



# **Independent national experts network in the area of adult education/adult skills**

## **Full Country Report - Estonia**

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**Independent national experts network in the area  
of adult education/adult skills**

**Full country report - Estonia**

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## 1.0 Country overview (statistical element to be inserted by Ecorys from updated country overview)

### 1.1. Employment rate – entire population

**Table 1.1: Evolution of employment rate - national average (2010-2016) compared to EU data**

Geographical area	Years									Targets	
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	EU 2020	National 2020
<b>EU-28 average</b>	:	67.9	68.6	68.6	68.4	68.4	69.2	70	71	75% of the 20-64 year-olds in employment	76%
<b>Member State</b>	67.5	72	66.8	70.6	72.2	73.3	74.3	76.5	76.6		

*Source:* Employment rates by age and educational attainment level (%) Eurostat code *lfsa\_ergaed*, last updated 25 April 2017.

*Explanatory note:* This table compares the average employment rate of the population (ISCED all levels) aged 20 to 64 in a given Member State over the period 2000-2016 to EU targets and average, including the EU2020 target, national 2020 targets and the average EU employment rate for 2016.

*-Comparison to EU2020 target*

The employment rate in Estonia (76.6%) has already achieved the EU2020 target of 75%.

*-Comparison to National 2020 target* Estonia has set the national target for 2020 (76%) slightly higher than the EU 2020 target (75%) and it was achieved in 2015.

*-Comparison between 2016 national data and the EU-28 average for 2016*

In 2016 the employment rate in Estonia was 76.6% while the EU-28 average was 71%, thus the national employment rate is above average in the context of EU-28.

*-Evolution over time*

Estonia stands out as having had a relatively rapid increase in its employment rate over 2010-2016 (increasing by nearly 10 p.p over this period) while the EU28 average has stood at a more stable level over the same period (increasing by 2.4 p.p). The EU average increased from 2015 to 2016 from 70% to 71% while in Estonia the rate has remained the same (apart from a 0.1% increase). This has been no surprise for Estonia because the economic forecasts predicted that the employment rate will decrease in 2016-2018<sup>1</sup> due to the influence of high wage levels and weak economic activity. This means that the challenge for Estonia is to maintain the current employment levels in order to be able to achieve the target in 2020. As mentioned in the previous country overview, one of the main challenges is to support employment rate growth among women as the employment

<sup>1</sup> Bank of Estonia, (2016) "Estonian Economy and Monetary Policy" Tallinn: Bank of Estonia, [http://www.eestipank.ee/sites/eestipank.ee/files/publication/et/RPU/2016/rpm\\_2016\\_4\\_eng.pdf](http://www.eestipank.ee/sites/eestipank.ee/files/publication/et/RPU/2016/rpm_2016_4_eng.pdf)

rate for men has exceeded the target (80.8%in 2016) while the employment rate for women has remained lower (72.6%in 2016) (Eurostat online database).

## 1.2. Participation rate – entire population

**Table 1.2: Evolution of participation rate in education and training - national average (2010-2016) compared to EU data**

Geographical area	Years									Targets	
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	EU 2020	National 2020
EU-28 average	:	9.6	9.3	9.1	9.2	10.7	10.8	10.7	10.8	15% of adults in lifelong learning	20% of adults in lifelong learning
Member State	6.6	6	11	11.9	12.8	12.6	11.6	12.4	15.7		

*Source:* Participation rate in education and training by sex and age (%), Eurostat code trng\_lfse\_01, last updated 25 April 2017.

*Explanatory note:* This table compares the participation rate in lifelong learning of adults aged 25-64 to EU data over the period 2000-2016.

### -Comparison to EU2020 target

Estonia has already reached the EU2020 target in relation to participation in education and training. Set at 15%, the EU2020 target was achieved in 2016 as data indicating a 15.7% national rate indicates. The national target of 20% remains a challenge.

Whilst the EU2020 target has been reached, it remains to be seen as to whether the 2016 national rates can be sustained, as the figures achieved in this year show a jump from the previous years (for which no apparent reason is evident).

### -Comparison between 2016 national data and the EU-28 average for 2016

At 15.7%, the 2016 national level participation in education and training rate stands 4.9 p.p above the Eu-28 average. Despite fluctuations, the national rate has consistently stood above the EU-28 average since 2010, prior to which it stood below the EU-28 average ( 6% in 2005, compared to 9.6%).

### -Evolution over time

In 2016 the participation rate in education and training was 15.7% in Estonia while the EU-28 average was 10.8%. This marks a steady increase in the rate over time, with a particularly marked jump between 2005 and 2010, relative to EU-28 trends. Across this period, the national rate increased from 6% to 11% whilst the EU-28 average remained at a similar level (actually falling from 9.6% to 9.3%).

Increasing participation in lifelong learning has been one of the biggest challenges for Estonia as the participation rate of 25-64 year olds in lifelong learning had remained stable between 2010 and 2015 and the national target of 20% of adults participating in LLL as well as the EU 2020 target of 15% seemed to be out of reach for Estonia to achieve. But in 2016 there has been remarkable growth in the participation rate compared to the previous years, growing from 12.4% in 2015 to 15.7% in 2016.

### 1.3. Trends for low qualified adults

#### 1.3.1. Share of low qualified adults

**Table 1.3: Share of low-qualified adults (ISCED 0-2) – national data (2010-2016) compared to EU-28 average 2016**

Geographical area	Years								
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28 average	:	30.6	27.3	26.6	25.8	24.8	24.1	23.5	23
Member State	14.2	11	10.7	10.9	10	9.4	11.8	11.3	10.9

Source: Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%), Eurostat edat\_ifse\_03, last updated 25 April 2017.

Explanatory note: this table compares the percentage of the population with low qualifications (ISCED levels 0-2) in 2016 to the EU-28 average for 2016 and the period 2000-2016.

#### *-Comparison to EU-28 average*

In comparative terms the share of low qualified adults (ISCED 0-2) aged 25-64 remains modest in Estonia standing at 10.9% in 2016 compared to 23% in the EU28. Whilst at EU-28 the share has steadily fallen over the last 12 years, there has been fluctuation in Estonia's rate across the same period.

#### *-Evolution over time*

Estonia had a 14.2% share of low qualified adults in 2000, which since then has fallen but been relatively static overall between 2015 and 2016 at a relatively low rate (11% in 2005, 10.9% in 2016). The picture has consistently more positive than for the EU-28 average, in that the national proportion has remained lower. However, the rate of change at the EU-28 level has been more marked. So, over the same period, the EU-28 rate has been decreasing from 30.6% in 2005 to 23% in 2016 for EU-28 on average.

The share of low qualified adults in Estonia is slightly higher among men (14.4%) compared to 7.5% among women. Moreover, the share of the low-qualified is higher among the youngest age group. A target has been set to reduce the share of youth aged 18-24 with low qualifications (ISCED 0-2) not continuing in education to 9.5% by 2020<sup>2</sup>. The share has remained relatively stable standing at 11.7% in 2010 and reaching 11% in 2015. Thus, more effort is needed to reach the target.

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<sup>2</sup> "National Reform Programme Estonia 2020," [https://riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article\\_files/eesti\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/eesti_2020_en.pdf)



### 1.3.2. Employment rate of low skilled adults

**Table 1.4: Employment rates of low skilled adults (ISCED 0-2) – national data (2010-2016) compared to EU-28 average 2016**

Geographical area	Years								
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28 average	:	55.7	53.8	53.4	52.7	52	52.6	53.2	54.3
Member State	40.6	51.3	45.2	48.5	50.3	58.2	60.6	58.6	62.7

*Source:* Employment rates by age and educational attainment level (%) Eurostat code lfsa\_ergaed, last updated 25 April 2017.

*Explanatory note:* This table compares the employment rates of those with low qualifications (ISCED levels 0-2) to the EU average over the period 2010-2016.

#### -Comparison to EU-28 average

In 2016 the employment rate for low-skilled adults in Estonia was 62.7% while the EU-28 average was 54.3%.

#### -Evolution over time

The employment rate of low skilled adults has been increasing rapidly in Estonia during 2010-2016, exceeding the EU28 average in 2013. The EU-28 figures have remained more static. For instance, compared to 2010 the EU-28 average for 2016 has increased only 0.5 p.p whilst the growth in Estonia has been 17.5p.p. The gender gap in employment of low qualified adults has stood above 10 p.p during the observed period, although this is considerably less than the gender gap in the EU, on average standing at 20 percentage points.

### 1.3.3. Participation rate of low skilled adults

**Table 1.5: Participation rate of low skilled adults – EU average in comparison to national average**

Geographical area	Years								
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28 average	:	3.7	3.9	4	3.9	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.2
Member State	:	:	2	3.5	3.9	4.6	3.2	4.1	5

*Source:* Participation rate in education and training by sex and educational attainment (%), Eurostat code and trng\_lfse\_03, last updated 25 April 2017.

*Explanatory note:* This table compares the participation rate in lifelong learning of adults aged 25-64 with low qualification levels (ISCED levels 0-2) to EU data and over the period 2000-2016.

#### -Comparison to EU-28 average

The participation rate of low-qualified adults in lifelong learning reached 5% in Estonia in 2016 while the EU-28 average was 4.2%.

#### -Evolution over time

Compared to 2010 the participation rate in Estonia in 2016 has more than doubled from 2% to 5% which is definitely a positive trend. Despite small fluctuations, (e.g. a drop from 4.6% in 2013 to 3.2% in 2014, there has been a positive overall trend across this time.

At the same time the EU-28 average has increased only 0.3 p.p across the same time period. Nevertheless the participation rate of low-qualified adults in Estonia remains far behind of the 15.7% participation rate in the general population of Estonia.

## **2. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ADULT LEARNING SYSTEM**

### **2.1. Main features and a concise summary of historic development**

In Estonia, adult education can be divided into three main parts: 1) formal education; 2) professional work-related training and retraining; and 3) popular adult education.

Formal education system allows adults to acquire any qualifications from level 1 to 8 in the European Qualifications Framework. For acquiring basic and/or general upper secondary education, adult upper secondary schools offer distance learning, evening courses or external study to provide flexibility in obtaining minimum level of qualifications. These studies are free of charge for the learner. Adults can pursue studies in any type of vocational training or at any level of higher education. In vocational education, many flexible forms of vocational training and forms of study have been implemented to enable combination of learning and work for adult learners, with part-time study provided for the learners free of charge. Nevertheless, there are currently no programmes to enable combining acquisition of basic or upper secondary education with vocational skills for adults. Adult learners can also acquire higher education through part-time study or as an external student. Part-time study is usually not free for students in the field of higher education. In order to be able to obtain a state-funded study place, the learner must apply for a full-time study programme. Free part-time higher education is provided in nationally prioritised fields, e.g. for teachers without a higher education. The share of adults aged 25-64, who participated in any sort of formal education during the four weeks prior to survey, has remained unchanged in Estonia during 2010-2016, standing between 4-5%.

Professional, work-related training and retraining is carried out as courses of a varying duration and passing a course does not automatically lead to higher level of formal qualifications (as defined in European Qualifications Framework). These courses allow adults to acquire and improve their professional, occupational and speciality knowledge, skills and experience as well as to retrain themselves. The share of adults participating in work-related training or retraining during four weeks prior to survey stayed unchanged around 3-4% in 2010-2015. In 2016, the share increased to 6.6% according to Statistics Estonia.

Job-related training is mostly based on private funding. In 2016, 77% of job-related training was financed by the employer and 6% by the participants themselves. Public financing of job-related training is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Research and Unemployment Insurance Fund.

Until 2007 professional training of adults was publicly financed only for the unemployed and some specific occupational groups (e.g. teachers, officials). Since 2007, the Ministry of Education and Research finances professional training courses for adults (financed by the ESF programme) in vocational and higher education institutions. These courses are free of charge for the participants. In 2017, about 12 000 people will be enrolled through the programme. The Unemployment Insurance Fund is another important provider of professional training for adults., In 2016, there were altogether close to 19 000 participants in training for unemployed and jobseekers and more than 2600 participants in training for

people with reduced work ability, according to the Unemployment Insurance Fund <sup>3</sup>. Further, since May 2017, the Unemployment Insurance Fund offers training vouchers for job-related training for people still in employment, but who are in risk of labour market exclusion (in low-paid jobs and among older age groups, no professional qualifications or poor language skills). During May to August, there have been a total of 140 participants in the measure.

Popular adult education is mainly carried out in the form of courses, but it is also possible to participate in study groups and summer schools. These courses are usually provided by non-formal learning centres, folk high schools, cultural and other learning centres. These courses do not grant an increase in the level of formal qualifications as defined in the European Qualifications Framework. Nevertheless, a certificate of participation is issued in most cases referring to the curricula acquired in the course. For the 2017-2020 period, attention is turned on granting horizontal skills for adults through training courses, including development of basic skills, ICT skills and language skills. Funds can be allocated for popular adult education from the state budget as well as the budgets of rural municipalities and cities. The Ministry of Education and Research has allocated funds to popular adult education centres for the remuneration of their teachers and managerial staff since 1995 on a competitive basis (funding has been provided to approximately 45 popular adult education centres per year). Since 2005, the activities of popular adult education centres have also been funded by ESF.

**Table 2.1 Number of participants in formal education and training by level of education and age**

	Age 20-24	Age 25+	Total
<b>Level of education (i.e. basic, vocational, higher)</b>			
<b>Primary</b>	3	18	21
<b>Lower secondary</b>	267	449	
<b>Upper secondary</b>	3,719	2,941	
<b>Post-secondary non-tertiary education</b>		5,905	
<b>Short-cycle tertiary education</b>		0	
<b>Bachelor's or equivalent level</b>		13,535	
<b>Master's or equivalent level</b>		10,336	
<b>Doctoral or equivalent level</b>		2,845	

Source: Eurostat, Eurostat database table "Pupils and students enrolled by education level, sex and age (educ\_uae\_enra02)", accessed 2017.08.21

<sup>3</sup> The numbers refer to participation in measures. A person can be counted several times if they participated in several courses during the year.

## 2.2. Provision

### 2.2.1. *Helps adults improve their Basic Skills*

The Adult Education Programme 2017-2020 prioritises the following key competences: digital skills, learning skills, social skills and entrepreneurship, national and foreign language skills<sup>4</sup>. Initiatives to provide basic skills for adults are project based. More than 2 million Euros of ESF financing was allocated to 9 different project offering training for key competences across the country for the period 2017-2020<sup>5</sup>. The aim is to include at least 20 000 adults in the courses for key competences, offered free of charge for participants.

### 2.2.2. *Helps adults achieve a Recognised Qualification*

In Estonia, only enrolment in formal education in adult upper secondary schools leads to a general (not vocational) qualification at primary, lower secondary or upper secondary level. As at November 2016, there are 16 municipal secondary schools for adults with a total of 4778 students. There are also two private schools offering learning programmes for adults.

### 2.2.3. *Helps adults develop other knowledge and skills, not for vocational purposes*

There is no comprehensive overview on the provision of this type of non-formal education. As outlined in 2.2.1 above, language skills are among the priorities in developing key competences among the population. As an example, 16 projects aimed at improving language skills among the population have been financed in 2017 by the ESF<sup>6</sup>. This includes projects focused on youth as well as those with poor national language skills among the adult population (projects organised by local municipalities). There are further courses targeted at new migrants, including refugees, that offer basic knowledge on living in Estonia and a basic language training at A1 level. These programmes are co-financed by the ESF and the state budget.

### 2.2.4. *Facilitates Transition to the Labour Market for unemployed people or those at risk of unemployment (ALMPs)*

ALMPs in Estonia are provided by the Unemployment Insurance Fund. The Unemployment Insurance Fund finances labour market training for the unemployed, those who have received redundancy notice and people in retirement age looking for employment. In addition, the Unemployment Insurance Fund support the training (and retraining) of people with reduced work ability and since May 2017 those in employment, but among labour market risk groups (working in low-paid jobs and aged over 50, with no professional qualifications or poor national language skills). In addition, the courses coordinated by the

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, 'Täiskasvanuhariduse Programm 2017-2020. Adult Education Programme 2017-2020'.

<sup>5</sup> Innove, '9 Projekti Saavad Innovest Toetust Täiskasvanute Võtmepädevuste Arendamiseks (9 Projects Will Be Funded for Developing Key Competences among Adults)'.

<sup>6</sup> Innove, 'Eesti Elanike Keeleoskuse Parandamiseks Käivitub 16 Uut Projekti (16 Project Are Initiated to Improve the Language Skills of the Estonian Population)'.

Ministry of Education and Research (financed by the ESF) offer also job-related knowledge and skills for the whole population (including those in employment).

#### *2.2.5. Opens up Higher Education to adults*

There are no targeted training programmes specifically for adults in higher education. Various universities offer flexible learning options (e.g. online learning or distance learning) or part-time studies, which are subject to study fees.

#### *2.2.6. Enables adult employees to develop their work-related skills*

The courses coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Research offer employees the opportunity to advance their work-related skills in publicly financed training courses. In some cases, the Unemployment Insurance Fund supports companies in providing training for their employees. This includes the training of people with reduced workability and training for hiring new employees or in case of large reorganisations in the company. According to 2015 data, 75% of companies provide work-related training for their employees (Statistics Estonia).

## 3.0 ADULT LEARNING POLICIES

### 3.1 Context

#### *3.1.1. Distribution of responsibilities regarding adult learning*

The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for the governance of adult education policy in Estonia. The tasks of the ministry include planning and implementing the national adult education policy, developing of the judicial area necessary for exercising education policy and ensuring its purposefulness and sustainability. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Research ensures analysis and assessment of training needs for an efficient implementation of education policy.

Many other ministries are also involved in different areas of adult education:

- The Ministry of Social Affairs creates a legal framework for providing necessary training and counselling services to the unemployed and the labour market risk groups, implemented by Eesti Töötukassa (Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund);
- The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications creates conditions for regular provision of education and training to employees and compliance of the knowledge and skills of employees with the needs of the companies;
- The Ministry of Agriculture is a very important funder and a contracting authority for education and training in the area of agriculture.

An Adult Education Council has also been formed in Estonia. It is an advisory body to the Ministry of Education and Research as well as other parties when it comes to planning and organising adult education, by representing the positions of the organisations in the council and providing expert analyses.

The Council is composed of the representatives of relevant ministries, in-service training institutions, formal education institutions, representative organisations of employers and employees, and other institutions and persons engaged in the area of adult education.

Local governments in Estonia do not have significant tasks in organising adult education besides organizing both stationary and non-stationary studies in the general education schools operating within their jurisdiction<sup>7</sup> (non-stationary studies are studies aimed at adult learners, whereby independent learning has a larger share besides lessons in comparison with stationary studies). County governments used to be responsible for some parts of supervision of educational institutions, but with the changes in 2017 the Ministry of Education and Research took up these responsibilities.

#### *3.1.2. Major national socio-economic strategies governing the provision of Adult Learning*

The most comprehensive strategy governing also the provision of adult education in Estonia, is the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy<sup>8</sup> (ELLS). Its main goal is to provide all

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<sup>7</sup> Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/513012014002/consolide>

<sup>8</sup> 'Eesti Elukestva Õppe Strateegia 2020 [Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020]'.

people in Estonia with learning opportunities that are tailored to their needs and capabilities throughout their whole lifespan, in order for them to maximise opportunities for self-realisation in society, in their work as well as in their family life. The lifelong learning strategy sets five main goals: (1) Changing the approach to learning; (2) Having competent and motivated teachers and school leadership; (3) Achieving lifelong learning opportunities with labour market needs; (4) Providing digital focus in lifelong learning; (5) Equal opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning. These goals apply to all levels and types of education, including adult education.

To implement the ELLS, the Ministry of Education and Research has adopted nine programmes, including the Adult Education Programme 2017-2029<sup>9</sup>. The programme sets the national framework for adult learning policy in Estonia. The main goal of the programme is to motivate adults to learn and to create flexible and high quality learning opportunities that are based on the needs and developments of the labour market. This goal is set to be achieved through three main measures:

1. Bringing adults who have discontinued their studies back to formal education and creating conditions for them to continue their studies and acquire a higher educational level (includes activities like designing a concept for a support system for adults to obtain secondary education; developing the system of recognition of prior learning, developing a concept for bringing adults back to VET, increasing awareness of lifelong learning opportunities etc).
2. Increasing access to and the quality of non-formal training and retraining (including activities like increasing the quality, flexibility and reliability of further training; providing opportunities for further training and retraining; developing the competences of adult trainers etc).
3. Developing the qualifications system and creating and supporting forms of cooperation in order to implement the lifelong learning approach (including activities like developing the occupational qualifications system; supporting further cooperation between different stakeholders of adult education; developing new funding principles for further training etc).

The first two activities are co-financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds and are hence also measures in the operational programme of the Cohesion Funds<sup>10</sup>. In total about an investment of 44,000,000 EUR is planned for these two measures during 2017-2020, of which 85% is co-financed by ESF.

Under the first measure an open call among adult education providers is used to attract people without general or basic education to return to their studies and acquire general upper secondary education. The following activities are supported: 1) finding and providing information that motivates adults without basic or secondary education to return to their studies; 2) creating the conditions for learning, developing and providing supportive measures to remain in studies and graduate studies; 3) developing and providing additional courses to support learning; 4) providing courses to improve learning abilities, providing individual coaching, consultations etc.; 5) additional activities needed to carry out learning outside of the educational institution; 6) activities developed in order to make learning more flexible in the educational institutions.

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<sup>9</sup> Adult Education Programme 2017-2020.

[https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/9\\_taiskasvanuhariduse\\_programmi\\_2017-2020\\_eelnou\\_1.pdf](https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/9_taiskasvanuhariduse_programmi_2017-2020_eelnou_1.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> European Union Structural Assistance to Estonia. Programming 2014-2020.

<http://www.strukturifondid.ee/programming-2014-2020/>



Under the second measure an open call among adult education providers is used to develop key competences<sup>11</sup> of the same target group. The goal of the measure is to motivate adults to learn and to create high quality and flexible learning opportunities that take into account the needs and challenges of the labour market. This measure includes seven different planned activities: 1) matching the content, volume and organisation of general education and VET provided to adult learners with the needs of the learners and the society; 2) developing the system of the recognition of prior learning to increase opportunities for recognising skills obtained through formal, informal and non-formal education; 3) developing regional cooperation to bring adults without secondary education and specialities back to formal education; 4) popularising lifelong learning; 5) developing the quality of adult further training; 6) providing quality and relevant further and retraining opportunities for adults to enhance their qualification; 7) developing funding principles for adult training.

## 3.2 Adult learning policy framework

### 3.2.1. A summary of major developments/ changes since 2010

Major developments in the strategic planning and legislative framework related to adult education include:

- A new Adult Education Act (1 July 2015) which aimed at increasing the quality and transparency in adult education provision and support learning among adults through widening the system of study loans and health insurance for adult students<sup>12</sup>.
- Vocational education reform (September 2013) to align VET with labour market demands, introducing a new structure of study programmes, new short-term programmes, more flexibility in changing programmes and providing access for adults with no formal pedagogical qualifications but who have practical teaching experience in VET programmes<sup>13</sup>.
- Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (February 2014) as an overarching education strategy encompassing all education fields, defining priorities for the period up to 2020<sup>14</sup>.
- The introduction of the OSKA coordination system in January 2015 to coordinate sectoral skills needs and labour force forecast analysis<sup>15</sup>.
- In addition, new measures have been introduced, widening access to adult learning, including:
- The introduction of adaptation programme (since 1 August 2015) for all new migrants who have stayed in Estonia for less than five years (including refugees, third country nationals) as well as EU citizens consisting of various modules on life in Estonia as well as Estonian language courses (A1) of up to 80 academic hours<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Key Competences for Lifelong Learning <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:c11090>

<sup>12</sup> Adult Education Act, in English: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/529062015007/consolide>

<sup>13</sup> Vocational Education Institutions Act, in English: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/515012016003/consolide>

<sup>14</sup> 'Eesti Elukestva Õppe Strateegia 2020 [Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020]'.

<sup>15</sup> Toetuse andmise tingimused tegevusele "Tööjõuvajaduse seire- ja prognoosisüsteemi loomine" (Conditions for granting support for creation of labour force need monitoring and forecast system), 8.04.2015, in Estonian: [http://www.struktuurifondid.ee/public/toojouvajaduse\\_seire-ja\\_prognoorisusteemi\\_loomine\\_OSKA\\_programm.pdf](http://www.struktuurifondid.ee/public/toojouvajaduse_seire-ja_prognoorisusteemi_loomine_OSKA_programm.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Kohanemisprogramm (Adaptation programme), Regulation of Minister of Interior, 1.08.2015. In Estonian: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/122082014005>

Since 1 May 2016, mandatory Estonian language courses for refugees were introduced up to level A2, financed from the state budget<sup>17</sup>.

- Widening career counselling to all adults (including employed and inactive) in the Unemployment Insurance Fund (since 1 February 2015)<sup>18</sup>.
- Introduction of training measures by the Unemployment Insurance Fund targeting adults in employment, at an increased risk of job loss, including adults with reduced work ability due to illness or disability, those working in low-paid jobs, adults older than 50, with no professional qualifications (or with outdated qualifications) or with poor Estonian skills (since 1 May 2017).

The Estonian policy targets in adult learning are projected mainly for the next four-year period, up to 2020. Policy targets are outlined in the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020<sup>19</sup> and the sub-programme focused on adult learning - Adult Education Programme 2017-2020<sup>20</sup>. According to the programme, the main aim is to motivate adults to take up learning and create learning opportunities that are flexible, good-quality and in correspondence with the labour market needs.

focused on adult learning - Adult Education Programme 2017-2020<sup>21</sup>. According to the programme, the main aim is to motivate adults to take up learning and create learning opportunities that are flexible, good-quality and in correspondence with the labour market needs.

According to the programme, the next four-year period (2017-2020) will focus on:

- Supporting adults who have dropped out of school to return to formal education or participate in work-related training and support the development of their key competences. This includes adjusting general formal education for adults, motivating adults to return to formal education and work out a conceptual plan to support adult's return to basic/secondary and vocational education and the further development of the system for consideration of previous skills and knowledge.
- Offering relevant and good quality training opportunities for adults with no professional qualifications (only general education) or those with outdated qualifications, including the development of digital literacy skills.
- Advancement of the adult education system, including development of quality criteria for adult training, improvement of information exchange and cooperation in adult education networks, supporting implementation of VÕTA (certification of previous work and learning experience) in all fields of education and enhancement of ability to deal with and motivate adult students from difficult conditions and with low motivation.
- Increasing access to non-formal education, including continuing with the supply of publicly financed work-related training for adults. This also includes developing financing principles relying on the contributions of the learner, state and employer

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<sup>17</sup> Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens, in English:

<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/529042016002/consolide>

<sup>18</sup> Töötukassa karjäärinõustamisele saavad nüüd kõik inimesed (All people can now take career counselling of Unemployment Insurance Fund), 30.01.2015, in Estonian:

<https://www.tootukassa.ee/uudised/t%C3%B6%C3%B6tukassa-karj%C3%A4%C3%A4rin%C3%B5ustamisele-saavad-n%C3%BC%C3%BCd-k%C3%B5ik-inimesed>

<sup>19</sup> 'Eesti Elukestva Õppe Strateegia 2020 [Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020]'.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, 'Täiskasvanuhariduse Programm 2017-2020. Adult Education Programme 2017-2020'.

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, 'Täiskasvanuhariduse Programm 2017-2020. Adult Education Programme 2017-2020'.

to ensure the sustainability of the supply of training after the end of the current EU financing periodI .

Increasing attention is turned on preventing unemployment with measures to improve the qualifications and skills of adult population in employment. With this in mind, Unemployment Insurance Fund has stated the provision of training vouchers and other measures to support acquisition of skills and qualifications.

### *3.2.2. Main legislative act(s) governing the provision of adult learning*

The main governance system of adult learning is outlined in the Adult Education Act<sup>22</sup> as the central act of the adult education system. It stipulates the obligations of the state and local governments in the coordination of adult training, the obligation of employers to grant study leave to learners engaged in distance learning, evening courses, external study or part-time study and outlines the minimum requirements in place for all institutions offering courses.

### *3.2.3. Main strategy(-ies)*

The underlining strategy for the development of adult learning in Estonia is the Adult Education Programme 2017-2020. This sets the main vision and targets for the next four-year period and lays out the measures and activities planned during the period. The Adult Education Programme is part of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy, that encompasses all fields of education.

There are other national strategies as well, which include adult learning in their agenda (e.g. Estonian Competitiveness Strategy 'Estonia 2020'). However, these mostly proceed from the main goals outlined in the Adult Education Programme.

### *3.2.4. Main implementing act(s)*

The Adult Education Programme sets out the actions planned for the next four-year period, together with a detailed action plan identifying the parties responsible for coordinating a specific activity and a financing schedule.

## **3.3 National quantitative policy targets**

The national quantitative policy targets relevant for adult learning are outlined in table 3.1 below.

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<sup>22</sup> Adult Education Act <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/529062015007/consolide>

**Table 3.1 Targets linked to Adult Learning in broader economic policies/LLL strategies/framework or implementing act**

General information		Progress toward target		
Target (target figure and date to be achieved by)	Adoption date (e.g. 31/03/2018)	Initial value (at date of adoption)	Current value	Summary of progress against target
Share of adults aged 25-64 with no professional qualifications (target by 2020: 25%)	2012	30%	28.5% (2016)	The share is not declining in the expected pace, has largely remained unchanged in the past 3 years. Source: Adult Education Programme 2017-2020
Share of adults participating in lifelong learning (target by 2020: 20%)	2012	12.9%	15.7% (2016)	The share is below the expected pace of change as the share stood unchanged for a long period, although an increase was reported in 2016. Source: Adult Education Programme 2017-2020
Number of students in distance learning in general education (target by 2020: at least 5075 students)	2013	5075	5377 (2015)	The aim has been to stop the downward trend and maintain the number of students in distance learning. It has succeeded in keeping the number of students above the target value of 2020. Source: Adult Education Programme 2017-2020
Share of drop-out in distance learning in general education (target by 2020: 30%)	2013	35%	36% (2015)	Share of dropping out has not decreased since the adoption of the goal. Source: Adult Education Programme 2017-2020
Share of students aged 25+ in vocational education (target by 2020: 33%)	2013	26%	32% (2015)	The share has increased in the expected pace and is close to the target for 2020. Source: Adult Education Programme 2017-2020
Share of adults aged 25-64 with low educational attainment participating in lifelong learning (target by 2020: 6.5%)	2013	4.6%	4.4% (2015)	The share has not increased in the period since the adoption of the target as expected. Source: Adult Education Programme 2017-2020
Satisfaction with adult education system and	N.A. (first measure)	N.A.	N.A.	The indicator is still being developed. The aim is

vocational education system (target by 2020: satisfaction has increased)	ment planned in 2018)			that satisfaction will increase by 2020 compared to the initial measurement in 2018. Source: Adult Education Programme 2017-2020
Share of youth aged 18-24 who are not in education (target by 2020: less than 9%)	2012	10.3%	11% (2016)	The share has not decreased in the expected pace. Source: Ministry of Education and Research 2017 <sup>23</sup> .
Employment rate of youth aged 20-34 1-3 years after graduation (target by 2020: 82%)	2012	74.7%	77.1% (2016)	Growth rate is in the expected pace, although it is lower than that measured in 2014-2015. Source: Ministry of Education and Research 2017
Share of population aged 16-74 with digital skills (target by 2020: 95%)	2012	65%	87% (2015)	The share has increased during 2012-2015. New measurement will be made in 2018. Source: Ministry of Education and Research 2017
Share of adults with higher education in the 30-34 age group (target by 2020: 40%)	2012	39.5%	45.4% (2016)	The target has been achieved. Source: Ministry of Education and Research 2017

### 3.4 Quality assurance

The activities of adult education institutions that offer formal education are regulated by the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act<sup>24</sup>, the Vocational Educational Institutions Act<sup>25</sup>, the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act<sup>26</sup>, the Universities Act<sup>27</sup> or the Private Schools Act<sup>28</sup>, i.e. quality assurance measures are also applied to these educational institutions. Quality assurance measures in continuing education are regulated by the Adult Education Act<sup>29</sup> as well as Continuing Education Standard<sup>30</sup>. With The first two measures are co-financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds and the third measure solely by the state budget. Depending on the specific activity under these measures, the ESF co-funding makes up around 85% of the total budgets.

The Ministry of Education and Research is also funding and carrying out activities supporting adult education development through other programmes, but it is not possible

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, 'Haridus- Ja Teadusministeeriumi Valdkonna Arengukavade 2016. Aasta Tulemusaruanded (Monitoring the Development Plans of Ministry of Education and Research 2016)'.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/521062016007/consolide>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/505022014002/consolide/current>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/506062016006/consolide>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/521032014002/consolide/current>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/520122013001/consolide/current>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/529062015007/consolide>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/126062015009>

to calculate, what part of the budget of these programmes exactly is invested in adult education.

Prior to the current Adult Education Programme, the adult learning framework in Estonia was based on the Adult Education Development Plan for 2009-2013<sup>31</sup>. The total budget invested for implementing this plan over the course of five years was 120,758,000 Euros. It can be seen that compared to the budget for current Adult Education Programme the size of the investment in adult education has decreased a lot, as for 2016-2020 the planned budget is only 51 million Euros. The Adult education training programme has the smallest budget of all the implementation programmes of the ELLS (accounting only for about 1% of the total ELLS implementation budget).

### 3.5 Public national investment

There is no information available of the total public investment dedicated to adult learning in Estonia, but as most of activities are carried out under the Adult Education Programme 2017-2020, some part of it can be calculated here. As presented in section 4.1, up to 15% of the budget for two activities of the programme are co-funded by the Government and 100% of the third measure. Based on that information it can be calculated, that in 2017 about 3 026 112 EUR is invested from the state budget to adult education. But this is only an estimate based on publicly available information, there is no information about actual investment.

**Table 3.2 Breakdown of public national investment**

Title of public investment source	Source of funding	Amount of funding	Targeted number of participants	Targeted level of provision	Start/ end date

\*information not available

### 3.6 EU support via structural funds (primarily ESF)

#### *3.6.1. Structural fund support planned as part of 2014-2020 financial framework*

As described in Chapter 4.1, two of the measures of the Adult Education Programme 2017-2020 are co-funded by ESF. Depending on the specific activity under these measures, the ESF co-funding makes up around 85% of the total budgets, i.e. up to 37 494 953 EUR is funded by ESF in the period of 2017-2020.

<sup>31</sup> "Täiskasvanuhariduse arengukava 2009-2013 [Adult Education Development Plan 2009-2013]."  
[https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/t2iskasvanutehariduse\\_arengukava.pdf](https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/t2iskasvanutehariduse_arengukava.pdf)

According to the data on financial support to the Member States between 2014 and 2020, available in July, 2016 for the European Commission from Operational Programmes for the European Social Fund (ESF), the planned financial support from the European Union for the investment priority most directly targeting adult learning, i.e. Investment priority 10.3 – Enhancing access to lifelong learning, is 92.6 million euros.

Two major application rounds have opened in 2016 to finance activities of adult learning in Estonia, funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Ministry of Education and Research. This involved financing school initiatives to bring adults back to school to finish basic and secondary education and prevent drop outs<sup>32</sup>. A total of 16 projects across Estonia were financed with more than 2.6 million Euros. The projects aim at introducing flexible forms of learning and e-learning for adults in secondary education and offering various support services (counselling, childcare etc) in schools. The projects will be implemented during 2016-2018. In terms of priorities of the European Agenda, these activities contribute to supply and take up (increasing take-up through outreach, guidance and motivation) as well as flexibility and access (widening access by making use of ICT, flexible learning opportunities oriented towards second chance programmes to increase qualifications).

The second round of applications was opened to support the development of key competences among adults and activities to attract adults to these programmes<sup>33</sup>. Key competences include learning, social, digital skills, initiative, entrepreneurial skills and language skills. A total of 2.3 million Euros will be allocated to the programme. These activities will particularly contribute to supply and take up by increasing the supply of adult learning provision in key competences.

The Ministry of Education and Research and the ESF will continue to work together, financing training for adults in vocational education institutions. 471 courses are offered in 32 fields expected to involve more than 6000 adults in 2016<sup>34</sup>. During 2009-2015 more than 42 thousand people have participated (contributing to supply and take up). Annual adult learning week was organised in October 2015 to increase popularity of adult learning and draw attention to related topics<sup>35</sup>.

### *3.6.2. EU support via structural funds (primarily ESF) provided as part of 2007-2013 financial framework*

One of the most visible investments to adult learning so far has been the funding of state-commissioned work-related training courses. Before the previous ESF financing period 2007-2013, the state primarily financed the training of the unemployed and of specific groups (e.g. teachers, administrators). But starting from 2007, the state has financed adult training to a considerably larger extent to a wider target group, also involving European Social Fund instruments. Presently, the adult work-related training courses<sup>36</sup> held in vocational educational institutions are financed from the European Social Fund (under the second measure of the Adult Education Programme), presented in section 3.

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<sup>32</sup> 'Täiskasvanute Tagasitoomiseks Kooli Sai Toetust 16 Projekti Üle Eesti'.

<sup>33</sup> 'Taotlusvoor Täiskasvanute Võtmepädevuste Arendamiseks'.

<sup>34</sup> 'Sel Kevadel Jõuavad Tasuta Töölased Koolitused 6225 Inimeseni'.

<sup>35</sup> 'Täna Algab Täiskasvanud Õppija Nädal'.

<sup>36</sup> Work-related training courses for adults <https://www.hm.ee/et/tegevused/taiskasvanuharidus/tasuta-kursused>

### 3.7 Effectiveness of investment

Evidence of the effectiveness of investment on adult learning can be found in a counterfactual impact assessment of Estonian adult vocational training activity<sup>37</sup> carried out in 2015. This impact assessment focussed on the ESF programme "Work-related training and development of adult education" which was one of the largest ESF supported programmes in Estonia during the previous ESF financing period (2007--2013). The analysis suggested that adult vocational training only had a modest positive effect on later labour market outcomes, but the size and statistical significance of the results are sensitive to which comparison group and matching technique to use. Analysis suggested that the effects of training are larger for those who were already employed at the time of application to the courses. These results were in accordance with earlier feedback surveys of participants, This survey adds that effect of training is missing for unemployed participants, as the training courses might be too short to be useful for the unemployed. The evaluation showed that the aims of the programmes were vague and although programme documents mentioned that priority should be given to participants with low qualifications and adults whose qualification had become outdated, in reality, a large share of participants of these trainings already had a higher education.

As the main investments to adult education in Estonia are made through the Adult Education Programme 2017-2020, the effectiveness of investment could be evaluated based on the indicators set in the programme (see Table 5). Unfortunately, no official mid-term evaluations of the programme have been carried out yet and there is no information on if and when it will be made.

**Table 3.3 Indicators of the Adult Education Programme 2017-2020<sup>38</sup>**

Indicator	Base level in 2013	2016	Goal for 2020
Share of adults (aged 25-64) without a qualification	29,6	27	25
Participation rate of adults in lifelong learning	12,5	16,5	20
Drop-out rate in non-stationary general education	35	34	30
Share of learners aged 25 or more in vocational education and training	26,3	30	33
Participation rate of adults aged 25-64 with low education level in lifelong learning	4,6	5,5	6,5

As seen from the table 5 above, all indicators set for the programme have seen some positive trends in 2016 compared to the base level in 2013. It cannot be said without an impact analysis that these trends are a direct proof of the effectiveness of investments to adult education, but the positive trend in general should be acknowledged.

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<sup>37</sup> Leetmaa et al., 'Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE) of Estonian Adult Vocational Training Activity'.

<sup>38</sup> Adult Education Programme 2017-2020.



## 4.0 ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING POLICY

The following sub-sections assess the existing policy through the lens of the six key success factors for effective adult learning policy that have been identified in a recent study.<sup>39</sup>

### 4.1 Develop learners' interest in learning

There have been several initiatives to raise attention on adult learning (e.g. annual adult learner week)<sup>40</sup>. More recently, heightened attention is placed on raising awareness of learning possibilities among low skilled adults and adults in need of skills update or retraining on the benefits of learning as well as learning possibilities. The Estonian Association of Adult Educators ANDRAS implements activities to enhance regional cooperation and increase awareness and popularity of lifelong learning during 2016-2018. For instance, an awareness campaign on learning for adults showcasing experiences of different adult learners was launched in 2017 together with a dedicated web-site<sup>41</sup>. As these activities are ongoing, it is too early to assess their effectiveness in reaching the target groups.

Career counselling for adults has started in January 2015, with about 7,500 participants in 2015 and 10,400 participants in 2016. Participation has further increased in 2017. Although, in order to reach the aim of 72,000 participants by 2018, the take-up of career counselling should be higher. There is also no clear vision of the target groups and participants in career counselling and, accordingly, there are no specific outreach activities to involve those in most need of qualifications increase or retraining.

Until recently, there was no systematic approach to involve social partners in planning, promotion and recruitment of learners, although both employers' and trade unions' national-level confederations have taken the topic on their agenda in 2016 through various initiatives. Nevertheless, the Adult Education Programme 2017-2020 makes references to including social partners in planning the activities for raising the digital competences, offering career counselling for adults and developing a concept for the financing additional training of adults. Further, social partners have been involved in the preparation of training programmes for adults in Unemployment Insurance Fund through their involvement in the tripartite Supervisory Board. Thus, the involvement of the social partners in the topic has been increasing in recent years, although there is room for further initiatives (e.g. involvement of social partners in recruitment of learners).

It has been highlighted as a conclusion from the PIAAC data that work content and workplace characteristics have substantially more impact on involvement in lifelong learning in Estonia than personal characteristics (including education and skills levels)<sup>42</sup>. Thus, it has been stressed that it is important to turn more attention to the demand for skills at the labour market as participation in learning in itself is not attractive if there are

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<sup>39</sup> Key success factors, indicating the strength of evidence (available in all languages): <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/policy-tool/key-success-factors>; Study "An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe": <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/final-report-20150817-en.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Adult Learner Week event page (in Estonian) [http://www.andras.ee/client/default.asp?wa\\_id=757&wa\\_object\\_id=1&wa\\_id\\_key=](http://www.andras.ee/client/default.asp?wa_id=757&wa_object_id=1&wa_id_key=)

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.jallekooli.ee/>

<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, 'Adult Skills: Their Use and Usefulness in Estonia. Summaries of the Thematic Reports on the PIAAC Study.'

no opportunities to implement those skills at the workplace. In order to address this gap between the demand for skills and participation in learning, skills forecast mechanisms are in place in Estonia. In particular, the OSKA sectoral analysis of skills demand and supply<sup>43</sup> are an important source of information in this respect. For the first time, these analyses focus on the skills that are in highest demand in the respective sectors analysed. At the same time, there is much effort needed to ensure that the training programmes particularly address these skills gaps. In addition, it is also important to ensure that it is not only the high skilled occupations that take advantage of these mechanisms. It is equally important to address the motivation for basic skills and increase in skills levels of those working in low-skilled occupations. There have been efforts to increase state contribution in this respect, e.g. through the training for basic skills (see 2.2.1 above) or labour market measures to prevent unemployment through training initiatives by the Unemployment Insurance Fund (see also 5.2 below).

## 4.2 Increase employers' investment in learning

Research shows that employers in Estonia tend to provide more financial support to youngest employees (aged 25-34), and less support to those in low-skilled positions and in smaller enterprises<sup>44</sup>. However, there are only limited financing mechanisms for employers to upskill or retrain their employees. Thus, the motivation and support of training by companies, particularly in SMEs, remains a challenge. Unemployment Insurance Fund offers incentives for employers to train employees in various labour market risk groups. For instance, the Unemployment Insurance Fund reimburses training expenses in cases where the employer has offered retraining for people who cannot continue in their previous job due to disability or health conditions or those who have been long-term unemployed<sup>45</sup>. Since 2017, Unemployment Insurance Fund also reimburses part of the training expenses of employers in case recruiting new employees in certain fields or in case of reorganisations in the company.

As a more recent initiative, heightened attention is given to the development and implementation of work-based learning – the aim is to involve 300 companies with 6,900 students in work-based learning by 2019. The initiative involves the Estonian Employers' Confederation, who has promoted the mainstreaming of work-based learning among employers, sharing information and experiences<sup>46</sup>.

There are increasing discussions on the digitalisation of work and the effects this might entail on the skills required at the workplace. In particular, as a result of the PIAAC study, it was revealed that the biggest shortcomings in the skills of Estonian population are seen in the problem-solving skills in technology rich environments: Estonia has fewer top performers and clearly more low performers of problem-solving skills in technology-rich environments than the average of OECD countries<sup>47</sup>. However, it was also highlighted that in the current labour market situation, participation in the labour market, level of income and health are much more explained by other indicators, especially education, than the

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<sup>43</sup> For more information on the OSKA programme, visit: <http://oska.kutsekoda.ee/en/>

<sup>44</sup> Saar et al., 'Oskused Ja Elukestev Öpe: Kellelt Ja Mida on Eestil Oskuste Parandamiseks Õppida?'

<sup>45</sup> Description of the measure (in Estonian): <https://www.tootukassa.ee/content/tooandjale-ja-partnerile/tootaja-koolituskulude-huvitamine>

<sup>46</sup> Information on the initiative (in Estonian): <http://www.employers.ee/algatused/opipoisiope-ehk-tookohapohine-ope/>

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, 'Adult Skills: Their Use and Usefulness in Estonia. Summaries of the Thematic Reports on the PIAAC Study.'

level of information processing skills. Therefore, increasing information processing skills alone would not lead to better outcomes in the labour market. Nevertheless, in light of the discussions held in the recent conference on the future of work in Estonia<sup>48</sup>, it was highlighted that in the future it might be those people with low digital skills that are increasingly left behind due to their poor level of skills as a result of the digitalisation of work. Therefore, to prevent these gaps in the labour market, there is a need to address these skills gaps and support the increase of digital skills among the population.

To some extent, digital skills are integrated in the programmes/ projects addressing basic skills (see 2.2.1 above). Also, OSKA reports touch upon the digital skills required across different sectors. However, there is a big step towards aligning the digital skills required at the workplace and the respective skills level of the population.

1 Saar et al., 'Oskused Ja Elukestev Õpe: Kellelt Ja Mida on Eestil Oskuste Parandamiseks Õppida?'

1 Description of the measure (in Estonian): <https://www.tootukassa.ee/content/tooandjale-ja-partnerile/tootaja-koolituskulude-huvitamine>

1 Information on the initiative (in Estonian): <http://www.employers.ee/algatused/opipoisiope-ehk-tookohapohine-ope/>

1 Ministry of Education and Research, 'Adult Skills: Their Use and Usefulness in Estonia. Summaries of the Thematic Reports on the PIAAC Study.'

1 For more information on the conference, visit: <https://www.eu2017.ee/political-meetings/future-work-making-it-e-easy>

### 4.3 Improve equity of access for all

Inequality participation among adults is a major challenge in Estonia, mainly for older age groups, low-skilled adults, employees in low-skilled jobs<sup>49</sup>. A recent evaluation of adult vocational training outlined that although officially (according to programme documents) priority should be given to attract participants with low qualifications and adults whose qualification has become outdated, in reality a large share of participants in adult work-related trainings were already highly educated<sup>50</sup>. Thus, reaching groups that are difficult to engage remains challenging. Various activities to promote learning among disadvantaged groups are offered by the Unemployment Insurance Fund. More recently, attention is given to bringing low-skilled adults back to formal education to increase their qualifications or offer training related to acquiring key competences (see also above). These activities involve various blocks of activities as identified by ICF (funding learning, development of the system for recognition of prior learning, using intermediary organisations for outreach, embed basic skills developments in adult learning programmes). As participation in lifelong learning among adults has remained unchanged for a longer period, the effects of these activities have not yet revealed in decreasing inequalities in lifelong learning participation. Since many of the activities are rather recent, their long-term effects remain to be seen in the future.

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<sup>48</sup> For more information on the conference, visit: <https://www.eu2017.ee/political-meetings/future-work-making-it-e-easy>

<sup>49</sup> Saar et al., 'Oskused Ja Elukestev Õpe: Kellelt Ja Mida on Eestil Oskuste Parandamiseks Õppida?'; Statistikaamet and Praxis, 'Täiskasvanuhariduse prioriteetsed sihtrühmad maakonniti'.

<sup>50</sup> Leetmaa et al., 'Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE) of Estonian Adult Vocational Training Activity'.

## 4.4 Deliver learning that is relevant

The Estonian skills forecast system covers three main dimensions:

- National level forecast forecasting demographic trends, employment changes, and projecting the supply of labour in 8-year perspective. The forecast is updated annually<sup>51</sup>.
- Sectoral skills forecasts, covering more in-depth knowledge of changes in skills profiles and skills needs in individual sectors in the next 10-year perspective. In 2016, 5 sectors were analysed, 6 sectors in 2017 and further 6 planned for 2018 (OSKA<sup>52</sup>).
- Short-term barometer for forecasting labour force need in the next 12-month perspective by detailed occupations. It also the only forecast mechanism offering a regional perspective (Unemployment Insurance Fund<sup>53</sup>).

The sectoral skills forecasts fill an important gap in the knowledge on the skills required at the workplace in different occupations. In order to deliver this estimate, OSKA sectoral reports use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods using statistical data combined with information collected from personal interviews with sectoral experts and from group discussions<sup>54</sup>. According to the OSKA planned methodology, each sector is analysed every six years. In the intervening years, the relevant sectoral expert panels keep an eye on the implementation of the recommendations made on the basis of the conclusions of the survey. Implementation of the results of the OSKA reports will be specifically analysed, highlighting the challenges of implementation and collecting opinions from stakeholders. The results will be published in autumn 2017. Currently information on the implementation of the OSKA results is rather limited and it has not been analysed comprehensively. For instance, Unemployment Insurance Fund refers that they use OSKA results in planning the training for unemployed. There is a mechanism to monitor implementation at the sectoral level through sectoral expert panels, although their conclusions are not discussed or communicated publicly. Therefore, the aim has been to move towards regular monitoring of the implementation of OSKA recommendations and conclusions.

Promoting innovation and flexibility in the provision of learning is largely dependent on the learning provider. Although there are efforts to introduce more flexibility in adult learning, particularly in adults' secondary schools, implementing VÕTA system (considering previous experience from learning and working) across the whole education system, offering training in key competences for low-skilled adults etc.

## 4.5 Deliver learning that is of high quality

The new Adult Education Act (introduced in 2015, see also above) has taken a step towards increasing quality in adult learning, particularly with common standards for programmes, a requirement to publish information on the learning programmes in a common information

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<sup>51</sup> Most recent forecast from 2017:

[https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/toojouproгноos\\_2025\\_lyhikirjeldus\\_uus.pdf](https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/toojouproгноos_2025_lyhikirjeldus_uus.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> <http://oska.kutsekoda.ee/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.tootukassa.ee/baromeeter>

<sup>54</sup> More information on the methodology of the OSKA surveys: <http://oska.kutsekoda.ee/en/oska-management-methodology/oska-methodology/>

system etc. Further development is planned up to 2019 on quality principles for adult learning and raising competences of adult trainers through courses and seminars. Thus, several developments in on this aspect are planned in the near future.

#### **4.6 Ensure coherent policy**

As the underlining strategic framework for lifelong learning the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy policies takes into consideration its connections with other national strategies and development plans. Nevertheless, it has been highlighted that there are a lot of parallel activities in adult learning from Ministry of Education and Research and Unemployment Insurance Fund which is continually widening its target group for active measures in learning. The current government sets out in its action programme for 2016-2019 that they will focus on harmonising the work-related training activities between the Ministry of Education and Research and the Unemployment Insurance Fund during 2017.

While in Estonia, most of the adult education is planned and developed at national level, the role and responsibilities of local municipalities has gained much less attention. With the implementation of the new Lifelong Learning Strateg there is increasing attention on the inclusion of local municipalities and planning and implementing adult learning policies. The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy stresses the importance of cooperation between national and regional level in developing key competencies, improving the system of adult secondary schools, offering support services for adults in learning, combining social services provided by local municipalities with learning programmes and offering language training for those with poor Estonian skills. In the Adult Education Programme 2017-2020, particular attention is focussed on widening adult learning networks at local level, including local municipalities. Local municipalities have also been eligible to receive financing to develop training on basic competences for adults (see also 2.2.1 above).

Building a knowledge base on what works in adult learning has remained limited in Estonia. There has been an impact evaluation of labour market training for the unemployed by the Unemployment Insurance Fund (2011) and an impact evaluation of the training coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Research (2015). However, there is no regular evaluation or analysis of intervention mechanisms in adult training or a public discussion on their results or effectiveness. Thus, there is a need to improve the knowledge base on what works in adult training in Estonia.

## 5.0 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM

Based on the above analysis and current policy developments, the following strengths and weaknesses could be identified<sup>55</sup>.

### 5.1 Strengths

- A Strong strategic framework (Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020), which enables coordination between different levels and forms of education, aligning learning with labour market needs in various educational levels, including formal and non-formal education and regular monitoring of implementation of the programme.
- Increasing policy attention on low-skilled adults, including outreach and training opportunities seems to be a promising trend in terms of inclusion of disadvantaged adults in learning and raising their qualifications levels. The results of recent activities remain to be seen in the future.
- Increasing attention on learning among adults by social partners, creating favourable ground for further cooperation and development among stakeholders. Social partners are also considered as important stakeholders in planning and development of adult education activities. However, as the topic is relatively new for the social partners, empowering social partners and giving them the skills and tools to develop and motivate learning within their membership networks would be important for further realisation of their potential.

### 5.2 Weaknesses

- Lack of clear intervention design and limited knowledge base on what works in adult learning. In adult learning, there is no regular impact evaluations of adult learning with particular focus on disadvantaged groups, including people aged 40+, low-skilled adults, people working in low-skilled jobs, mothers of small children etc. This is also partly a result of a lack of clear programme logic in planning interventions in adult learning, including the intervention design considering specific target groups, their needs and barriers to learning. This has been outlined for instance in case of publicly-financed vocational training for adults<sup>56</sup>. These problems can also be outlined in case of career counselling for adults where there has been no clear target group for the measure or an intervention mechanism to attract the target groups to counselling who are in the strongest need for training/retraining in the labour market.
- Lack of financial incentives for employers to offer training and retraining among their workforce with particular focus on disadvantaged adults. While job-related training is the most common form of non-formal learning, it is necessary to ensure that those with low skills or in need of update of skills have an access to job-related learning. It is also necessary to ensure that they have access to acquisition of basic skills or formal training, i.e. horizontal skills that can be implemented in the labour market in general, no matter who is the particular employer. Finding incentives and measures to ensure this access to people still in employment will be necessary in

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<sup>55</sup> These strengths and weaknesses are not based on an in-depth analysis of adult education policy in Estonia, which is beyond the scope of this country briefing.

<sup>56</sup> Leetmaa et al., 'Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE) of Estonian Adult Vocational Training Activity'.

implementing the activities in the Estonian Adult Education Programme. Recently, Unemployment Insurance Fund has widened their support measures for the employers to motivate them in providing job-related training to their employees who are among the labour market risk group. However, this target group is very limited and thus its effects will likely remain small in the general adult education system.

- Limited participation in lifelong learning among the disadvantaged groups (those most likely excluded from further learning or in labour market risk groups). While 2016 has shown some improvements in lifelong learning participation among the Estonian adult population, including the low-skilled and older age groups, there is still need for considerable improvement, particularly in order to achieve the target for lifelong learning participation by 2020 at 20% (see table 3.1). The particular challenges in Estonia lie in (see also table 3.1):
  - An increasing share of young people who do not continue learning at upper secondary education level
  - High share of adults with no professional qualifications or with outdated qualifications
- Keeping in mind the increasingly diversified working life with shorter duration of employment relationships and increasingly flexible forms of working, it will be necessary to ensure that all adults have the necessary skills to implement in various employment relationships and they are able to move smoothly between jobs and employers to prevent exclusion in the labour market and being trapped in low-skilled and low-qualified jobs.

## **6.0 FURTHER POLICY REFORMS AND ORIENTATIONS NEEDED**

In general, during the next four-year period the policy focus will primarily be on implementing the current Adult Education Programme rather than designing or implementing any large-scale policy reforms.

However, there are multiple areas where the results have not developed as expected and it has not been possible to achieve the expected growth pace to reach the targets set for 2020 (see also table 3.1). This is an evidence of the need to adjust or gear up some activities to move closer to the set goals. The main suggestions for further policy developments include:

- Open and transparent planning and development of adult learning policies and measures. It is particularly important to identify priority target groups in adult learning and aligning policy interventions according to the specific needs and barriers of these specific groups. With a clear vision of the groups targeted with various measures, it is also possible to transparently describe the intervention mechanisms and make straightforward conclusions on what works in adult learning. It is particularly important to increase the knowledge base on what works through analysing current policy interventions and learning from various regional and international practices (knowledge sharing).
- Inclusion and empowerment of stakeholders in adult education, with particular focus on the social partners and local municipalities. While there has been an increasing attention on the inclusion of the stakeholders as outlined in the Adult Education Programme, it will also be necessary to provide the stakeholders with the necessary knowledge, skills and tools to be involved in the adult education policies and actively contribute to their implementation. As the social partners and local municipalities have an important potential to reach the target groups who are in need of training/retraining through their local networks, it is important to ensure that this potential is used in targeting adult education policies.
- Making further efforts in including more target groups in various forms of lifelong learning. As the pace of increase in lifelong learning participation is lower than expected, it will be important to make further efforts in increasing participation in adult education. This includes particularly the groups most excluded from learning, e.g. those aged 40+, people with low skills or outdated qualifications, people with poor Estonian language skills, youth who have not continued in education etc. It will be important to ensure flexible pathways to participation in learning as well as ensure flexibility to combine learning with work and family responsibilities.



## 7.0 SUMMARY

Estonia has performed well in reaching its employment targets for 2020, although raising women's employment towards the target still needs attention. Despite this, Estonia's performance lags behind in adult learning targets as participation in learning has stood still during 2011-2015 while some improvements are monitored in 2016.

Most of the key reforms affecting adult education have been implemented in previous years, and thus, 2017 has mostly been about implementation of the Adult Education Programme 2017-2020. Nevertheless, there are several areas where improvements have not been as rapid as expected which makes it difficult to achieve the targets set for 2020.

The key challenges for Estonia lie in improving the knowledge base on what works in adult education. In order to improve achievements in adult education fields, it will be important to understand what has been working among the measures implemented so far and where are the areas of improvement. It is particularly important to identify the specific target groups for adult learning policies and make efforts to reach these target groups to involve them in adult learning policies.

It is also a challenge to involve the various stakeholders in adult learning policies, particularly social partners and local municipalities. There is high potential in reaching the adult learning target groups through the networks of stakeholders which makes it increasingly important that the stakeholders have the motivation, knowledge and the tools to be involved in the planning and implementation of adult education policies.

Third, a continuous challenge is the share of adults participating in lifelong learning, which still remains below the expected growth rate. In order to achieve the targets set for 2020, further efforts are needed to involve adults in learning. It is particularly important to ensure that it is not only about the general target of participation, but it is equally important to reduce the gaps in learning participation by age groups, gender, skills level etc. The Adult Education Programme as well as some earlier analyses identify particular challenges in the increasing share of youth that are leaving education before acquiring upper secondary education and the high share of adults with no professional qualifications.

As previous years have seen various policy reforms affecting the field of adult education, the following years will be mainly about implementing the adult education policy programme and strategic framework. However, in order to achieve the set targets, it will be necessary to improve implementation and involvement of adults in learning.

The particular areas for further policy reforms include improvement of implementation of the adult education policies and analysing their effectiveness (building a knowledge base on what works). It will also be necessary to increasingly make use of the networks of local stakeholders, particularly the social partners and the local municipalities, to implement adult education policies and involve adults in learning, particularly those in need of training/retraining. This will need to be accompanied by empowerment of the stakeholders and improving their skills and knowledge of the possible intervention mechanisms and the resources available for them to be involved in implementing adult education policies. Finally, it is continually important to ensure that participation of the stakeholders at high risk of exclusion from learning are specifically targeted with adult education policies and their involvement analysed and measured regularly.

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**ANNEXES**

**Annex 1: List of adopted legal acts, strategies, laws**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date of adoption</b>	<b>Short description of content</b>
Adult Education Act	July 2015	Regulates the adult education sector, including quality and transparency in adult education provision, right for study leave etc.
Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020	February 2014	An overarching education strategy encompassing all education fields, setting up priorities for the period up to 2020.
Adult Education Programme 2017-2020	December 2016	Implementation plan of the activities related to adult education within the Lifelong Learning Strategy framework, including division of tasks and financing plan.

Independent national experts network in the area of adult education/adult skills  
Full country report - Estonia

**Annex 2: Inventory of policy interventions**

Name of intervention	Source (with hyperlink)	Budget	Outputs	Which of the 6 building blocks for successful adult learning policies does it target? (tick all relevant)						Further details/description (purpose, duration, responsible entity etc.)
				Fosters learners' interest in learning	Employers' investment in learning	Improve equity of access for all	Learning that is relevant	High quality learning	Coherent policy	
Work and learn: programme to prevent unemployment	Unemployment Insurance Fund	3.6 million Euros (May-December 2017) 14.9 million Euros (2018) 17.8 million Euros (2019) 19.1 million Euros (2020)	A total of more than 55 000 participants are expected up to 2020		x	x				The aim is to provide training opportunities for people in higher risk of unemployment. Activities are implemented by the Unemployment Insurance Fund
Training courses for adults	Ministry of Education and Research	2.8 million Euros in 2017	About 12 000 participants are expected in 2017			x	x			Courses are commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research,

										participation is free of charge. Selection of courses is based on the skills forecast analyses.
Development of adults' key competences	Inno	Over 2 million Euros	9 projects were financed, although the total number of expected participants has not been published	x		x				Within the projects, adults are offered training in acquiring key competences, targeted mainly at groups usually underrepresented in adult learning.
Increasing the popularity of adult learning	Association of Adult Educators Andras	676 800 Euros during 2015-2018	5 nation-wide events and campaigns are planned during 2015-2018	x		x	x			Various knowledge campaigns and events are planned to raise the visibility of adult learning in the society and to raise interest in learning among various target groups (low skilled adults, parents of small children etc).

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