

# Estonia

## Country Overview

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## Country name

Estonia

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## Introduction

The following overview of literature indicates that preschool policies and practices promote the importance of social and emotional skills learning in ECEC settings in Estonia. The preschool institutions do not have unique, obligatory and standardised measurement instruments for social and emotional skills (SES), nor national based intervention and programmes for social and emotional learning (SEL). Non-government organisations and kindergarten through international projects work on the promotion of SEL, as well as developing practices in preschool settings. There is a lack of evidence-based studies related to intervention and programmes for social and emotional skills learning of preschool children.

## Development

Currently, the Estonian education system is decentralised. The division of responsibility between the state, local government and school is clearly defined. Preschool education (ISCED level 0) is generally acquired in childcare institutions (koolieelne lasteasutus). Local governments are obliged to provide all children from 1.5 to 7 years of age who permanently reside in their catchment area with the opportunity to attend a preschool or childcare institution if the parents wish so. In addition, there is also a system of childcare services (lapsehoiuteenus) mainly to the youngest children. These services can be either centre- or home-based (Eurydice, 2021). Most of the preschool children (96%) attend public preschool institutions. In 2016, 71% of two-year-olds and 90% for three-year-olds were enrolled in an ECEC setting. Enrolment of children under 2 years of age is lower in relation to parental leave benefits. Preschool institutions are responsible for developing its curriculum according to the local needs, interests and children's abilities, according to the National Curriculum for Preschool Child Care Institutions. Preschool institutions have the autonomy to apply multiple methodologies and pedagogies. The most widespread teaching practises are the step-by-step methodology, the Reggio Emilia approach, the Montessori approach and active learning methods such as Bruner's discovery learning (OECD, 2020). At the national level, there are no evidence-based and proven preschool programs related to social and emotional skills learning.

## Assessment

The assessment principles of the child's development are given in the Framework Curriculum of the Preschool Education (1999). The teachers observe children and provide information about their developmental skills. The evaluation of social skills includes the child's activity and interaction with others, independence and coping skills, control of emotions and expressive skills, and adaptation in the group (Õun, 2007).

Research of social and emotional skills of children in Estonia are measured as part of International Early Learning and Child Well-being study (IELS) conducted by parents and teachers. IELS included a direct measure of emotion identification and attribution, and indirect measures of prosocial behaviour, such as trust in familiar people and non-disruptive behaviour. Results show that teachers in Estonia perceive children as more disruptive than teachers in England or in the

United States do (Kettlewell, et al., 2020). On the contrary, teachers in Estonia perceive preschool children as exhibiting social and emotional skills at the same, or higher levels than children from England and the United States, showing higher prosocial behaviour, and better identification of feelings. In all domains, girls show better results than boys (OECD, 2020). However, this research and assessment is not at national level practises, and there is no evidence that Estonia has national and standardised assessments of social and emotional skills at preschool level.

## Intervention

There are no national systematic and certified programmes of social and emotional skills learning for children, but a few positive practises through international project activities were found. There are some activities of introducing Askelleittan as Finnish version of Second Step Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in preschool and school institution in Estonia (see <https://www.cfchildren.org/blog/2017/12/partners-in-estonia-champion-sel/> or <https://www.cfchildren.org/blog/2018/07/nordic-partners-supporting-second-step-and-sel/>)

One of the ongoing Erasmus projects “Nature As Teacher,” include development of intellectual outputs and exchange of practises related to social-emotional skills learning and include kindergarten from Estonia as a partner in the project ([www.nature-as-teacher.com](http://www.nature-as-teacher.com)).

## References

- Eurydice (2021). Estonia - Early childhood education and care. Available on link [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-education-and-care-24\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-education-and-care-24_en)
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