

# Supporting vulnerable target groups

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 ESTONIA

## Timeline

2022 Design 2023 Design 2024 Design

ID number 44295

## Background

The choice of education path is influenced by the learner gender, origin or background. These factors can hamper social mobility and exacerbate education and socio-economic inequalities, resulting in segregation both in the labour market and in society at large.

There is no comprehensive approach to supporting learners with special educational needs (SEN), and the services are often fragmented. The existing support systems are not effective enough to implement inclusive education and ensure access.

## Objectives

To develop and implement a holistic approach to supporting learners with SEN or migrant background, and to diversify training provision for vulnerable groups, in order to prevent inequalities and segregation, exploiting every individual's potential to the fullest.

To reduce the general risk of exclusion of young people and ensure the fastest and smoothest possible return of the young not in education, employment or training (NEET) to the education system or the labour market.

## Description

The following measures are foreseen:

- (a) diversifying professional and training choices for vulnerable groups;
- (b) supporting SEN learners in schools and in providing employment supported by guidance and counselling;
- (c) supporting students with a native language other than Estonian, including those from a migrant background, in learning Estonian and providing additional Estonian language tuition;
- (d) reforming support systems for SEN students, including aligning information systems to support flexible transitions for SEN students;
- (e) supporting NEETs in entering vocational education and training (VET);
- (f) promoting gender balance in the study choices of VET students.

The planned teacher training measures paid special attention to SEN and to supporting the mental well-being of students.

In 2022, 21 vocational orientation programmes were introduced in 15 VET centres. The 60 ECTS programme was offered for learners with intellectual disabilities who have studied according to the simplified basic education curriculum. The 30 ECTS programme was available for other target groups, including other SEN learners, and learners with migrant background. In 2022, refugees from Ukraine made up almost half of all students in vocational orientation programmes.

In 2022, amendments to the Vocational Education Institutions Act and related acts were adopted to enable the transition to Estonian-language instruction in VET; these included updating the qualification requirements of teaching staff and the conditions for admission and graduation (students of Estonian as a second language instead of Russian-speaking groups). The transition in VET was scheduled to be completed by the school year 2029/30. VET centres are required to draft their action plans to support learners during the transition.

### 2023 Design

Changes in legislation were drafted to better support vulnerable groups in VET, clarify who falls under this category, and broaden its scope by including a wider array of learners in need of support. In the draft support services regulation, the focus shifts towards assisting in the acquisition of missing skills rather than adjustments based on special educational needs. The amendments clarify the role of VET institutions in fostering student development, offering guidance, counselling, identifying support needs, and specifying the types and extent of support services available, such as individual curricula, special needs teachers, social pedagogues, psychologists, learning support, and small group learning.

### 2024 Design

Adoption of the regulation on support services for vocational education and training was pending to follow the timetable of another reform (extending compulsory education reform).

To enhance the competence of VET teachers and trainers, pedagogical-methodological in-service training courses in special pedagogy were foreseen as part of the forthcoming teachers' CPD programme.

The 'Choice of profession' programme, designed for youth lacking skills or readiness for further studies (including learners with SEN, dropouts from VET or upper secondary general education, NEETs, learners with a migrant background, or those lacking basic skills for successful progression in VET), has proven effective and was decided to be transformed into broader preparatory studies and expanded.

## Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education and Research
- Education and Youth Board

## Target group

### Learners

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)

Learners with migrant background, including refugees

Learners at risk of early leaving or/and early leavers

Learners with disabilities

Learners from other groups at risk of exclusion (minorities, people with fewer opportunities due to

geographical location or social-economic disadvantaged position)

## Thematic categories

### Modernising VET offer and delivery

Diversifying modes of learning: face-to-face, digital and/or blended learning; adaptable/flexible training formats

### Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

## European priorities in VET

### VET Recommendation

VET promoting equality of opportunities

### Osnabrück Declaration

Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET

## Subsystem

IVET

## Further reading

[Regulation on the conditions and procedures for studying in VET institutions for students with SEN \(in Estonian\)](#)

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[Standard of vocational education](#)

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[Vocational education institutions act](#)

## Related policy developments

**2023 Implementation**

### Education Strategy 2021-35

The education strategy applies an integrated approach to the development of the education system to make better use of Estonia's high-quality education for the benefit of people, society and the economy.

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#### Type of development

Strategy/Action plan

#### Subsystem

**2021 Completed**

## **Youth programme 2014-21**

In the Youth programme, measures and activities to achieve the overall goal of providing young people with ample opportunities for self-development and self-realisation are stipulated.

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### **Type of development**

Strategy/Action  
plan

### **Subsystem**

IVET CVET

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**2021 Completed**

## **Supporting learners with special educational needs (SEN) (until 2021)**

On the initiative of the Ministry of Social Affairs, a working group was set up from September 2015 to June 2016 to propose solutions for alleviating this transition for SEN students.

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### **Type of development**

Regulation/Legislation

### **Subsystem**

IVET CVET

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**2021 Completed**

## **Vocational orientation studies**

The orientation year aims at easing the transition from compulsory education to VET and/or to the labour market. It is a preparatory study programme for young people who lack the skills or readiness to choose a profession.

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### **Type of development**

Practical  
measure/Initiative

### **Subsystem**

IVET

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