

System of early education/care and professionalisation in **Estonia**

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Introduction

Estonian early childhood education has developed within the general educational and cultural context of Europe. The development of early childhood education has been substantially influenced by Germany and Russia, including also fifty years of traditions of the Soviet education. The first early childhood institution in Estonia was infants' depository institution established by Baroness Elisabeth von Uexküll in Tallinn in 1840. In 1862 the first institution called "a kindergarten" was founded in Estonia – the kindergarten of Estonian Provident Society. Before the war there were about 80 childcare institutions in Estonia, which were supported by societies, local municipalities and private persons. In the end of the 19th century the professional kindergarten teachers received their training mainly in Germany. Through the training of kindergarten teachers also Fröbel's ideas reached Estonia.

During the Soviet period a unified childcare institutions was developed in order to allow mothers to continue working. Kindertartens were opened mainly in bigger towns, collective farms and industrial centres. By 1980s a well-functioning network of early childhood institutions could be found in Estonia. The positive aspects were quite good spatial and material conditions, in the rural areas transport of the children was organized by local economic unit/municipality, kindergarten and crèche was guaranteed for all children. Whereas great drawbacks were a too large number of children (25-30) in the groups, the activities in the kindergarten were organized according to unified programme, which did not consider children's individual singularities.

After regaining independence in 1991, the Republic of Estonia initiated a reform of the whole educational system. Changes took place in the content of learning (proceeding from the concept of lifelong learning), in the system of educational institutions (the restructuring of the school network, new types of educational institutions) and in educational provisions (transfer from centralised management and financing to decentralised provisions). The organisation of work of early childhood institutions, its content and objectives were defined in Pre-school Childcare Institutions Act (1999) and Framework Curriculum of Pre-school Education (1999).

1. Contextual data

1.1 Demographic features impacting on ECEC

Birth indicators

Since Estonian re-independence in 1991 the population of Estonia has constantly decreased due to negative natural growth. Still, population loss due to negative natural growth is slowing down. In 2000-2003 population loss was over 5000 people per year, in 2005 the loss was less than 3000 people. In Estonia the downtrend in birth rate started fifteen years ago and birth rate has been at a low level for over 10 years. Still, in recent years the number of births has started to grow moderately. When in 2004 the number of births increased by almost 1000 children, then in 2005 the growth was much more moderate – only 358 children (Table 1).

Year	Birth	Death	Natural growth
1992	18 038	20 126	-2 088
1995	13 509	20 828	-7 319
2000	13 067	18 403	-5 336
2001	12 632	18 516	-5 884
2002	13 001	18 355	-5 354
2003	13 036	18 152	-5 116
2004	13 992	17 685	-3 693
2005	14 350	17 316	-2 966

Tab. 1 Births, deaths and natural growth in Estonia (1992-2005)

Based on initial evaluations the number of births in 9 months in 2006 has increased by 400 compared with the same period last year. That allows us to expect moderate continuation of growth tendency.

Looking at the number of children in age groups (Table 2), we can see that the decrease in birth rate is also reflected in these data. The decrease in the number of children that started in 1990 has directly influenced the number of educational institutions. Due to the low number of children some pre-schools and schools have been closed down. At the same time a recent increase in the number of births has caused some lack of places in pre-school educational establishments. This tendency has become evident in larger cities concerning care possibilities for children aged 1-3. Therefore, care opportunities for children under 3 are a very topical issue in Estonia at the moment.

Year	0 years	1-4 years	5-9 years
1990	24 006	97 235	117 512
1995	13 760	70 180	111 077
2000	12 067	49 373	81 707

Year	0 years	1-4 years	5-9 years
2001	12 965	48 573	74 577
2002	12 542	48 810	69 760
2003	12 938	49 237	65 107
2004	12 961	50 386	62 580
2005	13 915	51 282	61 322
2006	14 283	52 251	61 403

Tab. 2 Number of children in different age groups (1990-2006)

Birth rate as a development of population process is characterised by several fertility indicators. In Table 3 total fertility rate is presented that shows the expected number of births per woman. During the last 10 years the total fertility rate has been an average 1.4 in Estonia, but in 2005 increased by a tenth up to 1.5 that is still well below recovery level (estimated 2.1).

During the last decade the mean age of mothers at the birth of the first child as well as the mean age of mothers at childbirth has increased by almost 2 years in Estonia (Table 3). At the same time the share of marital births has decreased. When in 1992 over 50% of births were marital births, then in 2005 the share of marital births is 41.49%. Fall in marriages does not mean that people in Estonia mainly live alone. Cohabitation has become more popular, but this is not legally regulated and therefore is not reflected in official statistics.

Increase in cohabitation can be seen in the tendency that more people with common children get married. In 1993 16% of marriages had common children already, in 2003 this figure is almost one fourth. First of all women and men over 30 register their marriage after the birth of a child (Valgma 2005).

Year	Total fertility rate	Mean age of a mother at child-birth	Mean age of a mother at birth of the first child	Share of marital births, %
1992	1.71	25.30	22.73	66.05
1995	1.38	25.54	22.98	55.82
2000	1.39	26.96	24.01	45.55
2003	1.37	27.68	24.78	42.18
2005	1.50	28.19	25.20	41.49

Tab. 3 Birth indicators (1992-2005)

More and more women in Estonia strive for higher education in order to be successful in the labour market and guarantee better coping in a family. All these changes influence family relations and structures and also the number of children in a family. In previous decades education was not too important for further life and career. Today education and work experience is preferred to early motherhood. Valuing education and births in later age have increased the share of mothers with higher education. In 2003 the share of mothers with higher education was 21%, in 1990 it was only 15% (Valgma 2005).

Children in a single-parent family

Even the share of out-of-wedlock births increases due to the fact that more and more children are born from cohabitation, the share of illegitimate births increases also. These are births where data of a father are not entered into birth registration. In 2003 illegitimate births formed 15% of the total. The share of single mothers is bigger among very young mothers and among those who are in the end of their reproductive age. Almost half of mothers below 20 raise their children alone. Based on the 2004 data from the Statistical Office of Estonia the lowest number of single mothers was among mothers aged 25-34. The main reason why a child who was born into a family is at the moment raised only by a mother is separation and divorce. 71% of single parent families have 1 child. 23% have two children and 6% have three or more children.

Some minors live only with their fathers. Based on population census in 2000 there were appr. 4600, i.e. 2% of single-fathers in families with minors. The number of widowers was low – only 13% of single fathers. Distribution of single father families is similar to families with single mothers: 73% of such families have one child, 22% have two children and 5% of single fathers have 3 or more children. More single parents live in towns than in rural areas. The share of single parents in Estonia is one of the highest in Europe: 27% of families with minors have single mothers; European average is 15%. The share of single-father families is the same in Estonia as in Europe on average 2% (Valgma 2005).

Educational environment of children

Based on the 2005 data from the Statistical Office the majority of 0-17 year-olds (over 60%) live in two-parent households and a little bit more than one fifth live in a household with several generations. One tenth is raised in a single-parent household. In single-parent households the share of 0-2 year-olds is the smallest (6%) and the share of 15-17 year-olds is the largest (17%). If we compare families with pre-school and school-aged children the structure is quite similar. Similar to pre-school children until the age of 6 the majority of school-aged children live in two-parent households.

Evaluation of household's dwelling size and conditions from the aspect of the presence of children shows that no matter of the household type living conditions become more cramped when children are born. A household with no children has an average of 30m² per member, but a household with at least three children live in two times tighter conditions. Households with children aged 0-6 live in the most tighter conditions – they have only 16.9m² per member; households with 7-17 year-old children have 19.5m², single parents with children aged 0-17 have a little bit more space 21.9m² per member. Majority of households with children live in apartment houses: 76% of households with children aged 0-6, 68% of households with children aged 7-17 and 85% of single-parent households with children aged 0-17 (Kask et al 2005).

1.2 Statistics on parental / maternal employment

In Estonia the ratio of births and marriages is similar to the Nordic countries, where the share of single parents is large. In general, economic environment should be more favourable to children with two parents than to children with single parents. Still, economic environment does not depend so much on the presence of both parents, but on their social status (employed, unemployed, inactive) and income. More than half of Estonian children live in a household that has several adults in active age and two or more of them are working. 30–40% of children live in a household where at least one member of the household

is working. Educational environment of children aged 0-2 is different: 38% of them live in a household that has two working parents, at the same time 52% of children live in a household with only one working parent. In many cases this is due to the fact that mothers are on a parental leave and have therefore fallen into the inactive category. Social environment of children with working household members can be considered favourable. 10% of children have a more difficult situation, their parents are either unemployed or inactive. They have to manage with benefits and support money that does not guarantee a good educational environment for children (Kask et al 2005).

Comparing female and male employment we can see that over 90% of mothers to children over 7 years work (like fathers), at the same time only 23% of mothers to children under 1 year work (93% of fathers), 40% of mothers to children aged 1-2 and 81% of mothers to children aged 3-6 work (Table 4).

Age of the youngest child	Men		Women	
	Employed	From that part-time	Employed	From that part-time
Below 1	93%	1.7%	23%	21.4%
1-2 years	91%	1.6%	40%	18.8%
3-6 years	93%	2.0%	81%	4.9%
7-12 years	94%	2.6%	90%	6.1%
13-18 years	92%	1.9%	90%	8.1%
No children under 18	69%	5.7%	68%	10.1%

Tab. 4 Employment by gender and family and the age of the youngest child, share among 20-49-year-olds

About 70% of women and men who do not have children under 18 in their family work. So we can say that children influence female employment only for a short period of time in Estonia and we can rather say that men and women participate equally in the labour market. At the same time there is a direct link between part-time work of women and child's age. About one fifth of mothers to children under 3 works part-time, but the number decreases in case of children over 7 years of age (Roosalu 2006, 20).

1.3 Migration

For years immigration in Estonia has been higher than emigration resulting in high net migration rate up to the beginning of the nineties. In 1989 nearly 36% of the population were immigrants, who mainly resided in Northern Estonia. In the early nineties the outflow of immigrant population appeared (Indicators ... 2006).

A little is known about migration in Estonia today. The main reason is the fact that in 1994-2004 registration of the place of residence was voluntary. Therefore, we lack data on migration. Since 1990ies Estonian internal migration is characterised by two processes: people move from remote areas to town vicinity, but in urban areas urban sprawl takes place, i.e. people move out of towns to live in the neighbouring municipalities. Capital Tallinn is still the biggest business centre. Based on the data from the population register 7200 people have left Estonia in 2000-2004, mostly to Finland and Russia. At the same time immigration during the same period is below 1500 Bottom of Form (Tiit

2006). Internal migration data of the nineties are too unreliable (as they based on registration of the place of residence) to estimate the changes in migration.

1.4 Social issues (child poverty rates, child health)

Children at poverty risk

People who, as a household member, have a mean monthly income i.e. equivalent income, less than 60% of national equivalent income median value i.e. poverty risk line, live at poverty risk. In 2003 the poverty risk line in Estonia was 1936 EEK and the share of people at poverty risk was 18% of the population. In case of up to 6-year-olds this indicator was 22% and in case of 7-17-year-olds 20%. Children with single parents are in the worst situation, half of the up to 6-year-olds have equivalent income below the poverty line, from 7-17-year-olds one third. In two-parent households the number of children increases poverty risk. In 2003 the poverty risk rate in households with a child up to 6 years was 12%, in case of two children 20% and in case of three or more children 28% (Kask et al 2005).

Children's health

For improving people's health, several programmes have been created in Estonia, of which "National Healthcare Programme of Children and Adolescents" is connected with children, that is co-ordinated by Ministry of Social Affairs. Health improving kindergarten movement has also been started, into which 89 kindergartens (15% of kindergartens) have joined as of 2006. The children have been guaranteed free from charge treatment by the state.

It was analysed in the study of the State Audit Office in 2005, how the health care and improvement of preschool children is organised in Estonia (Maran, Suits, Uder 2005). The motive of the study was the fact, that until now relatively little attention has been paid to the healthcare organisation of preschool children. It turned out from the results, that although the health surveillance of preschool children is state priority and instructions have been worked out for that, there is no information on how many children regularly go through the instructions based medical check. The results indicated that most of all there are prophylactic consultations at the child's age of 0–2. It also turned out that 42% of the first form pupils who were examined some sort of health problem emerged. The Ministry of Social Affairs intends to start collecting more thorough information about the children's state of health on the start up of the digital health file in 2008.

While looking at the statistics of 1990-2007, it can be seen that the number of accidents resulting in child's death has constantly fallen in Estonia. At the same time the percentage of accidents occurring to 0-4-year-old children is relatively big. The research carried out by UNICEF in 2007 showed that Estonian children live in great risk of accidents. In the research the states were ranked according to deaths as a result of accidents per 100 000 under 19-year-old children a year. When in the first four states the level had been achieved, where per 100 000 children less than 10 accidents occur, then in Estonia there are nearly 40 accidents.

Death cause	Year	0-4 yrs	5-9 yrs	10-14 yrs	Total
Accidents, poisonings, traumas	1990	72	42	35	149
	1995	61	36	29	126
	2000	30	17	16	63
	2001	21	14	21	56
	2002	18	12	11	41
	2003	24	3	13	40
	2004	10	8	10	28
	2005	20	9	8	37

Tab. 5 The number of accidents ending in the child's death (1990-2005) (Statistical Office of Estonia)

2. Data on provision / early childhood services

2.1 Current statistics

The share of children of preschool age attending preschool childcare institutions in the total number of children of the same age has been continuously growing since 1995. 56% of 1–6-year-old children were covered by pre-primary education in 1995, as compared to 71% at the end of 2005 (Table 6).

	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Preschool institutions	767	671	646	642	596	597	600	609
Children in preschools (thousand)	81,9	60,9	50,6	49,9	49,6	51,3	52,9	54,5
The share of children in the total number of 1-6-year-old children, %	57	56	67	67	67	69	70	71
Age rate of children in pre-schools among 3-6-year-old age group, %	68	65	79	80	80	83	85	86

Tab. 6 Statistics in pre-school education 1990-2005 (Statistical Office of Estonia)

In 2005, 57% of all 2-year-old children attended crèches, which is 1% more than in the previous year. The coverage of 1-year-olds has slightly decreased compared to the previous year (Table 7).

Age	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Total	13 897	12 940	12 905	12 509	12 910	12 031	11 737	12 065
children in childcare institutions	1 656	7 374	10 476	10 764	11 450	10 503	2 311	26
Share, %	11,9	57,0	81,2	86,0	88,7	87,3	19,7	0,2

Tab. 7 Share of children attending childcare institutions in the total number of children of corresponding age, 1 January 2006 (Rummo 2006, 29)

Types of pre-school institution

Since 1999, pre-school childcare institutions are classified into four categories:

- Crèche (children up to the age of three) – up to 14 children in a group.
- Kindergarten – younger group (3–5 year olds); middle group (5–6 year olds); older group (6–7 year olds), composite group (2–7 year olds). A kindergarten group may have up to 20 children, and a composite group up to 18 children.
- Kindergarten-primary schools (-basic schools).
- Kindergartens for handicapped children - depending on the disability, there are 4–12 children in a group.

At the end of 2005 there were 516 kindergartens with 50,807 children, 9 crèches with 422 children (Table 8). There were 80 kindergarten-schools with 3,151 children of kindergarten age. In 2005 180 children were going to kindergarten for handicapped children. 27 private child-care institutions with 1,031 children were operating (last year — 24 and 981, respectively). Therefore the number of private institutions has increased (Rummo 2006, 27).

Child-care institution	Number of institutions	Number of places	Number of children	Number of children per 100 places
Lastesõim / Creche	9	350	422	121
Lasteaed / Kindergarten	516	49 027	50 807	104
Eriasteaed / Kindergarten for handicapped children	4	167	180	108
Lasteaed-alkool / Kindergarten-primary school	63	2 759	2 761	100
Lasteaed-põhikool / Kindergarten-basic school	17	430	390	91
Total	609	52 733	54 560	103

Tab. 8 Pre-school institutions by type, 1 January 2006 (Rummo 2006, 28)

The language of institution

The language of instruction in an institution for preschool children can be either Estonian or Russian or both. But within the group there can be only one language of instruction. The majority of institutions for Russian-speaking children are located in the urban area. Only one with the language of instruction in Russian and four with both languages are located in the rural area. A total of 74 preschool childcare institutions are working in Russian (33 of them are situated in Tallinn) and 47 are in both languages (Table 9). 7% of children whose mother tongue is Russian are studying in groups with language of instruction in Estonian. The reason for this is rather the ambition of parents to integrate their children into Estonian society than lack of a suitable Russian kindergarten in the neighbourhood. At the end of 2005 1,308 children with different mother tongue were going to Estonian-speaking groups in Tallinn. In one pre-school childcare institution in Tallinn the language of instruction is English (Rummo 2006, 27).

Language of instruction	Total number			Share, %		
	2004	2005	2006	2004	2005	2006
Institutions						
Estonian	467	476	487	78,4	79,3	80,0
Russian	78	74	74	13,1	12,3	12,2
Estonian/Russian	50	49	47	8,4	8,2	7,7

Language of instruction	Total number			Share, %		
	2004	2005	2006	2004	2005	2006
English	1	1	1	0,2	0,2	0,2
Children in child-care institutions						
Estonian	38 392	39 942	41 185	74,8	75,5	80,6
Russian	12 899	12 933	13 353	25,1	24,5	19,4
English	18	19	22	0,0	0,0	0,0

Tab. 9 Child-care institutions by language of instruction, 1 January, 2004–2006

2.2 Access to day care

According to the Education Act of the Republic of Estonia the early childhood education is mainly acquired at home and the parents or persons substituting them shall be responsible for that. Family upbringing is supported and supplemented by preschool childcare institutions.

In Estonia in terms of day care the parents can choose mainly between three facilities:

- Preschool childcare institution – the educational institution which enables day care and early childhood education for children that are at the pre-school age. Their operation is based on the Pre-school Childcare Institution Act (1999). The holder of the preschool childcare institutions or the owner is the local government or private undertaking.
- Alternative childcare institutions – play groups, play rooms, children’s centres, family centres and other childcare institutions which offer childcare services, which are formed either as local government institutions or private enterprises.
- Family day-care is a childcare service, in which one child minder takes care of 1-8 children either at his or her home or in the space rented for that.

The childcare service offered in alternative childcare institutions and in family day-care and the requirements imposed on that have been provided since 01.01.2007 in the Social Welfare Act. The child minder, who offers the childcare service must receive the relevant training and have a certificate of competency.

In 2005 the study “The mapping of the alternative childcare facilities for small children in Estonia” (Mürk 2006) was carried out. It turned out from this study, that mainly the childcare needs in Estonia are covered by municipal kindergartens. Alternative childcare services are mainly offered in towns or in smaller rural places, where there are no kindergartens. It turned out from the study results that in Estonian 15 counties there are under various names 19 play rooms and 25 family and children centres, which offer day-care service for 1-7-year-old children.

As the offering of the childcare service became legitimate only in 2007 there is not enough information on different forms of childcare at the moment. In order to get a reliable statistical overview about alternative childcare facilities, it would be necessary to create the respective register. It would also give an opportunity to support the alternative childcare facilities financially. At the moment there is no unitary support system.

2.3 Access to after-school facilities for school-age children

In Estonia school-aged children have a possibility to attend after-school facilities – a school or groups with a prolonged day, also different hobby groups after a school day. Groups with a prolonged day offer after-school activities for primary school children (grades 1-6), it includes hobby activities, learning support and teacher's supervision. A local government finances groups with a prolonged day. Usually they are open until 17.00 and there is no catering. In 2004 the total number of groups with a prolonged day was 1125, 20983 students from grades 1-4 attended the groups, 5033 students from grades 5-9 and 33 students from grades 10-12 attended. So, in total 26 104 students attended groups with a prolonged day, its share from the total number of students was 13.6% (Education 2004)

In order to offer diversified after-school activities for children, in 2006 the Ministry of Education and Research initiated a project of schools with a prolonged day. The state and local governments finance it. A school with a prolonged day offers after-school or pre-school activities for primary school children (grades 1-6) that includes diversified hobby activities, learning support, teacher's supervision and meal. These schools usually work until 18.00-19.00. A school with a prolonged day enables individual approach towards students, development of student's strengths or weaknesses and hobby activities. These schools exist in every county. The Ministry allocated resources to 54 schools all over Estonia for that project.

2.4 Governance, regulation, administration and inspection of services

Pre-school Childcare Institutions Act (1999) governs the operation of pre-school childcare institutions in Estonia. The basis of the schooling and education activity of the childcare institutions is the Framework Curriculum of Pre-school Education (1999). A child acquires pre-school education in either a pre-school childcare institution or at home. The primary task of pre-school institutions is to care for and to strengthen the health of a child and to encourage his or her emotional, ethical, social, intellectual and physical development, and to create preconditions for his or her successful coping in everyday life and for progress at school. The early childhood education is defined as a complex of knowledge, skills, experience and behavioural norms, which gives a child the opportunity to succeed in everyday life and at school (Pre-school Childcare Institutions Act). Pre-school institution supports child's family, facilitating child's growth and development and taking into account his or her individuality.

A child who does not attend a pre-school institution may participate in the activities of a preparatory group, located either at a pre-school institution or at a school. A child can also be admitted to a school without previously attending either a pre-school institution or a preparatory course. Once a child turns 7 years old, he or she is obliged to attend school.

Foundation and education licence

A childcare institution is founded by a rural municipality or city government on the basis of a decision of the council of the local government and an education licence issued by the Minister of Education and Research. A childcare institution is financed: 1) from rural municipality or city budget 2) state budget (pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Adult Education Act) 3) by parents 4) from donations. Parents cover the catering expenses of a child in a childcare institution. The daily catering costs of a child are estab-

lished by the board of trustees and approved by the manager. Upon resolution of the rural municipality or city council, other costs (administration, staff, social tax and teaching aid costs) are partially covered by parents.

Form of ownership

- Municipal pre-school institution
- Private pre-school institution

In financing a municipal pre-school institution, the share covered by parents per child may not exceed 20% of the minimum wage level established by the Government of the Republic. The actual amount of the payment is determined by the municipal or town council, and it may vary according to the age of the child, the financial situation of the pre-school institution or other factors. The daily amount to be paid by the parent for a child's meals is set by the board of trustees of the pre-school institution.

Pre-school institution's working time

The city government or rural municipality on the proposal of the board of trustees decides the year-round or seasonal operation of the pre-school childcare institution. Rural municipality or city government, on the basis of the proposal of the board of trustees, decides the opening time of the pre-school childcare institution. The majority of the early childhood institutions are open in Estonia the whole day, usually from 7.00 to 19.00. The parent can also bring the child to the childcare institution and take him or her away at the time suitable for him or her following the daily schedule of the childcare institution.

External assessment

According to the constitution of the Republic of Estonia (1992) the education is under the state surveillance. The assessment is given to the legitimacy and performance of the educational institution through the state surveillance and supervisory control. In case of childcare institutions the state surveillance is governed by the preschool childcare institution act (1999). In order to ensure the legitimacy of the operation of the municipal childcare institutions the supervisory control according to the local municipality organisation act shall be arranged. According to that law the supervisory control is the control performed by the local municipality over the legitimacy of the operation of the institutions and their employees of the rural municipality or town.

State surveillance on schooling and education of preschool childcare institutions is carried out by officials of the Ministry of Education and Research and county governor according to the procedure established by the Minister of Education and Research. The main aim of the state surveillance is to contribute to the acquiring of high-quality education and to ensure the efficiency and legitimacy of the schooling and education activity.

In case it turns out from the results of the state surveillance that there are shortcomings in the operation of the educational institution, the holder is obliged to eliminate these. If the holder does not rectify deficiencies by the due date determined by the Minister's directive, the Ministry of Education and Research can declare invalid the education licence of the educational institution, by which the operation of the educational institution shall be terminated. The Ministry of Education and Research shall compile a summary of the surveillance results every year, which all those who are interested can familiarize themselves with on the home page of the ministry (<http://www.hm.ee>)

When in earlier years the state surveillance was performed in all the childcare institutions at least once in six years, then since 2006 an internal assessment obligation was

established in the preschool childcare institutions and the counselling on internal assessment issues shall be ensured on the state level. The aim of this amendment is to support the internal assessment of the educational institution and to create an external assessment system, which would counsel the childcare institutions. The aim of the counselling is to increase the objectivity of the assessment and to deepen the awareness of the educational institution of their actual state and to support and develop the carrying out of the internal assessment and the development of the assessment culture. The counselling will be carried out by the advisers, whose training was started in autumn 2006 in the framework of the project “Koolikatsuja (School explorer) 2006+”.

Since 2006 the state surveillance has been thematic, that means that in the framework of the surveillance the information is collected and the operation of the educational institution is inspected in a certain aspect. For example the theme of the early childhood education in the academic year of 2006/2007 is the supporting of the school readiness in the childcare institution. The minister of education and research determines the sample of the educational institutions where the surveillance is carried out. The sample is compiled in the principle, so that the regional principle would be taken into account, the number of children and pre-school institution in the region. The language of instruction, form of ownership, the time of the last surveillance etc. is also taken into account. The sample involves at least 10% of the educational institutions.

2.5 Key policies and practices

2.5.1 Official curricula

The basis of the schooling and education activity of the childcare institutions is the Framework Curriculum of Preschool Education (1999). The framework curriculum is a basis for municipal and private childcare institutions for preparation of their own curriculum and it supports parents upon educating and developing their children at home.

The Framework Curriculum determines:

- Schooling and education objectives;
- Principles of schooling and education arrangement;
- The content, volume and temporal arrangement of schooling and education;
- Assessment principles of child’s development;
- Estimated results of child’s development;
- Estonian language teaching principles in a childcare institution or group, where the schooling and education is carried out in another language.

The content of schooling and education is given in five schooling and education areas: language and speech, mathematics, art, music, exercising. Kindergartens for children with special needs and childcare institutions, which have groups for children with special needs, compile their own curriculum which follows the general principles of framework curriculum, taking into account the special needs proceeded from children’s disabilities. The main aim of schooling and education is to support children’s physical, mental and social, including moral and aesthetical development, so that preconditions for coping with everyday life and studying at school would form.

In the framework curriculum the following principles of schooling and education have been mentioned:

- Consideration of the child’s individual, generic, age specific and national characteristics
- Teaching which is proceeded from the child
- Co-operation of the home and childcare institution
- The formation of democratic and humane relationships
- The placing of a high value on Estonian cultural traditions, consideration of cultures of other nations
- Activity in a group is based on the child’s natural interest in the surrounding
- A great importance in the child’s development is in play, which must involve most of the time on the schedule
- The environment that offers diverse exercising opportunities and experiences and positive examples fosters child’s development.
- The activities are planned so that the child would have opportunities to choose.

The management and teachers of the kindergarten compile a curriculum of the childcare institution and they are responsible for the fulfilment of this curriculum. The teacher compiles the activity and daily programme of the group. While doing it they take into consideration the framework curriculum and the schooling and education objectives and tasks, the age and generic composition of the group, the children’s level of development and parents’ wishes.

The most common methods upon application of a curriculum in pre-school childcare institutions are: the Step-by-Step method, the Montessori method; the Waldorf method; the Reggio-Emilio method. In 1994 the educational programme “Step by Step”, in Estonian “Hea Algus”, started its activities in Estonia. Before that teachers and their assistants received respective training in the USA. In January 2007 the situation is, that there are about 250 kindergarten groups and 150 classrooms in Estonia where the Step-by-Step methodology is fully applied. At the same time thousands of teachers who have participated in some trainings use successfully the elements from the programme.

2.5.2 The day care of under 3-year-old children

One of the parents can raise a child at home until the child is 3 years old, being on parental leave. At the same time the parents of under three-year-old children put their children into the kindergarten and use alternative day-care services if they wish. Due to the increase of the number of births the requirement of crèche places has increased, but the kindergarten queues are long and there are not enough places for those who wish it. This is the situation especially in bigger towns and their near surrounding. In rural settlements the majority of those who wish a place in the kindergarten, can also get it. Due to the scarcity of the crèche places many of the under three-year-old children’s parents use alternative day-care services or family day-care. The survey held among the parents in 2004 indicated that, the parents of 2-3-year-old children who wanted to go back to work were the ones who were the most unsatisfied with the prevailing childcare arrangement. They named the difficulties emerging in combining work and family life: the kindergartens do not have enough places for under 3-year-old children, alternative ways of childcare are expensive and part time working is not possible (Ainsaar 2004). In connection with the childcare service having become legitimate since January 2007, a lot of municipalities have created an opportunity, that the parent will be partly compensated his or her costs to the child’s day care.

2.5.3 Centre-related quality management / evaluation

Since 1 September 2006 the internal assessment (self-assessment, evaluation) in the preschool childcare institutions has been obligatory. It is a continuous process, the aim of which is to ensure the conditions that support the children's development, the consistent development of the institution, finding out the strengths of the educational institution and improvement areas. The basis of the internal assessment is the assessment criteria, which are given in the regulation No 23 of the minister of education and research „The counselling conditions of school and preschool childcare institution and procedure in the issue of the internal assessment” 04.08.2006 (Kooli... 2006). In co-operation with different working groups the Ministry of Education and Research has worked out auxiliary material for carrying out the internal assessment.

Since 2006 the head of the kindergarten submits once a year the performance indicators of the childcare institution. The aim of the performance indicators is to give the institutions an opportunity to monitor the indicators of their institutions in temporal trend and/or compare with the same kind of educational institutions. All the performance indicators have definite indicating meters, i.e. these are given as numbers. As the performance indicators are open, they also give information to the kindergarten personnel, parents, the holder of the educational institution and other interest groups. An opportunity is created to all those who are interested to familiarize themselves with the performance indicators through Estonian Education Information System (<http://ehis.hm.ee>). The performance indicators of the preschool childcare institution are:

- Results connected with a child (visiting numbers, group fulfilment, consideration with educational specific needs)
- Results connected with the personnel (qualification of the personnel, further training, teachers' age division, staff turnover, teachers' activeness)
- Results of the educational institution (the ratio of children and teachers, growth environment, state of being provided by computers, budget).

The head of the kindergarten submits in the framework of internal assessment of the childcare institution once in three years an internal assessment report. This document contains the internal assessment principles and procedure of the childcare institution and the analysis of the last three years' operation. In the analysis the strengths that have come into view in the main areas and aspects that need improvement are pointed out. The basis of the assessment is internal assessment criteria, the compiling of which has followed the principles of Total Quality Management. The following areas are analysed on the internal assessment:

- Initiative and management (initiative, strategic management, internal assessment)
- Personnel management (the assessment of the need for the personnel, recruitment of the personnel, involvement, motivation, support, improvement and assessment)
- Co-operation with interest groups
- Resource management (budgetary resource management, the improvement of the material-technical basis, management of information resources, economical management)
- Schooling and education (child's development, curriculum, the organisation and methods of schooling, values and ethics)
- Results connected with the child (visiting numbers, group fulfilment, child's health, considering the children with special needs, hobbies, children's satisfaction)
- Results connected with the personnel (personnel achievements, further training performance, staff satisfaction, statistics connected with the personnel)

- Results connected with interest groups (the activeness of the board of trustees, reflection in the media, involvement of the interest groups in the decision making, satisfaction of interest groups)

2.5.4 Child-related assessment

The assessment principles of the child's development are given in the Framework Curriculum of the Pre-school Education (1999). The kindergarten teacher observes systematically the child's physical, mental and social, including aesthetical and moral development. Once to twice a year the teacher of the childcare institution gives a parent a written evaluation on their child's progress. In evaluating the physical development first of all the child's general physical development is observed: co-ordination, walking, posture and balance, flexibility, precision, the ability to control face and finger muscles and strength and endurance. In evaluating the mental development the development of psychical processes and imagination and basic skills of studying are considered. In evaluating the social development the child's activity and interaction with other children and grown-ups, the development of child's activities, first of all play, independence and coping skills also the control of emotions and expressive skills which are closely connected with the adaptation in the group are observed; also the child's moral and aesthetical development is considered.

In evaluating the child's development the teachers use observation method most of all. The children are also interviewed, the children's drawings are analysed and the readiness to school is assessed. The teacher introduces the methods to the parents. The child's development is described proceeding from the child, valuing what has been achieved, the child's coping, positive attitudes and interest is recognized. In compiling the development description and giving the verbal evaluation the anticipated results of the child's development at the age of three, five and seven are as landmarks. These are given in the framework curriculum as indicators of physical, mental and social development. Such kind of division is notional, because one and the same indicator can be seen from different aspects. The anticipated results of the child's development are not considered as obligatory to everyone; these are certain generally recognized signposts, which help the teacher plan the necessary activities for child's development

2.5.5 Integration of (im)migrant children

The aims supporting the integration of the children of pre-school age and basic school and upper-secondary school including new immigrants who have different mother tongue than Estonian into Estonian society are specified and are implemented in the framework of the state programme "Integration into Estonian Society 2000-2007". Opportunities are created for the children of pre-school age to acquire the Estonian language in preschool childcare institutions, play centres and pre-school groups. In the educational institutions of other language methodical materials, specific dictionaries have been compiled through Non-Estonian's Integration Foundation for studying the Estonian language and teachers' training, language camps, co-operation projects etc. of kindergartens and schools with Estonian and Russian study language have been carried out.

The implementation of immersion programs in kindergartens and schools have been supported through Non-Estonian's Integration Foundation. In 2000 language immersion programme was started at schools. In the first five forms 134 Russian children began to learn all the subjects in Estonian. In 2002 the programme was begun to be extended to the kindergartens. The aim was to support the teaching of the state language to the children who do not speak Estonian, by helping them have good skills both in their mother tongue

and in the target language, which would enable them to participate successfully in political, economical and cultural life of the society in the future. In the framework of the project the training, methodical preparation of the trainers and teachers was planned and the informing of the heads of kindergartens and representatives of the local government on the aims of the project (Belova, Kulderknup, Pandis, Vahar 2005, 10). According to the information of the Language Immersion Centre the language 24 kindergartens and 32 schools implement immersion programme in 2007.

Parents are free to choose the preschool institution for their child. Preschool institutions are obliged to ensure a place for every child in its catchments area, if the parents so request. If the instruction takes place in a language other than Estonian, children aged 5-6 are also taught the Estonian language (teaching may start earlier if requested by the parents).

2.5.6 Integration of children with disabilities

It is determined in the preschool childcare institutions act, that the government of a rural municipality or a city shall create opportunities for development and growth for the children with physical, speech, sensory or mental disability or requiring special help or special care in the childcare institution of the place of residence (§). Conditions for growth with other children in the reconciling groups shall be created for the children with special needs. If there are no facilities in the childcare institution of the place of residence for forming a reconciling group, the rural municipality or the city government shall form special groups or found kindergartens for the children with special needs (§). The number of children in a special group proceeding from the nature of their disability is also determined in the preschool childcare institutions act.

In a reconciling group (a group which involves both conventional children and children with special needs) the allowed largest number of children is lower than in other groups of the childcare institution, considering that one child with special needs fills three places. Proceeding from the specifics of the children's special needs the law stipulates the creating of a speech therapist's and a special teacher's job in the childcare institution (Koolieelse ... 1999).

The number of kindergartens for children with special needs has decreased in Estonia since 1995 from 7 to 4 childcare institutions in 2005 and the children who attend them from 362 children to 180 children. At the same time the number of children in special and reconciling groups of conventional kindergartens has increased. Out of the number of children with developmental special needs in the preschool age about 40% have been involved in special and reconciling groups of preschool childcare institutions. Special groups have mainly concentrated into the county centres, where there are special teachers and speech therapists and the supplementary counselling of therapists is available if necessary. The problem is that in the childcare institutions of 1-3 groups, which are mainly situated in the country, the support of the specific specialist is not available for the child, teacher and parent. There are no facilities to form reconciling groups and special groups. Nearly 50% of the preschool childcare institutions in Estonia have 1-3 groups. (Üldharidussüsteemi... 2006)

2.5.7 Transition practices

From the point of view of following the lifelong learning principles it is essential, that the learners' transitions from one education level to another would be smooth. In Estonian childcare institutions the importance is laid both on the transition from home to the kindergarten and from kindergarten to school. When a child comes to the kindergarten the

teachers supports him or her in adaptation and they also counsel parents on necessary issues. In all kindergartens the parents have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the childcare institution before their child goes there, the majority of childcare institutions have also their home pages on the Internet with the necessary information about the institution. Smooth transition from kindergarten to school is promoted by continuous cooperation with the regional school, which has been planned in the development programmes of the childcare institutions. Several events usually take place together with the local school and the kindergarten children can go with their parents to familiarize themselves with the school, classes and teachers.

As attending a preschool childcare institution is voluntary in Estonia, there are children who come to school without previously attending the kindergarten. In order to adapt more easily at school, an opportunity has been created to go to school preparatory groups. As of 1 January 2005 according to the information of State Statistics Board there were 609 preschool childcare institutions in Estonia, with the total number of 54,546 children. 10,244 6-year-old children attended childcare institutions and school preparatory groups, which formed 87% of the age group. Thus, more than 1500 children did not go to the preschool childcare institution or school preparatory group before starting school. Although the rate of children that go to the preschool childcare institution of the age group has somewhat increased from year to year, a significant amount of pre-school-age children have not received adequate preparation for school (Üldharidussüsteemi... 2006).

In order to support the formation of the school readiness of all children and guarantee a smooth transition to school a wider application of preliminary teaching has been planned in Estonia. Preliminary teaching is a teaching before the commence of the school obligation which takes place on the basis of the framework curriculum of early childhood education, through which the child's development and the formation of personality and school readiness is supported. The task of the state is to guarantee a place in the kindergarten if necessary or an opportunity to participate in the activity of school preparatory group for all the 5 – 6-year-old children. For those parents, whose children do not participate in the pre-school childcare institutions or in a preparatory group, the counselling of a teacher will be guaranteed and the availability of the materials used in preliminary teaching. (Üldharidussüsteemi... 2006)

2.5.8 Collaboration with parents

It is stipulated in the pre-school childcare institution act, that the childcare institution shall support the family. Parents have a right to bring their child to the childcare institution and take him or her away at the time suitable for them and to demand the necessary conditions for the child's manifold development, by helping form those conditions. The parents can also familiarize themselves with the curriculum and daily schedule of the childcare institution and receive information on the work arrangement of the childcare institution. The parents are obliged to follow the daily schedule of the childcare institution and the healthcare requirements. The operation of the childcare institution is open to the parents, it means that the parents are welcome to the group at any time, they can make suggestions to the development plan, curriculum and the activity plan of each group of the childcare institution. The parents are expected to participate in the preparation and carrying out of various different events. In order to involve the parents into the decision-making processes, the childcare institutions have a board of trustees. The parents of each group of the childcare institution choose their representative(s) to the board of trustees at the beginning of the academic year. The board of trustees is a permanently operating body, the task of which is to monitor, that the schooling and education would correspond to the children's development and interests and to co-operate with the personnel of the

childcare institutions. The task of the board of trustees is to make suggestions to ensure the favourable development environment for the children, to make recommendations to the head of the childcare institution in compiling and using the kindergarten budget, to get an overview of the schooling and education and management of the childcare institution. The board of trustees of the childcare institution meets at least four times during the academic year. The co-operation principles and forms with the parents are given in the curriculum of the childcare institution. At the beginning of the academic year the parents' expectations and wishes are surveyed, the main co-operation activities are planned and the parents are involved in carrying them out. At the end of the academic year the feedback is gathered from the parents, the satisfaction surveys are carried out and the results of the co-operation are assessed.

In the academic year 2005/2006 the state surveillance was carried out in 61 Estonian preschool childcare institutions. The results indicated that in 82% of the childcare institutions the co-operation with parents was planned on the basis of the parents' wishes and needs (Ülevaade ... 2006). Parents were involved in the organising and carrying out of events, training visits. Parents help the teacher in forming the growth environment and the making of schooling and play means. All the necessary information is available for the parents. The shortcomings in co-operation were found in 18% of childcare institutions for example the insufficiency of the exchange of information, the one-sidedness of the forms of co-operation, not counting the parents' wishes. The analysis showed that the co-operation between parents and teachers has been planned and works in most of childcare institutions. More attention should be paid to the assessment of the exchange of information, co-operation forms and the efficiency of the board of trustee's work.

2.6 The five main trends impacting on early childhood policies and practices

The implementation of preliminary teaching

One of the areas of development activity in the Estonian general education system is a smooth transition from one education level to another. As the attending of childcare institutions is voluntary, then in order to support the formation of the school readiness of all the children and to guarantee a smooth transition to school the implementation of preliminary teaching is planned for all 5-6-year-old children in Estonia starting from 2008.

Curriculum development

Since 1999 the basic document of schooling and education in preschool childcare institutions has been the framework curriculum of early childhood education. The development activity of the national curriculum was started in 2002. In 2003 the implementation study was carried out, in order to get information about the compiling of curricula in kindergartens. In the supplementation of the curriculum it is analysed, whether individual approach to each child has been guaranteed, the support of his or her development, the activity fields are put in order and also the anticipated development results of 6-7-year-olds. It is important, that a child's smooth transition from kindergarten to school would be ensured. The improved curriculum is planned to be implemented starting from 2008.

The support of the children with special needs

The involving of the children with special educational needs in the preschool childcare institutions presupposes the guaranteeing of more efficient advisory service. The present children, parents and teachers supporting counselling system is scattered, in regions unevenly available and does not offer enough necessary and high-quality support in pedagogical-psychological counselling of children of special needs. The Estonian action plan "Education for All" compiled in the initiative of UNESCO sees as essential the involving of children with special needs and the necessary counselling and to enable them the support service (Haridus... 2004).

Creating alternative childcare facilities

In connection with the increase of the number of births there are problems with getting a kindergarten place. On the one hand the building of new childcare institutions and the expanding of the existing ones helps solve this problem. At the same time attention should be paid to the creation of alternative childcare facilities, which would support especially the parents of under 3-year-old children, who wish to go back to work. It is essential to offer flexible childcare services both in town and in the country and in such a form, which would correspond to the changing needs of the children and parents.

The support of the internal assessment of the childcare institutions

Since 2006 the internal assessment in Estonian preschool childcare institutions is obligatory. That means that the personnel of the childcare institution can plan and analyse their operation in all the areas, co-operate with interest groups and collect feedback from them about the performance of their work. The internal assessment of childcare institutions is supported by external assessment system, the aim of which is to support and counsel the development activity of the childcare institutions.

3. Data on personnel

3.1 Level of education and length of service pedagogical staff

The overwhelming majority (97%) of headmasters have pedagogical higher or professional secondary education; only 3% have secondary education or education in a non-pedagogical speciality. If two thirds of headmasters and deputy headmasters have higher education, then most of the teachers have professional secondary education and only 32% of the teachers have pedagogical higher education (Table 10). The majority of speech trainers (85%) and defectologists (89%) have higher education. Same as in other educational institutions, the share of males is small, and due to the specific character of pre-primary education even diminutive - 0.4%.

Pedagogical staff	Total	Of whom males	Share by educational level, %				
			Higher education		Professional secondary education		secondary education
			Pedagogical	Other	Pedagogical	Other	
Headmaster	595	5	83,0	1,5	14,3	0,5	0,7
Deputy headmaster	252	-	81,7	1,2	16,3	0,8	0,0
Teacher	5 987	5	31,6	1,9	55,7	4,7	6,1
Music teacher	612	4	39,9	4,4	48,7	3,8	3,3
Defectologist	28	1	89,3	0,0	7,1	0,0	3,6
Defectologist	371	-	84,6	6,5	3,0	0,8	5,1
Physical trainer	59	2	59,3	11,9	20,3	8,5	0,0
Teacher of rhythmic	313	16	61,0	5,4	22,7	3,5	7,3
Total	8 217	33	41,4	2,4	46,9	4,0	5,3

Tab. 10 Distribution of pedagogical staff by educational level, 1 January 2006 (Rummo 2005)

Most experienced headmasters can be found in the urban area: 79% of them have been working in the same field for at least 15 years. The corresponding number for the rural area is somewhat smaller — 76%. More than a half (58%) of the pedagogical staff has been working in the same field more than 15 years (Table 11). The level of education and experience of pedagogical staff ensure the children a pre-primary education of good quality (Rummo 2005, 35).

Pedagogical staff	Total	of whom with the length of teaching service (years), %					
		0-2	2-5	5-8	8-11	11-15	>15
In urban area							
headmasters	312	3,8	1,0	1,3	6,7	8,7	78,5
other	5 633	8,3	8,0	6,6	6,5	12,4	58,2
In rural area							
headmasters	283	3,9	1,4	3,2	4,6	10,6	76,3
other	1 989	11,2	8,2	7,1	7,0	10,8	55,7
Total							
headmasters	595	3,9	1,2	2,2	5,7	9,6	77,5
other	7 622	9,1	8,0	6,7	6,6	12,0	57,5

Tab. 11 Distribution of pedagogical staff by length of teaching service, 1 January 2006

3.2 Impact of the Bologna Process

Estonian higher educational system has two branches - academic and applied higher educational branch. Higher education is acquired in universities and applied higher educational establishments. Since 2002/2003 academic year the academic line of higher educational system has two stages, following the *bachelor-master* model. The first stage is Bachelor's studies and the second stage is Master's studies. The highest stage of academic line is Doctoral studies. Applied higher education is a first stage of higher educational system and it corresponds to the Bachelor's level in the academic branch.

Teacher training

The regulation "Framework Requirements for Teacher Training" stipulates that teacher training in Estonia will take place at the level of higher education (Õpetajate... 2000). The regulation defines the volume, content, requirements for academic staff, competence requirements for teachers and requirements for in-service training in teacher training.

Teacher training for pre-school educational establishments shall proceed from the following:

- Teacher training components are: studies in general education, subject-related, general educational sciences, psychology and subject didactics and professional placement (§5)
- The teacher training curriculum includes at least 40 CP of subjects in general educational sciences, psychology and subject didactics, including at least 10 study weeks of pedagogical professional placement (§8)
- The defined volume of training of pre-school teachers at the first stage of higher education is 120 CP and at the post-graduate level (Master's level) 80 CP (§9) (1 credit point = 40 hours)

Passing the curriculum shall guarantee that a teacher complies with special competence requirements. Special competence requirements for pre-school teachers are (§17):

- After graduation from the first stage of higher education a teacher shall be able to: 1) develop a favourable mental and physical environment for a child; 2) cooperate with other teachers and parents, if necessary counsel parents; 3) develop child's communication, learning and working skills; 4) connect learning and educational activities with child's home surrounding, nature and surrounding environment, guarantee child's security and safety; 5) know the curriculum for grades 1-3 and guarantee a blending transition for a child from a pre-school to school.
- In the end of a Master level curriculum a teacher, in addition to the above-mentioned special competence requirements, is able to: 1) teach children with special needs or be a physical education or music teacher; 2) counsel parents and colleagues in professional matters; 3) manage work in a pre-school educational establishment; 4) develop a curriculum.

3.3 Key features of curricula in the main institutions of professional training

The training of teachers of preschool childcare institutions is carried out in five institutions of higher education: Tallinn University, colleges of Tallinn and Tartu Universities and in one Applied Higher Education Institution. The more exact overview of the content and length of the teaching is given in appendix 1, 2. In all the higher education institutions the curricula of kindergarten teachers (Bachelor's studies) have been accredited, there is a high-level international co-operation and research work.

3.4 Qualification and in-service training

The Framework Requirements for Teacher Training define that once in five years a teacher attends professional in-service training for at least 160 hours (§17) (Õpetajate...2000). In order to fulfil this requirement pre-school educational establishments receive resources from the state budget. An establishment can choose a training facility where a teacher goes. In addition to that also local governments allocate resources for training that can be used by the whole staff in a pre-school. Use of the resources will be agreed upon at the level of the establishment.

The regulation "Qualification Requirements for Pedagogical Personnel" defines qualification requirements set to pedagogical staff working in a pre-school childcare institution (Pedagoogide... 2002). Head and vice-head of a pre-school childcare institution have the following qualification requirements: higher education in pre-school education, at least three years of pedagogical experience in a pre-school institution and 160-hours of management training. A teacher in a pre-school childcare institution shall have higher or professional secondary education in early childhood education. In case of other pedagogical education a person shall pass in-service training.

An evaluation is organised in order to assess professional skills and qualification levels of pedagogical personnel. The aim of evaluation is to support development and career opportunities of pedagogical staff by evaluating the results of pedagogical work against professional requirements. Basis for evaluation are presented in the regulation "Conditions and Procedure for Evaluation of Pedagogical Personnel" (Pedagoogide...

2002). A teacher may apply, in case of necessary qualifications and meeting the requirements, a grade of a junior teacher, teacher, senior teacher or teacher-methodologist. 6 out of 10 requirements shall be met, e.g. - participation in development work, presentations in conferences or media, supervision of students in professional placement, organisation of children's activities, contests, exhibitions etc. Evaluation is on voluntary basis. Evaluation is carried out by a committee that has representatives from a pre-school, local government and professional associations.

3.5 Remuneration and professional status

The Pre-school Childcare Institutions Act (1999) stipulates that representatives of local governments and pre-school educational establishments agree upon minimum salaries for pre-school teachers. Remuneration of the staff in a pre-school educational establishment comes from municipal resources (§27). Based on that remuneration of teachers in pre-school educational establishments depends on the possibilities of local governments and is different in every municipality. Usually remuneration of pre-school teachers is lower than of school teachers, only in some larger municipalities it is equal. Therefore, we can say that the profession of a pre-school teacher is not prestigious, even in recent years the importance and responsibility of a pre-school teacher have been discussed more. The following professional associations represent the interests of pre-school teachers - Estonian Association of Teachers, Estonian Association of Pre-school Teachers, Association of Early Childhood Education Managers.

3.6 Current issues and trends regarding training and workforce policies

Based on the "National Teacher Training Development Plan 2006-2013" Estonia has planned the following measures to support professionalism of teachers and make training more efficient (Õpetajakoolituse... 2006):

Creation of motivation mechanisms for teachers

A problem lies in teachers' age and lack of young teachers. In 2005 10% of teachers in pre-schools were younger than 30, the share of men in that age group was 0.3%. At the state level young people should be motivated to become a teacher, at the same time they should be guaranteed a competitive salary. Estonia has started a novice year that supports young teachers during their first work year. At the same time working teachers shall be motivated to increase their qualification.

Support to teacher's professional development

It has been planned to develop a professional development model for a teacher and guarantee respective in-service training, develop a system for teachers' professional counselling. Development portfolio for teachers that will reflect his/her studies, professional career and professional competence will be taken into use.

Development of teacher training curricula

Teacher training curricula will be brought into compliance with professional standards. During the studies more attention will be paid to support individual student's personal and professional development. Aims, content and evaluation principles of pedagogical professional placement will be specified. Professional placement will be closely linked to subject studies and will be analysed from the point of view of competences foreseen in the curriculum.

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