

Education Strategy 2021-35

POLICY DEVELOPMENT**STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN** ESTONIA

Timeline

2019 **Design** 2020 **Legislative process** 2021 **Approved/Agreed**2022 **Implementation** 2023 **Implementation****ID number 29880**

Background

The Education Strategy 2021-35 sets out key education goals for the next 15 years and is the follow-up to the Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020. From 2014, the 2020 strategy was the basis of funding decisions for 2014-20 and for the development of programmes that support the achievement of strategic goals in all fields of education, including vocational education and training (VET), adult education, academic and career counselling, and digital development, and coherence between education and the labour market.

The long-term strategic planning for 2021-35 has resulted in new strategies in education, youth, languages, research and development, innovation and entrepreneurship that were adopted in 2021. The Estonian national implementation plan of the VET Recommendation is based on the above national development plans, regional development plans (i.e. development strategy of Ida-Viru County 2019-2030+), the Just transition fund 2021-27, Recovery and resilience facility 2022-26, and the measures developed and planned for their implementation in the fields of VET, youth policy, adult education and skills policy.

Objectives

The overall objective of the strategy is to equip the population of Estonia with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare people to fulfil their potential in their personal, occupational and social life, and contribute to promoting both the quality of life and global sustainable development.

Three strategic goals have been set to achieve the general objective:

- (a) learning opportunities are diverse and accessible and the education system enables smooth transitions between levels and types of education;
- (b) Estonia has competent and motivated teachers and heads of schools, a diverse learning environment and a learner-centred approach to learning and teaching;
- (c) learning options are responsive to the development needs of society and the labour market.

Description

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.

It continues to support the contemporary approaches to teaching and learning, considers rapid technological developments, strives to ensure the next generation of teachers and the renewal of teachers' roles, and it focuses more on the skills policy, including a clearer division of the roles and responsibilities of education stakeholders (learners, parents, the government and local authorities, school owners, educators, labour market participants).

The movement towards the general objective of the strategy is monitored, including using the following indicators:

- (a) share of 18 to 24-year-olds with low educational attainment not in education or training (2035 target: 9%);
- (b) average pay of VET teachers compared to average pay in Estonia (2026 target: 120%);
- (c) share of adults with professional qualification (25 to 64-year-olds) (2035 target: 80%);
- (d) adult participation in lifelong learning (2035 target in formal and non-formal learning: 25%; in informal learning a new indicator has been developed and the first data will be collected in 2023).

2019 Design

In 2019, the strategy was being developed.

2020 Legislative process

In 2020, the strategy was approved by the government and sent to the parliament for debate. The programme was ready for endorsement by the new government but had not yet been approved.

The development of measures and indicators (sub-indicators) for the implementation of the strategy continued throughout 2020. The overall objective of the strategy is to equip the population of Estonia with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare people to fulfil their potential in their personal, occupational and social life and contribute to promoting quality of life, as well as global sustainable development. Achievement is measured by the following indicators:

- (a) 18 to 24-year-olds with low educational attainment not in education or training (%);
- (b) adults with a professional qualification (25 to 64-year-olds) (%);
- (c) adults in lifelong learning (%);
- (d) employment rates of graduates in growth areas of smart specialisation (%);
- (e) self-directed learners;
- (f) top performing students (level 5 or 6 in the PISA test) (%);
- (g) average teacher salary compared to the national average salary (%).

2021 Approved/Agreed

In November 2021, after discussions in the parliament, the government approved the Education Strategy 2021-35. The strategy focused on ensuring the next generation of teachers, support professionals, and school leaders, on the systematic implementation of contemporary approach to teaching and learning and cutting-edge curricula, as well as the integration of formal and non-formal education.

In pre-school and general education, the emphasis was on further development of the support services and the creation of a safe and inclusive learning environment that promotes physical activity and supports all participants in the learning process.

In VET and higher education, there was also a focus on the reduction of the share of people without professional training or with outdated skills. There was also an improved alignment of further training and retraining opportunities with labour market

needs.

The strategy was set to be implemented through four-year education and youth programmes (to be updated annually). Achieving the objectives of the strategy was set to be monitored by means of a set of indicators.

In VET, the activities of the Education and Youth Programme 2022-25 were planned, considering the goals set in both the education strategy, VET Recommendation, and Osnabrück Declaration. Besides mitigating the effects of COVID-19, VET-related activities focused on the modernisation of VET curricula to support the entry of young people into the labour market and expanding the target group of VET learners. Special attention was paid to the development of green and digital skills, flexibility and permeability of learning pathways, and increased cooperation with companies.

2022 Implementation

Compared to 2021, the share of 18 to 24-year-olds with low educational attainment not in education or training (NEETs) has slightly decreased (10.8% against 10.5%) but has not yet reached the pre-COVID level (2019: 7.6%). Average pay for VET teachers was EUR 1 718 in 2022 (8% rise compared to 2021; 102% of average pay in Estonia).

The share of adults with a professional qualification has slowly increased. In 2022, it was 74.8%, or 1.3 percentage points more than in 2021. Adult participation in lifelong learning increased again to 21.2% after the drop during the COVID-19 crisis (2021: 18.4%). However, participation of men and those not speaking Estonian was still a challenge, and the gap was growing compared to previous years. In 2022, reducing the number and share of adults with a low level of education was one of the biggest challenges in adult education. Among adults with professional education, the employment rates were the highest and the share of inactive people was the lowest.

The Estonian national implementation plan of the VET Recommendation was to build on the Education Strategy 2021-35, providing a detailed set of measures to achieve the objectives set in the strategy.

2023 Implementation

In 2023, the percentage of NEET youth aged 18-24 in Estonia was 9.6%, marking a decreasing trend compared to previous years. The share of adults with a professional qualification remained relatively stable at 74.5%, with minimal change from prior years. Adults' participation in lifelong learning reached 23.2%, showing a steady increase. Vocational education teachers earned approximately 117% of the national average salary, reflecting an ongoing effort to retain teachers and trainers and ensure the competitiveness of teaching profession.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education and Research

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices
Young people (15-29 years old)
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
Adult learners
Older workers and employees (55 - 64 years old)

Unemployed and jobseekers
Persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment
Low-skilled/qualified persons
Learners from other groups at risk of exclusion (minorities, people with fewer opportunities due to geographical location or social-economic disadvantaged position)

Education professionals

Teachers
Trainers
School leaders
Adult educators
Guidance practitioners

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Other stakeholders

Social partners (employer organisations and trade unions)

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Coordinating VET and other policies
Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses
Developing and updating learning resources and materials
Acquiring key competences
Integrating green transition and sustainability in VET curricula and programmes
Integrating digital skills and competences in VET curricula and programmes
Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Teachers, trainers and school leaders competences

Systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuous professional development of school leaders, teachers and trainers
Attractiveness of the teaching and training profession/career

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Permeability between IVET and CVET and general and vocational pathways, academic and professional higher education
Providing for individuals' re- and upskilling needs
Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

Flexibility and progression opportunities at the core of VET

VET as a driver for innovation and growth preparing for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand

VET as an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training and skills

VET promoting equality of opportunities

VET underpinned by a culture of quality assurance

Osnabrück Declaration

Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET

Establishing a new lifelong learning culture - relevance of continuing VET and digitalisation

Sustainability - a green link in VET

European Education and Training Area and international VET

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Strategic planning of the Estonian education system for 2021-35](#)

[Education Strategy 2021-35](#)

Related policy developments

2024 Implementation

Developing work-based learning and practical training

Developing WBL and practical training includes the following measures:

 ESTONIA

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2024 Design

Developing the professional qualifications system and jobs-and-skills forecasting

The following measures are foreseen:



ESTONIA

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2024 Implementation

Developing competences of teachers, trainers and heads of schools

In order to develop the competences of teachers, trainers and heads of school, the following measures are foreseen:



ESTONIA

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2024 Design

Supporting vulnerable target groups

The following measures are foreseen:



ESTONIA

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET

2024 Implementation

Supporting internationalisation in VET

The following measures are foreseen:



Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2024 Design

Seamless transitions between levels and types of education and training, and the labour market

In order to ensure flexible learning opportunities, accessibility of high-quality education and training, and supported learning with the aim of reducing drop-out and early leaving rates and exploiting every individual's potential to the fullest, the following measures are foreseen:



Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ... ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). Education Strategy 2021-35: Estonia. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2024 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/29880>