

Extension of compulsory education

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

REGULATION/LEGISLATION

 FINLAND

Timeline



ID number 36303

Background

One of the central aims of the Government Programme 2019-23 is to raise the education level and prevent the discontinuation of upper secondary education.

Objectives

The government aims to raise the minimum school leaving age to 18 years of age and introduce free upper secondary education. The extension of compulsory education was planned to come into force in 2021.

Description

Preparations to raise the minimum school leaving age to 18 years of age and introduce free upper secondary education help avoid discontinuing education due to the financial costs of attending VET.

A range of study and support options for completing compulsory education, such as voluntary additional comprehensive school education, folk high schools, workshops and rehabilitation and preparatory education may be included.

2019 Design

Preparations to raise the minimum school leaving age to 18 and introduce free upper secondary education were ongoing.

2020 Approved/Agreed

The legislation on the extension of compulsory education was adopted in December 2020 and is set to come into force in August 2021.

The Ministry of Education and Culture was also rolling out an extensive programme to support guidance counselling in primary education, lower secondary education, general upper secondary education and vocational education and training. The programme was part of the extension of compulsory education. It aimed to improve the quality and increase the amount of counselling in VET by 2022. The aim was also

to provide all students in VET with the guidance and support they need at the right time and in all learning environments so there are fewer school dropouts and learning outcomes improve.

2021 Implementation

Extended compulsory education came into force in August 2021 and the first age group started their compulsory upper secondary level or preparatory studies. The admission and entry statistics were followed closely and at the end of November only 664 students (0.01 percent of the age group) were still in the process of finding a suitable continuation to basic education. The Ministry of Education and Culture, together with EDUFI, launched a follow-up programme to support its implementation in 2021-24 focusing on seven aspects of the reform: application and admission, student counselling, quality of teaching, special education, student welfare, cost realisation and impact.

2022 Implementation

In 2022, the Ministry of Education and Culture started working on the 2023 report on the implementation of compulsory education that is cost-free for learners. The education ministry also carried out a survey on the amount and sufficiency of guidance, directed at learners in compulsory education studying in a vocational or general upper secondary education programmes.

The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) prepared monitoring reports on applications to and placement in education and training of persons within the scope of compulsory education. The reports were published at Vipunen, the education administration's reporting portal. EDUFI also started working on the 2023 report on the progress of studies.

As part of the extension of compulsory education, a new programme designed for the transition point from lower to upper secondary education started in August 2022. It is called preparatory education for programmes leading to an upper secondary qualification or TUVA. TUVA combines the former voluntary additional basic education, also known as 10th grade, with preparatory education for general upper secondary education (LUVA), and preparatory education for vocational education and training (VALMA).

2023 Implementation

Monitoring the extension of compulsory education was carried out in accordance with the established monitoring plan.

In the monitoring, various indicators were used, such as applications for enrolments, number of students at different educational levels, dropout rates, student well-being, special support needs, and cost effects. The indicators helped assess the impact of the reform and the achievement of its objectives, such as promoting educational equality and reducing school dropout rates. EDUFI updated the indicators in the education statistics portal Vipunen.

The Ministry of Education and Culture published a report on support services in upper secondary education, focusing on the support received by disabled students and students with special needs in the context of the extension of compulsory education. The Ministry of Finance conducted a preliminary assessment on gender impacts of the expansion of compulsory education.

2024 Completed

According to the extension of compulsory education monitoring plan, the final follow-ups were carried in 2024. To support statistical monitoring, content was added to Vipunen education statistics portal's compulsory education tracking reports by the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI).

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) completed an evaluation of the new forms of student counselling. It focused on new or enhanced forms of student counselling brought about by the extension of compulsory education.

The effectiveness of preparatory education programmes leading to an upper secondary qualification (TUVA) was evaluated. The evaluation of TUVA revealed its effectiveness in providing individualised learning paths and support for students transitioning to VET. However, challenges such as varying implementation practices across providers and a need for better coordination and resource allocation were identified. The findings aim to inform future improvements to enhance consistency and support for learners.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education and Culture
- Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)
- Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC)

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices
Young people (15-29 years old)
Learners at risk of early leaving or/and early leavers

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Optimising VET funding

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Lifelong guidance

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 CVET

Further reading

[Ministry of Education and Culture, article on the extension of compulsory education](#)

[Extensive programme for guidance counselling -- additional resources for guidance as part of the extension of compulsory education, Ministry of Education and Culture press release](#)

[Brochure of the development programme for guidance and counselling \[Opinto-ohjauksen kehittämishjelma, esite\] \(in Finnish\)](#)

[Compulsory education to be extended in August 2021 - the reform aims to improve conditions for learning and well-being among young people and to increase the employment rate, Ministry of Education and Culture press release](#)

[Brochure: The government has decided to raise the leaving age for compulsory education from the autumn 2021](#)

[The follow-up programme for extended compulsory education, press release](#)

[Survey on the amount and sufficiency of guidance](#)

[Vipunen, Education statistics portal](#)

Related policy developments

2022 Completed

Programme for quality and equality in VET

The programme to develop quality and equality in VET is mainly implemented through comprehensive development projects funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. The projects are mainly wide-ranging network projects with one coordinator.

 FINLAND

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Reform of continuous learning

The reform of continuous learning, in line with the Government Programme for 2019-23, is prepared by a parliamentary group that includes members from all parliamentary parties.

 FINLAND

Type of development

Strategy/Action

plan

Subsystem

CVET

“ ... ” **Cite as**

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Extension of compulsory education: Finland. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/36303>