



EUROPEAN  
ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION  
OF ADULTS

# **Country Report on Adult Education in ESTONIA**

Helsinki, 2011



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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Overview .....	4
Politics and Law .....	4
Future trends/key concerns/directions.....	5
Structure overview.....	6
European Social fund Programmes .....	6
Popularization of adult education.....	6
Training activities .....	7
Adult education at popular adult education centres .....	7
Work-related training and development activities for adults.....	8
Training the adult population.....	8
Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education .....	8
'Non-Formal' Education .....	8
Formal education .....	9
Vocational education and career related training.....	9
Universities .....	9
Non-governmental organisations NGOs .....	10
References .....	11

## Introduction

This Report covers the situation of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Estonia. It is divided into two sections. The section *Policy and Politics* gives an overview of the key policy currently in force, and also outlines the main legislation or political situation in the country. *Structure and Providers* gives a more detailed look at the organizational structures, and also outlines the main adult education providers, mainly looking at non-formal and informal learning.

We want to thank our members for their contributions to this reflection on the adult education situation in Estonia as far as possible as of 2010/2011. Inevitably there will be new things emerging within the ever changing situation of adult education, but we believe the majority of the information provided will be relevant and useful for the foreseeable future. However, to keep the resource accurate and up to date we are open to suggestions to improve the texts. If you feel there is something you can add about your country please contact us via email at [eaea-info\[at\]eaea.org](mailto:eaea-info@eaea.org).



## Overview

Major shifts have taken place in the education systems of Estonia over the last decade. The content of training and the system of educational institution, as well as the organisation of education as a whole, have changed, greatly impacting adult learning and education.

In Estonia the concept of the adult learner is generally **not related to the age** of the learner. According to Estonian legislation an adult learner is a **learner whose main occupation is not studying**; for instance by working or taking care of children and studying at the same time. [1]

Since November 1993, adult education is governed by the **Adult Education Act** which provides lifelong individual development. It outlines the obligations of the government and local authorities as well as employers in coordination and implementation of adult education, including the funding of adult education from the state budget.

According to the Adult Education Act, adult education can be defined within one of three categories [2]:

- formal education in adult comprehensive schools, vocational education institutions or higher education institutions,
- professional education and training,
- non-formal education.

## Politics and Law

The Adult Education Act is the central legislation related to the adult education system in Estonia. It stipulates the right of every person to constantly develop their knowledge and skills, the obligations of the state and local governments in the coordination of adult training, and the obligation of employers to grant study leave to learners engaged in distance learning, evening courses, external study or part-time study. [3]

Other important pieces of legislation that regulate adult education include the following [4]:

- The regulation of the Minister of Education and Research, 'The Procedure for and Conditions of Attending a Basic School or Upper Secondary School in the Form of Evening Courses or Distance Learning, and Graduating from School as an External Student', which **regulates the learning opportunities of adults in basic schools** and upper secondary schools;



- The regulation of the Minister of Education and Research, 'The Procedure and Conditions for Organising Professional Education for Adults by Vocational Educational Institutions', which regulates the organisation of adult professional training by institutions of **vocational education**;
- The regulation of the Minister of Education and Research, 'The Procedure for the Formation of State-Commissioned Education within the Area of Government of the Ministry of Education and Research', which legalised state-commissioned adult vocational education as a new type of **state-commissioned education** in 2007;
- The 'Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act' which regulates full-time and part-time study and external study at higher education level, and the organisation of training courses as well as the **recognition of previous study and work experience**;
- The Universities Act, which regulates full-time and part-time study and external study, and the organisation of **training courses** as well as the recognition of previous study and work experience;
- The Private Schools Act regulates the establishment and operation of private schools. Following this Act, all legal persons in private law who provide education for more than 120 hours or six months per year must establish a private school and apply for an education licence. [4]

## Future trends/key concerns/directions

The Minister of Education and Research presented the Adult Education Development Plan 2009-2013 which had been approved in 2009. The development plan has three main goals. Firstly, to **enable better access** to formal and non-formal learning in order to improve knowledge and skills and increase the ratio of people aged between 25 and 64 years participating in lifelong learning to 13.5 % by 2013. The two other goals are more qualitative than the first, one aim being to reduce the number of people who only achieve general education and who **lack professional qualifications**. The third goal is to offer training in order to create better circumstances for people to acquire a level of education or qualification that is **one step higher** than that which they have already attained. The development plan has an implementation plan where concrete actions and their costs are indicated. [5]

The Adult Education Act is being renewed during 2010 and 2011. With this renewal the main aim is to **increase the quality** of adult education. The main emphasis of the act will be on the **adult's legal rights** for accessing education during their lifetime.[6]



## Structure overview

**The Ministry of Education and Research** [7] contributes to the general development of the adult education system and supports the development of work-related training courses, key competences for lifelong learning and carrying out liberal adult education training courses in various educational institutions.

**The Ministry of Social Affairs** [8] is responsible for the training of unemployed people and the **Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication** [9] supports training in enterprises through Enterprise Estonia [10].

Today in Estonia, a variety of study opportunities have been developed for adult learners; including distance learning and evening courses, external study and part-time study. Formal education acquired within the adult education system allows adults to acquire **basic and general secondary education** at adult upper secondary schools through distance learning, evening courses or external study.

In addition to formal education, institutions of vocational education and higher education are increasingly providing more continuing education courses and retraining courses. These courses allow adults to acquire and improve their professional, occupational and speciality knowledge, skills and experience as well as to retrain. [11]

### European Social fund Programmes

In the current situation, adult education and lifelong learning activities are often promoted through European Social fund Programmes. Activities are divided into three specific categories; 'Popularization of adult education', 'Adult education at popular adult education centres', and 'Work-related training and development activities for adults' [12]

### Popularization of adult education

This programme was launched in 2008 and is being carried out by the Association of Estonian Adult Educators ANDRAS. The current programme includes the following:

#### Information activities

The ongoing organisation of the **Adult Learners Week**. The Association of Estonian Adult Educators ANDRAS and the Ministry of Education and Research have been organising the Adult Learners Week every autumn since 1998. The Adult Learners Week is aimed at **promoting education**, recognising learners and teachers, and introducing learning opportunities. The activities of the Adult Learners Week have expanded over recent years, the largest events include the



recognition of adult learners, the adult education forum, and the adult learners forum which has convened since 2005.

As of 1 January 2009, the show Huvitaja has been broadcast on the **public radio** station Vikerraadio with a focus on adult education. The show is aired daily, and it is also possible to listen to it on the Vikerraadio website. On the 1st of September 2009, Estonian **Television** began showing the series Tagatargemad, also aimed at adult education, all together, 53 shows will be produced in the series. Also, the adult education **magazine** Õpitrepp has been published as of March 2009.

### **Training activities**

**Qualification courses** are organised for adult educators, workshops are held for qualified educators and continuing education is **provided for teachers** at adult upper secondary schools and institutions of vocational education.

### **Development activities**

The **professional standard** for adult educators and professionals is being updated and cooperation seminars are being conducted between adult upper secondary schools and institutions of vocational education.

### **Adult education at popular adult education centres**

This programme was initiated in 2008 and is being carried out by the Estonian Non-formal Adult Education Association. The following activities are taking place in the course of the programme:

### **Training activities**

Training will be provided for at least 40,000 people. The training courses will take place in at least 45 popular adult education centres in all counties, and will provide information on the knowledge and skills necessary for **increasing professional competitiveness** and the key competences for lifelong learning required for coping successfully. Also covered is communicating in the Estonian **language**, communication in foreign languages, digital competences, learning to learn, **social and civic** competences, a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and **cultural awareness and expression**. **Training courses are also held for adult educators** and experts engaged in the field, which will be provided for at least 200 people. The main subjects will include: adult teaching and learning, supporting adult learners in their pursuit of education, managing adult education centres, managing the education process, and teamwork.



### Development activities:

- conducting **research** regarding the education process in the popular adult education centres;
- assessment of the **quality** of the education centres;
- developing a technique for determining education needs and **new target groups**;
- developing study programmes;
- procuring information and **communication technology** equipment for adult education centres chosen as a result of a competition;
- updating the websites of popular adult education centres.

### Work-related training and development activities for adults

This programme was launched in the summer of 2009 under the guardianship of the Vocational and Adult Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research.

### Training the adult population

In the course of the programme, **free work-related training** courses are held at institutions of vocational education and institutions of professional higher education that provide **vocational training**. In 2009-2012, at least 33,000 people will receive training in the course of the programme which will be held in all regional counties. In addition, at least 270 adult educators and experts engaged in this field will be trained. The target group includes educators and experts from institutions of vocational education and professional higher education as well as institutions of higher education and private education establishments.

## Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education

### ‘Non-Formal’ Education

Training courses based on non-formal education aim to allow students to develop their creativity, talents and social skills, and is usually linked to people’s **interests and hobbies**. Although informal training is mainly provided by informal education centres, it is also available at many other training institutions. [13]

According to the Adult Education Act, adult education institutions can be led by state and municipal authorities, private schools which hold an education licence, or individuals, provided that they follow the statutes and law stipulated about adult education provision.



## Formal education

Adults also have the possibility to obtain general education, vocational education and higher education in the framework of formal education. General education can be obtained in adult gymnasiums in the form of evening study, distance learning or as an external student and in evening study and distance learning departments of general education schools. Adult gymnasiums and general education schools in Estonia are generally municipal schools. [14]

## Vocational education and career related training

Vocational schools offer adult students the possibility to acquire vocational education in the form of part-time study, and also work-related training. Most vocational schools in Estonia are state schools but there are also municipal and private schools. Universities and professional higher education institutions offer adults the opportunity to study part-time. In professional higher education institutions and in universities students can also participate in in-service training. [15]

Work-related training of adults (in-service training and retraining) is firstly offered by private training centres, which form a big part of the education sector in Estonia, and secondly by vocational schools, professional higher education institutions and universities. Work related training can also take place within the workplace itself; and for some professional fields (e.g. teachers or doctors), study is within university institutions.

Aside from the state organised institutions, liberal adult education is also offered by private schools, funds and non-profit organisations located in all Estonian counties. [16]

## Universities

In Estonia continuing education is also provided by all universities including the University of Tartu [17], Tallinn University [18], Tallinn University of Technology Estonian University of Life Sciences [19], and the Estonian Academy of Arts [20]

The University of Tartu has its own **open university** which offers a wide range of continuing education options. The duration of the courses/programmes offered ranges from a half a day to two years, and they currently offer approximately 1000 courses every year to approximately 21,000 participants. [21]

The Open University at Tallinn University is open to everyone who is interested in developing themselves or their organisation, advancing their specialist field or their **vocational or professional qualifications**, gaining credit points in degree



studies or acquiring a second study major or a study minor. The Open University at Tallinn University also has a particular focus on **teacher training**. [22]

## Non-governmental organisations NGOs

### - ANDRAS

An important organisation in the adult education field, as mentioned earlier, is the Association of Estonian Adult Educators: ANDRAS. The mission of ANDRAS is to provide the prerequisites for lifelong learning in Estonia, and to include the decision makers and all other stakeholders in **designing the educational environment**, and to **motivate learners** in the learning process. [23]

### - Estonian Non-Formal Adult Education Association

Another important organisation is the Estonian Non-Formal Adult Education Association which is a non-governmental, national **umbrella organisation** in the **non-formal** adult education field associating education-orientated NGOs.

The mission of the Estonian Non-formal Adult Education Association as a civic association and nation-wide organisation connecting educationally oriented non-governmental associations and adult training institutions. It supports and recognises the educational goals of members at state government and parliamentary level and aims to create an environment of accessible information, to contribute to civil society more generally. [24]



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