

Country profile prepared for the
Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007
Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education

Estonia

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes

Compiled by:
UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE)
Geneva, (Switzerland)

2006

This profile was commissioned by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report as background information to assist in drafting the 2007 Report. It has not been edited by the team. Information included in the series of profiles has been compiled by the IBE. In several cases data have been revised and/or expanded thanks to the helpful support of Ministries of Education and UNICEF offices worldwide. The views and opinions expressed in the present document are not necessarily those of the EFA Global Monitoring Report or UNESCO. The profile can be cited as follows: "Country Profile commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007, Strong foundations: early childhood care and education". For further information, please contact: efareport@unesco.org

ESTONIA

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) programs

A. GENERAL INFORMATION, STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

Starting age of compulsory education (if applicable):

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) the compulsory education age range is 7-15 years.

1. ISCED 0 PROGRAMS (USUALLY, PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION)

(ISCED = International Standard Classification of Education)

1.1. National definition of ISCED 0 programs:

Pre-primary education

1.2. Normative age group(s) covered by ISCED 0 programs:

3-6 years of age

1.3. ISCED 0 programs: statistics and indicators

1.3.1. Enrolment:

	Percentage	Year
Gross enrolment ratio	114.3	2003/04
Net enrolment ratio	91.8	2003/04
Percentage of children entering primary education with previous preschool experience	84.9 (*)	2003/04

Sources: UIS. (*) Ministry of Education, December 2005.

1.3.2. *Enrolment ratio by age group (percentage, also including the first years of primary education when applicable):*

Less than 3 years of age	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	Age 6	Age 7
540	80.6	84.2	88.3	84.9	17.4 82.6(**)

Source: Ministry of Education, December 2005. Data refer to 2003/04.

(**) Primary education enrolment ratio

1.3.3. *Teachers, 2003/04:*

Total number of teachers	Of whom female (%)	Percentage of trained teachers (all)	Percentage of trained teachers (males)	Percentage of trained teachers (females)
6 538	99.73	88.6

Source: Ministry of Education, December 2005. (...) Not available.

1.3.4. *Funding:*

	Percentage
Public current expenditure per pupil as percentage of the Gross National Product per capita	6.89 (2002)

Source: UIS.

1.3.5. *Main source(s) of financing:*

Pre-school childcare institutions are mostly municipally owned and they are financed from a local budget, parents shall pay also the participation fee. The amendment of the year 2003 established the financing of childcare institutions from the state budget in addition to the financing from the budget of a local government.

Parents shall cover also the cost of catering for children at a childcare institution. Local authorities support financially less secured families in covering the cost of catering from 50 to 100 per cent from the daily cost of catering.

The management costs of the childcare institution, also remuneration for staff, social tax and the costs of teaching aids may also be partially covered by parents. The rural municipality or city council shall establish the rate for the amount to be covered by parents, which may vary. The amount covered by parents per child shall not exceed 20 per cent of the minimum wage rate established by the government of the Republic.

2. OTHER ECCE PROGRAMS

(Generally preceding ISCED 0 programs)

2.1. National definition of other ECCE programs:

Not available

2.2. Normative age group(s) covered by other ECCE programs:

Not available

2.3. Estimate number of children covered by other ECCE programs:

Not available

B. BACKGROUND INFORMATION CONCERNING ECCE PROGRAMS (INCLUDING ISCED 0)

3.1. Legislation concerning ECCE:

The Law on Pre-school Child Institutions, enacted on 9 June 1993, determined the functions and operating procedures of pre-school establishments. The new Pre-school Childcare Institutions Act, adopted in 1999, further defines the objectives and arrangement of work of pre-schools.

As to the Pre-School Childcare Institutions Act, the requirement for compiling a development plan for childcare institutions was introduced in September 2001. The plan is drawn up in co-operation with the board of trustees (*hoolekogou*) and the council of teachers (*pedagoogiline nōukogu*). A development plan determines main guidelines and fields for the establishment of a childcare institution and an action plan for three years.

3.2. Official body/bodies in charge of supervision or coordination:

As of the year 2001, the main responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research is planning, management and development of education, research, youth and language policy, the elaboration of national development programmes in the named fields, and the organization of financing, implementation and evaluation of the results thereof.

The Ministry of Education and Research is also responsible for the composition of the general study programme for pre-primary education. Specialists from the Ministry, experts from the pedagogical university and representatives of pre-school teachers' unions participated in the process of preparing the current curriculum

in close cooperation with children psychologists and members of the Board of Pre-Primary Education and of the Nursery school Teacher's Union.

County governments are responsible for state supervision of the pre-school childcare institutions as well as the activities of schools. They also organize the preparation of the education development programmes in their administrative district, and counsel local administrative governments on issues of education.

Local government authorities (municipalities) maintain pre-school childcare institutions, basic schools and upper secondary schools, as well as hobby schools, school libraries and other local institutions. Local governments are responsible for providing the opportunity to attend a childcare institution to all pre-school age children of the catchment area, whose parents demand it. Fulfilling this requirement is problematic for the local governments in whose catchment area the number of young families has increased; there is also a tendency to enroll children earlier (under 2 years of age) due to the employment of both parents. Local governments are trying to find opportunities for buying child places in nursery schools in the private sector, including babysitting service.

3.3. Other entities involved in the provision (e.g. municipalities, local governments) and main types of providers (e.g. public, private, mixed, community-based, etc.):

Pre-school education is not compulsory and is mainly offered by the following type of establishments: baby care centres or crèches for children up to 3 years old; kindergartens for children aged 3-6; day-care centres for children aged 1-6; *kindergarten-primary schools*. In recent years, several new types of education and care, and co-operation with different institutions have emerged, including family care, reconciliation groups for children with special needs, family advice services, and the foundation of private kindergartens and children's centres.

Child-care institutions may operate permanently or seasonally, which is decided by the executive body of the local governments based on proposals of the supervisory body. The executive body also decides upon the working hours of the institutions, based on the needs of the parents. A child-care institution has the right to compile its plan of activities and its daily work schedules, taking into account the region's cultural peculiarities and the national traditions. The local government determines the language of communication of the institutions, while only single-language groups are allowed.

Teaching and catering expenses are currently covered by the local government budgets and parents. The part covered by parents may vary according to the respective decision of the local council, based on the parents' financial circumstances.

There has been a decrease in the demand of pre-school education: compared to the 1990s, the number of births has declined, the socio-economic conditions have changed due to the transition to a market economy, and not all parents are able to pay the tuition fees (commonly EEK100-400 per month).

3.4. Type of personnel involved:

In pre-school institutions pedagogues, music teachers, and leisure-time teachers are employed. The pedagogical staff is responsible for the selection of methods and

materials of instruction. The institutions have to establish rules for carrying out an effective evaluation of the teaching activities and the children's progress, based on the curriculum requirements.

3.5. Type of staff training (requirements):

The training of kindergarten personnel entails the theoretical and practical skills, emphasizing: familiarity with the child's development and his/her growing environment; consideration of the child's individual needs and peculiarities; familiarity with the curriculum requirements; and ability to use a creative approach in teaching activities. Personnel are currently trained at diploma-level studies and degree-level studies at higher education institutions and universities. The employer is responsible for provision of opportunities for further training for personnel at the pre-school child institutions, whereas the employment contract of pedagogical personnel does not include any obligation for the staff to attend further training courses. Since 2003, in-service training of the teachers of pre-school childcare institutions (like teachers in schools) is financed from the state budget.

Teachers' qualification and the launching of a system of granting professional qualifications to teachers are subjects of discussion in educational circles. A development plan for teacher training, completed in 2003, describes the changed roles of a teacher and the competencies necessary for working in this profession; competency-based teacher training and evaluation of qualification are set as an objective. According to the plan, a graduate from teacher training has to pass the "on-the-job" qualifying phase (*kutseaasta*) – a year of practice under the supervision of an experienced mentor, whereupon the conformity of his or her competencies to the requirements of the professional standard shall be evaluated.

3.6. Recent national policies and reforms:

In 2001, a discussion was started in the society regarding the necessity and possibility of compulsory pre-school education. In order to ensure a smooth adaptation to school life, it is important for the child to attend a children's collective at least a year before his or her admittance to school. At present, about 1,000 children do not participate in the activities of the pre-school childcare institutions or the preparation groups of schools.

The trend of integrating children with special needs with mainstream children instead of segregating them, has found support both among teachers and parents. Debates on the development of the support network of children, parents and teachers as counseling centers are going on.

The attendance of children from non-Estonian language and cultural environment at pre-school childcare institutions is problematic as so far there have been no methodology courses for the future kindergarten teachers for teaching Estonian as the second language to children of pre-school age. Supporting a family from a different language and cultural environment and involving a child is a problem with which is being dealt preventively by developing the school readiness.

The movement "The quality of the pre-primary education", which involves educationalists, pedagogues, parents and local authorities, was started at the national conference of pre-primary education in 2001. The objective of the movement is to

shape a positive learning and development environment for a child by supporting the family.

3.7. Efforts targeted at vulnerable or disadvantaged children:

Reconciliation groups, special groups and special kindergartens provide the environment necessary for children who need special teaching and special care. The size of the reconciliation group is smaller in comparison with the ordinary group, usually consisting of two or three children. It also depends on the number of disabled children in the group, usually one or two per group, and the severity of their disability. Pre-school special learning groups are created to support the children with sight, hearing, speaking, physical or mental disabilities. In addition, several family advice service centres have been established in order to take care of periodical rehabilitation sessions.

3.8. Special projects/programmes aiming at expanding or improving ECCE:

Not available

3.9. Information concerning the curriculum (if applicable) or the contents of ECCE programs

The objectives and tasks of the pre-primary education are laid down in the Pre-school Childcare Institutions Act (1999) and in the study programme. According to the Pre-School Childcare Institutions Act (1999), the schooling and education in the pre-school childcare institution should be based on the study programme of a childcare institution, which complies with the general study programme for pre-primary education.

The curriculum regulates the work of the pre-school institutions. It is also the basis for the family advice services. The curriculum does not regulate the actual time spent on the specific activities, but it defines the fields, the subject matters, the knowledge and skills, which have to be dealt with or are to be acquired by the child. The pre-school institutions are entitled to draw up their plans of activity and daily work schedule, in accordance with national tradition and the cultural peculiarities of its regions.

3.9.1. Objectives and aims:

The Pre-School Childcare Institutions Act determines two main functions of pre-school institutions:

- to create possibilities and conditions for the formation of a healthy person, who is socially and mentally alert, self-confident and considerate of others, and who values her/his environment;
- to maintain and strengthen the health of the child, and to promote his or her emotional, moral, social, mental and physical development.

At the same time, the age, gender, and individual needs and characteristics of each child are supposed to be taken into consideration.

According to general study programme for pre-primary education, the main objective of schooling and education of a pre-school childcare institution is to support the physical, mental and social as well moral and aesthetic development of children, in order to form prerequisites for succeeding in everyday life and at school.

3.9.2. Learning areas and teaching-learning methods:

Contents of schooling and education are presented in five categories in general study programme for pre-school childcare institutions: language and speech; mathematics; art; music; physical exercise.

In a childcare institution or group where schooling and education is not conducted in Estonian, Estonian language instruction is compulsory starting from 5 or 6 years of age.

A content of these categories reaches children mainly through activities and plays planned by the teacher and mediated by topics that concern the child's life and the surrounding environment (e.g. home, seasons, nature, health, and holidays). The number of teacher-planned activities is also determined by the frame curriculum.

Depending on the age, there are from one to three study units of each subject per week. Groups are organized according to the age of the children: the smallest ones (1-2-year-olds) and the small ones (2-3-year-olds); younger children (3-4-year-olds); medium-aged children (4-5-year-olds); and older ones (5-6-year-olds). Sometimes combined groups of children of different ages are organized. The evaluation is informal and the transfer of children from one group to another does not depend on the evaluation results.

A pre-school childcare institution teacher is free to choose the methodology of instruction, considering the theories of development and learning by J. Piaget, L. S. Vögotski, and, J. Dewey. In planning schooling and education activities, methods of child-oriented approach are considered. The point of departure is the principle that development and learning of a child are influenced by individuality of a child, by his or her needs and interests and by his or her social relations and environment. The same principle is followed where schooling and education is joined together by topics related to a child's life and surrounding environment.

3.9.3. Average number of hours per week and average amount of weeks per year:

Not available

3.10. Any other relevant and pertinent information

Not available

[Main Source: EURYBASE, 2002/03.]

C. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION REGARDING ECCE (TO BE COMPILED IN COLLABORATION WITH UNICEF OFFICES WHERE POSSIBLE)

4.1. Parenting programmes are usually addressed to parents and families of children less than 6 years of age. Please provide information about any parenting programmes in your country according to the table below:

Type of programme	Yes or No (note for each programme)	Please estimate the number of beneficiaries (if possible)
Parenting education through early learning centres and child care centres	yes	
As component of health and nutrition programmes, such as information about child development included in health and nutrition visits	yes	
Parent groups that meet to discuss issues of their young children, including health, nutritional status, and development	yes	
As component of adolescent, livelihood or literacy programmes		
Media broadcast, such as <i>Sesame Street</i> , with media for and with children		
Other (please specify)		

Are any of these programmes targeted specifically toward the vulnerable, poor, disadvantaged or excluded? If so, which ones? (Please provide/attach any additional and relevant information if available).

Not available

4.2. Is there a national-level system for monitoring children's development or school readiness prior to entering primary school?

Not available

4.3. Is there a policy on early childhood (ECCE, ECD, etc.) that has been accepted? If not, is there one under development?

Children with special needs are developed and taught according to special programs, with the goal to reduce the treated special need to a minimum before the child reaches the age of compulsory school attendance. In order to develop co-operation between the family and the pre-school childcare institution, counselling centres have been opened where help is given to children with special needs and their parents.

Rural municipality or city government must provide children with physical disabilities, speech disorders, sensory disabilities or mental disabilities or children who need special support or special care with the opportunity to attend a pre-school child institution of their residence. Conditions are also created for children with special needs to grow in the integration groups together with other children. If it is impossible for an integration group to be formed in the childcare institution of residence, the rural municipality or city government forms groups for children with special needs or establish nursery schools (*lasteaed*) for children with special needs.

[Information revised by the Ministry of Education, December 2005.]