification of needs / referral for services

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, the owner of the school creates opportunities for identifying the special educational needs of a learner and providing the learner with the required support, and the head of the school arranges it. The school provides a learner who has difficulties in performing the duty to attend school or lags behind in achieving the study outcomes with general support, which involves individual additional instruction by a teacher, the availability of the services of the support specialists and, where necessary, the organisation of study assistance lessons individually or in a group. Where necessary, at least the services of a special education teacher, a speech therapist, a psychologist and a social educator are ensured. The owner of the school creates and the head of school organises opportunities for implementation of the services of support specialists. Where the general support provided by the school does not produce the desired results for development of the learner, enhanced support or special support may be applied for upon the recommendation of an external advisory team. The Ministry of Education and Research arranges the making of recommendations for the purpose of organising teaching and education and for the implementation of the support services. For the performance of the function described, the minister may enter into an



administrative contract with a state-owned foundation. The responsibility of an external advisory team is given to Innove Pathfinder (*Rajaleidja*) centres.

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Data collection and sharing

Based on the number of learners of municipal schools registered in the Education Information System, the support from the state budget is allocated to rural municipalities and cities for covering the operating expenses of the school regarding learners who receive enhanced support or special support. According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, the recommendation of the external advisory team is entered in the education information system in the sub-register of basic and upper secondary school learners, higher education learners and doctor-residents after the parental consent for the implementation of the recommendation has been granted. To apply enhanced support and special support, the head of school and the co-ordinator of studies of the learner with special educational needs have the right to process data entered in the Education Information System by another school or child care institution, or an external advisory team regarding the recommendation of the team as well as the enhanced support and special support applied to the supported learner, but only within the scope and to the extent that is necessary for the application of enhanced support and special support.

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Monitoring and evaluation

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, the Ministry of Education and Research exercises administrative supervision over the lawfulness of the activities of schools and their owners, with the aim of ensuring the availability of basic and general secondary education and accessibility thereto on equal grounds, the organisation of teaching and education, and the quality and effectiveness thereof. An official exercising administrative supervision has the right, among other things, to visit a school in order to inspect teaching and education activities and the provision of learners with special educational needs with support.

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Quality assurance and accountability

In Estonia, the quality assurance system is able to ensure a good balance between formative (developmental) and accountability purposes with a strong emphasis on schools' own quality self-improvement, while doing away with too much central government control and intervention. ... Although school self-evaluation is mandatory, the procedures for conducting and reporting the results of school self-evaluation are entirely at the discretion of the school. While the Ministry has developed tools for school self-evaluation, Estonian schools are under no obligation to use these.

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Funding

No information.



4.3 Formal and informal collaboration across ministries

The Authority of the Ministry of Education and Research co-ordinates and supervises local governments and other ministries of the Republic in the organisation of education (Republic of Estonia Education Act).

The prevention council (hereinafter, the council) is a government committee whose duty in the organisation of cross-sectoral prevention and criminal, narcotics and child protection policy is to:

- apply cross-sectoral prevention principles, including preparation and approval of a long-term cross-policy action plan and monitor the implementation thereof;
- co-ordinate the implementation of the narcotics policy and establish objectives;
- co-ordinate the prevention of offences and establish criminal policy objectives;
- co-ordinate the activities necessary for the implementation of the child protection policy provided in § 13 of the Child Protection Act;
- consult local governments and support raising of prevention work competence;
- make proposals and give opinions to the Government of the Republic and other relevant institutions;
- confer the civil courage award;
- confer the violence prevention award.

The composition, management and rules of procedure of the council are established by a regulation of the Government of the Republic. The council's chair is the Minister of Justice and vice chairs are the ministers of education and research, culture, social affairs, interior and health and labour. It is agreed that activities of the council are focused on children and youth.

The Ministry of Social Affairs confirmed a working group in March 2021 with the purpose to reform the support services for learners with special needs.

Reform of the support system for children with special needs:

- Creating opportunities to identify the child's need for help as early as possible (at the age of babyhood and infancy) and to provide necessary support in a timely manner in all age groups in order to prevent the need for assistance from escalating.
- Combining the assessments of children with special needs in different areas to reduce duplication and time to receive help.
- Development of a clear and simple support system for the parent of a child with special needs, which automates data requests and reduces the number of applications.
- Development of a care service for children with high care and assistance needs, which enables the parent to rest from the constant burden of care.



The working group official members are from Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, Education and Youth Board, Estonian Health Insurance Board and Social Insurance Board. The working group is confirmed to March 2023. The focus of 2022 was on analysing assessments which are conducted in different systems (education, health care, social affairs and employment) in order to support faster service provision.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs have many joint initiatives which are implemented in co-operation.

On 24 March 2021, the European Commission published the first comprehensive European Union (EU) Strategy on the Rights of the Child and proposed a Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee to promote equal opportunities for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The EU Child Guarantee Recommendation was adopted on 14 June 2021. To achieve the goal of the European Child Guarantee, it is the responsibility of each member state to develop targeted measures for the children at risk of poverty or social exclusion and create the Child Guarantee national action plan up to the year 2030. The wider aim of the Child Guarantee action plan is to ensure that children at risk of poverty and social exclusion have access to key services: free access to early childhood education and child care, education and school-based activities and at least one healthy meal each school day, free access to quality health care, access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing. One of the target groups of children in need are children with special needs including children with disabilities.

Source: [Estonia's Child Guarantee National Action Plan – An overview](#)

4.4 Specific mechanisms for formal and informal collaboration that impact on inclusive education

Development of a shared vision for inclusive education

The Authority of the Ministry of Education and Research co-ordinates and supervises local governments and other ministries of the Republic in the organisation of education (Republic of Estonia Education Act; CPRA).

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Strategic partners of the Ministry – non-governmental organisations (for example, unions of support specialists) also play an important role in the implementation of shared vision for inclusive education.

Policy development, implementation and co-ordination

Where a learner needs enhanced support or special support, an external support team and specialists in the field of education, social and health care are involved in the assessment of the learner's need for support (Eurydice, Country Report). Regional counselling centres provide cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary services at regional and local levels (CPRA).

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)



Identification of needs / referral for services

Each year, educational institutions' performance indicators are published online. In this way, all information about the educational institutions will be easily accessible to the learners, parents and owners of the institutions and the data can easily be compared. (National Overview, p.9). Haridussilm is an educational statistics database which allows the comparison of schools. It includes all available indicators of satisfaction, performance and efficiency in education. Eurydice provides statistics on educational institutions providing regular education. The internal evaluation report points out the strengths of an educational institution and the areas that need improvement. Educational institutions use the results in their development plans. All educational institutions submit data to the Estonian Education Information System about the internal evaluation reports and the time of the composition of the adviser's feedback reports. Thus, the Ministry can review whether internal evaluations have been conducted in an educational institution and whether it has received advisory services. The results of internal evaluations are public, but their publication on the website of the educational institution is not mandatory (The Inspectorate of Education of Estonia).

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Data collection and sharing

Foundation Innove organises external evaluation of the study results of general education institutions, standard determined tests, basic school final examinations and national examinations (National Overview, p. 9). According to the law, pre-primary child care institutions, general education schools and vocational schools are obliged to conduct internal evaluation. An educational institution shall prepare a complete internal evaluation report on its activities at least once every three academic years. The internal evaluation report is based on criteria which define the fields to be evaluated. The criteria, as well as data on the institution's activities, include quality indicators on special needs education (National Overview, p. 8).

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Monitoring and evaluation

The Ministry of Education exercises administrative supervision over the lawfulness of the activities of schools and their owners with the aim of ensuring the availability of basic and general secondary education and accessibility thereto on equal grounds, the organisation of teaching and education, and the quality and effectiveness thereof. An official exercising administrative supervision has the right to visit a school to inspect teaching and education activities and the provision of support to learners with SEN, informing the school head thereof in advance (National Overview, p. 9).

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Quality assurance and accountability

The Ministry's External Evaluation Department is responsible for the development and implementation of a quality system in general, vocational and higher education, as well as for the monitoring and analysis of the results in the area of government of the Ministry.



Funding

State budget and other resources including European Social Fund and European Economic Area/Norway grants.

Evaluative commentary

This section provides a qualified, evidenced-based reflection on the **challenges, opportunities and consequences** of system governance for the implementation of inclusive education in practice. It specifically considers the impact of levels of decentralisation/centralisation in the country on inclusive education in practice.

On the one hand, decentralised governance can be considered the strength of the Estonian education system and the division of responsibilities between state, local governments and schools have been clearly defined in legislative acts. On the other hand, areas for improvement have been emphasised in Education Strategy 2021–2035. This document indicates the need for clarifying the distribution of responsibilities between the government, local authorities and the private sector because the existing support systems are not effective enough to implement inclusive education and ensure access to education. The main challenges in the context of inclusive education in this document are defined as follows:

- improve the capacity of pre-primary managers to identify special educational needs early and to provide high-quality support services to children under school age;
- develop and implement a holistic approach to supporting learners with SEN and a migrant background in all levels of education.

Therefore, the focus is on developing the availability of support systems. In order to achieve these goals, it is necessary to specify the tasks and responsibilities of different sectors and make amendments to the legislative acts.

Although schools and local governments have a great deal of autonomy, there is a slight contradiction regarding the study organisation of learners with SEN. More precisely, the study arrangement for learners with SEN is very detailed in legislation acts and is not always based on the principle of inclusive education. Recommendations of study organisation for SEN learners given by the external multi-disciplinary advisory teams are often based on special education and these recommendations are mandatory for schools if the parent gives consent (Basic School and Upper Secondary School Act, 2018). Thus, more attention should be paid to creating flexible learning opportunities in the context of inclusive education and developing clear indicators to measure the effectiveness of the implementation of inclusive education.



SECTION 5. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

This section provides information on the general and specific quality assurance and accountability frameworks and mechanisms informing the country's education system.

5.1 School inspection processes and structures for all forms of educational provision

Since 1 September 2017, inspection is undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Research (currently 11 inspectors). The main objective is to ensure the accessibility of basic and secondary general education, as well as the organisation of education and schooling, its quality and efficiency on an equal basis. The legality of the educational institution and the owner's actions are controlled when conducting the inspection.

The task of state supervision is:

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

The Ministry exercises supervision in individual cases or as a thematic surveillance. The initial evaluation of an educational institution is carried out in the process of issuing of an education licence (for all private and municipal educational institutions). When processing the education licence, the compliance of the curriculum to the requirements set out in legal acts as well as the correspondence of teachers with the qualification requirements is evaluated.

The official conducting administrative supervision has the right to:

- visit a school in order to inspect teaching and education, informing the head of the school thereof in advance;
- participate in the meetings of the teachers' council, the board of trustees and parents;
- access the documents of the school;
- receive information from the school regarding the implementation of legislation;
- make proposals to the head of the school and the owner of the school for improvement of the operations of the school and mandatory precepts for elimination of deficiencies in teaching and education;
- make mandatory precepts to the head of the school and the owner of a private school for bringing the individual legal instruments regulating teaching and education and issued by them in conflict with an Act or other legislation issued on



the basis of an Act into compliance with the Act or other legislation issued on the basis of an Act;

- make a proposal to the person whose competence includes termination of an employment contract with the head of the school to terminate the employment contract with the head of the school who has committed an indecent act, an offence related to office or a corruptive act, or make a precept to terminate the employment contract with the head of the school who does not comply with the requirements for the position.

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 (Eurydice).

5.2 Other quality assurance processes for all forms of educational provision

According to the constitution of the Republic of Estonia, offering of education in Estonia is under state and administrative supervision (Eurydice).

In formal education, the organisation and conduct of state supervision is regulated by:

- [Pre-primary Child Care Institutions Act](#)
- [Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#)
- [Vocational Educational Institutions Act](#)
- [Private Schools Act](#)
- [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' (Eurydice).

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](#) (Eurydice).

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

The Education and Youth Authority organises the external evaluation of learning outcomes (standard-determining tests and examinations) in basic schools and upper secondary schools, analyses the results, and informs educational institutions about the results. An upper secondary school graduate is required to take, in addition to the school



examination and a learner investigation paper or practical work, three compulsory state examinations: in the Estonian language, mathematics and a foreign language.

The following (self-)assessment tools are available for teachers/schools: diagnostic tests and baseline tests (prior knowledge assessment at the start of a schoolyear); additionally, general competencies assessment tests (tests for learning and communication skills, functional reading and maths literacy, digital and entrepreneurial competencies).

From 2018 (the pilot was in 2017), a survey on satisfaction with the school and learning environment has been carried out; during the last five years (2018–2022), the survey was conducted every year in general education, and in 2018 and 2021 in vocational education. Although the report of every school is visible only to the school, Education and Youth compiles a general report as well.

Educational institutions draw up an internal evaluation report at least once during the period of the school development plan. The report lists the strengths and areas for improvement of the operations of the school. The methods for conducting internal evaluation are chosen by educational institutions themselves. Performance indicators, which are available to the public in EEIS (the Estonian Education Information System) and approved by an order of the minister, form a basis for internal evaluation. The objective of performance indicators is to give schools the opportunity to monitor its indicators in time and to compare them with the indicators of other educational institutions of the same type.

In order to better inform the public and perform internal evaluation of the school, the so-called KOOLIKAART (a school file) has been drawn up for every school and published in the educational statistics virtual environment [Haridussilm](#).

Since 1 September 2013, schools and pre-primary child care institutions have been in charge of deciding upon ordering the **counselling service** and paying for the service. The state guarantees counselling to pre-primary child care institutions. The majority of counsellors are people belonging to the management of educational institutions who fulfil this task in addition to their main job. Counselling is organised and co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education and Research.

Supervisory control over the lawfulness and efficiency of an educational institution's activities is initialised and carried out by the owner of the institution (in municipal schools by the local municipality, in state schools by the Minister of Education and Research), involving experts of the field where necessary (Eurydice).

5.3 Evaluation mechanisms used to monitor outcomes at different system levels

General outcomes (academic, social, well-being, etc.) for all learners

State (Ministry of Education and Research – MoER)

The national standards (the national curriculum for pre-primary child care institutions, the national curriculum for basic schools, the national curriculum for upper secondary schools, the national curricula for vocational studies, the standard of higher education, and the



standard of vocational education) guarantee the quality provision of education; laws and regulations establish the principles of education funding, state supervision and quality assessment.

System evaluations in Estonia aim to provide evidence on the overall performance of the education system. The MoER monitors the indicators of the Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035 ([Haridussilm](#)).

The MoER (supervision area) gathers information in terms of general education outcomes and other data about schools by local authorities, and shares information with them.

Education and Youth Board (EYB)

EYB creates and carries out tests and feedbacks, and well-being and school environment survey and exams (national exams in grades 9 and 12). Assessment results are analysed in their dynamics. The results for all institutions are available for schools, partly publicly and comparable between institutions. The schools that participated in the test all receive wide-ranging feedback on learner performance.

To graduate from upper secondary school, learners must complete a research paper and sit national exams in the Estonian language, mathematics and a foreign language.

The results of the state examinations are announced to the examinee on the internet at the [state portal](#) and through the examination information system EIS. It is also possible to order instant notification of results by e-mail or SMS.

EYB establishes the entrance exams for secondary schools (upper secondary schools) and universities.

The Agency of Education Quality (belonging to EYB) is responsible for the development of the quality indicators that measure general education, vocational education and higher education.

School owners (local authorities, private owner, state)

School owners gather and analyse data, draw their own conclusions and take measures if necessary.

Schools

Schools gather and analyse data, draw their own conclusions and take measures if necessary.

Specific outcomes (academic, social, well-being, etc.) for learners vulnerable to exclusion

If needed, outcomes are based on gender and language. The performance indicators set in the Education and Youth Programme present information about boys and girls, also about learners whose home language is different from the language of study.

Outcomes for schools (professional development, staff and personal well-being, etc.)

The results for all institutions are available for institution (school) level, never individual level.



Schools

Schools gather (especially from e-school or Studium) and analyse data, draw their own conclusions and take measures if necessary. Additionally, schools use the reports which are prepared by the EYB about their school.

Outcomes for parents and families (support, participation, family well-being, etc.)

Education and Youth Board (EYB)

The EYB delivered the well-being and school environment survey among parents of basic school learners in 2018 and 2021. It also compiles a report about results and shares it among schools.

Schools

Schools analyse data, draw their own conclusions, and take measures if necessary. Very often, schools create their own questionnaires according to their interest, but that is not mandatory. Schools make decisions whether and how they evaluate their own activity, environment, etc.

5.4 Evaluation mechanisms used to monitor the effectiveness of processes at different system levels

Effectiveness of teaching and learning processes

Education and Youth Board (EYB)

With teachers, principals and researchers, the EYB has created a competence model for teachers. The teacher's competency model allows each teacher to analyse the entire process of teaching and to identify their professional development needs. With the help of the model, it is possible to determine the teacher's strengths and areas that need development, and to become aware of what attitudes and behaviours are expected of them. Using the tool is voluntary for teachers/principal.

School

According to the law, pre-primary child care institutions, general education schools and vocational schools are obliged to conduct internal evaluation. The procedure of internal evaluation is imposed by the head teacher. Usually, the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes is included in internal evaluation. An educational institution shall prepare a complete internal evaluation report on its activities at least once every three academic years. The objective of internal evaluation is to ensure conditions for learner development and consistent development of the educational institution. This is done by identifying the institution's strengths and areas for improvement. Based on that, an action plan for implementing the development plan is established. Internal evaluation is linked to the development plan of the institution.

Principals very often have professional development processes for teachers, but that is not mandatory.



Effectiveness of school management processes

State (MoER)

System evaluations in Estonia aim to provide evidence on the overall performance (including effectiveness and efficiency indicators) of the education system. The MoER monitors the indicators of the Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035 ([Haridussilm](#)). All educational institutions submit data to the Estonian Education Information System.

Education and Youth Board (EYB)

With principals and researchers, the EYB has created a competence model for principals. It is used in the recruitment and selection of the head of the educational institution, training, individual counselling, performance evaluation and recognition. The 360-degree feedback method based on the competence model of managers allows the use of the information in the preparation of an individual development plan and to compare the manager's own assessment with the assessments given by others in important competencies. Using the tool is voluntary for principals/schools owners.

School

According to the law, pre-primary child care institutions, general education schools and vocational schools are obliged to conduct internal evaluation. The procedure of internal evaluation is imposed by the head teacher. Usually, the entire school staff participate in internal evaluation. The criteria of internal evaluation depend on the school. Usually, leadership and administration is evaluated by the school. An internal evaluation report is discussed by the school staff council and approved by the board of trustees and the owner.

Effectiveness of teacher professional development processes

The effectiveness of teacher in-service training is assessed based on data collected in the Juhan information system: content, volume, number of participants and feedback from participants. Teacher training is also registered in the Estonian Education Information System, where the head of the school can get a separate and school-based overview of each teacher (European Agency, Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion).

Efficiency and effectiveness of funding mechanisms

Usually, resource management is evaluated by the school. An internal evaluation report is discussed by the school staff council and approved by the board of trustees and the owner.

Effectiveness of (vertical) co-operation between stakeholders at different system levels

Usually, effectiveness of co-operation with stakeholders is evaluated by the school.

Effectiveness of (horizontal) co-operation between ministries and ministerial departments

Not present. As this is not measured it cannot be evaluated.



5.5 Specific monitoring mechanisms relating to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

Line of action: Supervision for guaranteeing the rights of the child

Monitoring and regular analysis of the rights stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([Strategy of Children and Families 2012–2020](#); CPRA).

Developmental conversations with each learner and their parents must take place at least once each academic year for the purpose of supporting the learner's development. Further study and development goals are agreed on the basis thereof (Basic Schools and Upper secondary School Act; CPRA).

A person who, due to their state of health, has not achieved the readiness for school required for commencement of studies by the time of reaching the age of compulsory school attendance, may, on the basis of a recommendation of the external advisory team, commence the performance of the duty to attend school in the next academic year. A parent will submit to the external advisory team an application for the postponement of the commencement of the performance of the duty to attend school. The minister responsible for the field will establish the conditions of and procedure for the postponement of the performance of the duty to attend school (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act; CPRA).

A special educational need is identified using pedagogical-psychological assessment, repeated and more accurate observation of the behaviour of learners in different conditions, gathering information about learners and the environment of their upbringing, and medical and speech therapy examinations of learners. Talented learners are also identified on the basis of the results of standardised tests carried out by licensed specialists, achievement of very good results in national or international subject Olympics, contests or competitions, and assessments of field experts (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act; CPRA).

5.6 Specific evaluation mechanisms relating to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

According to the [Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#), the school arranges a pedagogical-psychological evaluation of the learner who needs support. Also, where necessary, co-operation with the specialists of other fields is pursued and additional surveys are recommended. Results of the evaluation, tests and surveys, also the teachers' observations, recommendations made by the support specialists and external advisory team, the applied services and support, and assessment of their effectiveness are entered in the map of observation of the learner's individual development. At least once a year the co-ordinator of the studies of the learner with special educational needs assesses, in co-operation with the teachers and the support specialists, the impact of the application of the recommended support and makes proposals for further steps.



5.7 Specific accountability mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

Appeal process for rights violations

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, state supervision is exercised by the External Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Education and Research. Official supervision is exercised by the owner of the educational institution. The Ministry of Education and Research resolves appeals related to the legality of study and educational activities. In cases falling within the scope of official supervision, a proposal for the performance of official supervision shall be forwarded to the owner of the educational institution.

According to the Chancellor of Justice Act, the Chancellor of Justice performs the functions of protection of the rights of children and promotion thereof according to Article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Based on Article 33(2) of the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Chancellor of Justice shall perform the functions of promoting the implementation, protection and monitoring of the Convention.

School inspection

The Estonian Education Information System provides everyone with an opportunity to review the performance indicators of educational institutions. Data established by the minister's regulation are available for each educational institution (CPRA).

Evaluative commentary

This section provides a qualified, evidenced-based reflection on the **challenges, opportunities and consequences** of quality assurance and accountability for inclusive education in practice. It specifically considers the implications of how different stakeholders across the education system are accountable for ensuring the effective implementation of policy for inclusive education in practice.

Moving from external control to the internal responsibility of the stakeholders requires more than ever the professionalisation of teachers, principals and school administrators (local authorities) in management and teaching. In the last decade, numerous tests and feedback for teachers have been created. The capacity of teachers to use different feedback to improve and adapt teaching to learner needs has remained a challenge. Evidence-based management on the school and classroom levels needs data literacy of principals and teachers as well.

A gap between boys' and girls' performance: The drop-out rate for boys from basic education is twice as high as for girls. At the end of basic school, the share of low achievers is much higher among boys than girls, and fewer boys complete secondary education. The lower performance of boys in basic school is not due to differences in ability but to attitudes towards learning, etc. The monitoring system of boys' progress needs improvement.



Quality assessment indicators of state level have so far been focused mainly on the academic achievements of learners in Estonia. At the same time, no attention has been paid to monitoring the learning results of those learners who study on the basis of a simplified curriculum. Even more, there are few evidence-based assessment measures worked out at the state level to evaluate effectiveness of special settings from the perspectives of the short-term and long-term aims.

The main focus at the national level is on monitoring whether and to what extent the availability of support specialists has been provided to officially defined learners with special needs.

Ensuring coherence of the external and internal evaluations with one another is one of the main challenges emphasised in the document of Education Strategy 2021–2035. In terms of implementation of the policy of inclusive education, attention should be paid to:

- developing quality indicators that show the effectiveness of inclusive education, the well-being of all learners, academic and social inclusion, etc. Both quantitative and qualitative metrics are important here;
- focusing on self-evaluation questions to evaluate the functioning of the educational institution in the context of inclusive education;
- gathering evidence-based data for evaluating the achievements of inclusive education policy of institutional-level goals as well as the performance of inclusive classroom practice.



SECTION 6. STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION, CO-OPERATION AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

This section provides information on the structures, mechanisms and opportunities for stakeholder collaboration and co-operation in the country.

6.1 Does the legislation and policy framework specify learner voices are used to inform the development of learning and teaching environments?

Yes.

6.1a Description of the legislation and policy framework around the use of learner voice

Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act § 6 principles of organisation of studies sets that the needs and interests of learners are taken into account when designing the curricula of schools and implementing individual curricula. The learners of a school constitute the learner body. In its activities, the learner council follows the interests, needs, rights and duties of learners.

6.2 Does the legislation and policy framework ensure curriculum development processes take account of all learners and their communities?

Yes.

6.2a Description of how the legislation and policy framework around curriculum development processes take account of all learners and their communities

Upon the organisation of studies, the state, owners of schools and schools adhere to the following principles:

- general education of good quality is equally available to all persons regardless of their social and economic background, nationality, gender, place of residence or special educational needs;
- (basic) the needs and interests of learners are taken into account upon designing the curricula of schools and implementing individual curricula.

Sources: *Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act; CPRA*

Other countries take a rights-based approach to preventing school failure. For example, in Estonia, several legal documents describe all learners' rights to receive high-quality education and support, according to their needs (European Agency, 2019, Preventing School Failure). In each county, 16 Educational Support Service Centres have been established. Their task is to counsel and support learners, teachers and parents in organising study for learners with SEN. Guidance for individuals in the education sector is



offered in the context of youth work in order to promote the diverse development of young people (CPRA – Estonia Country Report; National Overview, p. 7).

To raise awareness of the Equal Treatment Act and the principles of non-discrimination, the Ministry of Social Affairs has been co-financing the European Commission PROGRESS programme 'Diversity Enriches' project of Tallinn Technical University since 2010. The project tackles all grounds of discrimination named in the Act. 'Diversity Enriches' has been focusing on diversity management in employment since 2013, with special attention on problems of homophobia, people with disabilities and the elderly (Human Rights Council, National Report, Estonia, p. 5). This campaign is aimed at the whole society, so its direct impact on school learners has not been assessed.

In August 2014, the government approved amendments to the national curricula of basic and upper secondary schools which, among other things, enhanced the promotion of gender equality at these school levels, including tuition of social subjects, career planning, technology and handicraft. According to a Regulation of the Minister of Education and Research, study literature must be based on the core values established in the national curriculum, whereas it must take into account the principle of multiculturalism and avoid stereotypes that incite gender-based, nation-based, religious, cultural or racial prejudice (GEM).

Two projects, implemented under the Norway Grants 2009–2014 programme, 'Mainstreaming Gender Equality' and 'Promoting Work–Life Balance' by the Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable and the Praxis Centre for Policy Studies, aim to integrate gender equality issues into higher education curricula, including teacher training (Human Rights Council, National Report, Estonia, p. 9).

In 2014, the Ministry of Social Affairs started amendment of the Equal Treatment Act (ETA) to improve protection against discrimination. The current law divides the areas protected against discrimination by the ground of discrimination. It covers discrimination based on religion or belief, age, disability and sexual orientation only in the area of employment, while discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin and colour is additionally covered in the areas of education, services and social security. The planned amendment will also extend protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, age, disability and sexual orientation to education, access to goods and services and social protection (Human Rights Council, National Report, Estonia, p. 9).

In 2015 the Youth Agency of the Ministry of Education and Research-led Archimedes Foundation launched a new project 'Youth Meetings' to enhance communication and mutual understanding between young people of age 11–16 residing in Estonia. Its wider purpose is to grow cultural awareness, openness and tolerance of the participants and society in general. The project activities are developed and led by the young people themselves on topics they consider interesting or important (Human Rights Council, National Report, Estonia, p. 9; GEM).

The process of renewal of the national curriculum has put more effort into the field of social studies and how to discuss the problems which are important in society.



6.3 Does the legislation and policy framework support the active involvement of different stakeholders in ensuring inclusive learning environments?

Parents and families

Yes.

1.10.1 The school head appoints a person whose duty is to organise co-operation between support specialists, instructors of talented learners and teachers (hereinafter, 'special educational needs co-ordinator') for the purpose of supporting the teaching and development of a learner with special educational needs. The special educational needs co-ordinator supports and instructs a teacher in identifying special educational needs and makes proposals to the teacher, parent and school head regarding further educational work, application of measures offered by the school in support of the development of the learner or conducting further investigations, thereby co-operating with teachers and support specialists (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act).

2.1.2 Developmental conversations with each child and their parents must take place at least once each academic year.

2.1.5 In order to co-ordinate co-operation between the school and the parents, the school head calls a meeting of the parents of the learners studying in the stationary form of study, thereby giving all parents the chance to participate in the parents' meeting at least once a year (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, p. 22).

2.2.1 All decisions that the school makes about children should be approved by parents.

The recommendations of the external advisory team are mandatory for the school organising the learners' studies and a parent must grant their approval (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act).

It is up to parents to choose between the local mainstream school and a segregated special school. Developmental conversations with each learner and their parents must take place at least once each academic year. The learners or their parents – and, where necessary, teachers and support specialists – are involved in drawing up an individual curriculum (CPRA).

Teachers are required to provide advice on issues of learning and teaching to the parents of learners who attend the pre-primary institution and the parents of learners who do not attend the pre-primary institution but who reside in the catchment area, if the parents so request (Pre-primary Child Care Institutions Act, p. 9).

Healthcare professionals should advise parents and teachers on issues related to children's health (Pre-primary Child Care Institutions Act, p. 9).

Learners and their parents have the right to receive information and explanations from the school regarding the organisation of studies and the rights and duties of learners. The school is required to grant the parents of a learner studying in the stationary form of study access to the information that is in the possession of the school regarding the learners.

Sources: *European Agency, CPRA*; [GEM, Country Background Report](#)



School-leaders/leadership teams, teachers and specialist staff

Yes.

The development plan of a school is drawn up for the purpose of ensuring the consistent development of the school. The development plan is made for at least three years. The development plan lays down the goals, and objectives and directions of development of the school.

The development plan and amendments thereto are prepared in co-operation with the board of trustees, learner council, teachers' council and experts from the school or external experts. The development plan is approved by the owner of the school or a person authorised by it, and the head of school reports on it in accordance with the procedure established by the owner of the school ([Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act § 67](#))

Source: *European Agency, Supporting Inclusive School Leadership*

1.10.1 The school head appoints a person whose duty is to organise co-operation between support specialists, instructors of talented learners and teachers (hereinafter, special educational needs co-ordinator) for the purpose of supporting the teaching and development of a learner with special educational needs. The special educational needs co-ordinator supports and instructs a teacher in identifying special educational needs and makes proposals to the teacher, parent and school head regarding further educational work, application of measures offered by the school in support of the development of the learner or conducting further investigations, thereby co-operating with teachers and support specialists. (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act).

Source: *European Agency, CPRA*

Stakeholders in the local communities

Yes.

The state and the local government are linked in terms of territory, as the local government is based on the administrative division of the state's territory. The basis for and procedure of the alteration of the administrative territorial organisation of Estonia is laid down in the Territory of Estonia Administrative Division Act 43. Local government has the right to establish alliances and joint agencies with other local governments. Such co-operation will contribute to the development of rural municipalities and towns, and enable a more effective representation and protection of joint interests in different levels of public authority (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015).

Tagasi Kooli is a citizen initiative, the aim of which is to strengthen co-operation between Estonian schools and the rest of the society. Guest teachers – active citizens, parents, alumni, learners and everyone willing to contribute to school life – are invited to give classes and share their experiences at school. The classes given by guest teachers mediate practical knowledge and experience from different fields of life to the teachers, thereby contributing to the diversification of education. For teachers, Tagasi Kooli creates important value in meeting the objectives of the new curriculum and extending the co-operation network with people who wish to contribute to the development of the new generation (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015).



Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Local-level decision-/policy-makers

Yes.

1.5.2 Increasing the efficiency of the co-operation between the various institutions (local authorities, county government, ministry, Chancellor of Justice) that exercise supervision in guaranteeing the rights of the child ([Strategy of Children and Families 2012–2020](#)).

Source: *European Agency, CPRA*

Non-governmental organisations, disabled people’s organisations or other organisations representing vulnerable groups

Yes.

To promote good governance, Estonia has joined the Open Government Partnership initiative. The government agencies are guided by Good Practice of Engagement.

Source: [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

Other(s)

Learners: 2.1.3 The learners or their parents – and, where necessary, teachers and support specialists – are involved in drawing up an individual curriculum.

Learners: 6.2.4 The learner or, if the learner has limited active legal capacity, their parent and, where necessary, teachers and support specialists, will be involved in drawing up an individual curriculum (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary School Act).

Source: *European Agency, CPRA*

The board of trustees is a standing body whose function is to ensure the joint activities of the learners, teachers, owner, parents of learners, graduates and organisations supporting the school in guiding, planning and observing teaching and education, and creation of better opportunities for teaching and education. The board of trustees is formed and its rules of procedure are established in accordance with the procedure established by the owner of the school (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary School Act § 73 – Board of trustees).

6.4 Does the legislation and policy framework ensure that curriculum development processes involve the participation and contribution of different stakeholders?

Yes.

6.4a Description of the legislation and policy framework ensuring the involvement of stakeholders in curriculum development processes

The learners or their parents – and, where necessary, teachers and support specialists – are involved in drawing up an individual curriculum. If the individual curriculum drawn up for a learner with special educational needs stipulates reduction or replacement of the



learning outcomes provided for in the national curriculum or exemption from learning a compulsory subject, the individual curriculum may be implemented on the basis of an advisory team recommendation. The curriculum of a school will be established by the head of the school. The curriculum of the school and amendments thereto will be submitted to the board of trustees, learners' council and teachers' council for the expression of an opinion before establishment (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act; CPRA) It is common practice for professional organisations of teachers and support specialists, as well as representative organisations of parents and learners, and representatives of schools and school administrators, to be involved in curriculum renewal.

Sources: *Piret Liba*; [GEM, Country Background Report](#)

6.5 Does the legislation and policy framework support the development of learning communities in local/regional areas?

Yes.

6.5a Description of the legislation and policy framework that supports the development of learning communities

[Strategic planning for 2021–2035](#) began with the agreement of the vision. The Ministry of Education and Research convened an expert panel of about a hundred experts and asked them to prepare vision documents in three perspectives: society's values and responsibility, coherence and well-being, and competitiveness. According to the vision documents, the main targets for Estonian future development are: happy learner, inclusive society of welfare and shared values, competitive and sustainably growing economy, and a viable and strong Estonian culture and language. To achieve this four-sided vision, three operational goals were formulated:

1. Learning opportunities are diverse and accessible, and the education system enables smooth transitions between different levels and types of education.
2. The approach to learning and teaching is learner-focused, forward-looking and helps learners to succeed in life.
3. Learning options are responsive to labour market needs.

The policy framework comes from [Estonian Research and Development, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy 2021–2035](#)). The general goal is that Estonian research, development, innovation and entrepreneurship work together to increase the well-being of Estonian society and the productivity of the Estonian economy, by providing competitive and sustainable solutions for the development needs of Estonia and the world.



Evaluative commentary

This section provides a qualified, evidenced-based reflection on the **challenges, opportunities and consequences** of stakeholder collaboration, co-operation and effective communication for the implementation of inclusive education in practice. It specifically considers how effectively different stakeholders across the education system are supported to increase their personal and collective ability to be inclusive in practice.

Education Strategy 2021–2035 emphasises that collaboration and coherence between different levels and types of education is limited. There is no comprehensive approach to supporting learners with special educational needs that includes the scopes of different ministries. In order to fill this gap, co-operation between different ministries has been established.

Although according to the good practice of legislative drafting, various interest groups are involved in the development of legislation, the voices of parents and learners themselves should be heard more in the context of inclusive education. This is especially the case when developing flexible curricula and ensuring transitions from one educational level to another.

Additionally, as one target set for 2035 in the Education Strategy 2021–2035 is ensuring the right to high-quality and inclusive education for all learners, special attention should be paid to:

- clarifying the understanding of the concept of inclusive education in a whole society. Studies conducted in Estonia have revealed that there are several interpretations of the meaning and ways of implementation of inclusive education ([Häidkind and Oras, 2016](#); [Kivirand, Leijen, Lepp & Malva, 2020](#)).
- supporting schools in shaping inclusive school culture and implementing structural changes in co-operation with different stakeholders of state and local government level ([Kivirand, Leijen & Lepp, 2022](#)).

In conclusion, removing legislative barriers to inclusive education policy, developing shared understanding of the meaning of inclusive education between different stakeholders and finding best practices for implementing inclusive education in the context of our own country are the main challenges in the near future in Estonia.