



Information gathering template prepared for the Global Education Monitoring Report 2021 - Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia - Inclusion and education: All means all.

Estonia

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Introduction	2
Survey reply and respondents	4
Country system overview	5
Section 1: Laws and Policies	10
Section 2: Governance and Finance	23
Section 3: Data	37
Section 4: Curricula, learning materials and assessment	41
Section 5: Teachers and support personnel	51
Section 6: Schools	61
Section 7: Communities, parents and students	68
References	72

Introduction

The template for the Profiles was a survey designed to collect information from countries in order to collect structured information to be used as the basis for the GEM Regional Report analysis work.

The survey respondents were specifically requested to not focus exclusively on children with disabilities, but include information on all of the groups considered to be vulnerable to exclusion or at risk of being marginalised, stereotyped or subject to discrimination, including for reasons such as gender, location, poverty, ethnicity, language, beliefs and religion, migration or displacement status, sexual orientation or gender identity expression.

The overall goal for the Profile was that the information provided in relation to each country identifies:

1. challenges (barriers and hinderances) and opportunities (support and ways forward) for the implementation of inclusion in education policies;
2. the ways in which countries monitor inclusion and exclusion in education (at individual and system levels);
3. challenges (barriers and hinderances) and opportunities (support and ways forward) for supporting inclusion in education created by sectors other than education and arrangements needed to co-ordinate work among government sectors, tiers of government and with other stakeholders to overcome overlapping dimensions of exclusion;
4. key policy solutions that are being implemented and key drivers of policy change.

The Profile begins with background information on the people completing the template.

The next section provides a short descriptive overview of the country's system of inclusive education.

This is followed by main sections presenting quantitative and qualitative data linked to each of the seven themes for the report:

1. laws and policies;
2. governance and finance;
3. data;
4. curricula, learning materials and assessment;
5. teachers and support personnel;
6. schools;
7. communities, parents and students.

Each section begins with a key guiding question (marked in italic text) that frames the overall information provided. This is followed by the specific questions on the main issues for the topic that should be answered.

Sections 1 and 2 focus on information relating to legislation and policies.

Section 3 focuses upon available data and the aims and procedures for data collection.

Sections 4 to 7 focus on information relating to policies and policy implementation in practice.

The information provided focuses on compulsory education (i.e. potentially -pre-primary, primary and lower secondary, and possibly upper secondary education). Only specific issues related to inclusion in early childhood education and post-compulsory education were considered when necessary.

Survey reply and respondents

The following country representatives have contributed to and validated this profile:

Piret Liba, Adviser, Education Management Department, Ministry of Education and Research, Republic of Estonia

Advice and information on some topics was collected from colleagues from the Ministry of Education and Research of Estonia by the government representative Piret Liba.

The main challenge for the preparation of the profile was:

As the range of topics is wide, it took time to delve into each topic and find relevant information.

The 5 most informative sources on inclusion in education (academic papers, policy reviews, evaluation studies etc.) for the country published since 2015:

1. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2018) National Overview
2. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Country Policy Review and Analysis
3. Eurydice. National Education Systems, Estonia
4. Republic of Estonia Ministry of Education and Research. Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act
5. OECD (2016). OECD Reviews of School Resources: Estonia. Summary.

Country system overview

(i) Provide a brief (maximum 1 page) narrative of the country's compulsory educational system. Specifically, provide information about:

a. the different types of schools, institutions and educational provision within the system and the age range / ISCED levels of learners they cater for

...the structure of the education system provides opportunities for everyone to move from one level of education to the next. Levels of education comprise preschool education (ISCED level 0), basic education (ISCED levels 1 and 2), upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) and higher education (ISCED levels 6, 7 and 8). (Eurydice. Country report)

Preschool education (ISCED level 0) is generally acquired in childcare institutions (koolieelne lasteasutus). Local governments are obliged to provide all children aged from 1.5 to 7 years permanently residing in their catchment area with the opportunity to attend a preschool child care institution if the parents so wish. In addition, there is also a system of childcare services (lapsehoiuteenus) catering mainly for the youngest children. These services can be either centre- or home-based.

Basic education (ISCED levels 1 and 2) is the minimum compulsory general education, which is acquired in the basic school (põhikool) and which gives the right to continue studies at upper secondary education level. Basic school includes grades 1–9. Successful completion of the curriculum and passing final examinations is the condition for acquiring basic education.

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

The volume of vocational education curricula is calculated in VET credit points (EKAP). One credit point corresponds to 26 hours of work used by a student for studying. The yearly study volume is 60 credit points. The study volume of vocational secondary education (ISCED 3) is 180 credit points. Successful completion of the curriculum, taking necessary tests and passing all required assessments, practical training and the final examination is the condition for graduating from a vocational school. Acquisition of upper secondary education gives the right to continue studies at higher education level.

Vocational education may be acquired also after graduation from upper secondary school. The study volume of VET after secondary education (post-secondary non-tertiary education, ISCED 4) is 120–150 credit points. Also, people with unfinished basic education can enter VET studies, the study volume is 15–120 credit points (ISCED 2).

Higher education (ISCED levels 6, 7 and 8) may be acquired as professional higher education (in a vocational school (kutseõppeasutus), institution of professional higher education (rakenduskõrgkool), educational institution belonging to the structure of university (ülikool)) or academic higher education (ülikool). The general structure of academic study has three levels or cycles. The first level is Bachelor's study and the second level is Master's study. The third and the highest level is Doctoral study. All persons with upper secondary education or foreign qualifications equal thereto have an equal right to compete to be admitted to the above mentioned educational institutions.

The volume of higher education curricula is calculated in credit points of European Credit Point Transfer System (ECTS). One credit point corresponds to 26 hours of work used by a student for studying. The yearly study volume is 60 credit points. The standard volume of Bachelor's study as well as of professional higher education study is 180–240 ECTS. The standard period of Master's study is 60–120 ECTS. The standard period of Bachelor's and Master's

study combined must be at least 300 ECTS in total. The standard period of Doctoral study is 180–240 ECTS. (Eurydice. Country Report)

b. the different authorities responsible for different types of provision etc.

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

At state level, the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 guides the long-term developments. The national standards (the national curriculum for preschool 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.

Local governments maintain preschool 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.

Studies are conducted in preschool childcare institutions, general education schools and vocational schools – in case of the vocational upper secondary education curricula -- under uniform national curricula, on the basis of which schools compile their own curricula. In case of other types of vocational training, school curricula are prepared on the basis of the Vocational Education Standard and the relevant professional standard. (Eurydice, Country Report)

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

c. any major external support programmes provided in the past 5 years e.g. bilateral - GIZ (German Society for International Cooperation) and USAID; or multi-lateral e.g. UNICEF, European Union, ADB (Asian Development Bank).

The European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund.

(ii) Are there specific features of the compulsory education system that impact on inclusion that should be kept in mind when reading the country response?

Area	Yes/No	Description of the feature
Early tracking of learners into a particular educational pathway	No	
'Double-shift' patterns to the school day (i.e. learners attend for either a morning or afternoon session)	Partial	In most schools children attend school in one shift, only 1% of schools have organised studies in two shifts (Eurydice)
Grade retention	Yes	Basic school has 3 stages: stage I – grades 1–3; stage II – grades 4–6; stage III – grades 7–9. Usually

		<p>children of the same age go to the same class. Due to flexible organisation of studies (also children younger than the age of compulsory school attendance may commence school studies and 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 student, to either prolong or shorten the time for completing a grade; or the basis of a decision of the teachers' council, students may be required to a grade), the age difference of students in one class may be 1–3 years. (<u>Eurydice</u>)</p> <p>The term “grade retention” has mostly been used to describe the repeating of a school year. Although this is not very common (due to flexible organisation of studies as described), the law in Estonia still allows students to repeat a class course. According to the national curricula by a reasoned decision of the Teachers’ Council, a student may exceptionally repeat a class if the student has 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 student or his or her legal representative in making the decision and hears his or her opinion. The decision of the Teachers’ Council must set out the considerations on the basis of which it is considered expedient to allow the student to repeat the class course. (Ministry of Education and Research of Estonia)</p>
Multiple languages of instruction	Yes	<p>Estonian and Russian.</p> <p>The following possibilities exist as additional possibilities and measures for the organisation of education of children whose mother tongue is other than Estonian:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • possibility to acquire basic education in the English language in two schools and in the Finnish language also in two schools; • possibility to study mother tongue two hours per week if the mother tongue (home language) of a student is different than the language of instruction of the school and if there are more than 10 students wishing to study the language;

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • possibility to study mother tongue as foreign language; • implementation of individual curriculum (incl. teaching of Estonian individually or in a small group); • teaching of Estonian (the official language), incl. in case the student studies at a school with Estonian as the language of instruction; • studying Estonian free of charge for asylum seekers and refugees; • a student whose mother tongue is other than Estonian or a student who has arrived from a foreign country and whose experience of learning in Estonian in basic schools is less than six academic years, may study Estonian as second language; • a student who has lived in Estonia for less than three years has the right to give up studies of foreign language B; • a student who has lived in Estonia up to three years and who is studying at an Estonian school in a class with Estonian as language of instruction or in a language immersion class, has the right for four Estonian language lessons per week; <p>(Eurydice, Country Report)</p>
Policies on access to compulsory education in local schools		No information found.
(others ...)		

(iii) In the country's system which groups are considered to be vulnerable to exclusion from education? Who has identified these groups as being vulnerable to exclusion?

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are pupils who, upon the recommendation of an external multi-disciplinary advisory team, receive 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.

A special educational need is identified through pedagogical-psychological assessment, repeated and more accurate observation of the learner's behaviour in different conditions, gathering information about the learner and the environment of their upbringing, and medical and speech therapy examinations.

The school head appoints a person whose duty is to organise co-operation between support specialists and teachers for supporting the schooling and development of a learner with SEN.

The person responsible for co-ordinating the schooling of a learner with SEN supports and instructs the teacher in identifying SEN. They make suggestions to the teacher, parents and school head regarding further educational work, the application of measures offered by the school in support of the learner's development or conducting further investigations, thereby co-operating with teachers and support specialists.

If the measures applied do not achieve results, then the school – with the parents' approval – can apply for additional support from the counselling centre or medical specialists.

According to the external advisory team's recommendation and with written parental consent, the school provides enhanced support or special support to the learner. (National Overview, p.3-4)

(iv) Please provide a brief (maximum 1 page) narrative overview of the historical development of inclusion of vulnerable groups in education in the country.

There is a clear movement from a disability-centred approach towards pedagogical specifications in legislation, identification of special educational needs (SEN) and evaluation of learners with SEN.

Labelling terminology is removed from the legislation. Medical diagnoses in the legislation on education are replaced with pedagogical ones in order to proceed from a learner's abilities and from adapting the study environment to the needs of every single learner.

The guidelines on the 'Lifelong Learning Strategy for 2014–2020' set the goal of considering the individual needs of learners with SEN and implementing principles of inclusive education. The following trends will be taken into account in organising instruction for pupils with SEN and the development activities thereof for the period 2014–2020:

- The educational, social and health services that support the instruction and development of pupils with SEN are cohesive and adjusted according to the pupils' needs.*
- Support specialists and study guidance services are available to schools regardless of the region or the school's size.*
- The number of pupils in special schools is decreasing. The network of segregated special schools established for pupils with severe and multiple disorders will meet societal expectations, take into account pupils' special needs and use the resources optimally and efficiently as part of the network of general education schools.*
- The competence of school leaders, teachers and support specialists in the organisation of study for pupils with SEN has increased.*
- In order to support pupils with SEN, teachers provide modern instructional materials and study materials appropriate for pupils' needs.*

A pre-primary institution for children with special needs is generally a mainstream nursery school. In certain cases, it is a special pre-primary institution (there are only three of these).

The number of special schools has decreased from year to year. Depending on the specific needs of the learner requiring special education, resource-intensive support measures or special treatment, the learner may study at a school for pupils with special needs. There are special schools for learners with visual and hearing impairments; for learners who, in addition to a physical disability, have an additional special educational need; for learners with severe and multiple disorders; and for learners with emotional-behavioural disorders. Approximately 2.6% of the total number of learners in compulsory schools study in special schools.

Special schools for learners with hearing and visual impairments act as resource centres and provide support for teachers, learners and families in mainstream schools. (National Overview, p. 5)

Section 1: Laws and Policies

What is the framework of legislation, policy and guidelines for supporting the development of an inclusive education system?

1.1 Have international/UN conventions/declarations to protect the rights of groups who are potentially vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion been integrated into national and/or regional law?

Convention/declaration on	Law	Comments
Child rights (UNCRC)	<u>Child Protection Act</u> Constitution of the Republic of Estonia	Prepares the child for an independent life. Teaching must be student-centred, guided by the differences of students and based on recognition of educational progress. The Estonian organisation of education is guided by the principle of inclusive education". (UNCRPD Article 24 overview)
Disability (UNCRPD)	Disability Policy Education Act Constitution §37	Ratified in April 2012 Right to education and inclusive education in state law and binding for municipalities and city governments. (CPRA) If the local government cannot establish the necessary conditions in school (e.g. very specific learning arrangement, resource-intensive support services), children are referred to an educational institution intended for disabled children. The parent retains the freedom to decide whether attending an ordinary or a specialised school suits his or her child better. (UNCRPD Article 24 overview)

	<p>Preschool Child Care Institutions Act §24</p>	<p>Estonian laws provide disabled people’s equal right to education, explicitly stressing the obligation to create the relevant conditions for them. Disabled people, like all others, (page 28) have the constitutional right to education (UNCRPD Article 24 overview) to support children with special educational needs, an individual development plan is prepared for each such child, based on his or her individual needs and prepared in cooperation with the relevant parties. (UNCRPD Article 24 overview)</p>
<p>Gender (Convention on discrimination against women CEDAW)</p>	<p>21 October 1991</p>	<p>In October 2013, Estonian government established the Gender Equality Council, set forth in the Gender Equality Act and functioning as an advisory body to the government. Its responsibilities are advising the Government in matters related to strategies for the promotion of gender equality, approving general objectives of gender equality policy and presenting opinions to the Government concerning the compliance of national programmes with the obligation of gender mainstreaming. Among the 22 members of the Council there are representatives of institutions and NGOs working with gender equality, universities and</p>

		<p>political parties. (<u>United Nations, 2016</u>)</p> <p>Gender equality in education</p> <p>In August 2014, the Government approved amendments to the national curricula of basic and upper secondary schools which inter alia 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.</p> <p>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. (<u>United Nations, 2016</u>)</p>
<p>Ethnicity or language (UN Declaration on Rights of persons</p>	<p><u>The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia § 12 -</u></p>	

belonging to National, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities)

everyone is equal before the law. No one may be discriminated against on the basis of nationality, race, colour, sex, language, origin, religion, political or other views, property or social status, or on other grounds. Incitement to ethnic, racial, religious or political hatred, violence or discrimination is prohibited and punishable by law. Incitement to hatred and violence between social classes or to discrimination against a social class is also prohibited and punishable by law.

National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act § 3 states that a person of a national minority has the right to maintain his or her ethnic belonging, cultural customs, mother tongue and religion. It is prohibited to denigrate the customs and religious practices of any national culture, and to hinder the performance thereof, and it is also prohibited to engage in any activity aimed at forcing the members of a national minority to adopt the national characteristics of another nation.

Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act § 6 states that 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.	
Other (e.g. Rights of indigenous people)		
<i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i>	Constitution of the Republic of Estonia	

1.2 Provide an overview of general education legislation impacting on the inclusion of learners from vulnerable groups:

Name and link	Year and status (enacted, under preparation etc.)	Description of key content
<u>Basic Schools and Upper-Secondary Schools Act</u>	09.06.2010	<p>The principle of inclusive education is laid down in the Basic Schools and Upper-Secondary Schools Act. According to the law, every child has the right to attend a school in their residential area or study in a mainstream school with an adapted curriculum and to receive different kinds of support. Or, if conditions are unsuitable and the parents agree, to study at a special school. Parents have the final decision in making educational choices for their children. (CPRA)</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 regular school or in a school created for students who need support. (Eurydice)</p> <p>In January 2018, the amendments to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act were approved by the Parliament. The objective of the amendments is to operatively offer relevant support to students with special educational needs irrespective of the school's type or form of ownership.</p> <p>All students may develop a need for additional support from teachers or support specialists during their studies and it must be immediately accessible in such cases. The</p>

		<p>objective is to approach each student individually in the future, proceeding from their need for support and the nature and scale of the support they need.</p> <p>The need for primary support is assessed and decided by the school. If this is not enough and the student needs enhanced or special support, specialists from outside the school will be involved: educational, social and health specialists. Creating more flexible possibilities for the formation of specialised classes and groups is also planned. The focus is on the need for support, its nature and scale, not a type of specialised class with a limit on the number of students. (Eurydice, Country Report)</p>
<u>Estonian Constitution</u>	28.06.1992	
<u>Education Act</u>	1992 In force from 01.09.2019	<p>Determines the competence of local governments (municipality or town). Eurydice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - planning of education development programs within their administrative jurisdiction and their implementation; - establishing, reorganising and closing municipal educational institutions pursuant to the procedure prescribed by legislation and ensuring their economic support and financing; - appointing heads of educational institutions under their jurisdiction to office and releasing them from office; - keeping records of children of compulsory school age and ensuring monitoring of compulsory school attendance, organising transport to the educational institution and back, and ensuring medical care and meals during school hours; - keeping records of persons with special needs and organising teaching for them. (Eurydice)
<u>Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy for 2014-2020</u>	2014	<p>... sets policy targets for inclusive education, whereas the development of inclusive competence-based national curriculum, the inclusion of national minorities, teacher education, and educational counselling are set as sub-goals. (Human Rights Council, National Report, Estonia, p.20)</p> <p><i>Estonian education policy priorities are set in the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020.</i></p> <p><i>The general goal of the Lifelong Learning Strategy is to provide all people in Estonia with learning opportunities</i></p>

		<p><i>that are tailored to their needs and capabilities throughout their whole lifespan, in order for them to maximise opportunities for dignified self-actualisation within society, in their work and in their family life. Two of the main strategy goals target inclusive education:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Change in the approach to learning. The goal is to implement an approach to learning that supports each learner’s individual and social development, the acquisition of learning skills, creativity and entrepreneurship in the work at all levels and in all types of education.</i> • <i>Equal opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning. Equal opportunities for lifelong learning have been created for every individual.</i> <p><i>(The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020). (Agency, CPRA, p.3)</i></p>
<u>National Curriculum for Preschool Child Care Institutions</u>	2008 In force from 01.01.2011	National standard guaranteeing the quality provision of education. (Eurydice)
<u>National Curriculum for Basic Schools</u>	Last Amendment 2014	<p>National standard guaranteeing the quality provision of education. (Eurydice)</p> <p>The principle of inclusive education is laid down in the Basic Schools and Upper-Secondary Schools Act. According to the law, every child has the right to attend a school in their residential area or study in a mainstream school with an adapted curriculum and to receive different kinds of support. Or, if conditions are unsuitable and the parents agree, to study at a special school. Parents have the final decision in making educational choices for their children. (CPRA)</p>
<u>National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools</u>	Last Amendment 2014	<p>National standard guaranteeing the quality provision of education. (Eurydice)</p> <p>The principle of inclusive education is laid down in the Basic Schools and Upper-Secondary Schools Act. According to the law, every child has the right to attend a school in their residential area or study in a mainstream school with an adapted curriculum and to receive different kinds of support. Or, if conditions are unsuitable and the parents agree, to study at a special school. Parents have the final decision in making educational choices for their children. (CPRA)</p>

<u>Vocational Educational Institutions Act</u>	In force since 1.01.2019	<p>... amending the terms and conditions for funding vocational educational institutions, and replacing the funding of vocational educational institutions through state-commissioned education by the allocation of activity support. Activity support is a support allocated to a school for the organisation of high-quality vocational training and implementation of the development plan.</p> <p>An educational institution offering vocational education may also earn from economic activities (sale of goods and services during work practice), providing payable services related to the main activity of the school as well as use other funding sources. Therefore, all educational institutions offering vocational education can also admit students to payable student places. (Eurydice)</p>
<u>Hobby Schools Act</u>	Passed 2006	<p>A hobby school is an educational establishment operating in the area of youth work which creates an opportunity for the acquisition of hobby education and for the diverse development of the personality, including cultivation of one's own language and culture, in different areas of hobby education.</p> <p>A hobby school is an establishment of a local government</p>

1.3 Provide an overview of education policy or guidelines impacting on inclusion of learners from vulnerable groups:

Name and link	Year and status (enacted, under preparation etc.)	Description of key content
		The general objectives for the education of learners with special needs are the same as the general objectives of education for other learners. They do not vary according to whether education takes place within the mainstream system or in special groups (schools or classes). (CPRA)
Estonia's disability policy	In June 2016, the Government approved a sectoral development plan in the field of employment and social protection.	<u>The Welfare Development Plan</u> brings together the strategic objectives of the labor, social protection, gender equality and equal treatment policies for 2016–2023, providing a comprehensive overview of the main challenges, objectives and directions of action in these policy areas. The two general objectives are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. high employment rate and a high-quality working life,

	<p>2. reducing social inequalities and poverty, gender equality, and a greater social inclusion.</p> <p>Four sub-objectives have been established in the Development Plan for the achievement of the general objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. correlation between the demand and supply of the workforce ensures a high level of employment, and high-quality working conditions support long-term participation in working life; 2. supporting an activating, adequate, and sustainable social protection has increased the economic coping of people; 3. efficient legal protection and high-quality personal assistance have improved people's opportunities to cope independently, live in a community, and participate in society; 4. men and women have equal rights, obligations, opportunities, and responsibilities in all social sectors. <p>... the right of people with special needs to pre-primary, basic, secondary and higher education must be guaranteed according to the principle of equal opportunity. People with special needs have the right to inclusive education and the state must guarantee that right. There is a principle that the organisation of instruction for pupils with SEN is based on trends of inclusive education that are internationally recognised and have been approved by European Union member countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally, pupils with SEN attend their local school and they are provided with the required conditions. • If needed, pupils with severe and multiple disorders are given opportunities to study in a segregated special class or school. • It is up to parents to choose between the local mainstream school and a segregated special school. <p>Instruction in a mainstream school presumes the existence of an adapted learning environment and the availability of support services and required equipment. These services must meet the needs of people with all types of impairments. Since school attendance is compulsory for Estonia's citizens, education must be guaranteed to all, including learners with the most severe impairments. Extra attention must be paid to pre-primary education and school preparation for children</p>
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		with special needs, as well as to in-service training and the re-training of adults with special needs. (CPRA)

1.4 Please describe any specific plans and strategies designed to support inclusion in education (e.g. national strategy on migrant learners):

Name and link	Year and status (approved, under preparation etc.)	Description of the focus
<u>'Digital focus programme 2016–2019'</u> , in Estonian	Currently there is follow up and continuation	One focus is to create digital learning resources for learners with special educational needs. Digital learning resources will create better opportunities to modify different levels of study materials and will help to take in consideration learners development. The objective is to create equal opportunities for lifelong learning for everyone. (CPRA) As the digital focus program is one of the implementation programs of the <u>Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020</u> , it will continue. <u>Strategic planning for 2021–2035</u> has begun. In connection with the renewal of the strategy, the programs will also be updated.

1.5 Is there a definition of inclusion in education?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please provide the definition and give the official source:

... 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;

Upon organisation of the studies, the school relies on the principles of inclusive education. Depending on the individual needs of the student, studies corresponding to the student's abilities and the required support in cooperation between the teachers, support specialists, assistant teachers and other specialists are ensured for the student. (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act)

1.6 Is there a definition of vulnerable groups?

No No information available Yes

If no, please give further information:

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.

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 emphasized 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.

1.7 Is there a definition of special educational needs?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please provide the definition and give the official source:

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act § 46 (6) students with special educational needs (SEN) are pupils who, upon the recommendation of an external multi-disciplinary advisory team, receive enhanced support or special support (it is also mentioned in the beginning of this country system overview).

1.8 Please provide information on any future developments planned for inclusion in education.

The Ministry of Education and Research is preparing strategies for the next period (2021–2035) in the fields of education, research, youth, and language policy.

The current strategies in the areas of responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research will expire in 2020, and the long-term strategic planning for 2021–2035 has started. ... (Goals for Estonian education and skills 2035)

General goal: The people of Estonia have the knowledge, skills and attitudes that facilitate their self-actualization in personal life, work and society and support the advancement of life in Estonia.

1st strategic goal: Learning opportunities are diverse, accessible and permeable for smooth transitions between levels and forms of education.

2nd strategic goal: Learning and teaching are learner-centered and future-oriented, and help the learner to succeed in life.

3rd strategic goal: Lifelong learning opportunities match the needs of the labour market.

1.9 Please provide information on any reports, evaluations and/or reviews of legislation and/or policy relating to inclusion in education, since 2015. This could include official and parallel reports on UNCRPD etc.

In 2016, the study "Inclusive education of SEN students and the effectiveness of related support measures" was commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research 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. According to the study the focus on early detection of and support for SEN students has

significantly increased in recent years, but at the same time different research reports have shown that the application of inclusive education has been hampered by attitudes as well as the lack of knowledge and resources.

Additional reports are:

Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (2019). *Estonian Education and Research Strategy 2021 – 2035. Smart and Active Estonia 2035.*

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2016. *Financing of Inclusive Education: Mapping Country Systems for Inclusive Education.* (S. Ebersold, ed.). Odense, Denmark

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. *Country Policy Review and Analysis*

European Commission (2017) *Country Report Estonia 2017 Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK AND THE EUROGROUP 2017 European Semester: Assessment of progress on structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances, and results of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011*

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019 *Compulsory Education in Europe – 2019/20. Eurydice Facts and Figures.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019. *The Structure of the European Education Systems 2019/20: Schematic Diagrams.* Eurydice Facts and Figures. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

OECD (2017), *The Funding of School Education: Connecting Resources and Learning,*

OECD (2019), *Working and Learning Together: Rethinking Human Resource Policies for Schools,* OECD Publishing, Paris

OECD Publishing, Paris. Ministry of Education and Research (2019). *Summary of the Ministry of Education and Research's annual report for 2018.* Tartu: Ministry of Education and Research.

Overview of the implementation of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy, the Youth Field Development Plan, Strategy "Knowledge-based Estonia", the Development Plan of the Estonian Language and Archiving Programme

United Nations (2016) National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21. Estonia

United Nations (2016) *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. Estonia*

United Nations (2017) *IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, Initial Report submitted by State party under article 35 of the Convention, ESTONIA*

1.10 What are the perceived main challenges (barriers and hindrances) and opportunities (support and ways forward) for inclusion in education in relation to laws and policies in the country?

The final report of the mid-term evaluation of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy (2019) refers that in the context of inclusive education, school leaders point out the lack of teachers' competencies and necessary support specialists as the biggest problem. (Both studies are available only in Estonian.)

The study "Inclusive education of SEN students and the effectiveness of related support measures" concluded that the legislation provides schools with the opportunities and freedom to take all necessary measures that may be needed to successfully enroll students with SEN in mainstream classes, but state supports financially students in special classes to a greater extent than students with SEN studying in regular classes. The study also suggested that,

based on the ideology of inclusive education, the diagnosis- based classification of students and definition special class types and sizes at the level of law should be stopped. Based on the study recommendations a draft amendment to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act was developed in 2017, the changes that came into force in 2018.

Additional challenges:

Expand inclusive education for students with special educational needs and adjust the functions of special schools.

The movement towards the integration of students with special educational needs (SEN) into regular classes in mainstream schools has been very slow. This runs against Estonia's commitment to inclusive education. The solution lies, in part, in increasing the financial support given to mainstream schools for SEN students. In this way, the national government should review the coefficients used to provide additional revenue to mainstream schools for teaching SEN students in both mainstream and special classes. These coefficients should make it possible for schools to hire well qualified teaching assistants to work in integrated classes. It is also important that funding for SEN students in mainstream schools is earmarked and that there are effective ways to monitor its use to facilitate the integration of SEN students in regular classes. The expansion of effective inclusive education will also require SEN schools to enlarge their functions to support both students with special needs being educated inclusively in mainstream schools and teachers providing inclusive education in these schools. The other key component of a strategy for inclusive education is enabling mainstream schools to provide effective inclusive education. This can be a slow and gradual process which, however, can be significantly accelerated by massive and effective capacity building. The practice of inclusive education requires major changes both in the professional competences and the attitudes of mainstream teachers. Only teachers capable to use a rich repertoire of innovative teaching methods and capable to create learning environments that support personalised teaching and learning can achieve successful inclusive education. It is important that all teachers receive some preparation to manage classes with SEN students, either through initial teacher education or professional development programmes. (OECD, 2016)

Section 2: Governance and Finance

How far are inclusive principles underpinning policies at national and local levels effectively supported by governance and financing mechanisms?

2.1 Is there formal collaboration across ministries on inclusion in education?

No No information available Yes

If yes, in which areas does this take place and who is involved?

Area	Yes/No	Description: what mechanism, who is involved and how
Policy development, implementation and coordination	yes	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)
Identification of needs / referral for services	yes	Where a student 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 student's need for support. (Eurydice, Country Report) Regional counselling centres provide cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary services at regional and local levels. (CPRA)
Data sharing	yes	Each year, educational institutions' <u>performance indicators</u> 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) <u>Haridussilm</u> is an educational statistics database which allows to compare schools. It includes all available indicators of satisfaction, performance and efficiency in education. Eurydice provides <u>statistics on educational institutions providing regular education</u> . 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

		<p>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. (<u>The Inspectorate of Education of Estonia</u>)</p>
Monitoring and evaluation	yes	<p><u>Foundation Innove</u> 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)</p> <p>According to the law, pre-primary childcare 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)</p>
Quality assurance and accountability	yes	<p>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)</p>
Career Guidance	yes	<p>At the beginning of 2019, the career services of the centres of Foundation Innove Rajaleidja and the development thereof were integrated into the career service system of Töötukassa (the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund). The services are provided by Töötukassa. (Eurydice, Country Report)</p>

Culture of collaboration	yes	<p>Partnerships which are regulated at state level include the work of school council and advisory bodies.</p> <p>The highest collegial decision-making body of the school is the council, the function of which is to organise the activities and plan the development of the school.</p> <p>The procedure for formation of the council and the rules of procedure shall be provided for in the statutes of the school.</p> <p>The council shall include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school head; • deputies of the school head; • heads of structural units of the school and employees responsible for broad groups of studies; • representative of the learners' body; • trustee of the employees or, in the absence thereof, the representative elected by the employees. <p>The advisory body is a body of advisors connecting the school and society. Its function is to advise the school and school manager on planning the development and organisation of teaching and education and economic activities.</p> <p>The advisory body shall have at least seven members and it shall be formed by the school manager for five years.</p> <p>The advisory body shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make proposals to the school head and the council on issues related to the directions of development, activity, assets, budget, management and amendment of statutes of the school; • provide assessment on the co-operation of the school with state authorities, local governments and businesses upon achievement of the objectives established in the school's development programme; • express an opinion on the application for the right to provide instruction in a new curriculum group; • provide assessment on the organisation of work practice in school, institutions and businesses;
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appoint a representative to the membership of the committee formed for the conduct of competition organised to fill the vacant position of a school head; • express an opinion on the annual report of the school. <p>The representative of the advisory body shall have the right to participate in the sessions of the council of the school.</p> <p>The procedure for formation and activity of the advisory body shall be established by a regulation of the Minister of Education and Research.</p> <p>(VEIA, sections 17,18)</p> <p>According to the legislation regulating the support for learners with SEN, constant co-operation is expected to support learners' studies and transition into the world of work, e.g. the school has to engage with local municipalities, the social sector, employers and other supporting personnel in accordance with the learners' needs. (<u>Conditions and procedure for studying at a vocational school for people with special needs</u>) (CPRA)</p>
(others ...)		

2.2 Are there shared responsibilities between central and local governments on inclusion in education?

No No information available Yes

If yes, in which areas does this take place and who is involved?

Area	Yes/No	Description: who is involved and how
Policy development, implementation and coordination	yes	In Estonia, the education departments of county governments usually have only an analytical and supervisory role. However at several counties, they have taken an active role in calling development plans into existence and encouraging the development of the school network. Mostly such country governments are in very good relations with unions of local governments. At the same time, there are local governments, who do not see this role and sometimes maybe do not want to take this role, as the Ministry often communicates directly with local governments in matters of the school network. At some counties, there is a clear division of work, so that the country government and the Ministry of Education and Research cooperate in reorganising the network of upper secondary schools and local

		<p>governments and the Ministry in matters related to the network of basic schools. Regardless of county-level unions of local governments being completely aware of their role in developing the larger picture of the development of the county and therefore there would be a good basis for making agreements in matters related to the school network, then in reality their contribution tends to be limited to activities in informing and training (for example cooperation between subject networks of teachers, informing the parents and community etc. (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia, 2015). On 1 January 2018, the county governments ceased their activities and their current functions were transferred to state agencies and local governments. The Department of Regional Administration established in the Ministry of Finance also received some tasks. The function of supervising educational institutions was transferred to the Ministry of Education and Research. According to the <u>Local Government Organisation Act</u> rural municipalities and cities shall have development plans and budget strategies on the basis of which the development of different fields of life is integrated and coordinated. The external evaluation department of the Ministry of Education and Research monitors the reflection of the principles of inclusive education in development plans of local municipalities. (The division of responsibility between the state, local government and school is described in the beginning of this overview.)</p>
<p>Identification of needs / referral for services</p>	<p>yes</p>	<p>According to the <u>Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act</u> the owner of the school creates opportunities for identifying the special educational needs of a student and providing the student with the required support and the head of school arranges it. The school provides a student 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 are ensured. The owner of the school creates and the head of school organises</p>

		<p>opportunities for implementation of the services of support specialists.</p> <p>Where the general support provided by the school does not produce the desired results for development of the student, enhanced support or special support may be applied upon 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 conclude an administrative contract with a state-owned foundation. The responsibility of an external advisory team is given to <u>Innove Pathfinder (Rajaleidja) centres</u>.</p>
Data sharing		<p>Based on the number of students of municipal schools registered in the education information system the support from state budget to be allocated to rural municipalities and cities for covering the operating expenses of the school regarding students who receive enhanced support or special support.</p> <p>According to <u>the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act</u> the recommendation of the external advisory team is entered in the education information system in the sub-register of basic and upper secondary school students, higher education students 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 coordinator of a studies of the student with special education needs have the right to process data entered in the education information system by another school or child care institution and an external advisory team regarding the recommendation of the team as well as the enhanced support and special support applied to the supported student, but only within the scope and to the extent that is necessary for the application of enhanced support and special support</p>
Monitoring and evaluation	yes	<p>According to <u>the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act</u> the Ministry of Education and Research exercises administrative supervision over the</p>

		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 organization 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 students with special educational needs with support.
Quality assurance and accountability	yes	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, whilst 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. (OECD, 2016)
(others ...)		

If no, please give further information:

2.3 Are non-governmental organisations and/or associations involved in governance processes?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please describe their involvement:

The National Audit Office is an independent institution acting in the interests of and hired by the Estonian taxpayers whose function is to investigate how the state and local authorities have spent the taxpayer's money and what they have given them for it.

In the area of education, the National Audit Office has conducted different audits, for example in 2013 the management of investments to education was audited. The National Audit Office considered it important, because:

- Since 2007, more than 800 million euros of investments (15% of the governmental sector's investments) have been directed into the area of education and research;
- Nearly 300 million euros have been invested into general education schools and vocational education institutions owned by the state;
- The Ministry of Education and Research is the largest owner of state owned buildings (approximately 40% of the surface area of buildings owned by the state).

2.4 Are there any accountability mechanisms to promote the inclusion of learners from vulnerable groups?

No No information available Yes

If yes, what is the focus of the mechanisms?

There may not be direct accountability mechanisms, but requirements to comply with the law.

Area	Yes/No	Description of the focus/actors involved (e.g. state/non state)
Appeal process for rights violations		<p>According to <u>the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act</u> 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.</p> <p>According to the <u>Chancellor of Justice Act</u> 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.</p>
School inspection	yes	<p>The <u>Estonian Education Information System</u> 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)</p>
Other quality assurance processes (e.g. standards for teaching, support services etc)	yes	<p><i>Raising teachers' qualifications 2008-2014.</i> The objective was to prepare a competency model, which would be in compliance with the professional standard system as the content of the professional standard is based on competences and the professional standard form is a well-developed framework for creating a competency model. The competency model provides a framework for three possible implementations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-evaluation of the heads of educational institutions for planning personal development; 2. Training a head of an educational institution;

		<p>3. Evaluating the work of a head of an educational institution. (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia, 2015).</p> <p><u>The competence model of the head of an educational institution</u> was updated in 2016. The update of the model was based on the understanding that the head of an educational institution must guide and inspire his team in supporting the development of each student in order to move forward together to use individualistic and innovative learning solutions. In order to support individual development, it is important to notice and support the development of each child according to his or her specific characteristics and abilities from the moment of entering the pre-school child care institution. (Competence model is available only in Estonian).</p>
Monitoring and evaluation (e.g. data collection on attendance, participation, achievement, funding)	yes	<p>Preschool child care institutions and schools are obliged to carry out internal evaluation.</p> <p>The Ministry of Education and Research annually prepares an <u>overview of external evaluation</u> of the education system. The overview includes a summary of results of state supervision in preschool child care institutions, general education schools, vocational schools and higher education institutions. Overview is given of the results of internal evaluations and counselling in educational institutions, national education surveys and other projects related to evaluation. (Eurydice)</p>
(others ...)		

If no, please give further information:

2.5 Please describe the general mechanisms for funding schools. Give details on: which institutions provide funding; what they provide; how they provide it and to whom, which mechanisms they use to allocate resources; and their respective roles and responsibilities.

The financing of educational institutions depends on the ownership of the institution. There are state, municipal and private education institutions.

Funding mechanisms	Description of who, what, to whom and how
European Social Fund	The European Social Fund helps to foster close co-operation between the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Affairs for implementing new programmes (Source: <u>Financing of Inclusive Education, 2016, p. 57</u>).

Municipalities	Pre-primary childcare is mostly owned by the municipalities and are financed by the local budget. (National Overview– Estonia)
Parents	Pay a participation fee for pre-primary childcare. (National Overview– Estonia)
State Budget Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State budget covers all the expenses of state schools. This to a large extent includes special schools. - Based on the number of learners in municipal schools, the state subsidy to be allocated to rural municipalities and cities is determined annually... The subsidy covers the labour and continuous training expenses of the teachers, heads of the municipal schools and the expenses relating to educational literature. - ... grants support for covering the operating expenses of the school regarding learners who receive enhanced support or special support. Similar subsidies are also made available to private general education schools. - The state ensures the availability of special teachers, speech therapists and psychological and social pedagogical counselling services free of charge for all schools. Local government ensures the availability of support specialists at the school level. The state allocates financial subsidies for recruiting support specialists. <p>(National Overview– Estonia)</p> <p>In order to guarantee the constitutional right to free general education to all students, 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 students.</p> <p>Vocational education is state financed generally through state commissioned education on the basis of the number of fulfilled study places during a standard period of study established in the curriculum. 99% of students of the educational institutions offering vocational education study in state financed study places; the ratio of students in payable study places is thus negligible. Private vocational educational institutions are financed through the state budget only in exceptional cases if in some field the demand for specialists is greater than the supply.</p> <p>The higher education institutions are mainly financed from the state budget through operational support allocations covering study costs, administrative costs, investments and assigned operating costs. Since 2017, operational funding is divided in two: 1) baseline funding (at least 80%) based on the last 3 years average operational support to the institution and 2) performance funding (up to 20%). (Eurydice, <u>Country Report</u>)</p>
National Agency of Educational Support Services	Counselling and instruction from a special education teacher, speech therapist, social educator and psychologist must be made available to pupils. If the school does not employ any such specialists, these services

	<p>must be ordered from regional study counselling centres. The state-funded National Agency of Educational Support Services is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the availability of free career and study guidance services for pupils, teachers and parents; • the quality of the services; • the systematic and co-ordinated provision of educational support services at the county level. (National Overview, p. 7)
Ministry of Defense	<p>The owners of general education schools can also get support for specific purposes from other ministries. For example, Ministry of Defence supports schools who are giving state defence classes. State defence is not part of compulsory subjects, it is optional and because of that, Ministry of Defence has decided to support schools. Support is meant for buying teaching materials for this subject.</p>
Private School Acts	<p>The rural municipality or a town shall cover the operational costs of a privately-owned general education school in proportion with the number of such students in said school whose place of residence according to the population register is in the administrative territory of this town or rural municipality. Operational costs are covered between local government and private school owner according same requirements and procedures as between two local governments (described above). Some local governments are against of obligation to cover operational costs of a privately owned general education schools and some of them have decided to go a step further and are not covering their share of operational costs of private schools. For solving this problem, the cultural commission of the Parliament started in the end of 2014 discussions about changing the financing system of privately owned general education schools.</p>

2.6 Do schools have flexibility to use funding allocations to support the inclusion of learners from vulnerable groups?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please describe the flexibility:

At the end of 2015, the Ministry of Education adopted a new concept of early childhood education and care. It allows the local governments to have more flexibility in organising provision, based on the needs of children and families.

The ESF and the European Refugee Fund supported the creation of 3,200 new kindergarten or childcare places.

EUR 47 million will be invested between 2014 and 2020. (IECE – Estonia Country Questionnaire, pp. 17–18).

2.7 Please describe the specific mechanisms for funding the inclusion of vulnerable learners and their families in education (e.g. benefits, cash transfers, scholarships). Give details on: which institutions provide funding; what they provide; how they provide it and to whom, which mechanisms they use to allocate resources; and their respective roles and responsibilities.

Funding mechanisms	Description of the who, what, to whom and how
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<p>State Budget Act</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... grants support for covering the operating expenses of the school regarding learners who receive enhanced support or special support. Similar subsidies are also made available to private general education schools. - The state supports the organisation of instruction for pupils with SEN who require special education on a learners-based principle, taking into account the special character of the study. - Upon allocation of a subsidy, no financial distinction is made based on whether the pupil with SEN is in a mainstream class or a segregated special class – this will be decided by the school and by parents. - Capitation fees arise in the case of pupils with SEN who are legally eligible to receive enhanced support or special support. <p>(National Overview– Estonia)</p>
<p>Social Benefits for Disabled Persons Act</p>	<p>Child care services for a child with severe or multiple disability are in certain cases financed from the state budget until the child reaches 18 years of age.</p> <p>Students with disabilities and their families are offered support for covering additional expenses deriving from the disability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disabled child support is paid monthly to a disabled child of up to 16 years of age for covering additional expenses deriving from the disability and for activities foreseen in the rehabilitation plan, the amount depending on the severity of the disability; • disabled parent support is paid monthly to a disabled parent or representative of a child who raises a child of up to 16 years of age or a child of up to 19 years of age who studies in basic school, upper secondary school or vocational school or receives formal vocational education in an institution of professional higher education; • study support is paid monthly to a non-working disabled student who studies in year 10-12 of upper secondary school, vocational education institution or higher education institution and who has study-related additional expenses due to one’s disability; • in-service training support is paid for partial reimbursement of actual training costs to working disabled people for work-related and formal training. <p>Children who study at schools for students with special needs, who live at the school’s boarding school facilities and whose home is</p>

	located outside the city or municipality of the school, will be compensated for travel between home and school up to four times a month. The travel costs of those students who travel between home and school on daily basis will be compensated for one return trip per day. (Eurydice)
European Social Fund ,Developing an Educational Counselling System‘	In order to ensure the availability of pedagogical and psychological counselling, the national European Social Fund programme, ‘Developing an Educational Counselling System’, has been implemented. It aims to ensure early childhood intervention in all regions, improve the counselling system and train service providers. The <i>Rajaleidja keskused</i> counselling centres established as a result of the programme will be used to improve collaboration in the fields of education, social affairs and healthcare for identifying the particular needs of children with special needs and their families and providing them with support. (www.innove.ee/et/haridustugiteenused/oppenoustamisteenused)

2.8 Please provide information (main conclusions, reference and a link if available) on any recent reports, evaluations and/or reviews, since 2015 of funding and resourcing relating to inclusive education.

The study “Inclusive education of SEN students and the effectiveness of related support measures” (2016) concluded that the current public funding system does not sufficiently support flexible learning arrangements. As a result of the study, it was recommended to highlight the support for organizing the learning of students with SEN in the state education support and to link it with the implementation of resource-intensive support measures. Based on the study recommendations a draft amendment to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act was developed in 2017, the changes that came into force in 2018. As a result of the amendment, state budget education support was significantly increased.

The Estonian school education combines excellent performance with a high level of equity. The 2018 PISA results show that the mean scores in science, mathematics and reading have increased since 2009, and the share of low achievement has remained the lowest in the EU in all three domains, putting Estonia on top of the PISA ranking among EU Member States. At the same time, Estonia also has one of the most equitable education system, with the smallest impact of socioeconomic background on pupils’ performance. As a consequence Estonia is making progress on sustainable development goal 4 (quality education). However, this positive performance is affected by the chronic issue of early school leaving that hinders future access to higher education (Graph 3.3.3). Overall 11.3% of 18-24 year-olds leave education and training without completing upper secondary education (EU average 10.6%), and this rate has stagnated in recent years. (2020 European Semester – Country Report Estonia, p. 33)

2.9 Overall, what are the perceived main challenges (barriers and hinderances) and opportunities (support and ways forward) for inclusion in education in relation to governance and finance issues in the country?

Challenges:

One concern highlighted in the vision document „Smart and Active Estonia 2035“ (2019) is that there is no system for evaluating and recalling school directors, who focus too much on administration, and not on development and change management.

Though Estonia has a well-developed network of special education schools (SEN schools) and programmes, relatively little progress has been made in integrating children with special educational needs into regular classes in mainstream schools. The solution lies, in part, in increasing the financial support given to mainstream schools for SEN students. In this way, the national government should review the coefficients used to provide additional revenue to mainstream schools for teaching SEN students in both mainstream and special classes. These coefficients should make it possible for schools to hire well qualified teaching assistants to work in integrated classes. It is also important that funding for SEN students in mainstream schools is earmarked and that there are effective ways to monitor its use to facilitate the integration of SEN students in regular classes. The expansion of effective inclusive education will also require SEN schools to enlarge their functions to support both SEN students being educated inclusively in mainstream schools and teachers providing inclusive education in these schools. The other key component of a strategy for inclusive education is adequately preparing teachers in mainstream schools to provide effective inclusive education.

Language acquisition problems clearly pose barriers to, and raise the costs of Russian-speaking students advancing through Estonia's education system. As such, they run against Estonia's commitment to equal opportunity and fair treatment. Language barriers are likely to distort the choice of upper secondary programmes by Russian-speaking students in favour of vocational programmes, and thus ameliorating the basis for this choice would probably improve the efficiency of the system as well. Hence, the national government should consider developing an earmarked grant designed to provide financial support to municipalities and schools for the additional hours of Estonian language instruction necessary to make Russian-speaking students proficient in the country's official language. (OECD, 2016)

... the Ministry has developed tools for school self-evaluation, Estonian schools are under no obligation to use these. This limits the ability to compare schools' experiences and the consistency of practices across schools. In addition, the level of externality in quality assurance processes is low. There is little external challenge to the conclusions of school self-evaluations; relatively little comparable quality information is provided to schools for self-evaluation; the external support provided to schools for self-evaluation has room to expand; and few municipalities operate a quality education framework. (OECD, 2016)

Additional issues are:

Create stronger financial incentives for school and class consolidation

Strengthen the degree of external challenge to further improve school self-evaluation practices

Invest in pre-primary education

(OECD, 2016)

Section 3: Data

What data on inclusion in education is available to understand if progress is being made towards equitable learning opportunities for all learners?

3.1 Please indicate if the following frameworks are in place, provide a link and give a brief description of their aims and focus:

Framework	Yes / No	Description
For monitoring and evaluating the implementation of national-level inclusion in education policy	yes	The visual educational statistics database HaridusSilm consists the statistical data about education, research and development, language policy and youth field in Estonia.
For quality assurance across all levels of the system (national, regional, school)	yes	<p>The Estonian Education Information System is a state register that compiles data concerning the education system. The register contains data on students, teachers and lecturers, graduation documents, study grants and scholarships, educational and training institutions, curricula and training and activity licenses, economic activity notices and the right to conduct studies.</p> <p>The visual educational statistics database HaridusSilm consists the statistical data about education, research and development, language policy and youth field in Estonia. It contains data on satisfaction, performance and efficiency of educational system.</p> <p>Haridussilm is a visual environment that compiles data on education statistics, where you can find data on basic, general, vocational and higher education, science, language policy, teacher salary statistics. The environment allows the user to compile statistical reports and compare educational indicators in sections that suit him /her. For example, the environment provides answers to the questions of how many first-grade children there are in a particular municipality or school, or how many basic school graduates in one or another county started to receive upper secondary education in another county. It is possible to study the background of schools, compare how many students reached graduation and how many dropped out, look at the age distribution of teachers and lecturers or qualification data.</p>
Providing guidance on the use of a range		No information found

of different data sources for evaluation and self-review at different levels (national, regional, school)		
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3.2 What data is collected on learners from vulnerable groups, how and why?

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education EASIE project collects data on learners from vulnerable groups for Estonia as an annual activity. One of the data sources is the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS).

“Within the 2018 dataset, data on two new International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels has been collected on a voluntary basis, namely ISCED levels 02 and 3, covering pre-primary and upper-secondary education. In order to allow comparison with the previous data collections, the indicators for ISCED levels 1 and 2 are presented separately from the indicators for ISCED levels 02 and 3. This means that this report contains three sections covering:

- 1. Pre-primary education (ISCED level 02)*
- 2. Primary and lower-secondary education (ISCED levels 1 and 2)*
- 3. Upper-secondary education (ISCED level 3).” (EASIE 2018 Dataset Country Report, p.3)*

“Data calculations have been made using all available data from the 2018 dataset, which is based on the 2016/2017 school year (please refer to www.european-agency.org/data). The calculations cover three areas of country data:

- 1. Population and enrolment data*
- 2. Age sample data (4, 9, 15 and 17 years) ...*
- 3. Data on learners with an official decision of SEN ..., including identification rates, distribution of educational placements, and gender and ISCED level breakdowns.” (EASIE 2018 Dataset Country Report, p.3-4)*

The Estonian Education Information System provides data related to learners’ rights to age-appropriate education

The OECD (2015) country background report includes data on students with special needs in differently owned schools (State, municipal or private): By type of ownership the number of state schools is the largest and the number of private schools the smallest among schools for students with special educational needs. This data also includes data on private schools.

3.3 Please provide the available data relating to all learners in the compulsory education system and where they are enrolled for their education.

All questions can be answered using the country’s own data sources as far as possible. Alternatively, the data can be provided from publicly available international sources e.g. UIS: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?quervid=216> or UOE: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Main_Page

Please give a clear reference to the Source in the column provided.

In the Learners column, as far as possible:

- provide actual numbers as far as possible and not estimates.
- only use 0 when the data is zero.

- use M to indicate missing data.

- use NA to indicate the question is Not Applicable (i.e. the country does not have that type of provision).

All questions refer to ALL learners in the education system, not just those formally identified as belonging to a group that is vulnerable to exclusion.

Please provide notes to clarify any issues with the data and include a specific note on the calendar year and/or school year the data refers to.

For the below data only ISCED 1 and 2 totals were used as these are compulsory.

The data below refers to the EASIE data of 2018 for Estonia. This data refers to the school year 2016/2017.

Compulsory education includes ISCED 1 and ISCED 2.

Data on learner access to compulsory education	Learners	Notes	Source
(i) What is the <i>potential population</i> of learners for the compulsory education system in the country (i.e. how many children are in the country that should, by law, be in some form of compulsory education)?	Total: 125,017 Male: 64,103 Female: 60,914	Numbers are for ISCED 1 and 2	EASIE Estonia 2018 Data
(ii) How many learners are enrolled in all forms of education (i.e. educational settings maintained by the ministry of education or by other authorities such as health, welfare or labour ministries)?	Total: 122,282 Male: 62,785 Female: 59,497	Numbers are for ISCED 1 and 2	EASIE Estonia 2018 Data
(iii) How many learners are out of any form of education (who by law should be in some form of education)?	Total: M Male: M Female: M		EASIE Estonia 2018 Data
(iv) How many learners are enrolled in mainstream schools (i.e. all learners, not just those with recognised needs or from vulnerable groups)?	Total: 119,064 Male: 60,594 Female: 58,470	Numbers are for ISCED 1 and 2	EASIE Estonia 2018 Data
(v) How many learners are enrolled in mainstream schools and spend the majority of their time (i.e. at least 80% or 4 days of the week) in inclusive groups/classes with their peers?	Total: 116,630 Male: 58,766 Female: 57,864	Numbers are for ISCED 1 and 2	EASIE Estonia 2018 Data
(vi) How many learners are enrolled in mainstream schools and spend the majority of their time (i.e. at least 80% or 4 days of the week) in separate, special groups/classes, away from their peers?	Total: 2434 Male: 1828 Female: 606	Numbers are for ISCED 1 and 2	EASIE Estonia 2018 Data
(vii) How many learners are enrolled in totally separate, special units and/or schools, away from their peers?	Total: 3218 Male: 2191 Female: 1027	Numbers are for ISCED 1 and 2	EASIE Estonia 2018 Data

3.4 Please provide information (main conclusions, reference and a link if available) on any recent reports, evaluations and/or reviews, since 2015 of data collection and monitoring for inclusion in education.

In addition to the EASIE data, The study “Inclusive education of SEN students and the effectiveness of related support measures” (2016) recommended the reduction and adjustment of special needs classifications in the Estonian education information system. In addition, the study found that a self-assessment framework that guides schools to compare their outcomes with the ideal can provide support for bringing the ideology of inclusive education to every school.

3.5 Overall, what are the perceived main challenges (barriers and hinderances) and opportunities (support and ways forward) for inclusion in education in relation to data collection issues in the country?

According to the Statutes of the Estonian Education Information System (available only in Estonian), the school enters in the register data on the special educational needs of the student, the type of support and support services provided. The External Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Education and Research regularly monitors the data entered by the school into information system on the support measures implemented for students and compares them with the recommendations of the external advisory team. In those cases where the measures indicated by the school do not comply with the recommendations, the circumstances will be clarified and the school will be advised. If necessary, supervision will be initiated. An overview of the external evaluation of the education system is published annually in the yearbook (available only in Estonian).

The concept of data management in the field of education is being developed.

Section 4: Curricula, learning materials and assessment

To what extent are curricula, learning materials and different assessment processes and procedures adapted to the principles of inclusive education?

4.1 Curriculum

a. Does the curriculum content include and represent all learners?

No No information available Partially Yes

If yes or partially, please provide a description and available links, including to underpinning values and principles.

All schools have to describe the SEN policy and the organisation of instruction for pupils 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.). (National Overview, p. 6)*

According to the Pre-School Childcare Institutions Act, schooling and education in pre-primary childcare institutions should be based upon the study programmes of childcare institutions, which comply with the general study programmes for pre-primary education. Each child has the right to teacher assistance in order to reach the goals set by the curricula. The principles and arrangements for supporting learners with special needs are established in the curriculum of a children's institution. (National Overview, p. 7)

In basic schools and upper-secondary schools, the national curriculum is also valid as the framework curriculum for learners with special needs. In addition, the simplified national curriculum has been adopted by the regulation of the Ministry of Education. It establishes the basic education standard for learners with severe and multiple disorders who, based on the external multi-disciplinary advisory team's recommendation and upon agreement of parents, undergo simplified, coping or nursing study. An individual curriculum may be compiled for learners with special needs according to their abilities. (National Overview, p.8)

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act 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. By law, it is the teacher's job to observe the development and coping of students at school and, where necessary, adjust studies according to the individual needs and abilities of students. Depending on the individual needs of the student, studies corresponding to the student's abilities and the required support in cooperation between the teachers, support specialists, assistant teachers and other specialists are ensured for the student. Education Information System contains information on the student's need for support and the services provided. For example, it contains information about children whose home language is different from the language of instruction at school and who need additional language learning and general support to achieve learning outcomes. (Source: Piret Liba)

b. Does the process of curriculum development involve the participation and contribution of different stakeholders?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please provide information on stakeholder involvement.

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 a counselling committee recommendation. (p. 7)

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 organizations of teachers and support specialists, as well as representative organizations of parents and students, and representatives of schools and school administrators, to be involved in curriculum renewal. (Source: Piret Liba)

c. Is there guidance/procedures for schools to ensure that the curriculum content takes account of all learners (e.g. using flexibility to address differences due to gender, culture, religions, the ethnicities/nations living in the country, their history and culture, differences related to disability and socio-economic background, LGBT community).

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description and examples of this flexibility.

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)

Sixteen Educational Support Service Centres are established at each county level. Their task is to counsel and support pupils, 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 (Source: 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. The "Diversity Enriches" has been focusing on diversity management in employment since 2013 with special attention on problems of homophobia, people with disabilities and elderly. (Human Rights Council, National Report, Estonia, p.5) This campaign is aimed at the whole society, its direct impact on school students has not been assessed.

In August 2014, the Government approved amendments to the national curricula of basic and upper secondary schools which inter alia 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.

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 on 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 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”ⁱ 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 the 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)

d. If individual education plans (IEPs) are used, please describe the procedure for developing (who is involved and how), what they focus on (specific curriculum areas; cross curricular competences; support strategies etc.) and how IEPs are implemented, used across the school?

Teachers are obliged to observe how all learners are developing and coping and, where necessary, adjust the study process according to their needs.

If a learner needs additional support besides the class or subject teacher, then a development observance chart must be drawn up and additional support shall be provided. During the period when the measure is applied, the teachers and support specialists observe how the learner is developing and coping. For the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of the measures applied, all the teachers and support specialists who participate in applying the measures shall describe how the learner is developing and coping and make regular recommendations.

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

In order to achieve the goals formulated in the learner’s curriculum and provide them with the required support, study assistance or level-based groups or special classes may be formed in addition to mainstream classes. Studies in a study assistance group, level-based group or special class must be based on the learner’s needs and limited in terms of time. Attention must be paid to the recommendations of the co-ordinator of the studies of the learner with SEN or those of the external advisory team or both. When teaching a learner who needs special support in a mainstream class, the external advisory team’s recommendations must be taken into account. (National Overview, p.6)

When teaching a learner, a school may change or adjust the study time, contents, process and environment. If 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 shall be drawn up for the learner pursuant to the procedure set out in the national curricula.

If the individual curriculum drawn up for a learner with SEN 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 the external multi-disciplinary advisory team’s recommendation. (National Overview, p. 8)

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)

e. Are there different curricula or programmes for specific groups of learners at risk of exclusion (e.g. ethnic minorities or minority language groups)

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description of the main characteristics/organisation.

Enhanced support is applied to a learner who, due to a permanent learning difficulty, psychical 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.*

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 the need for support specialists;*
- *make recommendations on creating the conditions necessary for inclusive study at school and for implementing such study. The external advisory team's recommendation is entered in the education information system. (National Overview)*

The Ministry of Education and Research systematically supports language learning activities that lead to more coherent integration of the society. The Language Education Policy Profile attempts to strengthen ongoing reforms in Estonia. There are constitutional guarantees of support for minority groups who wish to maintain their language and culture. ... In formal education, it is possible to learn only in Russian as a minority language. However, on request of at least 10 representatives of a certain native language in the school or local municipality, the municipality is obliged to provide lessons of that language. The state also finances approximately 20 Sunday schools where different languages and cultures are studied at weekends. (Human Rights Council, National Report, Estonia, p.15)

The Estonian Ministry of Culture has compiled a National strategy for Roma integration.ⁱⁱ The document is an integrated set of policy measures within Estonia's social inclusion policies. The objective is to mainstream Roma inclusion into all public policies aimed at the gradual elimination of poverty and social exclusion among marginalised

Roma communities, in particular in the areas of education, employment, health and housing. (Human Rights Council, National Report, Estonia, p.17)

The following types of classes and groups may be formed by schools in order to create the required support services for students whom these cannot be ensured in an ordinary class:

- 1. Remedial instruction groups for students acquiring basic education for provision of special education or speech therapy assistance – the upper limit of the size of the group is 6 students;*
- 2. Classes for students with behavioural problems acquiring basic education – the upper limit of the size of the class is 12 students;*
- 3. Classes for students with severe somatic illnesses – the upper limit of the size of the class is 12 students;*
- 4. Classes for students with a speech impairment, visual impairment, hearing impairment or physical/motor disability – the upper limit of the size of the class is 12 students*
- 5. Classes for students with specific learning difficulties acquiring basic education – the upper limit of the size of the class is 12 students;*
- 6. Classes for students with mild learning difficulties acquiring basic education – the upper limit of the size of the class is 12 students;*
- 7. Classes for students with emotional and behavioural disorders acquiring basic education – the upper limit of the size of the class is 8 students;*
- 8. Classes for students with multiple disabilities acquiring basic education – the upper limit of the size of the class is 6 students;*
- 9. Classes for students with moderate learning difficulties acquiring basic education – the upper limit of the size of the class is 6 students;*
- 10. Classes for students acquiring basic education whom the counselling committee has, based on their specific educational needs, recommended studying in a small class, including students with autism spectrum disorders, activity and attention disorders or addiction disorders or students whose talent in combination with another special need results in the need to study in a small class – the upper limit of the size of the class is 4 students;*
- 11. Classes for students with severe and profound learning difficulties acquiring basic education – the upper limit of the size of the class is 4 students;*
- 12. Classes for students with educational problems acquiring basic education – the upper limit of the size of the class is 12 students.*

The pilot project of the computer based statistics programme is presented in this question. Is there also policy to ensure the availability of textbooks/materials that promote the inclusion of learners from different vulnerable groups such as Russian, Roma, socially or economically vulnerable learners?

No. There are three national curriculum 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 student to take into account the individual abilities and needs of the student. (Source: Piret Liba)

4.2 Learning materials

a. Is there autonomy for schools and teachers to select learning material/textbooks etc?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

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

b. Are there policies to ensure the availability of textbooks/materials that promote the inclusion of learners from different vulnerable groups? (e.g. resources relevant to different ethnic groups etc.)

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

In cooperation with the University of Tartu and Wolfram consortium, the Ministry of Education and Research developed a computer based statistics program, the objective of which is to make learning mathematics at schools interesting and practical. A new curriculum and digital learning materials have been created for stage III of basic school and upper secondary school level. The innovative method was tested in 31 pilot schools. In the future, the computer based statistics program will be extended to other schools, *considering the results of the pilot project.* (OECD,2015, Country Background Report)

The teaching materials created within the project were and are available to all interested parties, and the trainings were open to all teachers, including teachers of students with special educational needs. The teaching materials have been tested in more than 70 schools and are constantly updated, taking into account the feedback from teachers and students. The methodology is also included in the training of mathematics teachers in university. The final report of the project (2019) also provides an overview of the results of an online survey of teachers who have completed APS (APS refers to an interactive learning resource for computer-based statistics) training or piloting. The most frequently mentioned reasons why one third of the respondents do not want or hesitate to use APS materials in the future were lack of time, the need to achieve the learning outcomes in the syllabus, the difficulty of the materials and the unsuitability of long tasks for weaker students (including SEN).

The school allows students acquiring basic education to freely use the educational literature (e.g. textbooks, workbooks, exercise-books and worksheets) required for completion of at least the school curriculum and allow students acquiring general secondary education to freely use textbooks required for completion of at least the school curriculum. The Ministry of Education and Research ensures the availability of the minimum educational literature required for completion of national curricula. Schools are free to choose the educational literature required in each grade for completing the school curriculum.

The requirements for educational are established by the minister of education and research. When creating study materials, the fundamental values of general education provided by law must be followed, including the values arising from the ethical principles specified in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the fundamental documents of the European Union are considered important. (Source: Piret Liba)

c. Is there guidance/procedures to help schools to make learning materials accessible for all learners? (e.g. Braille/large print for learners with visual impairment, materials in other languages).

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

There is a SEN website (in Estonian) what compiles all information about students with special educational needs: teaching, learning materials, projects and events, continuing education courses, related literature, etc.

d. Is ICT used to improve access to materials for vulnerable groups?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

The e-learning material that has been created and is being created is available on the digital study material portal E-Schoolbag (e-koolikott). Students with special educational needs (SEN students) are provided with a comprehensive approach to tailor-made e-learning materials suitable for pupil studying under the simplified curricula (see SEN website).

e. Are there specific financial and practical resources available for textbooks/materials/ICT for different vulnerable groups?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

Learning materials for students with special educational needs can be downloaded free of charge from the SEN website e-shop. Methodological instructions for teachers for using these learning materials are also available free of charge. For a small fee, it is possible to order these materials on paper.

The creation of digital learning materials is also funded by the ESF.

4.3 Assessment

a. Is there a national/local assessment framework that includes all learners?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

For each level of education (pre-primary, basic, secondary and higher education), the state establishes requirements, called national standards of education. These are set out in national curricula which determine general objectives of the respective educational level, required content, estimated length of study period, required knowledge, skills and experience. (The Inspectorate of Education of Estonia) (CPRA)

The Ministry of Education and Research has set a goal that in the assessment of learners as well as institutions, it is very important to find the right balance between summative and formative assessment and to develop the institution's self-analysis and reflection skills. Assessment results are analysed in their dynamics and a differential approach is implemented: the stronger ones get recognition, while schools with weaker results are provided with the assistance they may need. The main activities include:

- *Creating assessment tools for assessing the learners' development in key competences.*
- *Developing quality indicators that measure the learning and educational processes' results, effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction. The results for all institutions are publicly available and comparable between institutions.*

- *Developing external evaluation criteria for educational institutions. The external evaluation is connected to the institution's self-analysis, which will have an emphasis on the learning and educating process, its effectiveness and results, as well as the results of the stakeholder satisfaction questionnaire. The external evaluation gives the educational institution competent feedback, and the application of suggested improvements outlined in the report are supported.*

(The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020) (CPRA)

b. Is there guidance for teachers on how to use curriculum-based assessment to identify all learning needs in the classroom?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

The principles of assessment are recorded in the national curricula and specified in the school curriculum.

The nationwide Innove Pathfinder network offers free counselling and instructional materials for adults supporting children in education - parents, teachers, support professionals.

c. Is there guidance/procedures on providing access to tests/examinations when learners need additional support/reasonable adjustments? (e.g. adapted materials, extra time etc.)

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

The nationwide Innove Pathfinder network offers free counselling and instructional materials for adults supporting children in education - parents, teachers, support professionals.

Pathfinder network is part of the foundation Innove which is a private legal entity established by the Ministry of Education and Research. (Source: Piret Liba)

d. Are there specific arrangements and/or formal procedures to support the assessment of the specific needs of learners who need additional support in their learning? (e.g. those with disabilities)

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description, including clear information on the focus of needs identification procedures and who is involved in the procedures (learners, parents, professionals):

A regulation of the Minister of Education and Research has approved the Conditions and Procedure for the Preparation and Conduct of standard-determining tests and final examinations of basic school and upper secondary school, and for the preparation, assessment and storage of examination papers. The same regulation also lays down differences for students receiving general, enhanced or special support.

e. Is ICT used in the assessment of vulnerable groups?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act § 32 to process tests and testing-related data, the Government establishes a database aimed at enabling the following:

- 1) preparation of standard-determining tests, harmonised final examinations of the basic school, state examinations, internationally recognised foreign language examinations replacing the final examination of the basic school or upper secondary school, national tests and surveys, other general competencies, field-related competencies, recurrent themes and study result assessment tools;
- 2) preparation, holding and keeping of tests;
- 3) evaluation of tests;
- 4) retention, analysis and communication of tests results;
- 5) issue of examination certificates;
- 6) administration of blank forms of documents certifying education;

obtaining reliable information on education statistics, conducting studies and surveys, and strategic management.

There is the Examination Information System (EIS) - an electronic environment for the preparation of tasks and conducting tests, including examinations. There is no separate environment for different vulnerable groups. The EIS can be used by all students, teachers, parents, examination center specialists and task preparers. The EIS organizes state exams and basic school final exams. School administrators can register their school students for exams at the EIS. Later, it is possible to organize the exam: to divide the students into classrooms and groups, to mark the members of the commissions, the assessors of the exam ect. Once the exam results are available, the school administrator can view the exam results. (Source: Piret Liba)

4.4 Please provide information (main conclusions, reference and a link if available) on any recent reports, studies, evaluations and/or reviews, since 2015 relating to issues around curricula, learning materials and assessment processes.

In Estonia the basic education standard is established in the national curriculum for basic schools and, with regard to students with mild learning difficulties, students with moderate learning difficulties, and students with severe and profound learning difficulties acquiring basic education, in the simplified national curriculum for basic schools. The study “Inclusive education of SEN students and the effectiveness of related support measures” recommended to facilitate the parallel teaching of different curricula. Teaching students in two different curricula in one class is hampered by inconsistencies between two curricula. The overlap of the national curriculum teaching materials with the simplified curriculum teaching materials should be increased in order to facilitate the simultaneous teaching of students studying on the basis of two curricula in the classroom.

Performance in basic skills remains one of the highest in the EU and worldwide. The 2015 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that among EU countries Estonia has the lowest proportion of low achievers in mathematics (11%) and science (9%) and the second lowest in reading (11%). However, the proportion has slightly increased in all three tested subjects since 2012. Gender gaps and the impact of socioeconomic status on performance are one of the lowest in the EU, indicating that the education system is equitable at this level. (European Commission, 2017, 2017 European Semester)

4.5 Overall, what are the perceived main challenges (barriers and hinderances) and opportunities (support and ways forward) for inclusion in education in relation to curricula, learning materials and assessment processes in the country?

According to the vision document „Smart and Active Estonia 2035“ (2019) one of the major challenges is a profound change in national syllabi based on the values and competences described in the general part of the basic and upper secondary school curriculum, and the introduction of more collaborative and problem-based learning methods. Learners should move on their learning path at their own pace, which could be “normal,” “faster,” or “slower.” The

curricula for all grades and types of education should have room for close-to-life choices to develop some professional or vocational skills. In addition, it is considered that adaptation and self-management capability, social skills, critical thinking skills and creativity, entrepreneurial attitude and perseverance are important at every level of education, as the environment is changing at an ever-increasing pace. In order to acquire these skills, it is important to change teaching methods and environments and find opportunities to evaluate skills. The increasing importance of these skills in the future indicates that, in addition to learning in the work environment, training courses, including courses that integrate specialised and general skills, are still needed. It is seen, that methodological and assessment tools for learning should be developed to focus on the development of skills and value attitudes alongside the acquisition of knowledge. The focus of the content of the teacher's work moves towards guiding learners, directing information choices and activities, and feedback.

Challenges:

Reducing early school leaving remains a challenge in the context of the increasing demand for high-skilled workers. The share of early school leavers was 11.2% in 2015 and is around the EU average, but above Estonia's 2020 target (9.5%). The figure masks significant differences between rural and urban areas and remains significantly higher for men than for women (13.2% vs 9% in 2015). Drop-outs are particularly a problem in the first year of upper secondary vocational educational training (VET) (22.4% in 2016), but it is on a decreasing trend.

Despite recent improvements, vocational education and training remains relatively unattractive. Estonian authorities aim for a 35%-65% share of basic school graduates pursuing VET as opposed to general secondary education. In practice, the ratio remains around 27%-73%. There was some progress on implementing measures to raise the proportion of VET students in apprenticeships. The drop-outs of students enrolled in apprenticeship programmes show improvement, having dropped from 31.4 % in 2010/11 to 21.4 % in 2015/16 (the lowest point in six years).

Part of this lack of attractiveness may stem from the fact that VET skills at the upper secondary level are not strongly rewarded in the labour market. (European Commission, 2017, 2017 European Semester)

Section 5: Teachers and support personnel

How are staff in schools prepared to accommodate students of all abilities and backgrounds, in terms of their initial training, continuing professional development and their attitudes to inclusion?

5.1 Please list type of staff, their numbers and required level of education for the position in different type of educational institutions

Type of staff	Number	Required education	Comment
Mainstream schools			
Teachers	14707	Masters	<p>A mainstream school teacher can also work in a special school - so when summing up the numbers of these teachers, some of the teachers are double in the data. Receive Diploma and teaching certificate providing evidence of teaching qualifications</p> <p>Teacher training includes three components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General education studies • Study related to specific subject(s) • Professional study (educational science, psychology, didactics and practical training). <p>During initial teacher education, all the teachers receive training modules to prepare them to work with pupils with special educational needs. (National Overview, p.9)</p> <p>For teacher training, the pre-conditions for the beginning of studies in a corresponding higher education level are applied: the pre-condition for the commencement of teacher training is acquired secondary education or</p>

			<p>a foreign qualification equal thereto.</p> <p>An additional pre-condition for the commencement of teacher training is passing teacher professional aptitude tests. (Eurydice)</p>
Professional staff (psychologists, pedagogues, social pedagogues, speech and other types of therapists)	988		<p>Some of the support specialists also work as teachers - if they give the lessons in the curriculum, the support specialists can be both teachers and support specialists. (Support specialist) has completed support specialist training at a higher education level and commences work as a speech therapist, special education teacher, psychologist or social educator in a school for the first time within 18 months as of completing the support specialist training. A person who commenced work as a speech therapist, special education teacher, psychologist or social educator in a school for the first time for the first time in the course of acquiring higher education or in the course of higher education studies in the specialisation immediately preceding these may also apply for the beginner's allowance for a support specialist within four months as of acquiring higher education, provided that the period of time between the completion of the previous studies and the commencement of higher education studies in the specialisation does not exceed one year (Basic School and Upper Secondary Schools Act)</p>
Teacher Assistants (specify role and add rows as required)	-	No information found.	
<i>School heads</i>	473		Some principals also teach, ie they are also teachers.

			<p>The Ministry of Education has launched continuing training programmes for teachers and school heads with implementation of inclusive education as the cross-cutting priority. Inclusive education is one of the main priorities of the in-service training courses.</p> <p>(National Overview, p.9)</p>
Special schools			
Teachers	959	Master	<p>Identical to teachers in mainstream education, but including the compulsory competence: development, creation and research in the field of special education. (Eurydice)</p>
Professional staff (psychologists, pedagogues, social pedagogues, speech and other types of therapists)	165		<p>(Support specialist) has completed support specialist training at a higher education level and commences work as a speech therapist, special education teacher, psychologist or social educator in a school for the first time within 18 months as of completing the support specialist training. A person who commenced work as a speech therapist, special education teacher, psychologist or social educator in a school for the first time for the first time in the course of acquiring higher education or in the course of higher education studies in the specialisation immediately preceding these may also apply for the beginner's allowance for a support specialist within four months as of acquiring higher education, provided that the period of time between the completion of the previous studies and the commencement of higher education studies in the specialisation does not exceed one</p>

			year (Basic School and Upper Secondary Schools Act)
Teacher Assistants (specify role and add rows as required)	No information.	No information found.	The role and responsibilities of the assistant teacher are described in the guidance material developed for schools to support the student. At present, the qualification requirements for teaching assistants are decided by schools.
<i>Others (please specify and add rows as required)</i>	No information.		
Other institutions offering education if they exist (i.e. children's homes, young offenders institutions etc).			
Teachers	-	No information found.	Education is provided only by schools.
Professional staff (psychologists, pedagogues, social pedagogues, speech and other types of therapists)	-	No information found.	Education is provided only by schools.
Teacher Assistants (specify role and add rows as required)	-	No information found.	Education is provided only by schools.
Vocational Education			
Teachers	1963	Bachelor	
Pre-primary			
Teachers	7997	Bachelor	

5.2 Please indicate if education/training on inclusion in education is available for the following groups of professionals.

Type of staff	Yes	No	No information	If yes please state if pre- or in-service, mandatory or optional, who provides education/training and summary of content
Head teachers/School directors	x			The in-service training system for teachers and school leaders has been centralized and inclusive education has been a priority for in-service training for many years. In-service training is based on the <u>competence model of the head of an educational institution</u> (available only in Estonian). According to the model, the competencies of a leader are: innovation management, team management, supporting the development of each student, results-based management, presentation of a success story.

Teachers	x			<p><i>NB: For pre-service education, please cross reference your answer to question 5.4 as necessary</i></p> <p>Optional competences include: supporting learners with special educational needs; (Eurydice)</p> <p>National in-service training programmes organise courses for teachers on how to deal with learners with SEN in the inclusive classroom. (CPRA)</p> <p>Competence centres of universities support and guide on how to implement new curricula, and current approaches to learning and inclusive education. The competence centres provide training for the implementation of new methodology and support and give advice to teachers. (<u>'Competent and motivated teachers and school leaders 2016–2019'</u> programme, in Estonian) (CPRA)</p>
Teacher Assistants	x			<p>Teacher assistants may be involved in learning events for the whole school team funded by the ESF. One of the priorities of the learning events is to organize cooperation for the implementation of inclusive education.</p>
Professional Staff	x			<p>Training of support specialist is organised within the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy sub-programme 'Study and career counselling 2016–2019'. The main aim of the activities carried out is to educate the support specialists who are providing those services in being competent and using modern methodology and evaluation tools. All provided services must meet established quality criteria.</p> <p>Gaining occupational qualification and launching training is provided by activities of this sub-programme. Supported activities include co-operation between local specialists, creating and implementing new networks, mentorship systems, summer schools, supervision, etc. To provide high-quality services there are organised different kind of events, self-development days, network meetings and training for specialists from all counties. In co-operation with different organisations and institutions countrywide seminars are organised. Methodical, instructional and informational materials are composed for counselling</p>

				<p>specialists. In-service training courses for support specialists are organised in co-operation with universities.</p> <p>(<u>Study and career counselling 2016–2019</u>, in Estonian) (CPRA)</p>
Inspectors			x	<p>Such a group of professionals does not exist. There is no separate inspectorate in Estonia. Administrative supervision over the lawfulness of the activities of schools and their owners is exercised by the officials of the Ministry's External Evaluation Department. There are 10 officials in Ministry exercising administrative supervision and we do not call them inspectors. (Ministry of Education and Research of Estonia)</p>
Teacher Trainers	x			<p>Higher education institutions work together to develop the principles for assessing the results of their teaching staff. In assessing the work of the teaching staff in universities (including during the recruitment process), the quality of teaching work is taken into account, including the international aspect. This includes having work and teaching experience in foreign universities, participation in international development programmes, development of curricula, teacher effectiveness and learners' feedback, the teacher's self-development, etc. This also includes the results of academic research carried out by the staff. (<u>'Competent and motivated teachers and school leaders 2016–2019'</u> programme, in Estonian) (CPRA)</p> <p>The concept of continuing education for teachers and heads of educational institutions, which was prepared in 2014, specifies duties and responsibilities of various teacher education partners: the teacher, the educational institution, the owner of the school, the Ministry of Education and Research, the institutions providing continuing education and the university competence centres. Specific duties and responsibilities related to determining training needs, planning continuing education, allocating resources, organising trainings, assessing effect and maintaining records have been determined at every level. (Eurydice. National Education Systems, Estonia, Chapter 9.3. p.1. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-</p>

				policies/eurydice/content/continuing-professional-development-teachers-working-early-childhood-and-school-education-22_en
Others (please list add rows as required)				

a. If you answered no to any of the above, please provide further information:

5.3 Is education and training of teachers aligned with national policy goals on inclusive education?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

For implementing the Lifelong Learning Strategy, the Ministry of Education and Research has compiled a programme 'Competent and motivated teachers and school leaders 2016–2019'.

Within the framework of the programme's measures and activities, models of co-operation and learning together are implemented. The aim is to support teachers and other school staff members. In educational discussions, schools also include members of the local community. To support teachers in problem-solving and to improve their prevention work, support specialists are included in team training. Extra attention is paid to different kinds of network development. (CPRA)

Teacher training curricula of higher education institutions are based on the Universities Act and two regulations of the Government of the Republic: The Standard of Higher Education and The Framework Requirements for Teacher Training.

According to the higher education standard, the objectives and learning outcomes of higher education curricula must correspond to the requirements and tendencies of international legislation governing the respective profession and if a professional standard exists, take account of the acquisition and implementation of the knowledge and skills described in it. Competencies described in the professional standards for teachers, special education teachers and vocational teachers are taken as starting points in the development of teachers' training curricula. The professional standard for teachers was first approved by the Education vocational council in 2005 and the professional standard for vocational teachers in 2006. The new standard that forms the basis for initial training was approved in May 2013, and higher education schools brought their curricula into line with the standard by the academic year 2015/2016.

(Eurydice. National Education Systems, Estonia, Chapter 9.1. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/initial-education-teachers-working-early-childhood-and-school-education-23_en)

National in-service training programmes organise courses for teachers on how to deal with learners with SEN in the inclusive classroom.

5.4 With respect to the main initial teacher education programmes, describe how inclusion in education is addressed in it (i.e. requirement for number of academic credits under European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), subjects and topics covered, focus etc).

The Primary School Teacher curriculum (300 ECTS) in Tartu University is composed of the following modules: 1) general studies (21 ECTS); 2) subject and methodology studies (96 ECTS); 3) general education and psychology studies, including teaching practice (82 ECTS); 4) minor specialisation (teacher of English at primary school, teacher of handicraft, home economics and art at basic school (a 42 ECTS); 5) elective subjects (18 ECTS); 6) optional subjects (11 ECTS); 7) master

thesis module (30 ECTS). Within the general education and psychology studies module there are the following compulsory subjects: inclusive education (3 ECTS), learning-supportive teaching (6 ECTS), supporting children with special educational needs (3 ECTS), schools with modern approach to learning (3 ECTS), the learning and teaching of students with learning difficulties at the first and second school level (3 ECTS).

The Primary School Teacher curricula in Tallinna University (English version could be downloaded from the linked website) contains the following compulsory subjects: students with special needs (3 ECTS), basics of counselling (6 ECTS), student development and support system (3 ECTS) and internship in a field of learning and teaching of children with special educational needs (3 ECTS).

5.5 Please provide information (main conclusions, reference and a link if available) on any recent reports, evaluations and/or reviews, since 2015 relating to initial teacher education and/or professional development issues.

The study "Inclusive education of SEN students and the effectiveness of related support measures" (2016) recommended that initial teacher education should also integrate the basic knowledge and skills needed to engage students with SEN in different subjects. Consideration should be given to increasing the practice of working with students with SEN.

According to the PISA survey in Estonia, the results of students in schools where the language of instruction is Russian are lower than those in the schools where the language of instruction is Estonian. Russian-language schools have improved their results compared to the previous PISA survey but the difference is still noticeable and it is important to find ways for reducing the gap between the results of students of schools with different languages of instruction. (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia, 2015).

In Estonia, there is considerable autonomy for the management of the teaching workforce at the local level. This is a strength in a system where schools are individually judged on their ability to improve student learning. Teacher appraisal processes internal to the school are established, include the observation of practices in the classroom and have an impact on the professional development of teachers. There are also indications that there is no inequitable distribution of teachers across schools and school locations. A positive development has been the introduction of a new competency-based teacher career structure but its potential is not being adequately used. (OECD, 2016)

... the potential of the existing competency-based career structure, for both general and vocational education teachers, is not being adequately used. At this stage it essentially remains a voluntary instrument to formally recognise teacher competencies and with no direct association with compensation and the specific roles performed at the school. Teachers do not seem well-informed about both the teacher professional standards and the teacher qualification stages to which they could access through a certification process. Those who know about these new processes show little interest in engaging in them as they lack incentives to do so. At the same time, school directors seem to take little account of the qualification stages in the context of salary setting at the school level. Generally, schools in Estonia do not seem to be using the competency-based career structure as a reference to distribute roles and tasks among teachers within schools. Hence, the career structure is yet to penetrate schools' teacher management practices.

... there are some concerns about the operation of teacher professional development. First, the use of results from school-based teacher appraisal to inform the teacher's professional development plan seems limited. Second, even if schools organise internal processes for teacher appraisal, there seems to be limited alignment to school development plans. Third, the unaffordability of courses, conflicts with the work schedule and lack of relevance of teacher professional development activities seem to be important barriers for some Estonian teachers to engage in

professional development. Fourth, even though professional development is provided in an open market with a diversity of providers, there is no process to accredit professional development programmes. (OECD, 2016)

Additional issues are:

Rethink the organisation of school staff and make the teaching profession more selective

Make teacher certification a requirement for teachers and compel school owners to adopt certification levels

Strengthen school-based teacher appraisal as the main process for teacher development

Ensure the relevance of professional development for teachers and accredit programmes (OECD, 2016)

According to the study conducted by the think tank “Praxis” as a part of the international comparative study „Divided Education, Divided Citizens?“ the problem of teachers in Russian speaking schools is the low level of Estonian language skills of teachers in Russian-medium schools, which seems to affect the educational results of students in Russian-medium schools.

5.6 Overall, what are the perceived main challenges (barriers and hinderances) and opportunities (support and ways forward) for inclusion in education in relation to teachers and support personnel in the country?

Challenges:

The vision document „Smart and Active Estonia 2035“ (2019) highlights that the shortage of teachers, especially teachers of mathematics and natural sciences, is worsening, while teachers have little cooperation and low self-efficacy. Few teachers come to school after graduating from university and nearly a third of new teachers leave after their first year of work. A major problem is the lack of support specialists, especially special education teachers and psychologists working at school. So far, we have been relatively good at supporting weaker pupils, but children with special educational needs related to talent do not receive enough attention.

The emerging teacher shortages and the unattractiveness of the profession risk affecting the quality of education. Half of all teachers in primary and secondary education are over 50 years old and almost every fifth teacher is over 60. (2020 European Semester – Country Report Estonia, p. 33)

... the shortage of teachers, especially teachers of mathematics and natural sciences, is worsening, while teachers have little cooperation and low self-efficacy. Few teachers come to school after graduating from university and nearly a third of new teachers leave after their first year of work. A major problem is the lack of support specialists, especially special education teachers and psychologists working at school. So far, we have been relatively good at supporting weaker pupils, but children with special educational needs related to talent do not receive enough attention. There is no system for evaluating and recalling school directors, who focus too much on administration, and not on development and change management. (Estonian Education and Research Strategy 2021 – 2035.)

Further support Russian-speaking students in Estonian language

The national government should consider developing an earmarked grant designed to provide financial support to municipalities and schools for the additional hours of Estonian language instruction necessary to make Russian-speaking students proficient in the country’s official language. Language acquisition problems clearly pose barriers to, and raise the costs of Russian-speaking students advancing through Estonia’s education system. As such, they run against Estonia’s commitment to equal opportunity and fair treatment. Language barriers are likely to distort the choice of upper secondary programmes by Russian-speaking students in favour of vocational programmes, and thus ameliorating the basis for this choice would probably improve the efficiency of the system as well. (OECD, 2016)

85% of all basic school students have Estonian as their language of instruction, 14% of students have Russian as their language of instruction, and about 1% of student study in other languages. Training for Russian-speaking school teachers is mainly organized by the Narva College of the University of Tartu. (Source: Piret Liba)

Section 6: Schools

How does the work of schools, school management and leadership impact on access, participation and provision of equitable opportunities for all learners?

6.1 Who is excluded from attending any form of school?

Please give reasons for this group being excluded from attending school and describe any form of alternative provision made for them?

There is no group which is excluded from attending any form of school. General compulsory school attendance applies in Estonia. Pursuant to § 9 of the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act a person who has reached the age of seven years before October 1 in the current year is subject to the duty to attend school. A person is required to attend school until they acquire basic education or attain the age of 17 years.

In Estonia, compulsory education starts at the age of 7. (European Commission, 2019, Compulsory Education in Europe)

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 pupil places. A person who needs special treatment due to behavioural problems is admitted to school on the basis of a respective court judgment or ruling. (Basic Schools and Upper-Secondary Schools Act) (CPRA)

Participation in School is almost universal. (OECD.2016)

The number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) has decreased more than half since 2010, but in 2018 there was a slight increase in the number of NEET youth; it is estimated that there are 12.300 young people in Estonia that do not study, work or participate in training; regional differences are worrying, e.g. in North-East Estonia, the share of NEET youth is 13.7% (the Estonian average is 9.8%) (Ministry of Education and Research (2019). Summary of the Ministry of Education and Research's annual report for 2018.)

All home-educated learners are on the register of their local school. School staff are obliged to prepare learning plans and evaluate the achievements of learning outcomes set in the curriculum. Home-educated children/learners are considered as being in formal education.

Out of education children/learners refers to mandatory school-age children/learners who live in Estonia, but have not enrolled in any school. The rural municipality or city government keeps records of those who are obliged to attend school. Once per academic year, the data from the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS) is compared with that of the Estonian population register on persons who are obliged to attend school and whose place of residence is in the administrative territory of the rural municipality or city. This is in order to register the obligation to attend school. (EASIE background information)

6.2 Are there issues around the over- and under-representation of different vulnerable groups in different school settings?

No No information available Yes

6.3 Please give details on the main admissions criteria for schools.

a. Highlight any issues with the national polices.

Pursuant to § 27 of the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act a basic school is required to admit all person 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, where the desired school has vacant student places. The place of residence of a person means the address of their place of residence registered in the Estonian population register. In recent years there has been remarkable growth of people, who have got long-stay visas (from 1787 in 2014 to 16756 in 2018), at the same time the number of long-term residence permits has going down. As people staying in Estonia on the basis of a visa do not have registered place on residence in the Estonian population register, their access to the social guarantees, including access to education, is limited. Currently we are meeting the challenge how to provide a person subject to the duty to attend school, but no address of their place of residence registered in the Estonian population register, with the opportunity to acquire basic education.

b. Where schools set their own admissions criteria, please outline any impact on inclusion.

Private Schools Act § 12 gives to the board of a private school the right to establish additional requirements to those provided by law for the admission of students. Thus, private schools may, for example, have an emphasis on sport, art or religion, be based on certain pedagogies or be aimed at children with specific special needs. In this case, it is the parent's choice.

6.4 Please provide information on the different forms of support that are available to learners in schools.

a. Inclusive pedagogy, personalised learning and universal design approaches

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

The programme 'Competent and motivated teachers and school leaders 2016–2019' sets the goal that the head of the school will motivate the teachers to approach each learner individually, to participate in the development work of the school and in various forms of teacher training.

Programme activities will concentrate on implementing inclusive education principles among teachers and school leaders. (CPRA)

b. counselling and mentoring possibilities

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

In order to support the participation of students in studies that correspond to their abilities, students are guaranteed education counselling services in public centres called Rajaleidja (Pathfinder in English) in all counties. (Eurydice)

c. input from specialist teachers/therapists

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

There is a person in every school appointed by the director who is responsible for the organisation of cooperation between support specialists and teachers necessary for supporting the study and development of a student with a special educational need. (Eurydice)

d. input from learning support assistants

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

A support specialist:

- *cooperates with other support specialists for identifying the student's needs for aid and support, and assesses, based on the competencies of the specialty, the student's development and coping in study environment;*
- *advises and supports the teacher in planning and conducting the student's study and development activities, finding a study methodology and study form suitable for the student, selecting and adjusting suitable learning materials and aids, and drawing up an individual plan for organisation of studies or curriculum;*
- *supports and guides a student in solving problems that have emerged, plans and conducts interventions arising from the special educational needs of the student and activities supporting the student's development, coping and social capability individually or in a group, and assesses the effectiveness of the applied measures;*
- *in cooperation with other support specialists, advises school management, teachers and staff in organising the study of students with special educational needs, designing a development and study environment based on the needs of the student, and selecting the measures suitable for supporting the student;*
- *advises, within his or her professional competencies, the parents and family in issues related to supporting a child's development and coping;*
- *cooperates, where required, with medical, rehabilitation, social care, etc. specialists for providing the child with the required support. (Eurydice, Country Report)*

If no, please give further information:

e. availability of ICT / assistive technology

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

InnoVe Rajaleidja (Pathfinder) network that offers free educational counselling services, also provides quick advice by the Pathfinder's e-advisors, who can be contacted on weekdays from 9 am to 5 pm in the chat window that opens in the lower right corner of the Pathfinder's website.

f. Please describe any other forms of support available.

Psychological Counselling: The task of a psychologist at school is assessing the factors (psychic processes, personal characteristics, emotional condition, mental health problems, communication and behavioural skills) affecting a student's psychological development and coping in the process of study; advising a student on tackling the issues related with a student's personal life, studies and mental health, on developing cognitive processes, intellectual performance, behavioural and communication skills, and on making study and career choices; supporting a student and advising the parent and the school staff on organising support for overcoming a crisis situation.

Career Guidance: A career advisor supports people in career planning; he or she helps to increase self-awareness, awareness of the learning opportunities and the labour market, set up goals and plan activities to achieve these goals.

(Eurydice, Country Report)

Class alternatives: For the purpose of better organisation of the studies of learners with special educational needs, the following groups and classes may be formed in schools in order to create the required support services for learners for whom these cannot be ensured in a mainstream class:

- *remedial instruction groups for learners acquiring basic education for provision of special education or speech therapy assistance;*
- *classes for learners with speech, hearing and visual impairments, physical disabilities, learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural disorders, multiple disorders. (Basic Schools and Upper-Secondary Schools Act)*

Home educating and in-hospital teaching due to health status:

- *Home educating means the organisation of education in a learner’s home or in another place outside the school premises agreed with the learner or, if the learner has limited active legal capacity, a parent of the learner. Home educating is applied to a learner with special educational needs based on the learner’s health status.*
- *In-hospital teaching means the teaching of a hospitalised learner acquiring 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)

6.5 Please give a description of the strategies in place for practically supporting mainstream school staff teams to increase their capacity to be inclusive and to improve access, participation and achievement for all learners.

Strategy	Description of the focus
Competent and motivated teachers and school leaders 2016–2019	sets the goal that the head of the school will motivate the teachers to approach each learner individually, to participate in the development work of the school and in various forms of teacher training. Programme activities will concentrate on implementing inclusive education principles among teachers and school leaders. (CPRA)
<u>The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020</u>	The Ministry of Education and Research has set a goal that in the assessment of learners as well as institutions, it is very important to find the right balance between summative and formative assessment and to develop the institution’s self-analysis and reflection skills. Assessment results are analysed in their dynamics and a differential approach is implemented: the stronger ones get recognition, while schools with weaker results are provided with

	<p>the assistance they may need. The main activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating assessment tools for assessing the learners' development in key competences. • Developing quality indicators that measure the learning and educational processes' results, effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction. The results for all institutions are publicly available and comparable between institutions. • Developing external evaluation criteria for educational institutions. The external evaluation is connected to the institution's self-analysis, which will have an emphasis on the learning and educating process, its effectiveness and results, as well as the results of the stakeholder satisfaction questionnaire. The external evaluation gives the educational institution competent feedback, and the application of suggested improvements outlined in the report are supported. (CPRA)
Education Act	<p>The Authority of the Ministry of Education and Research ensures a system whereby methodological services are provided to public educational institutions and teachers, co-ordinate the operations of methodology institutions and co-ordinate the training and in-service training system of education personnel. (CPRA)</p>

6.6 Please provide information regarding school buildings and infrastructure.

a. Are there schools that face infrastructure issues that are barriers to inclusion?

No No information available ✓ Yes

If yes, please give a description and provide information on what barriers, how they are monitored and any data/evidence that is available.

In order to modernize the school network, in 2015 the government approved the principles of investing in educational infrastructure (only available in Estonian). This framework describes the current situation of educational infrastructure, forecasts the basic school and upper secondary school network in more detail, describes the investments made in the period 2007-2013 and determines the principles of investment in infrastructure and the criteria for selecting infrastructure investment objects for general education schools. Based on the principles, the investment plan for basic school study buildings for the period 2014-2020 was approved.

b. Are there strategies and/or initiatives to improve school buildings and infrastructure?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please describe the strategies, their aim and focus.

Strategy	Description of the focus
<p><u>Organizing the network of basic schools for students with special educational needs in the period 2014–2020</u> (only available in Estonian)</p>	<p>The purpose of the support is to ensure the availability of learning for students with SEN in each county in a modern learning environment. Support is provided for investments in the buildings of schools and dormitories for students with SEN with the aim of organizing the school network in accordance with the <u>Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy</u> school network program.</p>
<p><u>...Implementation of the principles of inclusive education in general education schools in the period 2014–2020</u> (only available in Estonian)</p>	<p>The purpose of the support is to increase the readiness of general education schools to implement the principles of inclusive education, according to which a student with special educational needs generally attends the school of close to home.</p>
<p>European Social Fund</p>	<p>In order to implement the principles of inclusive learning more widely in mainstream schools, all school owners will be supported with smaller-scale investments in infrastructure and furnishings, which will adapt the learning environment to the special needs of the student. In addition, support is provided to local governments for investments in the study buildings and boarding school facilities of schools for students with special educational needs, with the aim of ensuring the availability of modern learning environment in each county. Both measures are co-financed by the European Social Fund. (<u>the Operational Programme for Cohesion Policy Funds 2014-2020</u> approved by the European Commission)</p>

6.7 Please provide information (main conclusions, reference and a link if available) from any recent reports, systematic evaluations and/or reviews, since 2015 of the school system, potentially drawing on information from school inspections and / or school self-review work.

Reviews of the external evaluation of the education system are published on the website of the Ministry of Education and Research every year (Välisindamise ülevaated), documents are only available in Estonian.

A recent research project, entitled ‘Inclusive education of SEN students and the effectiveness of related support measures’, mapped the situation around early detection of and support for learners with special educational needs (SEN). It found that more learners with SEN are attending mainstream schools, but they are mostly educated in separate special classes. Academic achievement is becoming more difficult for learners with SEN at higher levels of the education system.

On average, 94% of pupils complete basic school, but only 86% of special classroom pupils and 81% of special school pupils graduate. After basic school, 96.6% of pupils who graduated the national curriculum continue their studies,

compared to only 59% of those who graduated according to a simplified, individual curriculum. (Estonian Centre for Applied Research) The Full study is available in Estonian only.

6.9 Overall, what are the perceived main challenges (barriers and hinderances) and opportunities (support and ways forward) for inclusion in education in relation to schools in the country?

Challenges:

The vision document „Smart and Active Estonia 2035“ (2019) highlights that the level of basic education in Estonia is rated among the best in the world and educational inequality is low. At the same time, according to pupils, the quality of education is better than social relationships in the school environment. According to pupils, they do not have enough autonomy at school. Basic schools do not support the integration of children from different cultural backgrounds and do not provide sufficient knowledge of the Estonian language to children with a different mother tongue.

Estonia suggests that removing obstacles and ensuring smooth transitions from one education level to another would help to prevent school failure. (European Agency, 2019. Preventing School Failure)

The share of basic school graduates with a mother tongue other than Estonian with B1 level in Estonian has not changed, making it impossible to reach a goal (90% B1 by 2020) that was already difficult enough to achieve.

- *Different topics relating to students with special educational needs still pose a problem, including communication of information about students' special needs, or legal transgressions and counselling in the case of difficult situations (depression and addiction); There is an increasing number of students in need of support being included in regular schools, with between 40% and 60% of teachers feeling that school-based support services are not available;*
- *The share of school leavers in the 3rd stage of basic school has decreased, while in upper secondary schools and vocational training institutions it has remained more or less at the same level. In vocational training institutions in particular, the share of interruptions of studies continues to be worryingly high and could be reduced by advice and support. (Ministry of Education and Research (2019). Summary of the Ministry of Education and Research's annual report for 2018. Tartu: Ministry of Education and Research.)*

The performance gap between Estonian and Russian-medium basic schools persists and strengthens regional disparities as well as hindering the mobility across the country because of the language barrier. ... a pilot project providing Estonian-speaking teachers in pre-school education groups was launched in the two Russian-speaking regions. The project is expected to be further expanded in 2020 to cover basic schools too. (2020 European Semester – Country Report Estonia, p. 33)

Section 7: Communities, parents and students

How far does the wider school community support learners to access and benefit from education opportunities?

7.1 Have there been any campaigns to raise awareness of inclusion in education at national or local level?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

The topic of inclusive education has received significant media coverage over the years, but no separate campaign has been carried out.

7.2 Does legislation/policy support parental involvement in schools?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

It is up to parents to choose between the local mainstream school and a segregated special school.

Developmental conversations with each child 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 children who attend the pre-primary institution and the parents of children who do not attend the pre-primary institution but who reside in the catchment area, if the parents so request. (Pre-Primary Childcare Institutions Act, p. 9) (CPRA)

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) (CPRA)

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

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. (CPRA)

7.3 Does legislation/policy support collaboration between schools and stakeholders in their local communities (e.g. services/employers)?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

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. Bases for and procedure of the alteration of the administrative-territorial organisation of Estonia is laid down in the Territory of Estonia Administrative Division Act⁴³. Local government has the right to establish alliances and joint agencies with other local governments. Such cooperation

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 cooperation between Estonian schools and the rest of the society. Guest teachers – active citizens, parents, alumni, students 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 cooperation network with people, who wish to contribute to the development of the new generation. Also the President of the Republic of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, is a supporter of the Tagasi Kooli initiative and has given a class to students within the initiative himself. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015)

If no, please give further information:

7.4 Does legislation/policy support the development of learning communities in local/regional areas e.g. support for schools to work together; involvement with universities, support services to provide research evidence and development of innovative practice?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please give a description.

The context is national and the aim is to include all the schools in Estonia. The higher aim is to ensure that schools in Estonia are evaluated on fair grounds and that the evaluation motivates schools to pursue improvements in different aspects.

The process of developing the Good School Model involved 87 Estonian experts, including educational researchers, school head teachers, teachers, representatives of various unions, MoER officials and representatives from local councils.

The Good School Model aims to describe different aspects of a good school and to find the criteria that indicate that a school actually deals with these aspects. The model focuses on the self-evaluation of schools in given aspects.

With the permission of the acknowledged schools, good examples from the self-analysis reports are published on the Ethics in Estonia portal (Eetikaveeb). A best practice database is being compiled, with the aim of sharing the valuable experiences of schools, supporting the creation of a co-operation network and disseminating the Good School notion and its different viewpoints. (European Agency, Raising Achievement of all Learners in Inclusive Education. Country Report)

7.5 Does legislation/policy set out a role for NGOs, DPOs, or other organisations representing vulnerable groups?

No No information available Yes

If yes, please describe the role. Specify which non-governmental actors are particularly active in inclusion in education and how they operate.

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

7.6 Please provide information (main conclusions, reference and a link if available) from any recent reports, systematic evaluations and/or reviews, since 2015 of parental and wider community involvement in the work of schools.

Schools consider it important to involve their community. According to the questionnaire sent to general education schools, schools involve the community to their activities to a larger or smaller extent in order to strengthen the bond between the school and their community. The main option for schools to communicate with the community is through joint events. Joint events open to the community are organised on important dates or before holidays. In addition, also joint maintenance work days are organised, during which students, school staff and members of the community clean up the surroundings of the school or the local park together, for example. Several schools organise family days, where there are athletic and fun activities for the whole family.

A particularly outstanding example of involving the community is from an Estonian small town, where the events organised by the local school are open to the community and also the most important ones are broadcasted on a large video screen at the central square of the town. Schools also organise trainings for parents and also for other community members. In addition to joint events, several schools have also formed, in addition to the usual board of trustees, a board of parents and/or alumni. Often schools introduce their activities to the community also through the local newspaper or the communication portal Facebook.

In conclusion it can be said that all schools having participated in the survey consider good relations between the school and the community important and wish to strengthen the bond between the school and the community by organising different joint events. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015)

Furthermore, while the role that is given to school “boards” to influence and actively shape the operation and organisation of schools is a strength in Estonia, this very much depends on the capacity of different boards to undertake this role. There is considerable variation in the approach to school planning and how involved the school community is in this. (OECD, 2016)

7.7 Overall, what are the perceived main challenges (barriers and hinderances) and opportunities (support and ways forward) for inclusion in education in relation to communities, parents and students in the country?

The vision document „[Smart and Active Estonia 2035](#)“ (2019) points out that there is a need to increase the inclusion of education with society at large and the links between each school and its community in social, economic and cultural terms. The vision document emphasizes the need for flexible individual learning pathways and a community approach to education. Children, young people and adults of one region should be offered diverse learning opportunities. The learning environments of general education and vocational schools, adult education institutions, cultural and youth institutions, workplaces, etc. Should be thus combined, and local businesses and civic organisations are actively involved. Individual learning paths should be developed by combining these and considering the learning in different environments. The involvement of parents in school life and the capacity of local governments to organise the educational landscape should grow significantly.

The consolidation of the school network has become a policy priority (OECD, 2016)

Making a decision to close a school is a difficult one for the local government and is often postponed. If the owner of the school decides to close the school, this brings along other problems. It is highly probable that the students will have to begin travelling longer distances to school and the trip will take longer. Teachers having worked at the closed schools will have to find new jobs. In addition, a regional development challenge is that when a school at a small rural municipality is closed, it will have more extensive repercussions than it would seem at first glance, as in small rural areas, the school often binds the community and is a place for joint activities for local societies. In addition,

closing a school at a rural municipality may cause the area to lose its attractiveness as a residential environment and families with school-aged children will move away. People leaving the area will probably decrease the number of taxpayers in the municipality, which in turn creates a difficult situation for the municipality, i.e. closing a school may indirectly cause other kinds of expenses. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015)

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