

# Supporting Adults without Secondary Education in Returning to Formal Education

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Research report

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In addition to the authors, many other people contributed to this research. **Kjell Rubenson** had a great influence on the outcome, as he helped to make the methodological choices and structure the policy recommendations. The client contributed to the report by constructing the initial research question, helping with methodological choices and giving feedback, therefore we would like to acknowledge **Märt Tomson, Terje Haidak, Kairi Solman, Priit Laanoja, Meeli Murasov, Inna Laanemets, Mart Reinhold, Aino Haller** and **Mai Timmi** from Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. We would like to thank **Pille Liblik** from Estonian Ministry of Education and Research and **Kaie Piiskopp** from Foundation Innove for familiarizing us with the current study programs. We thank **Mare Räis** from Viimsi Secondary School for her helpful comments throughout the research process. The report was written simultaneously in Estonian and in English, we are grateful to **Erle Luuk** from CentAR for help with the translations.

Very important input to the research came from the **adult gymnasiums' and vocational schools' personnel**, who were also kind enough to provide the facilities for the group discussions. Finally, we would like to thank **local governments**, who participated in the survey and made some additional comments.

# Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2 THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ADULT FORMAL EDUCATION IN ESTONIA .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 ESTONIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM.....	17
2.2 POSSIBILITIES FOR ADULTS TO GAIN SECONDARY EDUCATION .....	18
2.2.1 <i>Education institutions, stationary and non-stationary studies.....</i>	18
2.2.2 <i>Preconditions for studies .....</i>	20
2.2.3 <i>Study programmes .....</i>	20
2.2.4 <i>Prison education as a special form of adult secondary education .....</i>	22
2.2.5 <i>Conditions of graduation.....</i>	22
2.2.6 <i>Regulation of dropping out .....</i>	23
2.3 SUPPORT FOR LEARNING ADULTS .....	23
2.4 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON ADULT FORMAL EDUCATION IN ESTONIA .....	26
2.5 OVERVIEW OF THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS IN ESTONIA AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION.....	29
2.5.1 <i>Overview of people without upper secondary education in Estonia .....</i>	29
2.5.2 <i>Participation in adult secondary education.....</i>	32
2.5.3 <i>Dropping out of adult secondary education.....</i>	33
<b>3 METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>35</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION AND TARGET GROUPS .....	35
3.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PEOPLE’S SURVEY .....	35
3.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE MUNICIPALITIES’ SURVEY .....	36
3.4 DESCRIPTION OF THE FOCUS GROUP SURVEY OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL.....	37
<b>4 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE.....</b>	<b>40</b>
4.1 MOTIVATION AND BARRIERS TO LEARNING.....	40
4.1.1 <i>Reasons for dropping out of initial education .....</i>	40
4.1.2 <i>Barriers to participation .....</i>	46
4.1.3 <i>Barriers for people who have returned .....</i>	50
4.1.4 <i>Motivation for continuing studies .....</i>	51
4.2 SUPPORTING ADULTS IN THE SCHOOLS .....	54
4.2.1 <i>Current measures taken at schools .....</i>	54
4.2.2 <i>Support personnel at school.....</i>	56
4.2.3 <i>Need for additional measures .....</i>	57
4.2.4 <i>Summary .....</i>	58
4.3 SUPPORTING ADULTS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM .....	60
4.3.1 <i>Barriers in the education system.....</i>	60
4.3.2 <i>Need for additional measures .....</i>	64
4.3.3 <i>Summary .....</i>	65
4.4 SUPPORTING ADULTS THROUGH COMPLEMENTARY MEASURES.....	65
4.4.1 <i>Current support measures in schools and municipalities .....</i>	65
4.4.2 <i>Need for additional complementary measures .....</i>	74
4.5 PROMOTION AND INFORMATION AVAILABILITY .....	75

4.6	CONCLUSIONS BASED ON EMPIRICAL FINDINGS.....	77
<b>5</b>	<b>BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER COUNTRIES.....</b>	<b>79</b>
5.1	INTRODUCTION .....	79
5.2	LARGE SCALE PROGRAMS AIMED AT INCREASING LEVEL OF EDUCATION NATION-WIDE .....	80
5.2.1	<i>'Adult Education Initiative' or 'Knowledge Lift' in Sweden</i> .....	80
5.2.2	<i>Noste program Finland</i> .....	82
5.2.3	<i>New Opportunities Initiative in Portugal</i> .....	83
5.3	EDUCATION SYSTEM .....	85
5.3.1	<i>Recognition and validation of non-formal and in-formal learning in formal studies</i> .....	85
5.3.2	<i>Possibility for choice of different paths in secondary level</i> .....	88
5.3.3	<i>Certificate for unfinished studies - Finland</i> .....	89
5.4	NUMBER AND ORGANISATION OF CLASSES .....	89
5.4.1	<i>Increasing the flexible forms of learning (time-wise)</i> .....	89
5.4.2	<i>Reduced amount of studies for adults</i> .....	90
5.4.3	<i>Modernising schools</i> .....	90
5.5	INCREASING MOTIVATION AND OVERCOMING PERSONAL BARRIERS FOR STUDYING .....	91
5.5.1	<i>Simplifying the structures of adult education and information</i> .....	91
5.5.2	<i>Increasing basic literacy</i> .....	93
<b>6</b>	<b>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>94</b>
6.1	CLEAR GOVERNING STRUCTURE AND OVERARCHING AIMS .....	94
6.1.1	<i>Clear governing structure</i> .....	94
6.1.2	<i>Strategy for adult basic and secondary education</i> .....	95
6.2	FINANCING AND ORGANISATION OF SUPPORT MEASURES.....	97
6.2.1	<i>General financing of schools</i> .....	97
6.2.2	<i>Increase attractiveness of general education compared to unemployment</i> .....	97
6.2.3	<i>Clearer and equal opportunities support system</i> .....	97
6.2.4	<i>Increasing child care opportunities</i> .....	98
6.3	ORGANISATION OF ADULT SECONDARY EDUCATION .....	99
6.3.1	<i>Increase flexibility of vocational upper secondary education</i> .....	99
6.3.2	<i>Using recognition of prior learning in formal education</i> .....	99
6.3.3	<i>Improving learning opportunities for non-native Estonian speakers</i> .....	100
6.3.4	<i>Establish a certificate indicating unfinished studies</i> .....	100
6.3.5	<i>Adjusting the precondition of a research project for graduating</i> .....	101
6.3.6	<i>Develop e-learning possibilities and e-learning capability</i> .....	101
6.4	INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING .....	101
6.4.1	<i>Development of a comprehensive communication strategy</i> .....	101
6.4.2	<i>Reaching the target group</i> .....	102
	<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>104</b>
	<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>111</b>
	<b>APPENDIX 1: SURVEY SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS .....</b>	<b>115</b>

## List of figures

Table 1 Number of institutions giving vocational education and different study programs with open admission.....	19
Table 2 Reasons for dropping out of vocational education and needed prevention measures.....	27
Table 3 Respondents to the municipalities' survey by size.....	37
Table 4 Number of participants in focus groups .....	38
Table 5 Significant relations between the reasons for school-leaving and barriers to continuing studies. ....	49
Table 6 Assessment of potential measures by people not planning to return to education.....	58
Table 7 Assessment of potential measures by people not planning to return to education.....	64
Table 8. Assessment of potential measures by people not planning to return to education.....	74
Table 9 Sample characteristics of the people's survey. ....	115
Figure 1 Classification of barriers to adults' learning, .....	13
Figure 2 The Bounded Agency Model. ....	14
Figure 3 Distribution of people according to the levels of education, 2011.....	29
Figure 4 People without lower and upper secondary education according to the age groups, 2011..	30
Figure 5 The share of the adult population (20-64 years old) without upper secondary education regionally, 2011. ....	31
Figure 6 The number of adults without upper secondary education regionally, 2011.....	31
Figure 7 Adult persons who study in different school levels and institutions (school year 2013/14).	32
Figure 8 Distribution of persons who study in different institutions by sex (school year 2013/14 for vocational secondary education, 2011 for general education).....	33
Figure 9 Form of study according to the type of study (school year 2013/14).....	33
Figure 10 Reasons for dropping out of studies for adults who have not returned to school.....	41
Figure 11 Reasons for dropping out by gender if a person is currently not studying. ....	43
Figure 12 Reasons for dropping out by age groups if a person is currently not studying. ....	44
Figure 13 Reasons for dropping for people who returned to school as adults (but failed to finish) and others (by the age at time of dropping the school). ....	45
Figure 14 Reasons for dropping out by intentions to continue studying.....	46
Figure 15 Barriers for dropouts to return to studies.....	47
Figure 16 Barriers of returning to school by age groups.....	48
Figure 17 Barriers of returning to school by gender. ....	49
Figure 18 Reasons for dropping out on students' own initiative (number of dropouts, average of 5 academic years).....	51
Figure 19 Reasons to return to school for adults who plan to do so. ....	52
Figure 20 Reasons for returning to school for adult learners. ....	53
Figure 21 Universal measures in municipalities. ....	66
Figure 22 Special measures for adult learners by the municipalities.....	67

## Executive Summary

It has been found that people with upper secondary education participate more readily in lifelong learning (Järve et al. 2012). Therefore they are more capable of dealing with changes in the society and are overall better equipped for life. There are over 100 000 adults in Estonia without secondary education, meanwhile there are only 5000 over 20-yearolds studying to obtain either lower or upper secondary diploma. A considerable number of people who currently lack secondary education are capable of obtaining this level of education. This could be beneficial both to the individuals themselves as well as the society at large.

**The aim of the current study** is to gather information about the barriers and preconditions for adults wishing to obtain secondary education in Estonia and, in light of these, to analyse the current education organisation, study organisation and support measures regarding adult learners in adult gymnasiums and vocational schools.

In order to gather relevant **data** a survey was carried out in December 2013 among adults without secondary education and those who are currently studying to obtain it. The purpose of the survey was to identify the most important barriers and the potential solutions to overcome these. To gather information about current support measures an electronic survey was carried out among the Estonian municipalities. The information about school organisation and education system was obtained in the focus groups, which were carried out separately with adult gymnasium and vocational school staff in five different regions. Together different experiences were discussed and potential solutions to improve adults opportunities and motivation for learning were proposed.

Currently most of the adults who are studying on the secondary level do so in non-stationary form in adult gymnasiums. In vocational secondary education the proportion of students older than 20 is quite large, but only a couple of hundred over 25-yearolds are studying in those programmes. About a third of adult students in adult gymnasiums and one fifth in vocational secondary programmes drop out. It follows that **out of all the adults without secondary education only a small proportion is currently studying in formal programmes and out of those relatively many drop out.**

### ***Reasons for leaving school and motivation to return***

Regardless of the specific group under observation the main reason for dropping out of initial education was financial difficulty. For women children were also a significant reason. About two thirds of people without secondary education have not considered returning to school. Those who have considered it are equally likely to have made the decision to return to school (17%) or to have given up the idea entirely (18%).

As a **barrier to returning financial reasons** are again the most prominent. Equally important are **attitudinal barriers** like lack of motivation or perceived need, but also age. The latter was most often stated by people over 50. In addition, awareness of educational opportunities was also found to be rather low. If a person has discontinued their studies because of care responsibilities, health or attitudinal barriers, then these are also likely to be the reasons for not returning.

**Financial difficulties** are also important reason for dropping out for those adults who have returned to secondary education in adult gymnasiums. Conflicting schedules with work or employers lack of support also often result in dropping out. Based on statistics from schools and from the focus group discussions about half of those dropping out are exmatriculated because of attendance issues or

because of unsatisfactory results. These reasons are often just a façade for more serious issues that also need the intervention of supportive personnel, like the psychologist, to prevent dropping out.

The most common **motivators** for adults to return to school are **better career opportunities, wish to enter tertiary education or internal motivation** to improve one's knowledge.

### ***Institutional framework***

Adult secondary education in Estonia can in principle be offered as non-stationary studies in adult gymnasiums as well as in vocational schools. Some initial education providers also have a non-stationary studies department. Vocational secondary education isn't offered in non-stationary form although the legislation doesn't restrict this. Therefore **adults' participation in secondary education is somewhat restricted.**

Although curricula for lower and upper secondary education are regulated on the state level and are the same for both initial education and adult secondary education a number of exceptions are made for non-stationary studies. **This enables adult gymnasiums to offer flexible learning opportunities.** The empirical study showed that there may be some aspects that could be developed further to gain more flexibility.

The relevant legislation to use prior learning assessment in secondary education is in place, but there are no practical knowledge nor experiences on how to do this. Evaluating prior knowledge can substantially cut study duration and could therefore be very beneficial for adults with strict time constraints. It follows that **a national system for using prior learning assessment in secondary education should be developed.**

**Adults learning in vocational secondary education and adults learning in adult gymnasiums have currently different opportunities in respect to financial support.** Adults learning in adult gymnasiums do not receive financial aid. Vocational school students studying in stationary form are eligible for national scholarships. General social support is of course available for both of these groups. Vocational school students are also eligible for transportation support; meanwhile adult gymnasium students have no central system for this and may or may not receive support from their municipality. Different municipalities regard adult learners differently and therefore **adults in different regions have different benefits and therefore unequal opportunities to participate in education.**

**It should thus be considered firstly whether to unify the system of financial support for all adults to create equal opportunities for participation and secondly how to increase the flexibility of vocational secondary education.** One solution for the latter could be to use the new module-based study organisation in a way that increases adults' opportunities within the current system.

Working adults are entitled to up to 30 days of study leave a year. If they are studying in secondary education then for 20 of these days the employer is obliged to pay the usual wage. Additionally for completing secondary education another 15 leave days can be taken out and the national minimum wage will be paid for it. This is independent of form of study. If all employers were to follow this, then it can clearly be quite a burden for them, and the empirical analysis showed that **employers' negative attitudes and unwillingness to provide flexible schedules is a significant barrier to learning.**

Looking at different benefits it is clear that unemployment is today more favourable to studying in secondary education, because registered unemployed people are eligible for financial benefits, different labour market services and health insurance. Entering secondary educations means losing all of these benefits. Although studying in vocational education provides students with health insurance they still miss out on the privileges of the unemployed which can additionally include transportation and accommodation support when participating in short courses. Therefore **participation in secondary education is not seen as a viable alternative to unemployment**. In addition those who start studies in non-stationary form also lose their survivor's pension (if they were receiving it).

### ***Support in schools***

The survey among adults without secondary education showed that they rarely see that the schools could or should do something differently. Out of the three school level measures offered (widening of e-learning opportunities, change of study organisation and contact from school) people saw only contacting from the school and encouragement from them to continue education as potential influential for returning to school.

Although potential students do not see that school could do much to persuade them to return to school there are still a number of things that could be improved. On the national level it could be said that the variety of study forms is sufficient, but not all adults have access to every type of study organisation in their region. There is no one ideal form of studies for adult learners and **different flexible forms should be encouraged**. It is equally important that potential learners should be informed of these opportunities, because only complete information can provide the tools to make the decision to return to school. So it follows that **information availability should be a priority**.

Today different schools use e-learning opportunities to a different extent and understanding of what constitutes e-learning also varies. It is clear that some teachers do not have the skills nor the motivation needed to actively use e-learning opportunities. To help make better use of the technological capabilities of the schools the **education technologists are needed**, so someone would train the teachers, but also help them on a daily basis.

In adult gymnasiums the financing of support personnel more generally is seen as an issue. Although the legislation states that support personnel should be available in all the schools the adult gymnasiums often lack funding for these positions. Adults with their complicated life situations are even more likely to need help from the psychologist and other supportive personnel than children. Also some schools feel the need for speech therapists for adults. Therefore the **current financing issues should be resolved, so that all schools are able to afford the support staff**.

The fact that school was rarely seen as the main barrier to returning to education shows that the general attitudes of adults are much more detrimental. If the aim is to motivate as many people as possible to return to their studies **the first barrier to address should be changing the general attitude towards adult formal education**.

### ***Education system***

From the potential students' perspective common reasons why not to return to school do not stem from the education system.

The teachers raised the issues of curriculum and termination conditions. The discussion was centered around the number and volume of courses and recognizing previous out of school activities as a part of studies. There was no unanimous opinion on these matters: some teachers felt that the number and volume of courses should be reduced, while others believed that the workload should be the same as in ordinary gymnasiums. The general view was that diplomas should be consistent, especially on further learning opportunities for both stationary and non-stationary training. However, there is no common position on the broader purpose of adults' secondary education.

Regarding graduation requirements, the topic most debated was the compulsory research project and the ability of supervisors to guide adults to practical work instead. It was proposed to make an exception for learners in prisons, by replacing the requirement of research project with an exam. This is because it is not possible to access the necessary materials for research nor conduct empirical studies in prison.

The main challenges perceived by the schools were the ambiguous roles of different types of schools, the funding of schools and, more generally, the lack of a comprehensive strategy for adult education. More precisely, the following topics were discussed: which are the roles of general secondary schools and vocational schools in offering secondary education to adults, how should be the division of pupils between the adult gymnasiums and the ordinary secondary schools as well as division of adults between vocational secondary education and vocational education. The question is whether adults should acquire secondary education in general or vocational education institution? Should adults acquire vocational secondary education or shorter and more flexibly offered vocational training in vocational schools? Do adult gymnasiums represent a second chance for those who fail in traditional education and need a simplified approach to learning or are they strong upper secondary education establishments providing flexible learning opportunities? It would be necessary to define the role of and the need for the various institutions of adult education. The different ownership of adult gymnasiums and (most of) the vocational schools hinders effective collaboration and development of uniform adult education infrastructure.

At the level of the education system, it is important to set forth clear secondary education level objectives. There are opportunities in the education system, such as curriculum modification, new types of certificates etc., which would allow more flexibility for adult learners. Such changes would require at least some level of agreement on the role of institutions and the distribution of educational objectives.

### ***Support and benefits***

Potential learners evaluate additional support measures as most effective compared to the school and the education level measures. This is also confirmed by the school personnel that the main obstacle for students to participate in the school is related to money, work and child care.

More than half of those who faced a problem with a need or a desire to work and/or lack of motivation, felt that they could attend a school depending on the availability of a scholarship and/or flexible working hours, but also the confidence that a better education can earn a higher salary. As those with economic and/or motivational problems are many, such measures could influence greater number of people compared to the other measures. Biggest part of the people with the childcare problem found the solution to be covering of childcare costs and/or child care option close to home. As child care availability throughout the group of people without secondary education is a small

problem, it would not help many, but those who have such a problem, see significant help of these measures (more than half estimate that they would consider going to school if these measures were available).

Additional support measures were also evaluated by the teachers and school personnel as the most important factor in bringing adults back to school. It was pointed out that a every little help is important and, more generally, it would be necessary to ensure that the transport expenses, support for minimum living expenses and support for school lunch are covered comprehensively.

Local governments have offered support primarily case by case, and consequently different situation in different municipalities has evolved. Some of the local government responses seemed to indicate additionally that the local authorities do not see adults as learners but only as working people, and therefore the need for support is not systematically addressed. What exactly should be the role of a local government should be placed to the debate as the state has already committed distributing support to some of the students. If, for example, some smaller municipalities if at all have only one or two adults with their specific support needs studying on the secondary-level, these students gather together in the school. In addition, the school can control whether the student has taken part in training which is rather difficult for a local government to do. Therefore, the logical place for sharing the specific grants (different from universal social benefits) is by the school.

Supporting adults with information in returning to school is not possible to overemphasize. For adults return to school is the free choice, and in order that the choice would fall towards returning to school, it is important that relevant information (cost of studies, time of the studies, flexibility in terms of time, course content, availability of materials, etc.) would be easily accessible in one place. It is important that the information is targeted and in an understandable form. The potential of personalized appeals to people is essentially great. In addition to informing potential learners, the improvement of attitude of employers and general society towards adults in secondary school level studies is important. Thus, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive information strategy to ensure its effectiveness and purposefulness.

In summary, a holistic approach to education system as well as to support measures is necessary. Adults' lives are more complex than lives of students in initial education and the return to school is their free choice. This is why learning has to be encouraged and supported with the involvement of various institutions in co-operation.

## Introduction

People with upper secondary education participate more readily in lifelong learning compared to people without this level of education. Therefore they are more capable of coping with changes in the society and are overall better equipped for life. There are over 100 000 adults in Estonia without secondary education, at the same time there are only 5000 over 20-yearolds studying to obtain either lower or upper secondary diploma. A considerable number of people who currently lack secondary education are capable of obtaining this level of education. This could be beneficial both to the individuals themselves as well as the society at large.

Adults returning to school often face a number of adjusting difficulties (e.g. combining work and family obligations with studying). There are different needs for those who are working on different times than most of the people or are not working at all, for people with caretaking responsibilities etc. Adjusting is more difficult in formal education, as participating in formal education is more time consuming compared to participating in labour market training or retraining. Returning to secondary education is voluntary decision for adults unlike to young people who have to comply the compulsory school attendance law, therefore it requires flexible school flexible system that takes into account the diverse needs of learners.

The goal of this project was to gather information about adults without lower- or upper-secondary education and their barriers and prerequisites for participating in formal education in Estonia. Additionally the management of adult education, the school level practices and the appropriateness of supportive measures in Estonia were analysed. Based on this information we make suggestions for improving the study arrangements for adults in secondary education (e.g increasing the flexibility of the school system) and for designing more adequate supporting measures in order to increase adults' motivation and possibilities for participating in secondary education in Estonia.

We look at three aspects of supporting adult education: the school level context, education system context and complementary measures implemented by the state, schools and municipalities. Also, the special attention was paid to the differences between general and vocational secondary education in the context of adults' formal education. The main research questions of the study are:

Research questions regarding the school level education management

- Which aspects of school level education management increases or decreases the access to schooling and influences the likelihood of graduation;
- Find positive examples of how the organization of studies has been modified to fit the needs of adult learners;
- What are the target groups' needs regarding the flexibility of school level educational provision;
- Analyse what are the main factors that increase the risk of dropping out.

Research questions regarding education system

- Find out what type of changes are needed in the formal education provision on the state level to make the provision more fruitful and to support transition to further education;

- Analyse the second chance measures implemented in other European countries (from the perspective of provision to find out which measures implemented in other European countries have been effective in this sense;

#### Research questions regarding the support measures

- Map the existing complementary measures (including project based);
- Find out which measures are most widespread and which of those are effective;
- Analyse the efficiency and influence of complementary measures for adult learners (covering transportation costs, financial support/scholarships, providing accommodation, child care, etc);
- Find out the need and characteristics of additional support measures (based on the experiences with project based measures in other European countries).

In order to answer the research questions we conducted a survey among adults without secondary education to find out the barriers to learning and to evaluate the appropriate measures to overcome these obstacles. Also, the focus groups were carried out with adult gymnasiums' and vocational schools' staff in different parts of Estonia for obtaining their perspective on the barriers to participation in adult learning, study organisation in schools and the appropriateness of the national education system. Additionally an electronic survey was carried out among the Estonian local governments in order to gather information about the support measures offered in municipalities.

The report is structured as follows. The first chapter gives a theoretical overview of the obstacles that keeps adults from participating in secondary education. In the second part the regulatory framework for the adult secondary education is introduced. The third section gives an overview of the methodology of data gathering and in the fourth chapter the results of the surveys and focus group interviews are presented. In the fifth section some examples of good practices from other European countries are brought out and the last part is dedicated to the policy recommendations.

# 1 Theoretical background

Recognising the specific characteristics of adult learners is essential in the process of redesigning educational opportunities for this target group. Both motivation and barriers to learning need to be considered and the education system needs to provide an adequate framework which allows for different approaches according to people’s needs. In this chapter we will provide a short overview of the theoretical literature on the aspects in which adult learners differ from regular students.

One of the most widely used **classifications of barriers** to studying is **by Cross** (MacKeracher *et al.* 2006; Rubenson & Desjardins 2009; Saar & Roosalu 2011) that has been further elaborated by Fagan (1991). Cross distinguished between:

- situational
- institutional and
- attitudinal factors

that create barriers to participation in adult learning (see figure 1). According to MacKeracher *et al.* (2006) Potter and Alderman also developed a fourth set they named

- academic factors

The barriers according to this approach are named and sorted from the perspective of the learner and are expected to influence both the decision to participate and the actual participation process. **Situational** factors, or life factors as Fagan (1991) calls them, reflect the circumstances that limit the access to and pursuit of education. Second category **structural** (or institutional or program) factors encompasses limitations to participation which stem from the methods institutions use to design, deliver and administer educational activities. **Attitudinal** (or learner-inherent or dispositional) factors as the name implies reflect the learner’s perception of their own abilities and opportunities in relation to successfully participating in studies. Lastly **academic** factors combine different skills that are essential to successfully participate. See figure 1 for examples of different factors.

Situational	Structural (Institutional)	Attitudinal (Dispositional)	Academic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidation of different roles</li> <li>• Personal resources</li> <li>• Support from family</li> <li>• Geographic / transport opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability and quality of programmes</li> <li>• Admission requirements</li> <li>• Admission process</li> <li>• Timing and scheduling</li> <li>• Support services for students</li> <li>• Attitudes of teachers and staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-confidence</li> <li>• Valuing learning</li> <li>• Attitudes about self</li> <li>• Prior negative experiences</li> <li>• Health and fitness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy skills</li> <li>• Numeracy skills</li> <li>• Computer skills</li> <li>• Skills in accessing information</li> <li>• Attention and memory</li> <li>• Critical and reflective thinking skills</li> <li>• Skills in writing essays, examinations and tests.</li> </ul>

Figure 1 Classification of barriers to adults’ learning, compiled by the author based on MacKeracher *et al.* 2006.

Which of these barriers dominate the most depends on the context of a country. **The Bounded Agency Model** formulated by Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) states that structural conditions play an important role in forming the individuals' circumstances and thereby limit their choices. Therefore structural conditions "bound" individual agency. Public policy can affect the structural conditions but also indirectly influence the individuals' subjective rationality and view of their opportunity structure (disposition). Therefore Rubenson and Desjardins assume that the particular welfare state regime affects individuals' capability to participate in adult education through the particular way the material, social and institutional environments are constructed and how these result in situational, structural and dispositional barriers.

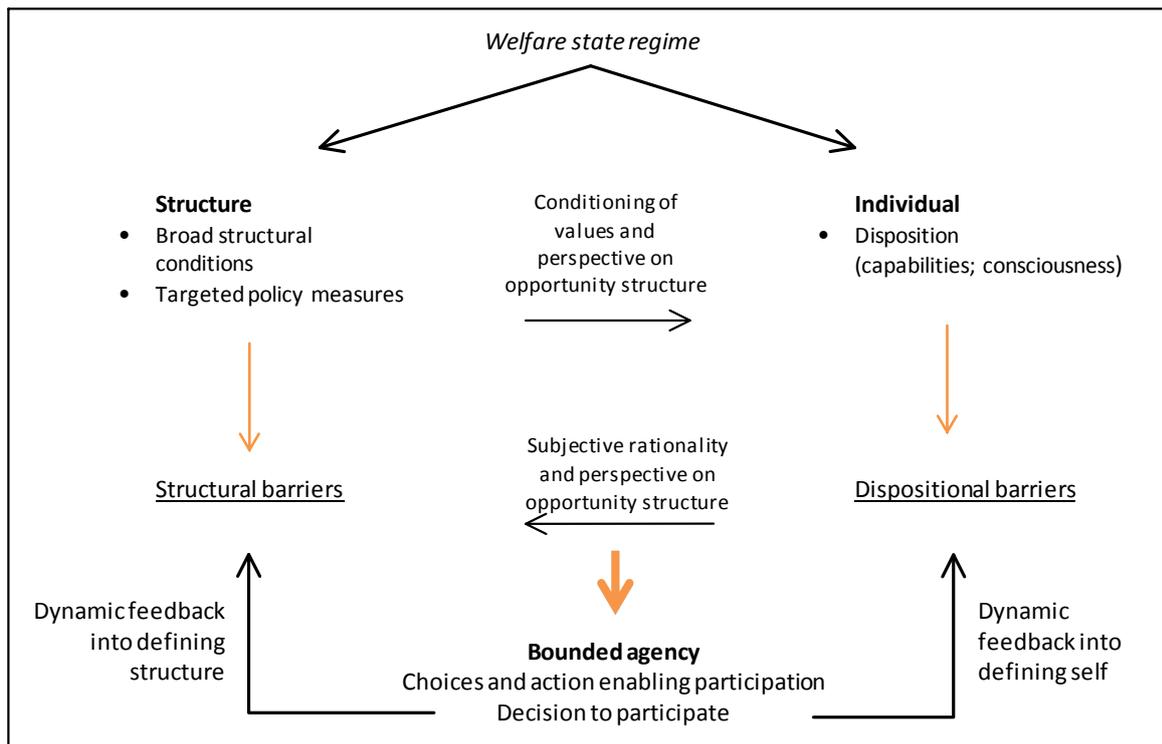


Figure 2 The Bounded Agency Model, from Rubenson & Desjardins 2009: 195.

It is also important to note that while the previous model could very well be applied to both young and old learners there are still **important differences between these groups**. Some barriers are harder to overcome for adults than for young people in initial schooling. Adults learn what they want to learn and what is meaningful for them; draw on their previous resources; take as much responsibility as they want to take and; are not inclined to learn something they are not interested in (Illeris 2007 as referred in Illeris 2010). Knowles suggested that teaching adults is qualitatively different in a number of ways:

- they are self-directed
- they need to know why they are learning
- their previous experience is a source of learning
- they have intrinsic motivation to learn
- their learning is problem centred rather than subject centred (as referenced in Jarvis 2010).

Jarvis (2010) finds that the most important factor among these is the experience of adult learners which also dictates how certain subjects should be taught. He argues that in areas where adults have little previous knowledge like initial vocational training a more pedagogic approach is appropriate. Accordingly continuing vocational education should be more andragogic (Jarvis 2010). Therefore teaching adults is a complex task and teachers should be equipped with a variety of skills to cope with different situations that arise in the classroom.

On **the school organisation level** Potter and Ferguson (as referenced by MacKeracher *et al.* 2006) have identified five essential elements of an effective lifelong learning institution: recognition, support, flexibility, accessibility and availability. MacKeracher *et al.* (2006) find that this list should be supplemented with relevancy and respect. These reflect the most important directions to measures that should help to overcome adult learners' barriers to learning:

- Recognition – the various needs of adult learners have to be accepted and not questioned in everyday school life.
- Support – adult learners may need more guidance and support, because of their family and work responsibilities, as well as difficulties adjusting to the academic environment. This support should be readily available.
- Flexibility – adult learners need access to various forms of education flexible in time and location as well as to different teaching and learning formats. This can also be facilitated by the employers by allowing flexible working schedules.
- Accessibility and availability – learning activities need to be provided when the learner needs them and not when the school is willing to offer it. One of the key solutions for this is better online learning opportunities and continuous intake.
- Relevancy – learning content should be relevant to the learner's family, work and community responsibilities.
- Respect – learners should be treated with thoughtful consideration by the staff. Negative attitudes towards the learner may discourage the student. (MacKeracher *et al.* 2006)

On **individual level** one of the main issues is the motivation of learners, more specifically how to motivate adults to return to school after a long disruption on their education path. The motivation of learners' is clearly a result of the opportunities they have and how they perceive them, so there are a lot of factors influencing it. Previous research has identified some of the most important factors for adults returning to school to make the decision of participating and also to successfully graduate from their studies.

Adults have been found to be motivated to return to school mostly due to work-related reasons. Although for adults intrinsic motivation is usually more important than extrinsic, for lower-educated adults extrinsic factors tend to play a bigger part (Daehlen & Ure 2009). Other authors have found that teachers' attitude and teaching methods as well as the organization of studies are of critical importance. Adult educators are encouraged to find ways to improve the learning environment to improve motivation. Also labelling students as motivated or unmotivated in the learning situation may prove counterproductive. Adults are very responsive to instruction quality, better instructions motivate them more. This can be achieved through active study methods, relating material to everyday experiences and including students actively in the process. Adults are also responsive to

feedback, which has a number of advantages helping the adult better direct their learning and increases feeling of control and progress. (Järve *et al.* 2012)

In conclusion adult participation in formal education is influenced by many factors. The theoretical background described in this chapter helps to structure our analysis and the following conclusions. When evaluating different policy measures it will be important to take into consideration the contexts of different welfare states and how they may affect the results of intervention as stated by the bounded agency model.

## 2 The current situation of adult formal education in Estonia

In this chapter we give an overview of adult learners' possibilities to obtain secondary level education. We describe shortly the policy context and give an overview of the previous studies on adult formal education in Estonia.

### 2.1 Estonian education system

Formal education is understood in this study as it is defined in the Education Act<sup>1</sup> (RT 1992, 12, 192, last red. RT I, 11.07.2013, 5). Therefore the levels of formal education, which are relevant in the context of this study, are the following:

- **Lower secondary education**, which is the minimal compulsory level of general education, prescribed by the national standard of education. The acquisition of basic education provides the prerequisites and grants the right to continue studies to acquire secondary education. (Education Act §15).
- **Upper secondary education** (Education Act §16) is a level of education which is based on basic lower secondary education. Secondary education is divided into general secondary education and secondary vocational education
  - **General upper secondary education** is a set of requirements established by the national curriculum for basic schools and upper secondary schools. The acquisition of general secondary education provides the prerequisites and grants the right to continue studies to acquire higher education.
  - **Upper secondary vocational education** is a set of requirements established by the vocational education standard and the national curricula for vocations or professions. The acquisition of secondary vocational education provides the prerequisites and grants the right to start working in the acquired vocation or profession or to continue studies to acquire higher education.

Estonian education system prescribes lower secondary level of education as compulsory (or the minimum school leaving age 17). If a person has not completed the compulsory minimum level and is over the minimum school leaving age, he/she may study in vocational education courses that do not require primary education. These studies may give partial qualification but do not give lower secondary education. In order to continue studies in higher level education institutions, the lower secondary school has to be completed. If a person completes lower secondary school, he/she has three possibilities for further studies:

- Vocational education without studies of general education
- Vocational upper secondary education
- General upper secondary education

After completing the vocational education without studies of general education the person may proceed to vocational or general upper secondary education.

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<sup>1</sup> Here, formal education is not considered in the meaning of formal education as defined in the Vocational Education Act (RT I, 02.07.2013, 1), §23 lg 2.

The amount of general subjects within the vocational upper secondary education is one study year (in total 40 weeks). If the person wants to proceed to a higher education institution after the completion of upper secondary vocational education, he/she may take an additional year of general subjects. This is not however obligatory and it is possible to proceed straight to the higher level of education. At the same time, there is usually competition for most places of higher education and therefore it may be necessary to study more than is possible within common upper secondary level vocational education programs. In Estonia there is no optional extra year of study for moving between levels of education, while in Finland, for example, there is an optional tenth grade and in Ireland people can take a transition year before upper secondary education.

Accordingly, adults can study at all levels of secondary education and vocational upper secondary education in Estonia. Learning opportunities are designed so that there is no dead ends, every level of formal education enables to move to the next level. In case a person has dropped out at some point, he/she can continue their education from where they left off. Problems with continuing the education might arise if the previous level was completed with poor results or the education was completed a long time ago, so that studying at the next level is complicated.

## 2.2 Possibilities for adults to gain secondary education

### 2.2.1 Education institutions, stationary and non-stationary studies

According to the Adult Education Act (RT I 1993, 74, 105 last red. RT I, 02.07.13), an adult may acquire lower secondary education or general upper secondary education in **non-stationary form of studies**<sup>2</sup> or in general education schools as an **external student** and vocational upper secondary education in **non-stationary form of studies in vocational educational institutions'** formal studies<sup>3</sup>. However the information gathered from focus groups proved that in practice, there is no possibility for adults to gain vocational upper secondary education in non-stationary form. As a rule adults do not participate in general educational institutions' full-time studies.

Adults may acquire **general upper and lower secondary education** in upper secondary education schools that are specialised in non-stationary form of studies, these are also called **adult gymnasiums**. Also some general education schools have opened **evening or distance learning or other forms of non-stationary study programmes** aside stationary study programmes. If a person is older than 17 and has not yet acquired lower secondary level of education, the local municipality has to guarantee the possibility for acquiring this level of education. Studying at lower and upper

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<sup>2</sup> In general education institutions, full-time stationary study is for those who are subject to compulsory school attendance or for students for whom learning is the full-time activity. In full-time study, the share of classroom instruction exceeds that of independent learning. Non-stationary study is aimed at adult learners, independent learning having a larger share than lessons compared to full-time study. Lessons also include time for provision of various services supporting the development of students, for instance, career counselling (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act §22).

<sup>3</sup> According to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, stationary and non-stationary study forms are defined by the amount of individual work. In case of stationary studies, individual work forms less than half of study prescribed by the study program, in non-stationary study, individual work is more than half.

secondary education levels in municipal and state owned schools<sup>4</sup> is free of charge, irrespective of the age of the student.

According to the web page of the Ministry of Research and Education, there are 39 general education schools in Estonia, where it is possible for adults to study. Out of these, 16 are gymnasiums specialised to non-stationary studies and the other are evening or distance learning programmes opened by regular schools. All except one of these schools are in municipal ownership<sup>5</sup>.

Within the system of vocational education, it is possible to acquire general education in two types of study. It is possible to acquire lower secondary education while attending **vocational education studies that do not require this level of education** (however obtaining lower secondary education diploma is optional in this program). This kind of study is organised in **cooperation between a general education and a vocational education institution** and a person gets two certificates at the end of the studies: one from the general school for the lower secondary education and the other from the vocational school for the vocational studies. As of August 2013, there were 75 vocational study programmes without the requirement of the lower secondary education at 20 vocational educational institutions (see Table 1). However, it is not possible in all of these programmes to acquire lower secondary education. This possibility exists for example at Kopli Vocational School of Tallinn, Põltsamaa Vocational School, Vana-Vigala Technical and Service Schools<sup>6</sup>.

Upper secondary vocational education can be acquired within vocational education studies. Although according to the Adult Education Act adults can study in non-stationary form, in reality no such possibilities are offered. There were 33 vocational schools in 2013 that offered upper secondary vocational education in total with 425 opened study programmes. Vocational education institutions are as a rule state owned but also some schools are in private or municipal ownership.

**Table 1 Number of institutions giving vocational education and different study programs with open admission.**

	Number of institutions	Study programs
Vocational education without the requirement of the lower secondary education	20	75
Vocational education based on the lower secondary education	28	293
Vocational upper secondary education	37	440
Vocational education based on upper secondary education	46	622

*Source: Estonian Educational Information System*

<sup>4</sup> In the study year 2012/13 there were in total 37 privately owned schools out of 548 general education schools (Estonian Education Information System).

<sup>5</sup> There is one bigger privately owned gymnasium Audentese Erakool, which has non-stationary studies department for adults. Additionally there are one to four adult students (over 20 years) in different privately owned schools, which are not listed in the Ministry's webpage as institutions for adult education.

<sup>6</sup> This information is based on the web search of vocational schools' web pages. The possibility to study at the lower general education level was searched for in the webpage of schools that offer study programs for vocational education without the requirement of lower secondary education.

In conclusion there are specific institutions for adults to study in different levels. Lower secondary education and general upper secondary education is usually acquired in non-stationary form of studies. In vocational upper secondary education this kind of study arrangement is not possible.

### 2.2.2 Preconditions for studies

As a rule, for studies at the next level, **a certificate of a lower level of education is required**. For example, for study programmes at post-lower secondary level of education, it is necessary to have a certificate of lower secondary education (or a corresponding certificate of acquiring this level of education abroad).

**For non-stationary** studies in general education, in most cases **the person has to be over 17 years of age**. Lower secondary level of education is obligatory and possibilities for acquiring this level of education have to be created for everybody, regardless of their age.

For entering upper secondary education one might have to take the entrance exams, i.e. upper secondary level education is not guaranteed to everybody. At the same time there is no competition in adults' gymnasiums, everybody with lower secondary education can start their upper secondary education in these schools.

For attending a vocational upper secondary programme a certification of lower secondary education is required. If a person is **at least 22 years old and has not completed lower secondary education, competencies equal to lower secondary education are required**. It is school's task to evaluate the competencies (Vocational Educational Institutions Act §25).

In general, the completion of lower secondary education is mandatory in order to obtain an upper secondary education, nevertheless, in theory, it is possible to study in upper secondary level education without having a diploma of lower secondary education (in vocational upper secondary education). In this case the competencies equal to lower secondary education have to be acquired in everyday life, nevertheless according to the participants of the focus groups this is not a common practice.

### 2.2.3 Study programmes

According to Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act (PGS) there are three national general education study programmes in Estonia: the national study programme for lower secondary education (PRÕK), simplified lower secondary education and upper secondary education. The same national study programme applies both to stationary and non-stationary studies. In case of non-stationary studies, it is possible to make some modifications in time and load of studies. The school study programme is designed in order to apply national program in their school and to take account the specific conditions of the school.

Vocational education study programmes without the requirement of lower secondary education are created by the school. There is no national programme. If a person attends the programme, where beside vocational education, the general lower secondary level of education is acquired the latter takes part according to the national study programme for general schools of lower secondary level of education.

National general education study programs include compulsory curricula for at least following subjects:

- **language and literature:** Estonian (for Estonian language schools), Russian (for Russian language schools), and literature;
- **foreign languages:** Estonian as the second language, first foreign language – English, German, French, Russian, second foreign language – English, German, French, Russian.
- **mathematics:** mathematics in lower secondary education school, broader and narrow mathematics for upper secondary level of education school.
- **natural sciences:** biology, geography, physics, chemistry and for lower secondary education also nature studies;
- **social studies:** personal, social and health education, history, civics and citizenship education;
- **art subjects:** music, arts;
- **technology** in the national curriculum for lower secondary education schools: crafts, handicraft and home economics, technology studies;
- **physical education:** physical education

As a minor difference, there is **no physical education in non-stationary studies**. In lower secondary education schools, there are no **physical education, home economics, crafts, handicraft, and technology studies**. Additionally, it is possible to give up **second foreign language** studies in case of lower secondary education.

In case of an agreement between a student and a principal a school **may take into account studies or activities pursued outside of the school study programme** if this enables one to achieve the study outcomes prescribed by the individual or school study programme. In non-stationary studies a pupil may study only **single subjects**. In this case there must be an individual curriculum for each study year. Those who are older than obligatory school attendance age have the right to graduate the general school as an **external student**.

In case of vocational upper secondary education, there are different study programs according to vocation. The general logic is that there are national study programs for different qualifications<sup>7</sup> and school study programs supplement and specify the national programme at the school level. If there is no national study programme, the school creates the programme on the basis of the description of the vocational qualification. The school study programme is registered in a national registry after checking its consistency with regulations and other study programmes. The vocational upper secondary level education study program includes 40 weeks of general education studies. Of this, half is only general education studies and the other half is integrated with vocational education subjects (Pilli, Kuusk, p. 5).

For adults there are certain exceptions made in formal education: enabling non-stationary studies, studying as external student, recognizing previous out of school activities as a part of studies and omitting certain subjects from the study program. However, there is no specific study programs for adults, the general study programs are used for teaching grownups. Evaluating and recognizing the competences acquired outside of school are not common in the general education. Therefore adults can not move on faster in their educational path by using their experiences drawn from everyday life (look also the empirical part of the study).

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<sup>7</sup> This is only for vocational upper secondary education level studies. For lower level studies there are only school study programs and no national study programs created.

#### **2.2.4 Prison education as a special form of adult secondary education**

Saar & Roosmaa (2011) bring into attention the fact that prison education is also a part of lifelong learning and the adult secondary education system. Education provides an opportunity to increase chances for employment and hence facilitates rehabilitation. Most of the prison education in Estonia is provided by the same adult gymnasiums that also teach outside of the prisons. The current study is not focussing on this type of education, nevertheless at some instances we will bring attention also to the prison education. Regarding the study programs or conditions of graduation there are no differences in prison education compared to regular education.

#### **2.2.5 Conditions of graduation**

##### ***Lower secondary education***

The requirements of graduation of basic school (lower secondary education) are the following (PRÕK §23):

- most recent yearly grades in subjects are at least “satisfactory”
- carried out a creative work
- scored at least a “satisfactory” on:
  - the examination in Estonian or Estonian as a second language
  - mathematics examination and
  - one freely chosen examination

In exceptional cases there may be one weak or poor examination grade or most recent yearly grade in two subjects (p.2).

An external pupil will be considered to have graduated from basic school if he or she has passed the basic school final examinations and passed the subject examinations in courses in which he or she lacks grades to be entered on to the basic school graduation certificate or in which he or she has not proved his or her knowledge and skills through assessment of previous learning and work experience. An external pupil will not be assessed in physical education, handicraft and home economics or technology studies. Schools where non-stationary learning is implemented are obliged to create conditions for graduation as an external pupil for a person beyond the compulsory schooling age. The school has to provide the external pupil with study activities supervised by the school, comprising at least 15 academic hours. The rest of studying takes place independently.

##### ***Upper secondary education***

In order to graduate from an upper secondary school PGS sets following conditions:

1. Following state examinations have to be taken (passed if at least one per cent of the maximum score has been obtained):
  - a. in Estonian or, in the events provided for in the national curriculum for upper secondary schools, in Estonian as a second language
  - b. in mathematics and
  - c. in a foreign language.
2. a school examination of the upper secondary school must be passed with at least satisfactory results (PGS §31 lg 5);

3. a student research paper or practical work, except in the event of graduation from school as an external student with at least satisfactory results (PGS §31 lg 5).

National study program adds to this (GRÕK §18 lg 3):

4. most recent yearly grades in subjects are at least “satisfactory”

The conditions for graduation of external pupils are the same in case of the upper secondary education as it is in lower secondary education. I.e. all the exams and courses must be passed.

### ***Vocational education***

A person graduates if the competencies required in the study program are attained.

#### **2.2.6 Regulation of dropping out**

Aside personal wish to terminate attending to school there are several reasons why a person may be excluded from the school. Minimum level of achievement is set also for adult education with PGS (§28):

1. if, upon acquisition of basic education, the student is **absent from lessons without a good reason** and they cannot therefore be transferred to the next class, except a student subject to the duty to attend school;
2. if the student fails to fulfil the conditions of graduation from an upper secondary school within the **standard period of study** and their period of study has not been extended under an individual curriculum;
3. if **over a half of the course grades received by the student are “weak” or “poor”** in three or more subjects over the academic year when studying in an upper secondary school;
4. if, while pursuing studies in the non-stationary form, the student has **not participated in studies for five consecutive study weeks**, except a student subject to the duty to attend school.

The exclusion from the vocational education institution is not regulated by law.

## **2.3 Support for learning adults**

### ***General education schools***

Regarding the support measures there is mostly no differentiating between adult and young learners. If a person studies part-time, he/she has the right to take **one year leave** per three years of study (Basic schools and upper secondary schools act §22 p. 7). There is no such possibility for full-time students.

The minimum obligatory support measures in case of learning on upper or lower secondary level are prescribed by law. Naturally the closest persons to pupils in school are teachers, who have to observe the coping of students at school and, where necessary, **adjust studies according to the needs of students** (PGS §37 p. 1). For the purpose of developing the abilities and talents of students, their individual study needs have to be identified, suitable teaching methods chosen and, where necessary, differentiated teaching has to be carried out. Schools provide students who temporarily fall behind in attaining the presumable learning outcomes with additional pedagogical guidance outside lessons. Students will be provided with the services of at least a **special education teacher**

(including a speech therapist), **psychologist** and **social educator**. The owners of the schools will create and the heads of school will organise the opportunities for implementation of the services of support specialists.

Once a year a **developmental conversation** with students is carried out based on the objectives of development that are mutually agreed upon.

The school may but does not have to have **boarding school facilities** (PGS §39). **State supported places** in boarding school facilities are given to the basic education-acquiring children of families who have difficulties. There is no prescribed support for adults in this respect.

The school will allow students acquiring basic education to **freely use the educational literature** (e.g. textbooks, workbooks, exercise-books and worksheets) required for completion of at least the school curriculum and allow students acquiring general secondary education to **freely use textbooks** required for completion of at least the school curriculum. The Ministry of Education and Research will, per grade and subject, ensure the availability of the minimum educational literature required for completion of national curricula (PGS §20 p. 1,2). The school has to have a library, which has at least the educational literature collection (PGS §41).

The owner of a school organises catering for students at school (PGS §42). The **state budget** contains support for covering the **school lunch expenses** of students acquiring basic education in the **stationary studies** in municipal and private schools. This does not apply to students in non-stationary studies.

Local municipalities have to organise transport to the educational institution and back (The Education Act §7 p. 2). The conditions are decided by the municipalities. In some municipalities the law is interpreted so that the transportation has to be organised only to the children at the compulsory school age<sup>8</sup>.

To sum up, adults can study free in general education schools, there is provided educational literature, additional pedagogical guidance if necessary, one year leave and also students individual needs are taken into account. However material support for covering the costs of accommodation, transportation and food, is not provided for adults in general education schools. Adult learners in difficult financial situation have the possibility to ask for help from local municipality. It means that adult learners in general schools are entitled to the same financial help as other people in need.

### ***Vocational education institutions***

By law the pupils of vocational education institutions have among others the following rights:

- obtain a study allowance/scholarship
- obtain support for covering school lunch in case of full-time studies and if person is up to 20 years old
- obtain compensation for travel expenses. This is prescribed for those in full time studies, who study in formal vocational education, on a place commissioned by the state (Conditions and

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<sup>8</sup> The regulation is worded as follows: Local governments shall keep records of children of compulsory school age and ensure monitoring of compulsory school attendance, provide children with material and other assistance in the performance of the obligation to attend school, organise transport to the educational institution and back, and ensure medical care and meals during school hours

policies for yearly reimbursement of transportation costs for students §11 (*Õpilaste sõidukulu iga-aastase hüvitamise ulatus ja kord*))

- take academic leave of up to two years for health reasons, of up to one year in the case of performing conscript or alternative service, and to care for a child until the child is three years old
- obtain support services free of charge for the support of studies

Subsidies are prescribed in the state budget for covering the expenses of school lunch of pupils up to twenty years of age who have not completed secondary education and who study in full-time study according to initial training curricula. Thus **lunch expenses are not covered** for adult learners.

Vocational education pupils are entitled to **basic study allowance** (which is 38.35 euros in 2014) during nominal period of study prescribed by curriculum (Study Allowances and Study Loans Act (*Õppetootuste ja õppelaenu seadus – ÕÕS*)). The allowance is granted in order to cover expenses related to the acquisition of education. Students are entitled to the study allowance if they:

- study according to a curriculum of formal vocational education which foresees student training places formed on the basis of state commissioned education
- study in full-time study
- and are not on academic leave

The allowance is granted based on the order of merit list and the application of a student. Thus there is no upper age limit for applying the allowance. Nevertheless, not all students are eligible for the allowance, only those who have the best study results. Studying full-time is usually complicated to adults. At the same time studying part-time is. Adults find participating in full-time studies usually more complicated compared to studying part-time, however the latter enables working and therefore there is less need for study allowance. The surplus in the basic allowance funds is added to the special allowance fund. From the special allowance fund allowances can be granted disregarding the requirements specified and taking into account other circumstances which hinder the pupil from continuing his or her studies. The procedure for the use of the special allowance fund is approved by the board of the educational institution (*ÕÕS §5 p. 5*).

State guaranteed study loans are only for those who have acquired upper secondary level education (*ÕÕS §15*). Thus those who pursue studies in secondary education level **are not entitled for study loans**.

Thus adults in vocational education are entitled to longer leave to care for a child than in general education. Additionally, a full-time students studying at the upper secondary level are entitled to receive a reimbursement of travel expenses and also a study allowance in case of the good study results. These benefits are not offered to adults who are studying in general education schools or part-time. Free school lunches are not provided to adults in general education schools nor in vocational education institutions, similarly adult students are not entitled to study loans. In respect of the need-based financial aid, students in vocational schools can apply for the support through the school, while students in general education schools can apply only for the general subsistence allowance.

### ***Employers***

Working adults have the possibility to take a **study leave** for up to 30 calendar days per year. In case of formal studies, 20 calendar days are paid at the average wage. For graduation from formal study, study leave of 15 days is granted, during which national minimum wage is paid. This applies irrespective of whether one participates in full-time or part-time studies (Adult Education Act §8).

Therefore employers have a relatively heavy burden in enabling lifelong learning. It has to be borne in mind that employer is obligated to pay also for the substitute worker in addition to the employee at study leave.

### ***Unemployment and studying***

A person in fulltime studies cannot be registered as unemployed. An unemployed person who starts fulltime studies therefore loses access to most support services and allowances provided by the Unemployment Insurance Fund. This includes financial support in the form of unemployment benefits, scholarships and compensation of transportation and accommodation expenses while in training. Students can be registered as unemployed if they are on academic leave or have worked at least 180 days in the last 12 months. (§6 Labour Market Services and Benefits Act/*Tööturuteenuste ja -toetuste seadus*)

Being a registered unemployed person also has the advantage of having health insurance, which is also guaranteed to students of vocational schools but not to students of general secondary education if they are older than 21 for lower secondary or older than 24 when entering upper secondary (§5 Health Insurance Act/*Ravikindlustuse seadus*).

With respect to benefits, being an unemployed is more attractive to adults than studying in general education, because unemployed people are entitled to labour market services, unemployment benefits and health insurance, unlike adult students of general education schools. Although health insurance is guaranteed in vocational schools, adults still lose the unemployment benefits and labour market services in case of starting the studies in vocational education institution. Therefore studying in general education or in vocational education is not an attractive alternative for unemployment at the moment.

## **2.4 Previous studies on adult formal education in Estonia**

In Estonia, as elsewhere, adult education has expanded upon mostly within lifelong learning studies. Adult secondary level education has previously been studied within the framework of the international LLL2010 project (see Saar ja Roosalu 2011). The project didn't concentrate on secondary education specifically but rather on formal adult education more generally. The subject has been also studied by Tartu University's research centre RAKE in 2012. More specifically they studied reasons for dropping out of vocational education in Estonia. This study mostly focused on young people and their educational choices, but it also gives some insights about the problems facing Estonian secondary vocational education. Third study that has touched on the subject was conducted by Estonian Center for Applied Research CentAR and regarded participation in lifelong learning by people without vocational and tertiary education. We will now give an overview of the relevant results of these studies.

**Lifelong learning 2010 (LLL2010)** gathered original data about adult learners in formal education by defining the group as follows: adult learner has left initial education; has re-entered the formal education system; and there was a gap of at least two years between these two. In the country report for Estonia adults' attitudes, motives, confidence and satisfaction with continuing their studies was examined. They found that provision of flexible study forms is rather limited in Estonia and education institutions could place more emphasis on the students' personal interests and goal attainment. While 70% of institutions state that one-to-one teaching is practiced often, only third of the students agree with this. Compared to others ISCED level 1-2 institutions offered less support, like study advice, organised transport and dormitory, to their students. (Roosmaa et al 2010)

Most important problems for adults learning on ISCED levels 1-4 were time, money and transportation. Family problems, work and lack of preparation for studies were also frequently mentioned and a smaller proportion had problems with organizing childcare. Adult learning on ISCED levels 1-3 were slightly less satisfied with the general learning climate, but a bit more satisfied with the practical organization of the institution than those studying on higher levels. Although social control is the weakest motive for learning, it was found that for low-skilled adults it seems to have a significant effect. (Roosmaa et al 2010)

The study on **reasons for dropping out of vocational education** do not consider the special characteristics of adult learners. This report nevertheless brings out important aspects of dropping out of vocational education in Estonia and is therefore relevant in the context of the current study. The study used interviews with school personnel, current students in risk of dropping out and recent dropouts. The main results of the study are presented in Figure 4. In addition to studying reasons for dropping out they evaluated different preventative measures based on a review of literature and the data they gathered. (Espenberg et al 2012) As the focus of the report is reducing drop-out rates most of the suggested measures concern development discussions, professional group instructors, career counselling and other informative measures. In addition the financial reasons were mentioned as an important reason for dropping out, corresponding prevention measures are adequate benefit system and informing students about the benefits.

**Table 2 Reasons for dropping out of vocational education and needed prevention measures, adapted from Espenberg et al 2012:91.**

	Reasons for dropping out	Prevention measures
<b>Personal reasons</b>	Wrong speciality	Better career counselling at lower secondary schools; Focusing on general subjects over the first year of school and introducing different specialties
	Little motivation	Measures for reducing absences; professional group instructors
	Difficulties adapting, social immaturity	Development discussions; professional group instructors
<b>Family related reasons</b>	Problems in the family Parenthood	Development discussions
<b>Financial reasons</b>	Entering the labour market and the related lack of time	Informing students the about benefits;

	Lack of finances	adequate benefit system
<b>School related reasons</b>	Conflicts with teachers or peers Incompetent behaviour by the school personnel	Development discussions with students and with teachers

The study of **adults without vocational qualifications and their participation in lifelong learning** concentrated on all different types of learning. Municipalities and people without vocational education were questioned and interviews with employers supported the conclusions. Also the data from Estonian Statistics were analysed. The study found that participation in lifelong learning depends on the person's level of formal general education but is not influenced by vocational qualifications. Therefore secondary education may be a vital tool to support lifelong learning, as a person obtains the learning skills and strategies which aid in further development of various other skills.

The study also mapped the motivation and obstacles to studying. 80% of adults participating in formal education named learning a vocation and/or obtaining a diploma as the main reason for returning to school. About half of the respondents said that learning skills important for everyday life and wishing to improve knowledge on subjects of personal interest as important reasons. Those adults who participated in continuous training state work related reasons (like improving career opportunities, employer demanded) as the most important motivation. Adults who were not participating and did not wish to participate claimed that health, age and other personal reasons were the main obstacle. Fifth of those who were not participating but wished to participate said that work schedule was the main obstacle. More than 10% said that training is too expensive and another 10% stated other personal reasons as obstacles. People who had participated in formal education but wished they had done so more stated work schedule as the main obstacle (40%). More than fifth of respondents said that there were no suitable training opportunities nearby. (Järve et al 2012)

The study made a number of recommendations to improve lifelong learning opportunities for adults without vocational and tertiary education, but it should be noted that the purpose was to encourage all forms of studying. The recommendations included (Järve et al 2012):

- training opportunities to improve learning skills and languages;
- use programmes (like Knowledge Lift in Sweden) to increase the general education level of many people over a brief period;
- improvement of the availability of information on learning opportunities and support measures;
- motivate employers to invest in employees education through encouraging cooperation between schools and employers as well as through awarding employers who considerably invest in employees;
- increase opportunities by diversifying financing opportunities through vouchers or learning accounts or by allowing withdrawals from pension funds;
- increasing day-care opportunities for adults with small children.(Järve et al 2012)

Simultaneously with the current study **the Association of Estonian Adult Educators Andras carried out round table discussions** in some selected municipalities to find solutions how to better motivate adults to participate in learning activities. This project is again concerned with adult education in general. The discussions were held in 2013 and although there aren't any reports analysing the

outcomes the summaries of each discussion are freely available online<sup>9</sup>. A superficial overview of these shows that the main barriers that the participants in county reports found were financial barriers, motivational issues, transportation and care responsibilities but also lack of information. The discussions concluded that financial support in the form of scholarships linked to actual school/training attendance is a must have. Also support for transportation is important to increase the mobility of potential learners. The summaries highlight another problem with the lack of information about people without education. It was generally concluded that the municipalities should be given a more concrete responsibility to track these people and direct them back to education through social workers and other staff. Another issue that was raised in multiple summaries was the general attitude towards lifelong learning in the society as a whole and more specifically the attitude of employers that hinders the participation of employees.

As we can see the different studies have captured different aspects of the problem complementing each other in different ways. It follows that different groups vary in their barriers as well as motivation, but situational and structural determinants seem more prevalent throughout these previous studies. They have also made a number of suggestions for improving the participation in lifelong learning. The aim of this study is to find out which types of barriers are more important for the target groups in question and whether these groups could also benefit from the aforementioned measures.

## 2.5 Overview of the education of adults in Estonia and their participation in secondary education

### 2.5.1 Overview of people without upper secondary education in Estonia

Number of adults (people between 20-64 years) without secondary education in Estonia is 118 000, which is ca 15% of the population. Only 1% is without lower secondary education. Thus there are very few people with lower education level than is obligatory minimum.

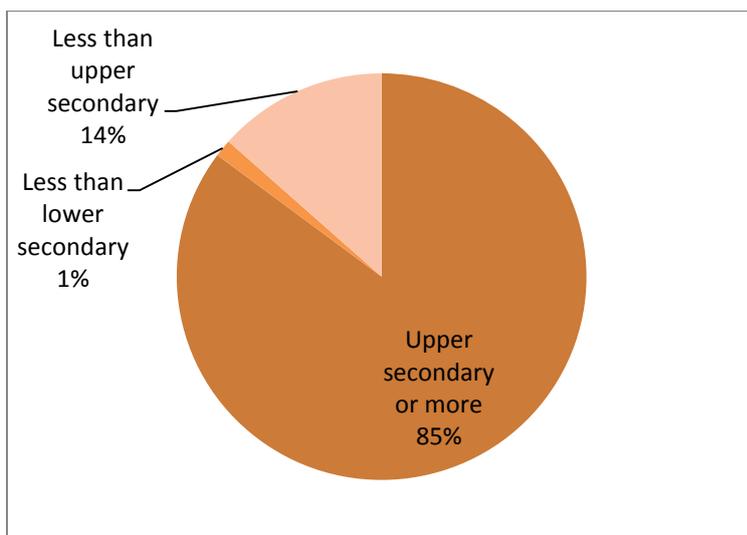


Figure 3 Distribution of people according to the levels of education, 2011.

Source: Census 2011, Estonian Statistics

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.andras.ee/client/default.asp?wa\\_id=1525&wa\\_id\\_key=](http://www.andras.ee/client/default.asp?wa_id=1525&wa_id_key=)

Among those without secondary education the share of men is around twice as high as the share of women (75 thousand men and 43 thousand women). Respectively the share of those without upper secondary education among men is 19% and among women 10%.

Both absolute and relative share of people without upper secondary level of education is higher in younger age groups. Many of those in the age group 20-24 are still studying and among them the share will decline somewhat. In the age groups 25-39 16-18% are without upper secondary education (in each age group 14-15 thousand people). In the age groups 40-54, there are twice less people without upper secondary education (only 7-9%, 6-8 thousand in each five-year age group). In the older age groups the share of those without upper secondary education is again higher.

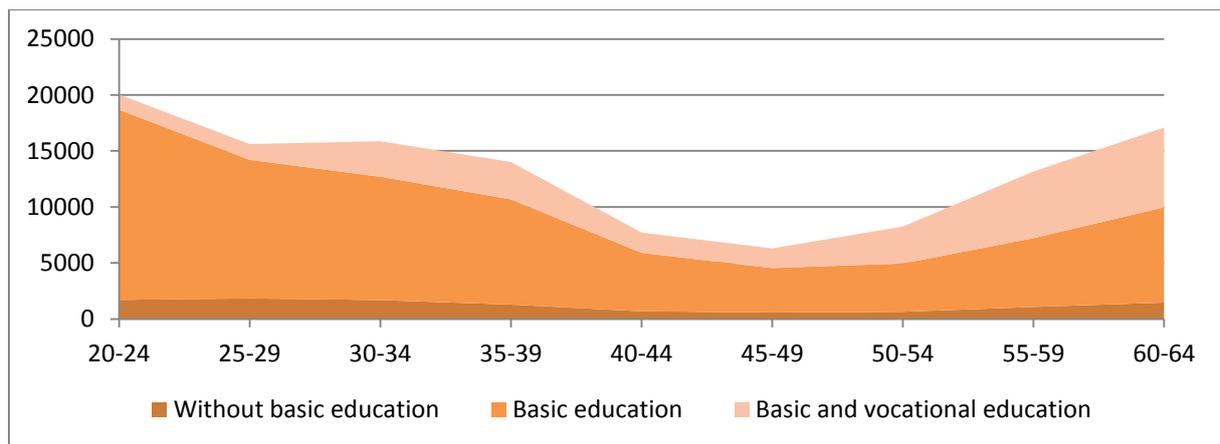


Figure 4 People without lower and upper secondary education according to the age groups, 2011.

Source: Census 2011, Estonian Statistics

Regionally excel Ida-Viru, Tartu and Harju counties with lower share of people without upper secondary education. At the same time, as these counties are with higher population, the absolute number of people without upper secondary education is still highest in these countries.

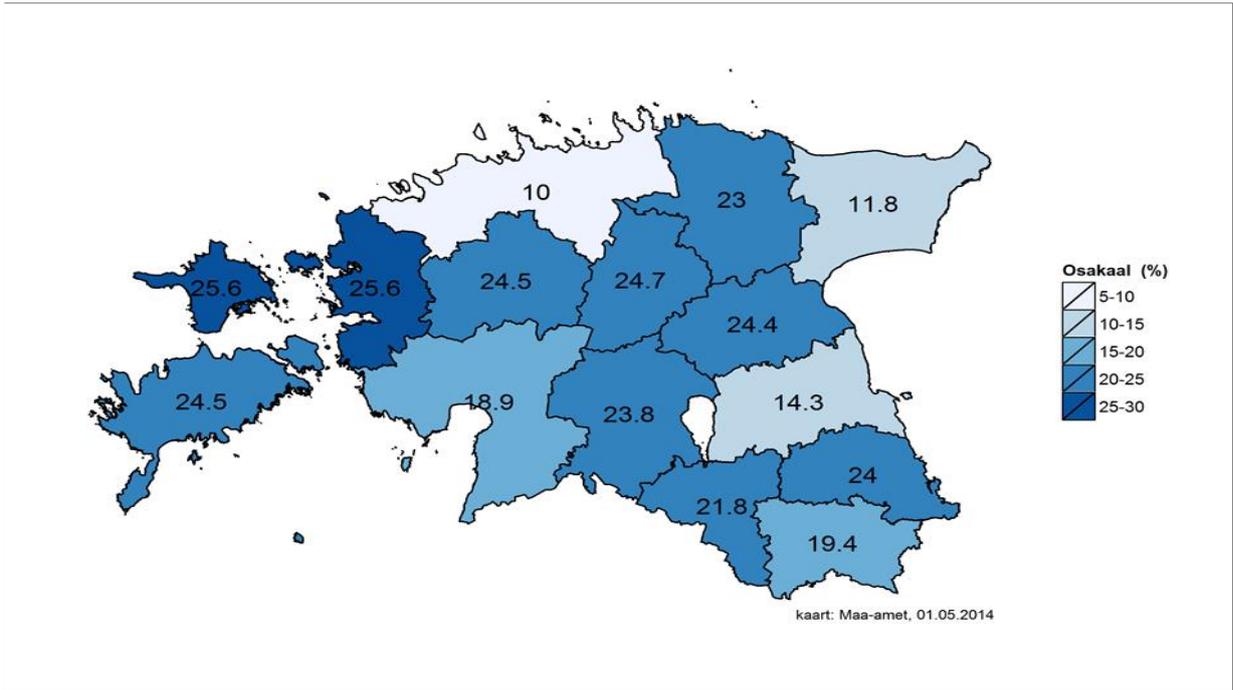


Figure 5 The share of the adult population (20-64 years old) without upper secondary education regionally, 2011.

Source: Census 2011, Estonian Statistics

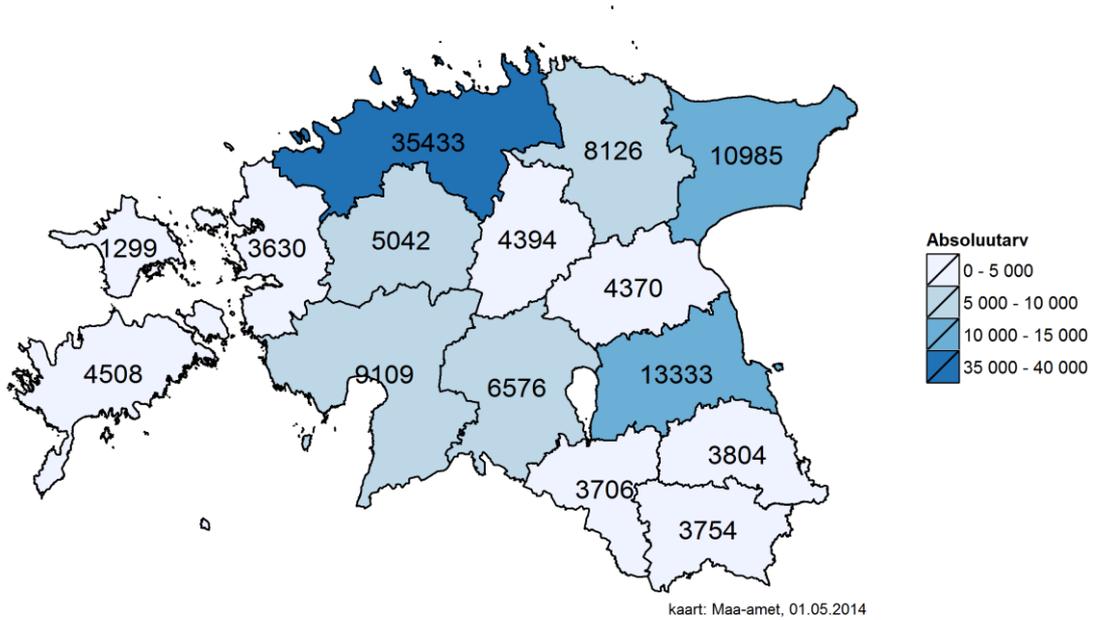


Figure 6 The number of adults (20-64 years old) without upper secondary education regionally, 2011.

Source: Census 2011, Estonian Statistics

People with below upper secondary education are disadvantaged in terms of their situation in the labour market, health and overall economic well-being compared to people who have this qualification. Those without an upper secondary education are more often unemployed and do not participate in the labour market. Unemployment rate in 2013 for those (aged 15-74) without upper secondary education was 15%, for those with upper secondary education but without tertiary education it was 10%. Participation in labour force for those who have lower secondary education (aged 25-64) was in 2013 67% and for those who have upper secondary level of education 82%. Respectively also in average the income of those with lower secondary education is lower than of those who have higher education level.

Before designing the support measures for the adults without lower secondary education it should be taken into account that this group of people is very small. The amount of adults without upper secondary education is little bit bigger, but nevertheless there is only three counties where the number of these people exceeds five thousand. In general people without upper secondary education qualification are disadvantaged in regards to economic situation and labour market prospects compared to the average in Estonia.

### 2.5.2 Participation in adult secondary education

Around 5000 persons aged over 20 were enrolled to general or vocational education schools in the study year of 2013/14. This forms around 4% of all people without upper secondary education (in age group 20-64). Of those around 1000 were in vocational education programs that do not give upper or lower secondary education, thus around 5000 studied on the lower or upper secondary education level, i.e. around 4% of those without upper secondary education.

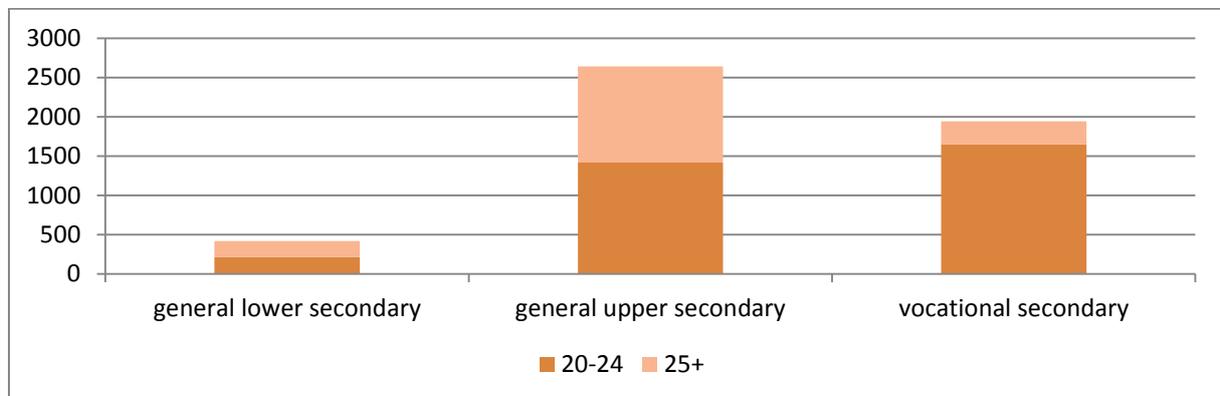
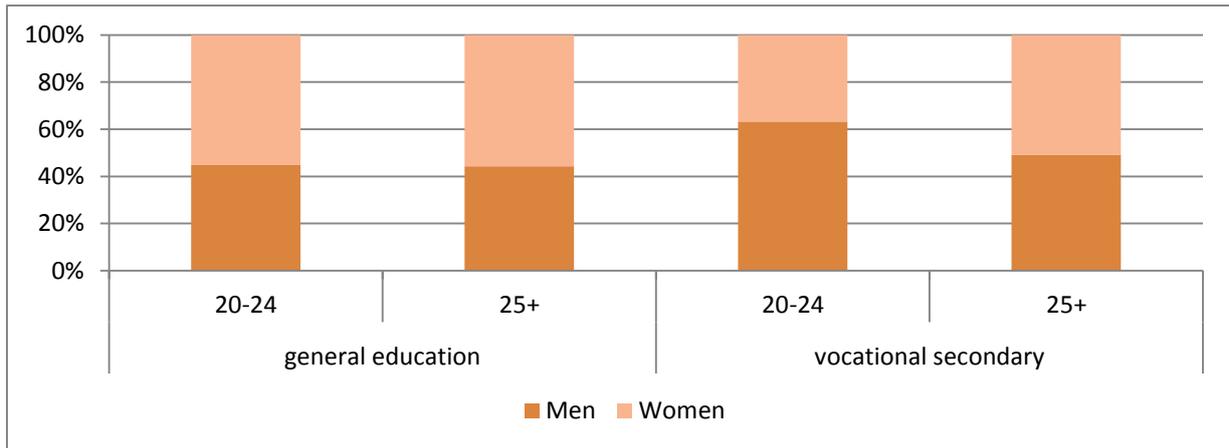


Figure 7 Adult persons who study in different school levels and institutions (school year 2013/14).

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, Estonian Educational Registry

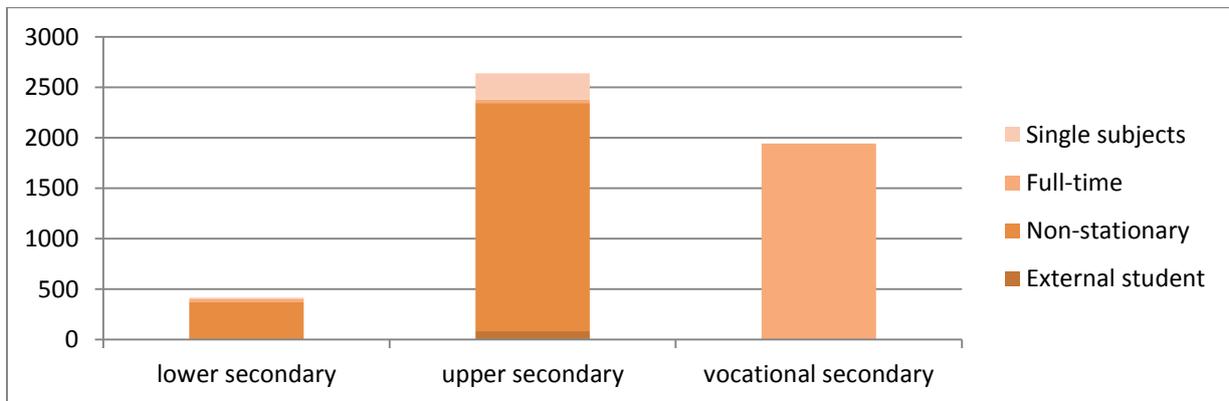
While in general more women than men tend to participate in formal studies, there is one group where more men than women participate. This is vocational secondary education in the age group 20-24.



**Figure 8** Distribution of persons who study in different institutions by sex (school year 2013/14 for vocational secondary education, 2011 for general education).

*Source: Ministry of Education and Science, Estonian Educational Registry; census 2011, Statistics Estonia*

Those adults who study in general education lower or upper secondary level do it mostly in non-stationary form of studies, some study also single subjects or as external students. In total there are only 70 people in full-time studies. At the same time those 1941 adults who studied in the vocational secondary education level did it all in full-time studies. None were studying in non-stationary form, as this is not possible.



**Figure 9** Form of study according to the type of study (school year 2013/14).

*Source: Ministry of Education and Science, Estonian Educational Registry*

To sum up, very small amount of adults without upper secondary education are currently obtaining this qualification. Most of the adult learners are acquiring general upper secondary education in non-stationary form. Vocational secondary education is offered only in stationary form, therefore adults studying in vocational schools are mostly young people – 20-24 years old.

### 2.5.3 Dropping out of adult secondary education

Adults are free in their educational decisions, they can choose whether to begin the studies, but also whether to stop pursuing the education. Adults have also many obligations what makes it difficult to fit the studies in to everyday life. Therefore adults tend to have bigger drop-out rates. According to Estonian Educational Information System 19% of the people enrolled to vocational secondary

education have dropped out during last six years. The drop-out rate for the age group under twenty is 16%, for the 20-24 years old 21% and above 25 years old 20%.

The drop-out rate in general education schools is even higher. According to the Ministry of Education and Research the drop-out rate in non-stationary lower secondary education (study year 2006/2007 until 2011/2012) is 41% on average and in upper secondary level 34%. Accordingly very few adults decide to return to secondary education and many of them drop out.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction and target groups

In this chapter the overview of target groups, methodology of data gathering, samples and strategy of the analysis is presented. The methodology of the study was designed with the help of Kjell Rubenson from The University of British Columbia, who advised the research team throughout the research.

The target groups of the study are:

- adults without secondary education, who are not currently participating in formal education;
- adults without secondary education, who have returned to formal education and are currently studying;
- adults without secondary education, who have dropped out from the non-stationary general education;
- Administrative staff and teachers of the formal education institutions;
- Local governments.

In the context of this study adults are defined as people between 20 and 64 years of age. More detailed information about the samples representing the target groups is presented at the following subchapters.

In order to cover all the topics and target groups the data was gathered from three main sources. Firstly the people's survey was carried out among adult learners and potential adult learners who do not have upper secondary education yet, to gather information about the barriers and motivation for learning among these target groups. Secondly the survey among the Estonian municipalities was carried out via electronic questionnaires about the support measures that they have offered or are offering to adult learners. And thirdly we spoke to school administrative staff and teachers in focus groups, in order to map the current situation in schools and to understand which changes are anticipated at different levels (study organisation, education management, support measures). In following all three phases of the research are described more closely.

### 3.2 Description of the people's survey

The survey of people targeted adults without lower or upper secondary education who are not currently studying and those who have returned to studying. The target groups were defined as follows:

1. Without upper or lower secondary education, 20-64 years old, has been away from formal education at least a year;
2. Without upper or lower secondary education, 20-64 years old, has been away from formal education at least a year; returned to adult formal education but dropped out;
3. Without upper or lower secondary education, 20-64 years old, has returned to formal education after a break in initial education of at least a year.

Dropping out was defined as being away from studies at least a year, in order to exclude people who were temporarily away from school because of health reasons for example. Defining adults as people

older than 20 years of age is related to the nominal length of studies at the upper secondary level education.

The survey was carried out over the telephone in Estonian as well as Russian language. People were reached by calling randomly generated mobile phone numbers. The planned sample was 500 respondents: 300 for target group 1 and 100 for groups 2 and 3. The survey was carried out in November and December 2013. In the initial stages of the survey it became apparent that target group 3 could not be reached via telephone. A new approach was adopted to interview this target group in schools. All together 11 schools were visited to cover different types of schools regarding region, study organization, curriculum and language of studies. In the final data 56 person's data was gathered via face to face interviews.

Sample characteristics of the surveyed people are presented in the appendix 1. We have weighted the data of currently studying adults using data from Census 2011. Adults not in school are assumed to represent the population as the data was gathered using random sample and there is no description of the population available.

The third target group of adults who had returned to school but dropped out again turned out to be very small in our sample and therefore cannot be analysed separately.

Respondents were presented with the support measures according to the barriers that they mentioned. This means that all respondents did not evaluate all the measures, but only those measures that could be relevant in overcoming the specific barriers that they brought out. The logic used for directing from barriers to support measures is presented at the appendix 2.

The people's survey results were analysed quantitatively with the help of data analysis software STATA. Cross tables and correlation were used as the analyses methods. In addition to point estimates confidence intervals are calculated and presented to show statistical significance.

### **3.3 Description of the municipalities' survey**

The municipalities' survey was designed as an electronic survey with an extensive questionnaire on different support measures. The link to the survey was sent at least to one or two contacts in every municipality. All municipalities were sent the link to their general email address with the plea of forwarding the questionnaire to most competent person. Where possible municipalities' specialists in the field of education were additionally contacted. The first e-mail was sent out in December 2013, in the beginning of January a reminder was sent to those who had not started to fill out the questionnaire and to those who had partially filled it. After two weeks the municipalities that still had not started to fill out the survey were phoned. The data gathering was completed by the end of January 2014.

The electronic form allowed several answers from the same municipality and a number of municipalities had multiple answers. The database was cleared with following rules:

1. Submissions without the name of the municipality were deleted;

2. If a municipality had both an unfinished and finished<sup>10</sup> answer the first one was deleted;
3. If the respondent had left the questionnaire on the first page the municipality was considered as not having responded;
4. If one municipality had more than one complete answer these were combined.

**Table 3 Respondents to the municipalities' survey by size.**

Number of residents	Unfinished responses	Finished responses	All responses	No municipalities in 2013	Ratio of finished responses	Response ratio of municipalities
<b>Up to 1000</b>	3	27	30	42	64%	71%
<b>1000-5000</b>	18	97	115	142	68%	81%
<b>5000-20 000</b>	4	27	31	37	73%	84%
<b>20 000-300 000</b>	0	3	3	4	75%	75%
<b>300 000 +</b>	0	1	1	1	100%	100%
<b>Sum</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>80%</b>

*Source: Number of municipalities in 2013 – Ministry of the Interior*

Most of unfinished responses were filled out until the second page of the survey, which included naming universal measures that are/were available in the municipality. The questionnaire was sent out in the end of 2013, but we continued to gather information until January 2014. This is important because a number of municipalities were merged beginning 1st January. So the number of municipalities decreased from 225 to 215. Therefore some municipalities didn't answer the questionnaire because juridical they were no longer a separate municipality and new officials may have lacked the information. Others nevertheless found a way to answer the questions. So out of the new municipalities 72% responded, meanwhile out of the original 225 69% answered.

The municipalities' survey results can be divided into two parts: first the data on distribution of different general and specific measures in municipalities; and second the specific measures that were provided by the municipalities. The first part was analysed quantitatively using frequency tables with confidence intervals. The data were weighed according to the number of residents so that the municipalities that had responded would represent all municipalities that are approximately the same size. Other responses are weighed by finished answers. For the second part of the data qualitative content analysis was used.

### **3.4 Description of the focus group survey of school personnel**

Altogether 10 focus groups with school personnel were planned in different geographical locations in Estonia. The sample was drawn from all the adult secondary education providers in Estonia. Separate focus groups were held with vocational institutions' representatives and adult gymnasiums' representatives in five different regions. The regions were loosely based on NUTS regions, but transportation opportunities as well as geographical closeness were taken into consideration. The

<sup>10</sup> Please note that 'finished' in this context means having submitted the answers, but does not indicate whether the person had answered all or any of the questions.

focus groups were held in Tallinn, Tartu, Paide, Haapsalu and Narva (vocational only). The cities were chosen because of their good geographical accessibility for other schools in the region.

The head masters of the schools chose the representatives to the focus groups. The only criterion given was that the participants should be interested in the subject of discussion. The exact number and position of participants was also up to the head masters. The maximum number of participants in one focus group was seven in order for everyone to get a word in. The schools in the district were invited one by one until the maximum number of participants was reached and at least three schools were represented.

Unfortunately we were unsuccessful in getting together the adult gymnasiums in the North-Eastern region of Ida-Virumaa. And therefore interviews were held separately in two of the local schools. However, as there are fewer schools in that area compared to other regions, we believe that we managed to gather the information about special characters of the region.

**Table 4** Number of participants in focus groups

Region	Adult gymnasiums		Vocational schools	
	Schools	Participants	Schools	Participants
<b>West</b>	3	5	2	6
<b>South</b>	4	7	3	7
<b>Central</b>	3	7	3	6
<b>North-East</b>	2 (two interviews in two schools)	4 (in one school one to one interview and in the other three interviewees)	2	5
<b>North</b>	4	5	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>29</b>

All but one interview were recorded and transcribed. In one instance the participants refused to be recorded and the supportive interviewer wrote down the answers and when possible citations. The participants were aware that this written summary would still be used in the analysis.

The duration of the focus group was 1,5-2 hours and a half structured interview plan was followed. Firstly participants were asked about the perceived barriers and motivators of adult learners. Then the school personnel were asked about their own adjustments in the schools and lessons to help adults cope with these barriers. Special emphasis was on positive examples and how they felt their work was restricted by the current legislation or other factors. They were additionally asked how they felt the adults' teachers training should be regulated. The last part of the focus group revolved around some potential solutions to support adults in returning to school. The interviewer offered some examples and the participants were given the chance to evaluate the potential impact of these measures. Throughout the interview participants were encouraged to offer solutions to the different problems they faced.

The transcriptions of focus groups were inserted into Nvivo and coded thematically. Initial codes were created following the interview plan to cover all the thematic interests. Additional codes were created for themes that were brought up by the focus group participants. The results in this report are presented thematically. The researchers did not prefer any one opinion to others. Because of the qualitative nature of this part no numerical values about the frequency of answers can be given.

Nevertheless if an opinion was agreed upon by all the participants it will be identified as such. The quotes used in the empirical part have an illustrative purpose and they have been translated from spoken language to written language.

## 4 Empirical evidence

At the analysis of the results we will focus on three topics:

- how the barriers are perceived by different groups
- how adults are currently supported on the school and education system level and which complementary measures are being provided
- how could it be done more effectively

The support measures for adult learners are organized in accordance to the level of the intervention, hence there are different chapters for school level, education system level and support measures.

### 4.1 Motivation and barriers to learning

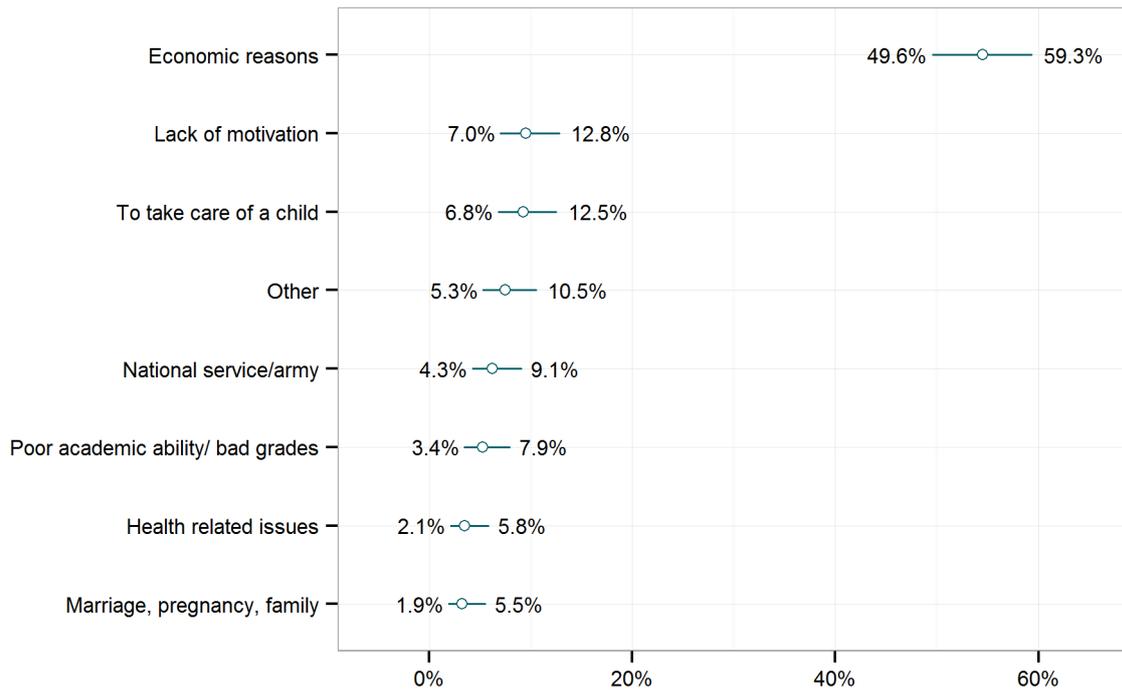
In this chapter we will have a look at the barriers to adults' participation in formal education from the perspective of the (potential) learners as well as from the perspective of the teachers and other school staff. When considering barriers it is important to distinguish between barriers that hinder a person from entering education and those that hinder them from successfully continuing studies until graduation. In the previous chapter we saw that barriers can be either situational, dispositional (attitudinal), academic or structural. It is important to distinguish between different types of barriers, because they have to be addressed differently as we will discuss later.

#### 4.1.1 Reasons for dropping out of initial education

Results from people's survey concern two broader categories – first, adults who are currently continuing their studies at school, and second, adults who have not returned to school (including those who have returned and dropped out again). The next two figures outline the reasons for dropping out in the first place for the two groups. The picture is quite similar – in both cases the financial reasons are clearly the most common (the desire or need to work), other reasons are not so prevalent. Although a lack of motivation and raising a child were also at the top of the list, the difference was not statistically significant compared to the other reasons.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that respondents did not pick their answers from the list of reasons presented to them; instead the spontaneous answers from the respondents were coded by the interviewer. Therefore the distinction between e.g. desire and need to work may be more blurred than seems at first glance. On the other hand these results show how people themselves have rationalised their decisions which need to be taken into account when considering supportive measures.



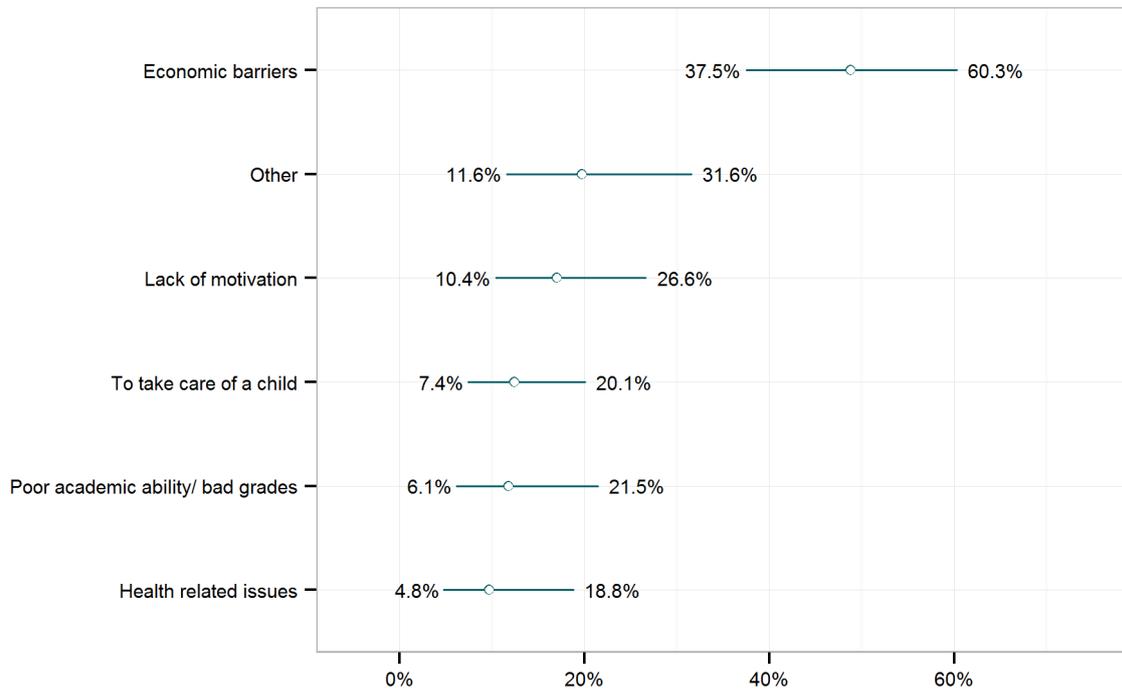
**Figure 10** Reasons for dropping out of studies for adults who have not returned to school.

*Source: People's survey*

The reasons that were mentioned in ten or fewer cases (i.e. 2.5% of the sample) were excluded from the figures. These categories included the following reasons:

- Problems with teachers or school management;
- Wrong choice of specialty;
- Taking care of family members other than children;
- Lessons were boring/person couldn't sit still in class;
- Pressure from friends, family or the society;
- Lack of need for education or a diploma;
- Inconvenient lesson times.

Although the respondents had the possibility to bring out several reasons for dropping out, most of them named only one. Only around 20% marked two or three reasons. A vast majority of multiple answers included the desire or need to work and almost a third marked these two specific reasons (in the figures category "financial reasons" includes both need and desire to work).



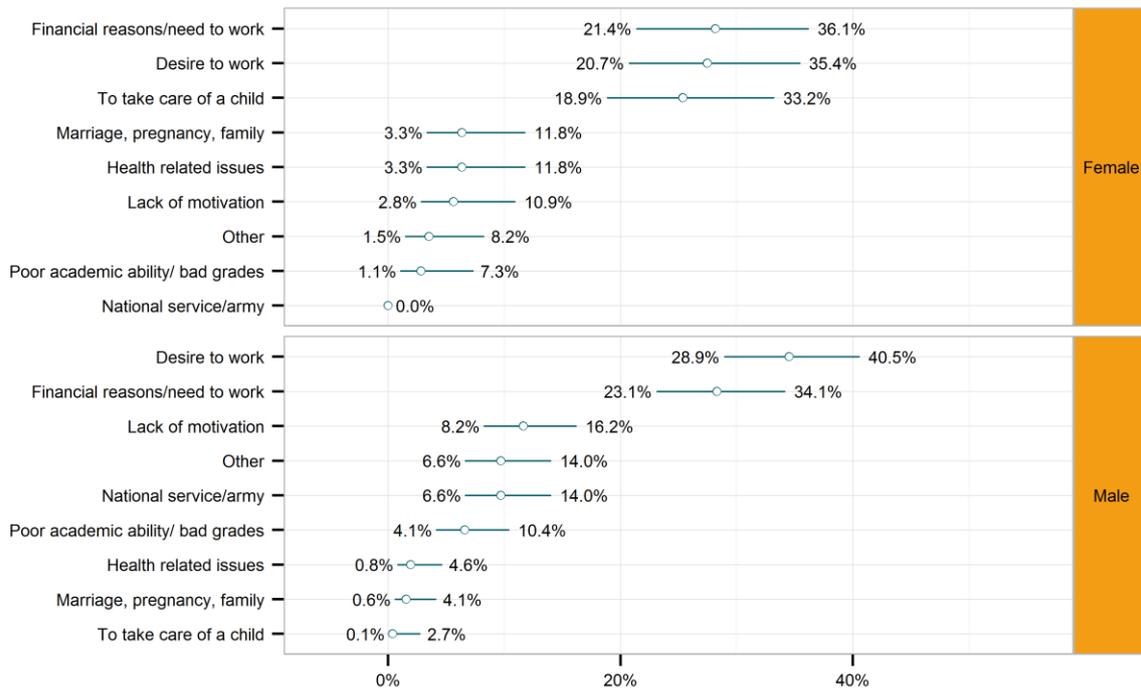
**Figure 11. Reasons for dropping out of studies for adults who have returned to school**

*Source: People's survey*

Among the reasons for dropping out of school, we can identify a few discussed in Espenberg *et al.* (2012), for example economic reasons, motivational issues and parenthood. Nevertheless, unlike in Espenberg *et al.* (2012), our results indicate that **reasons stemming from schools don't seem to play a significant role in school-leaving**. Our survey does not confirm that bad results, wrong specialty or social immaturity were among the main factors of school-leaving. Also, our sample indicates that national military service affected quitting studies in around as many cases as bad results. These differences between two studies could partly be explained by a broader focus of the current study. Espenberg *et al.* (2012) focused on vocational education, but we also include general education. Also the methodology and target group's age varied, therefore the differences in results are not surprising.

The focus group discussions with school personnel confirmed that life changes (often requiring the person to suddenly provide for themselves and/or others) are the main reason for dropping out of initial education, which tends to be very inflexible regarding health and time constraints. Another issue that the personnel highlighted was the enormous study load and time pressure in initial education which are beyond the capabilities of some of the students. Some said that parenthood has become less of a problem over the years due to the teaching of family planning.

So far we have looked at the general results, but the number of observations allows us to inspect the reasons for school-leaving also across some background characteristics. First, we will take a closer look at gender (see figure 12) and age groups (figure 13). As expected, raising a child/children is among the most important reasons for females and negligible for males. Although considering that commonly women stay at home caring for the child and men are the bread winners for the family, it is also likely that men who had become fathers named "need to work" instead of having children. National service or army only interrupted the studies of men, especially in the older age groups.



**Figure 11 Reasons for dropping out by gender if a person is currently not studying.**

*Source: People's survey*

Another interesting aspect is that for some reason younger age groups (and men) have more motivation problems. This may be explained by the high standards in initial education that was brought out by the school personnel. The pressure may be causing stress in students who then feel that any efforts they make are likely to result in low grades and therefore find the school system demotivating. This tendency is problematic, as negative experiences in school system are important barriers for returning to school. Encouraging the participation of a target group with negative learning experiences needs a different approach than encouraging a target group with general motivational problems.

On the other hand the older age groups may be hiding their lack of motivation behind health and age related 'excuses'. In other words people who don't wish to admit their lack of motivation may be rationalising their non-participation with illusory barriers.

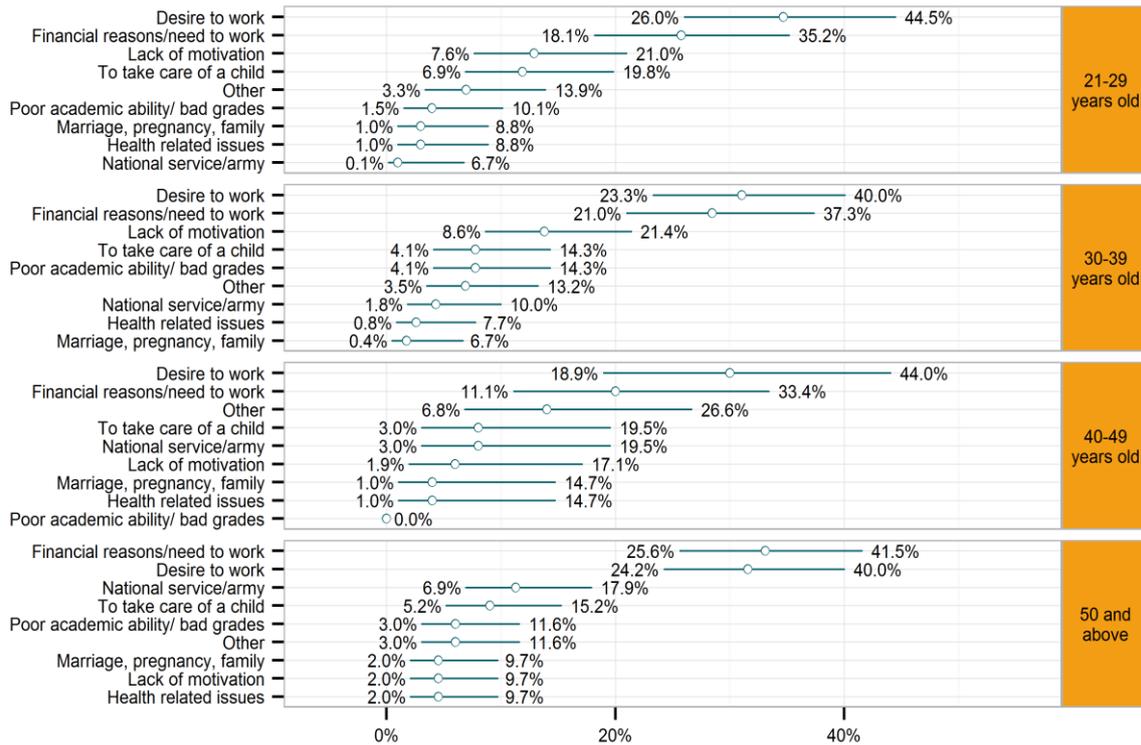
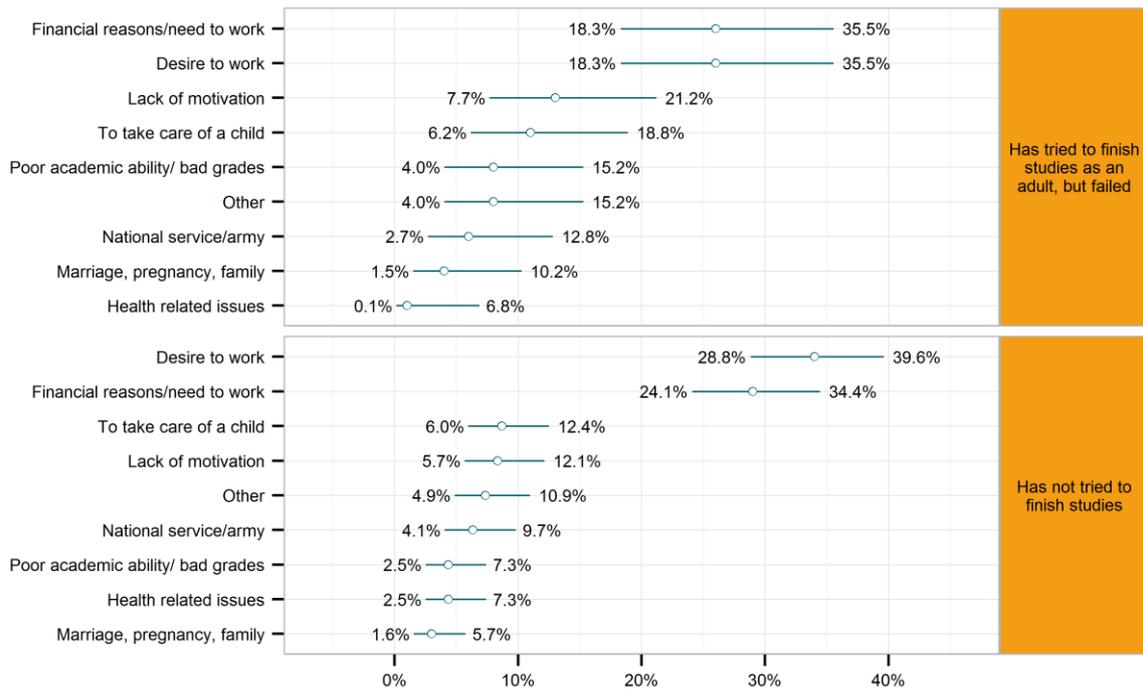


Figure 12 Reasons for dropping out by age groups if a person is currently not studying.

Source: People's survey

Our interest also lies in individuals who have actually returned to studies as adults, but left school, aged 20 or above, without finishing. In general, adults who have already tried to finish their studies are similar to those that haven't by age, region of residence, language spoken at home, type of settlement, labour market status and household background. Surprisingly, the two groups show similar intentions towards going back to school as well. There are a few differences as men have been more active in trying to finish their studies, and proportionally less people have tried to finish lower secondary education.

Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, we don't find any notable differences between the two groups in question, when it comes to reasons for dropping out (see graph below). Bad grades were a more frequent reason for those who were aged 20 or above at school-leave. Although economic reasons and especially the desire to work were mentioned less frequently among respondents who had returned to schools as adults, these were still by far the most important reasons for school-leave, followed by raising children and lack of motivation. In this light, it seems quite clear that the main factors increasing the risk of dropping out again are economic in nature. The desire and need to work imply financial shortages and we will see later, that scholarships are perceived as a potentially effective support measures.



**Figure 13** Reasons for dropping for people who returned to school as adults (but failed to finish) and others (by the age at time of dropping the school).

Source: People’s survey

We also checked for differences over other background variables, such as the region of residence, type of settlement, language spoken at home, plans to return to studies and type of education last attended. In most cases subgroups were very similar, but there were some significant differences. For example, adults who have considered returning to studies, but dropped the idea, mentioned economic reasons and problems as reasons for school-leaving significantly more than people with either certain or no intentions to return to school (see figure 15). Also, there are some differences between those who initially attended adult general education school and vocational school. For the former group the need to work and raising a child are significantly more frequent reasons for school-leaving than for vocational school attenders, but the confidence intervals are very wide and the differences aren’t statistically significant. Attitudinal barriers were similar for both school types, but it is likely that economic reasons play a bigger role for vocational school dropouts.

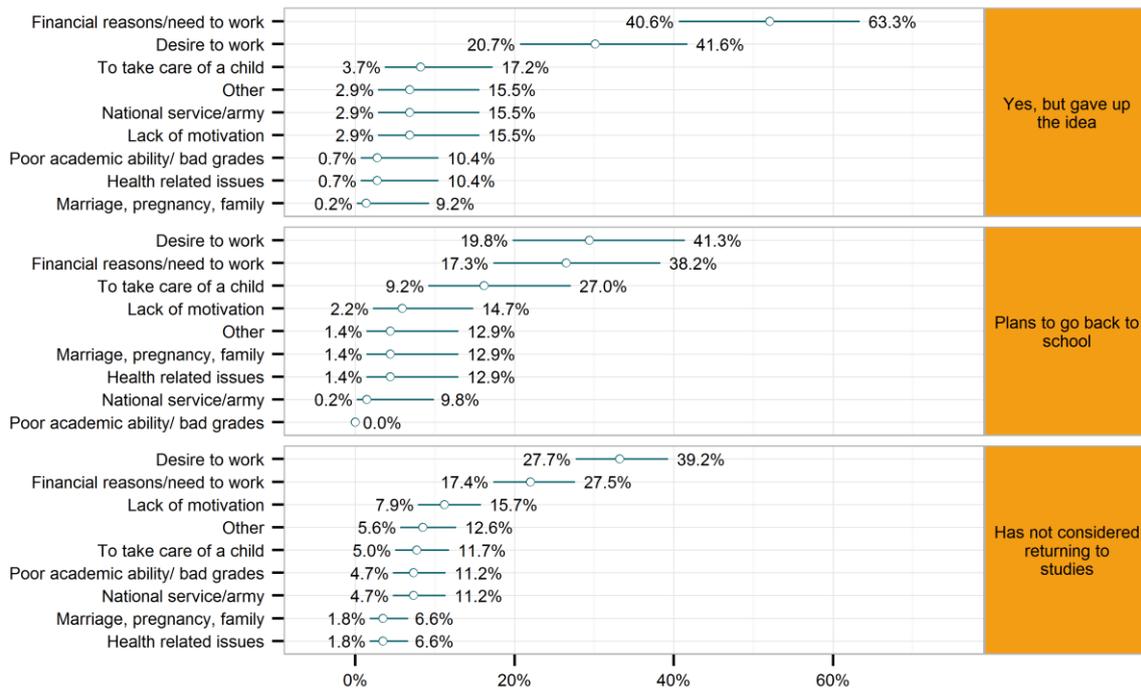


Figure 14 Reasons for dropping out by intentions to continue studying.

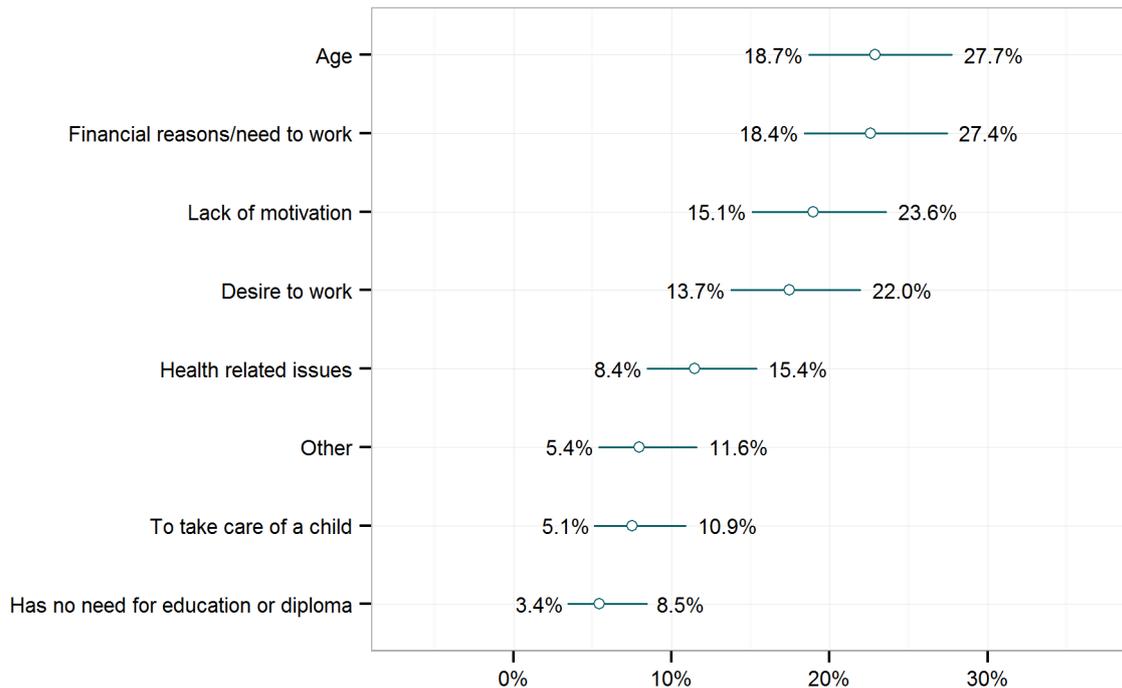
Source: People's survey

In conclusion, regardless of the target group under observation, the most important reason for dropping out is financial reasons (need/wish to work). For women the need to care for a child is just as important. Other reasons are less common and based of statistical significance can't be ranked.

#### 4.1.2 Barriers to participation

Among those adults who aren't studying at the moment, 2/3 have not considered returning to school. The third, who have considered it, is split equally between those who have neglected the idea (ca 18%) and those who are planning to return (ca 17%).

The main barriers for people who do not plan to return to school and those who have thought about it, but discarded the idea are related to **attitudinal** (age and lack of motivation) or **economic reasons**, but also health and family or general lack of time were mentioned (see graph below). We do not report here reasons that were mentioned by less than 10 people in our sample, such as laziness, taking care of other family members besides children, fear of studying or bad grades, too boring lessons and pressure from friends or family. None of the respondents mentioned that studies would be too easy or that schools' timetables were inconvenient. Among other reasons, work-related issues and transportation problems were mentioned a few times. So the main obstacles relate to the socio-economic situation of the person and to the general attitudes of people.



**Figure 15 Barriers for dropouts to return to studies.**

*Source: People's survey*

Figure 7 indicates that barriers are mainly driven from the demand side of education, i.e. people themselves, not the supply side. Thus, following the theoretical framework introduced earlier, very few adults perceive structural and academic barriers to have a serious effect. Rather, attitudinal barriers, such as age, lack of motivation, health problems, and situational factors (need or desire to work, family responsibilities) make returning to studies difficult.

Economic reasons were also seen as a serious obstacle by the teachers. In addition to general financial restrictions people are discouraged from participation because they lose unemployment benefits and survivor's benefits. Incidents, where a student drops out as soon as they become aware of this, are not uncommon.

Based on data from EU Adult Education Survey, Roosmaa and Saar (2011) report types of barriers (institutional, situational and dispositional) to participation in lifelong learning, including both education and training. Although their focus (includes training) and categorizing reasons are slightly different, some general results are similar to our findings. For example health and age related issues are most common, followed by economic reasons and family responsibilities. Unlike us, they find that distance is an important factor. This was also seen as a barrier by the schools' staff who said that transportation is often too expensive and sometimes leads adults to dropping out. (Obviously the personnel has no reliable information on those who don't even return because of distance/transportation issues.)

But the similar findings on attitudinal barriers strongly show that the concept of lifelong learning has not been internalised by the adult population in Estonia. This was also confirmed by the schools' staff who noted that the general attitude in the society does not support adults entering formal education. Especially problematic is this type of attitude in some of the municipalities that are not interested in supporting adults returning to school.

Barriers to return to school can vary between different socio-demographic groups. To carry out such a comparison we need to combine the barriers into larger groups<sup>12</sup> which enables us to generalise the results better. Although age as a barrier can be interpreted as attitudinal, it is negatively correlated with other attitudinal barriers and will therefore be viewed separately. Enne seda aga liigitama üldistatavuse parandamiseks takistused veidi laiematesse gruppidesse .

When we examine the main barriers that prevent people from continuing their studies by age groups and gender, again we find some expected differences. The importance of age and health issues as barriers grow with age and are the two most important barriers for the oldest age group, whereas economic reasons and the desire to work lose importance as age grows. These results are in line with Roosmaa and Saar (2011).

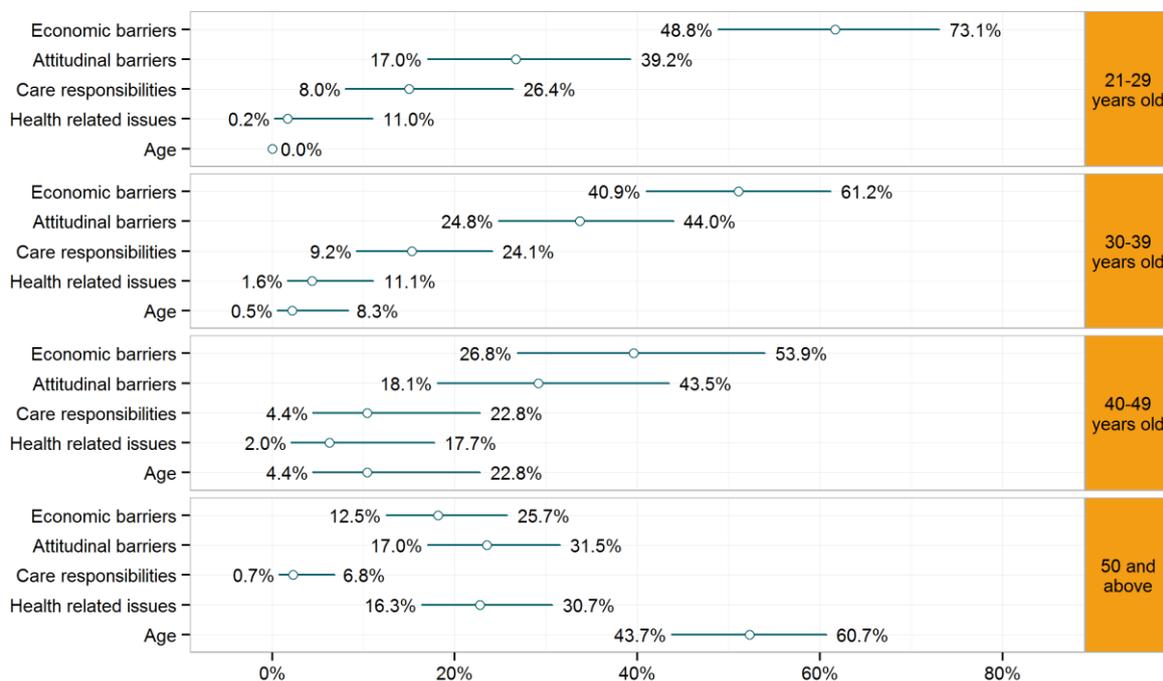


Figure 16 Barriers of returning to school by age groups.

Source: People's survey

When it comes to gender, taking care of child/children is a more common barrier for women than for men. On the other hand, men report the need to work or economic reasons more frequently. Women also seem to perceive age and health as barriers more often than men, but the reason here, at least partly, is that there are proportionally less women in the youngest age group and more in the oldest age group in our sample. Men, on the other hand, seem to have less motivation to return to school.

We also checked, whether barriers are perceived differently by the level of studies last attended, by the main language spoken at home (Russian-speakers perceive health as a barrier somewhat more often than Estonian-speakers), by the age of school-leaving (younger than 20 and older), and by the

<sup>12</sup> The barriers are grouped as follows: economic (wish and need to work); attitudinal (lack of motivation, influence of friends and family, lack of need, laziness, poor results in school); care obligation; age and health related barriers.

time that has passed from leaving school (these results are almost identical to the age group results). In almost all cases age and economic reasons or the need to work were the most important barriers to continuing studies.

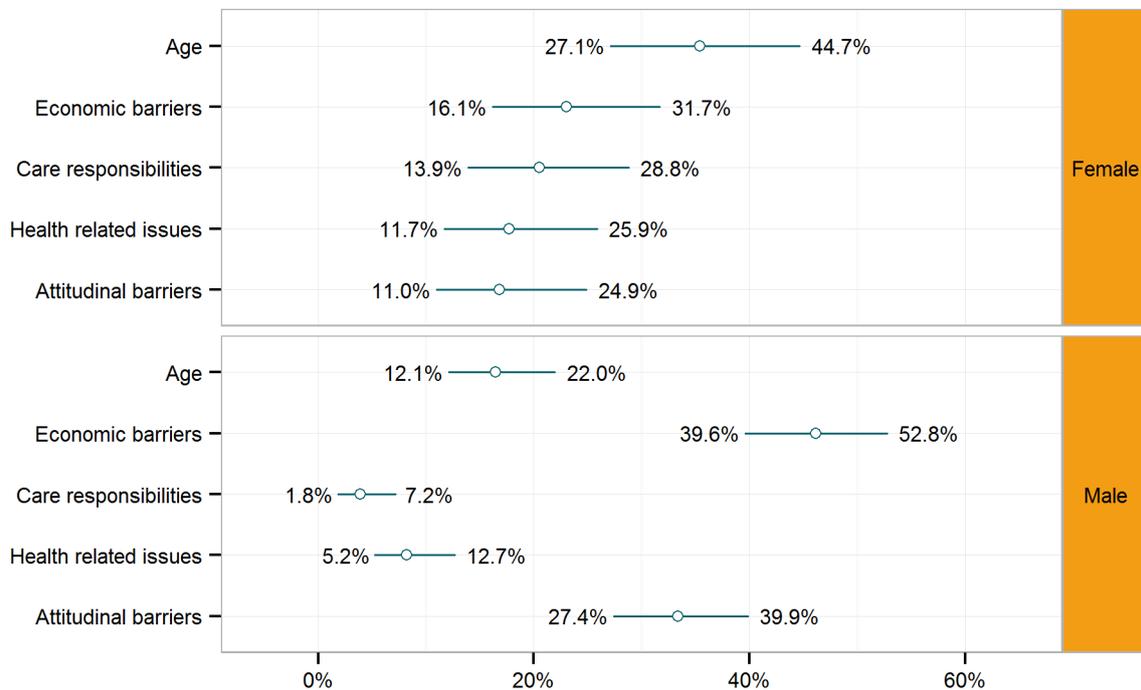


Figure 17 Barriers of returning to school by gender.

Source: People's survey

By comparing pairwise the reasons for dropping out of initial education and current barriers to continuing studies, we detect quite a few statistically significant relations using a weights-corrected Pearson's  $\chi^2$ -statistic (for survey data) (essentially F-statistic).

Results in table 5 show that people who dropped out of school because of care responsibilities, attitudinal or health related reasons often name the same reasons for not returning to school. The same doesn't seem to apply to economic reasons, although economic reasons were the most often named reason for both dropping out and for not returning.

Table 5 Significant relations between the reasons for school-leaving and barriers to continuing studies.

Reason for dropping out of initial education	Barrier to return	Correlation	Comment
Care responsibilities	Economic	-	Those who dropped out because of care responsibilities are less likely to name economic reasons as a barrier to returning to school. This may partly be due to the larger portion of women in older age groups where the importance of economic barriers is lower. On the other hand it may be due to the longevity of care responsibilities.

Reason for dropping out of initial education	Barrier to return	Correlation	Comment
Care responsibilities	Care responsibilities	+	There are very few observations, but they direct towards a positive relationship. A lot of those who dropped out of initial education because of care responsibilities still name it as a reason for not returning to school.
Attitudinal	Attitudinal	+	Attitudinal barriers also seem to persist as barriers to returning. This is mostly related to the lack of motivation.
Health related	Attitudinal	-	No one in the group, that dropped out because of health issues, named attitudinal barriers as a reason for not returning to school.
Health related	Health related	+	For most of those who left school because of health issues this remains a barrier to returning as well.

Source: People's survey

In conclusion, economic barriers are as relevant for the decision to return to school as it was for dropping out. Equally as important are attitudinal barriers like age, motivation, perceived need etc. Age is most widely spread reason for over 50-year-olds. Whether a person has left school because of care responsibilities, health reasons or attitudinal barriers, most likely the same reason persists as a barrier to returning to school. This relationship was not observed for economic reasons.

#### 4.1.3 Barriers for people who have returned

Our people's survey showed that only 21 out of 100 people who have gone back to school are not totally sure whether they will finish studies. These results may be biased because the data was gathered in or near adult gymnasiums and therefore students with lower school attendance were less likely to be included in the sample. This is far too small of a number to base results on, but for these 21 people, raising a child/children was noted by 6, lack of motivation and bad results/fear of failure by 5, and the desire to work or need to work by 4 and 3 people, respectively. These results seem to indicate that once adults have made the decision to go back to school, and are continuing studies, economic reasons no longer play such a big role, but the few results could be driven purely by chance.

An important aspect worth mentioning from the people's survey is that out of the sample of 100 adults who are currently studying, none thought that they were not likely to finish their studies. Three out of four were sure they would finish. Thus, the lack of information about support measures is mainly driven by the fact that people are confident they will finish, once they have already decided to go back to school.

School staff at vocational schools had little experience with adults in secondary education, but teachers in adult gymnasiums daily deal with this group. They stated that work related reasons and general financial situation of the students are the main barriers. Another reason is non-attendance which didn't come up in the students' survey. Non-attendance is strongly related to the aforementioned financial and work related issues, because these are the main reasons for adults to skip lessons. Either they don't have the money for transportation or work and school schedules conflict. Non-attendance is an issue because students quickly fall behind and instead of making up

the time they often resign completely. The tendency of adults to give up may in part be due to their higher expectations for themselves in school work. Teachers agreed that grades are very important to older learners. Therefore they'd rather quit than merely pass courses.

This is also supported by the statistics of exmatriculation. Based on Tartu Adult gymnasium data it is evident that around 1/3 of those who start studies in September dropped out during the same academic year. Half of those give up on their own will and half are expelled on the initiative of the school because of the non-attendance or lagging behind in studies. The main reason among those who quit on their own will is work related (around a quarter).

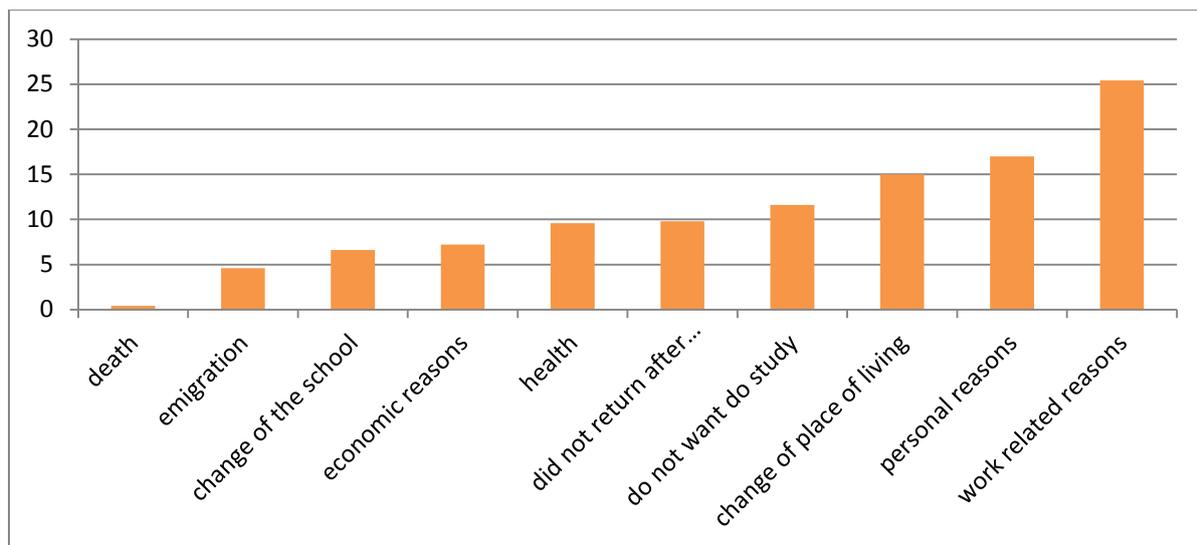


Figure 18 Reasons for dropping out on students' own initiative (number of dropouts, average of 5 academic years)

Source: Statistics from Tartu Adult gymnasium

Teachers and other staff also mentioned that unlike young people adults face a lot of different life problems which need special attention by the psychologist or social pedagogue. Because of their negative previous experiences they find adapting to school difficult, but they also face loan problems and issues with childcare. These issues can often become a reason for dropping out as an adult and should be addressed with appropriate measures.

In conclusion, we can't reliably say what are the main barriers for adults who have returned to school and are currently studying based on the population survey, but based on school statistics and focus groups it is safe to conclude that about half of the students are thrown out because of serious attendance issues or very poor performance. These issues are mostly likely a façade for other serious issues (like psychological problems) which need schools' support personnel's intervention. Among other reasons for dropping out economic problems are most widely spread. This is mostly related to need for working and consequent schedule conflicts.

#### 4.1.4 Motivation for continuing studies

Shifting our focus specifically on adults who plan to go back to school and their reasons for doing so, purely rational reasons dominate, such as the need for a diploma for studying on the next education level or better opportunities on the labour market. Subjective and emotional reasons, such as finishing what was once started, and in some cases a genuine interest in studies or the wish to prove oneself (see results in the following figure) seldom seem to have an effect. Therefore external

motivation has a stronger effect than internal motivation. This has been previously found by Illeris (2007) who stated that adults are mostly interested in further education if it has to do with their work or career opportunities. This also means that people are more open to external intervention.

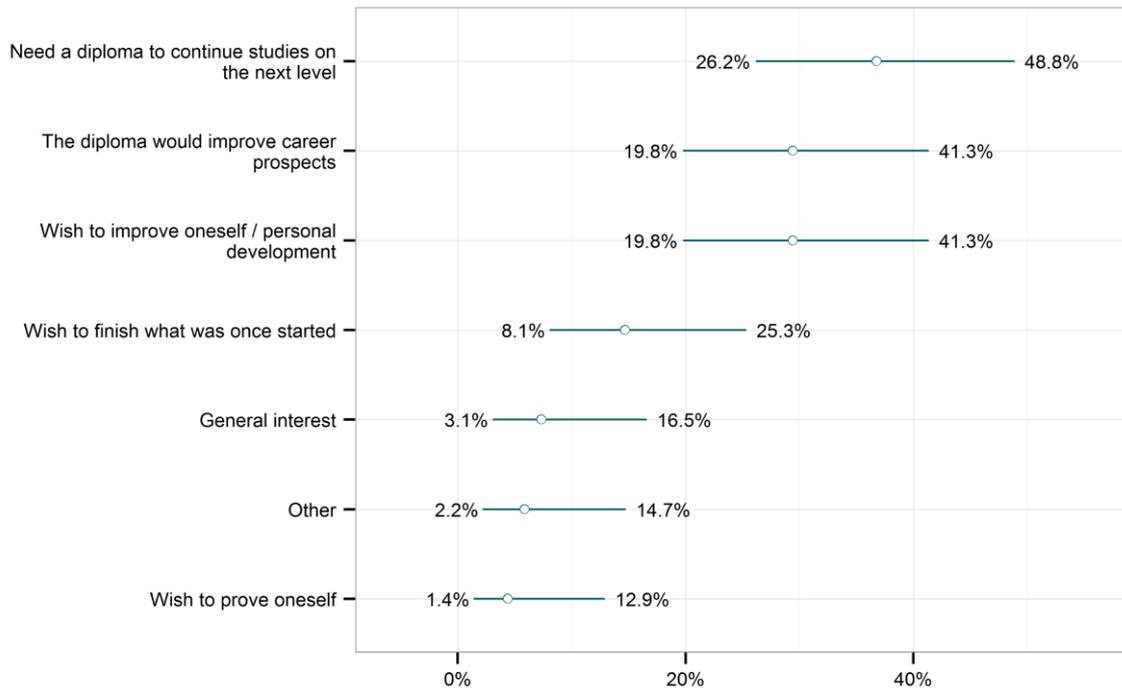
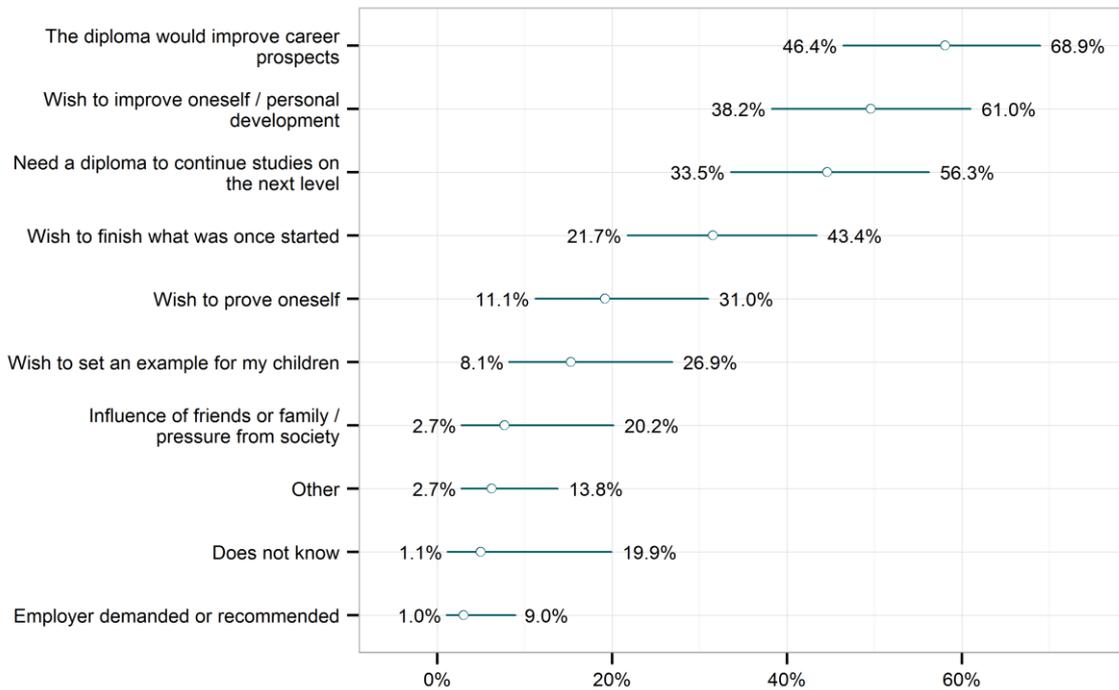


Figure 19 Reasons to return to school for adults who plan to do so.

Source: People's survey

The group of adults who have decided to go back to school is quite small in our sample (68 out of the 400 adults questioned), thus we will not focus on any subgroups.

We saw previously that adults who plan on continuing their unfinished studies are mainly driven by rational considerations. We can compare these results with responses from adults who are currently studying. In the following figure we can recognize familiar results from the previous graph, although in a slightly different order. Rational considerations have played the most important role, while subjective reasons have not been as important. Although not very frequent, there are a few new reasons not apparent in the previous graph, such as the desire to set a good example for children or a requirement from the employer.



**Figure 20** Reasons for returning to school for adult learners.

*Source: People's survey*

School personnel brought out similar points when speaking of adults study motivation. The teachers found that mothers of small children are very motivated students. They usually dropped out of initial education to care for their children and are therefore less likely to be influenced by negative school experiences or previous poor performance in the school. Additionally setting a good example for children is a strong motivator in its own right. Another very motivated group according to the teachers are adult who have returned to school because of pressure from work. This includes for example Estonian Rescue Service's, Estonian Defence League's and Estonian Defence Forces' employees whose educational requirements have been increased in recent years to a minimum of secondary level education.

In conclusion, most dominant motivators for adults to return to school are wish to improve career prospects, improve further education opportunities and self-improvement generally. This is in line with previous research on the subject. This is similar for those who have already enrolled and for those who are still planning to return to school. Less frequent motivators are employer's demands or setting an example for children. Although these are less spread, on individual level they are very strong motivators. People who have returned to school for these reasons are very committed students.

## 4.2 Supporting adults in the schools

The aim of this chapter is to analyse how the barriers can be overcome through school level changes. By school level changes we here mean changes and measures regarding organization of studies including teaching methods, time schedule, study load etc. Measures that are not directly related to studies, such as additional services provided by the school, will be discussed as complementary measures in the following chapters. We now give an overview of the different adaptations that the schools have made to better accommodate the needs of adult learners and then try to find out what else is expected by the (potential) learners and school staff.

### 4.2.1 Current measures taken at schools

The legislation today allows schools and teachers quite a lot of **freedom to organize the studies in flexible ways**. For example the amount of contact lessons and their schedule is mostly up to the schools themselves. This is more often used in adult gymnasiums, because vocational schools struggle to fit all of their subjects (general and vocational) on less contact days. In fact we encountered no vocational schools that provided vocational upper-secondary education in part-time or distance forms. Generally the vocational schools see little room to adapt studies to adult learners' needs. Their ability to bring adults back to school lies with the opportunity to obtain a vocational certificate in quite a short timeframe.

*"I fear that if you add general subjects to the vocational curricula then the study time will drag out and there will be very few people interested. Right now, what brings adults to vocational school, is that over a fairly brief period of time we are able to give them a vocation."* (Vocational schools)

A natural question for the adult education providers is how they deal with students who have forgotten previous school knowledge and may have trouble following the curriculum. School teachers and administrators admitted that this is an issue with most of the students, but all the schools have been able to deal with it either through special courses or consultations, some simply start each school year with recalling previous courses. Biggers schools also have the opportunity to provide different level courses in parallel. Another aspect is that these students often lack the necessary study skills. This has again been resolved by the schools with either integrated study skills teaching or some even have special courses.

As we have seen thus far adult learners are very different in their situations and needs and therefore we were unable to find one certain type of organization that would fit all. On the contrary we found that different gymnasiums with their different approaches provided the necessary flexibility enabling students to find the schools most suited to their needs. Different schools have lessons on 2-5 days a week, some have lessons in the morning, some in the evening and yet others have identical lesson plans for morning and evening enabling students to attend school whenever their able to. Some also have lessons or consultations on Saturdays. Because e-learning opportunities are still rather rare and thanks to their flexibility and minimal need to attend school students are willing to travel from all over Estonia to these schools. On the other hand some students need a more hands-on approach with more contact lessons to develop better learning strategies and habits and keep them on track. Most of the schools stated that they had consulted with their students regarding lesson plans to better accommodate their needs. Naturally these needs may vary over time and there is the obvious need to evaluate the organisation of studies every couple of years. This **variability in learning forms**

**should be encouraged** and information on different types should be made more readily available. There is no one place that gathers this type of information, even though this may be detrimental to adults' decision to return.

Regarding different e-learning methods the schools found that the necessary conditions have been created. Nonetheless the teachers' e-teaching skills are found to be lacking. Some found that the students are also less capable with it-solutions than is commonly thought. Vocational schools said that the vocational courses that are mainly manual activities of handicraft can't be well taught over distances.

The problem with teachers' unsatisfactory skillset hasn't to do with too little e-learning courses. The problem lies with the inability to practice the skills right away. The new skills add work load because of the time it takes to develop the material and to get used to the programmes. On the other hand a lot of schools lack appropriate technological support. Because of this the school staff some room for improvement in the area of e-learning.

Another weakness stood out when talking to the school personnel – a narrow understanding of e-learning in general. A lot of people define e-learning as communication using the internet (such as using email) or as putting text files up for students to download. This is a quite restricted view, because the current resources in schools and at students' homes would allow the teachers to use a much wider variety of methods: interactive learning materials, tests over the internet, video lectures, video calls etc. The teachers agreed that some students would be able to benefit from such an approach, but they currently lack the opportunities.

*"Especially those who are younger, more used to computers and those who are at home with a young child – for them ... or also who are abroad, for them e-learning would be big help, if you could do more or less do everything in the learning environment." (Adult gymnasiums)*

Schools have also used different strategies for consultations and for providing opportunities for resits. It is common practice that teachers provide consultations which are not included in their working hours. In some schools this is more organized by providing study groups with a teacher or having a separate consultation class, others have no formal form of consultations. A few schools mentioned that if needed, consultations and examinations can be carried out via Skype. Although apparently this isn't very popular among the students.

The national curriculum also leaves open the exact content of lessons and teachers claimed that they need to be able to respond to the specific group's needs and it is possible within current national study program. This freedom also enables the teachers to skip some themes or approach them differently from initial education teachers. The example of family planning was brought out repeatedly in this context.

*"The basic school curriculum has some funny things like family planning – what are you going to teach a 40-yearold? But it's up to the teacher [how they plan the lessons]."*

(Adult gymnasiums)

An important part of lessons is the selection and creation of new learning materials that take into account the distinct characteristics of adult learners. Teachers generally didn't see the need for adult secondary education textbooks, because each teacher still needs to choose the right methods and adapts the material in her own way. This has to do with the relative freedom teachers have planning their lessons. It was however mentioned that language textbooks sometimes cause difficulties because of their simplistic and childish vocabulary, themes or presentation that isn't relevant for an adult learner. Vocational schools also didn't see any problems with the textbooks and other materials used in general subjects, but they found that a lot of vocational courses lack up to date textbooks. But this isn't related to the needs of adult learners as much as a general need for relevant textbooks.

In Ida Viru County (in North-eastern Estonia) the subject of learning materials was raised in the context of students low Estonian language skills. Students who speak Estonian as a second language need materials with a much simpler vocabulary and sentence structure than native Estonian speakers. Currently some teachers use basic school textbooks in secondary school just so the students are able to comprehend the texts. This does not enable the students to attain the same level of subject understanding. As a positive example teachers brought out a few bilingual (Estonian and Russian) textbooks which help to overcome the language barrier.

All in all teachers and staff of all the schools agreed that they have been given all the flexibility they could ask for and they have every opportunity to address the needs of different students. Although vocational schools admitted that the full time programmes of vocational secondary education can be quite difficult for adults because they are very time consuming. The legislation also allows vocational schools to create separate groups for older and younger learners, but this has not been used by the schools. The main reason for this is lack of older students in this track. Adult learners are more common in vocational programmes which are not vocational secondary education programmes and in these groups also aged based groups are used. The schools don't see a way to significantly reduce contact lessons. Some insisted that vocational secondary education can only be taught through full-time studies, but others believed that the new modular vocational education system could be used to increase flexibility for adult learners. This would require special modular curricula for adult learners.

#### **4.2.2 Support personnel at school**

The subject of supportive personnel came up in each and every one of the focus groups. The definition of supportive personnel can be a bit different in schools. Most feel the need for psychologist, social-psychologist and career counsellor, but others also say that the increase in special needs students means more need for speech therapists and special education teachers. Although the new legislation dictates that schools have to have supportive personnel the schools often lack funding for these places by the municipality. Vocational schools and larger adult gymnasiums have been able to find the funds, because funding is linked to the number of students. This conflict between state demands and municipality funding is a serious issue for the schools and needs to be addressed as soon as possible, because everyone at the schools agreed that these counsellors are very important to keep adults in school. The position of counsellors is often informally filled by certain teachers or administrative staff whom the students feel they can trust. Unfortunately these people are rarely trained in dealing with social and psychological troubles and may therefore be unable to effectively help the students. Also this is an additional strain on the teachers' workload.

*"Educational technologist is very good. Big schools have...in Tallinn and the like. To support teachers, because it's developing so fast, you just can't keep up. I feel I can't. I have been through [training] some time ago, but if I'm not using it all the time, then I forget. "* (Adult gymnasium)

The focus group participants also found that teachers have a need for IT help, preferably in the form of educational technologist (*haridustehnoloog*). Schools usually have some form of IT support, but the person responsible for this is often also the computer teacher and isn't therefore always free for consultations. Another issue is that IT support is not trained in different environments for e-schooling and aren't able to give advice on different methods that the teachers could be using.

#### **4.2.3 Need for additional measures**

Continuing with the focus on adults who don't plan to return to school, respondents were asked about possible support measures that could make them reconsider. Results with information from at least 10 respondents are presented in the following table. Next we'll see, which school related measures would be considered effective by the potential learners. Adults, who haven't thought about going back to school<sup>13</sup>, were asked to evaluate measures addressing the barriers they themselves named. More specifically they were asked whether such a measure would make them reconsider returning to school. All measures that were evaluated by at least 10 respondents are presented in the table below.

Altogether 83% (332 observations) stated that they do not plan to return to school. A third of those (100 observations) found that nothing could motivate them to return to school (altogether about a quarter of people without secondary education belong to this group). So quite a large portion of people without secondary education have a strong negative attitude towards returning to school. Next the ca 50% of people without secondary education, who aren't studying and have not totally ruled out returning to school, are examined more closely.

Looking at those, who are not ruling out returning, it seems there isn't much the schools can do to invite more students. School based measures were found important by very few people (in comparison to measures on the education system level and support measures). Online courses and reorganising studies would make about 1% consider returning to school. This result fits into the wider picture which shows that school leaving is often due to reasons unrelated the schools themselves. On the other hand it needs to be clear that the support measures were offered according to the barriers that the respondent named and these school related barriers were rarely named. It follows that school based measures can't be the main factors influencing the decision to return to school. The table below shows that these measures were also proposed to those who named age or health as a barrier. The latter groups are partially hindered by attitudinal barriers and these cannot be addressed by school or even education system changes if the general attitudes don't change.

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<sup>13</sup> This was not asked from those who are planning to return to school. If the respondent said that they had considered returning but decided not to, then they were asked whether these measures would make them reconsider. If the respondent then replied that nothing would motivate them, then these responses were left out of the analysis at this point. Altogether 232 answers are analysed here.

**Table 6 Assessment of potential measures by people not planning to return to education (n=232, number of responses is in parentheses).**

Support measure	% of respondents that were led to this measure (n = 232)	Barriers that led to this measure	% of respondents that found the measure potentially helpful	% people without secondary ed that could benefit from the measure
Contact and encouragement from school	36,2%	Desire to work Lack of motivation	32,1%	6,8%
Mostly online courses	10,3%	Health issues	12,5%	0,08%
Differently organized studies (e.g. timetables)	19,4%	Pressure from friends/family Age	8,9%	1%
Adjusting school environment to special needs	10,3%	Health issues	20,8%	1,3%

Source: People's survey

Only a fifth of people with health problems found that they would return to school, if the school environment was adapted to special needs. Because this group found that neither the development of teaching methods nor adjusted school environment would help them overcome the health barrier, it is likely that some of this group is actually hindered by attitudinal barriers rather than health.

Despite all this, those who named 'desire to work' as a barrier to returning to school said that they may be motivated to return to school if they were contacted and encouraged directly by the school. A third of those naming these barriers found that encouragement from the school would influence them to return. Interestingly the schools were also interested in this type of activities. A number of schools, both vocational and general, said that they actively advertise their school and would be willing to call potential students individually if they had the contact information. According to the schools the municipalities do not give out the contact information of potential students because of data protection requirement. Schools said that calling potential students would enable them to introduce and explain different study opportunities and also available support measures. So it seems that there's a wish for such encouragement from the potential students and schools, the question remains how to bring the two together.

#### 4.2.4 Summary

From the perspective of the schools the biggest problem for adult gymnasiums is the financing of support personnel and for vocational schools the inflexibility of study organization.

The issue of financing support personnel should be resolved between the state and the municipalities as fast as possible to ensure the students with the necessary support. Additionally it should be discussed whether the position of a educational technologist could be supported in all the schools. This would significantly increase the possibilities for e-learning, which are hindered by the teachers' lack of practical and up to date knowledge of learning methods and environments as well as motivation. Although, according to our data, the potential learners didn't see e-learning as a necessity, the teachers named various target groups that would benefit from it. E-learning possibility

isn't a reason to return to school for most, but it may aid in staying in school by increasing the variety of teaching methods. Unfortunately we lack the data to confirm this. Support personnel in schools also serves to decrease dropping out and not as much as a motivator for returning to school.

The current study organization in vocational secondary schools makes it quite difficult for adults to study there, even though the teachers are very accommodating. Today's regulations don't hinder the use of more flexible study opportunities. Using special modular curricula for adults wishing to obtain vocational secondary education would help to develop a more flexible system that would consider the time constraints adults face. At the same time it is important to actively encourage adults to participate.

Measures taken by the school do not have a very high potential for bringing adults back to school, because the barriers to returning aren't usually connected to schools. Nevertheless there's a small target group that would consider returning if the school contacted and encouraged them. This and the fact that measures by the school are less valued shows that a bigger barrier to returning to school is general attitude, not specific school related factors. So if the purpose is to get as many people back to school as possible, the starting point for new measures should be motivating general change in attitudes.

### 4.3 Supporting adults in the education system

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate how the barriers can be overcome through changes in the education system. Elements of the education system that we considered are the accessibility of schools, national curriculums and general education organization in Estonia. This chapter does not describe national measures, because these are mainly covered in the introductory chapter.

#### 4.3.1 Barriers in the education system

The potential learners didn't really see aspects of the education system as significant obstacles to return to school, with the exemption of **geographical distance of the school**. This was not common problem and in general these were in fact the least common barriers that were hardly ever mentioned. Teachers and administrators of adult gymnasiums did not find the current network of schools insufficient, but did say that the current number of schools should not be reduced, because it is likely to increase distance as a barrier.

Another barrier which relates to the education system level is students' **insufficient knowledge of the Estonian** language even though there are Russian language departments in adult gymnasiums. Examination in Estonian is a requirement for graduation and good language skills are required to study on secondary level. Therefore this sets multiple barriers for (potential) learners – those who lack language skills are less likely to return to school and are more likely to drop out. This barrier was not named often, but it is clearly more of a problem in areas with the highest non-Estonian population in North-Eastern Estonia and Tallinn. The teachers said that the language problem is most prominent in Ida-Viru County and it also presents itself in learning materials which use complex words and sentence structures. In the coming years the importance of Estonian language skills will increase as vocational secondary education starts its transition to teaching only in Estonian from the school year 2014/2015.

School staff had differing views on how the education system could and should be adjusted for a more effective solution. **Graduation requirements were named most often as a barrier for students**, but the **national curriculum** was also mentioned. More specifically teachers found that the requirement of a research project to graduate the school is too difficult and/or time-consuming for their students and this is increasingly causing difficulties for them. This has proven to be especially problematic in prison education, because prisoners' access to research materials and data gathering in prison are restricted. Teachers did agree that this exercise in research is very useful for students who consider going to university, but at the same time it may be too much for the other students. Others found that the schools have enough freedom to adjust the difficulty of the project to what they deem appropriate. Alternatively school examination was proposed by some participants in a focus group instead of the project. Currently the research project may be replaced with practical work and in several schools it was found to be a task that does not require too much effort from adults as they have some everyday or work experience which is easily transferable to the required practical work. The differing opinions indicate that the project requirements may be quite different in schools and this may be causing inequality in student's opportunities to graduate. Judging again from the interviews we can say that there isn't a clear consensus on this issue, but the issue seemed problematic in a few different aspects.

Another issue that was brought up, regarding **graduation requirements**, was the new regulation on national examinations in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Instead of 20 points out of 100 only one point is now

required to pass the examinations. This was seen as a positive improvement because adult learners are very critical of themselves and often drop out right before examination because of the fear of failure. The reduction in the points needed reduces such fear and is likely to raise the portion of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who successfully attend and pass the exams. It was even suggested that something similar could be considered for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade to reduce dropping out right before examinations.

Regarding **national curriculums** the focus groups had quite different views. Most found that the curriculum should be exactly as it is to maintain the comparability to the initial education diploma. Others named some subjects that could be reduced to fewer courses or maybe even left out for adult learners. The staff couldn't point out any one particular subject that is unnecessary, but found that this should be carefully considered. They also agreed that the current initiative to reduce the scope of courses is welcomed and will hopefully benefit adult learners. Yet others found that Estonia could follow the example of Finland where adult secondary education programmes are reduced to 44 courses (compared to Estonian 72 courses). These teachers said that adult students experiences and inclinations could and should be taken into account more. Students lacking any interest in some subjects should be able to pass with the absolute minimum and choose other more interesting subjects instead.

Vocational schools had additional worries about the new integrated system that is about to be launched where vocational and general courses are in part integrated. School staff said that this is a difficult task for teachers, but they were generally very positively minded. The new integrated approach means that new course plans need to be drawn up for every course and teachers need to adapt their materials and lessons. This creates a much bigger work load than usual, and is likely to require further funding. No direct assessment could yet be given by the staff about its effectiveness, but they generally found that the number of courses should not be reduced anymore or the programmes would lose all comparability with other secondary education programmes.

From the point of view of schools **the unclear role of the schools, financing of schools** and general **lack of a unified strategy for adult formal education** were seen as problems.

The question of adult education institutions' role arose in most of the focus group interviews. Vocational schools mostly felt that vocational secondary education today isn't well adjusted for adult learners and showed considerable doubts whether the current organization could be adapted to enable part-time studies. They therefore found that the role of vocational secondary education is not to deal with adult learners. Vocational schools had very little experience with adults in these programmes and found that the vocational programmes which are popular among adult learners are more effective for this target group. Therefore the staff indicated that vocational secondary education is seen as part of initial education and vocational training is more adapted to the needs of adults.

*„Yes, in my opinion, among those who's education is cut short, you can distinguish the ones who want academic education or upper secondary education or upper secondary education is required by employer... but these people are not coming to vocational schools, they are going to adult gymnasiums. But those, who come to get a vocation, they are not interested in upper secondary education after all this time“*

(Vocational school)

The adult gymnasiums on the other hand found that the schools are often misjudged based on comparison with initial education providers which is harmful for the schools' reputation. The adult gymnasiums are dealing with a completely different target group and the non-stationary organization of studies sets its own limitations. Their students in large part come directly from those initial education providers which excluded the students because of absenteeism or very low achievements. Adult gymnasiums with their flexibility are able to help these students, but they feel they shouldn't be criticised based on the examination results of these students, because the examination results alone don't adequately represent the effort that the school puts into the students. This means that adult gymnasiums clearly position themselves as second round schools for the low achieving but even more importantly for people whose education has been interrupted by unexpected life events. The teachers repeated that students should not be criticised for enrolling and dropping out repeatedly, because often these students want to learn, but can't because of unexpected pregnancies, death of loved one or other life events that put a strain on their time, financial and emotional resources.

*„It is sad that our school has heard a lot of accusations, because we time and again accept these students and then again through them out, as if we are wasting government money. But we don't know, maybe this time s/he is mature and ready for it. The opportunity must be given.”*

(Adult gymnasiums)

The adults' formal education system is currently still up for debate: specifically the necessity of different institutions, their network and division of the roles between the different types of schools. A representative of an adult gymnasium found that vocational school should not teach general subjects at all. Some vocational schools did not see the purpose of separate adult gymnasiums either because perceived lack of need for them or because they felt that vocational schools could also carry that role with more efficiency. In the latter case a vocational school could have an alternative 'academic' track to fill the role of adult gymnasiums. But there were also those who said that these two types of schools have distinct roles and both are needed.

On the other hand the roles of vocational education and vocational secondary education were seen as problematic, because a number of vocations can be obtained in both forms. This poses the question of how reasonable this kind of system is and what is the role of secondary education in it?

*„If I have worked and have basic education I can get the same vocation and I am equal in the labour market with those who have secondary education and the same vocational qualification. This side of things hasn't been discussed at all...”*

(Vocational schools)

At least two vocational schools had made a proposition to merge with the local adult gymnasiums which had been rejected by the gymnasiums. It is clear that if asked from the adult gymnasiums themselves, their representatives are interested in remaining separate institutions. On another occasion the merging of the schools was actually tried when the adult gymnasium was brought under the roof of the vocational school and the two coexisted in the same facilities. Unfortunately the physical closeness did not translate into synergy in studies. The students wanted either general or

vocational secondary education and therefore did not benefit from the integrated institutional organization. The adult gymnasium was soon moved to a different building for economic reasons (the municipality had been paying rent in the state owned vocational school). Therefore this type of merging may in some cases be financially more effective, but it is more likely to lower the interest of students than to raise it, because of increasing geographical inaccessibility. Additionally the previous experiences show that the integration may also pose difficulties on other levels.

Currently if an adult wishes to obtain lower secondary education and vocational qualification they need to, at least formally, attend two schools: a general education school and vocational school. A system for this has been developed for example in Põltsamaa where these students are formally listed in two schools, but the general education subjects are also taught in the vocational school so that students only attend one school.<sup>14</sup> Initially this programme was for adults who had dropped out because of unforeseen life events, but recently the student population is more made up from troubled youth from disciplinary schools. This in turn decreases participation motivation for other groups and brings about a whole array of difficulties for the school.<sup>15</sup> Therefore adults lack accessible and comfortable study programmes that enable them to simultaneously obtain vocational and basic education, although vocational school teachers would likely be able to teach 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade as well.

In one focus group was clearly formed the group opinion that Estonia currently lacks a coherent strategy in this area and this can also be seen from the conflicting views of the different schools' staffs. There is an obvious need to define the roles and purpose of all the actors. Another group found that the different ownership of the schools restricts cooperation and that all upper secondary education institutions should be state owned to assure efficiency. Some adult gymnasiums on the other hand were sceptical whether state ownership would do more good than harm. Additionally there's a need to define the aims of adult formal education, especially the vocational schools were somewhat suspicious, whether adult basic and secondary education is necessary and reasonable.

Role conflicts are also prevalent in services provided by the state and local municipalities. Often similar services are provided, but people still don't know where to turn to and different actors rarely work together.

*„We have schools, but you have to walk through the doors. And on the other hand we have municipalities, there they have education organisers, all sorts of counsellors...so what do they do exactly? Well, I don't really know either. Like, all the structures have been created, but everyone's working alone and the person has to be the activist and walk through the doors”.*

(Vocational schools)

The financing of schools was seen as a problem in adult gymnasiums but less so in vocational schools. Gymnasiums stated problems with financing in a number of areas: extern students, supervising of research projects, consultation hours, teachers with low work load, supportive staff (psychologist, career counsellor, etc.) and providing of optional courses. In each of these areas the funding was considered to be too small or completely lacking. The problems were more prevalent in smaller schools because the funding is strongly linked to the number of students. Therefore bigger schools

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<sup>14</sup> A case study of the school can be found in Anspal et al.2011.

<sup>15</sup> A new proposition has been made in Põltsamaa which will try to integrate the local general secondary school and vocational school when the local government owned general secondary school will become state owned. <http://poltsamaa.info/index.php/498-volikogu-asub-arutama-poltsamaa-guemnaasiumihariduse-riigistamist>

tend to have a buffer of sorts while the smaller schools can't afford to offer any optional courses and have no supportive staff. The supportive staff is mandatory by law, but most of the municipalities are not allocating funds for the positions. This conflict between state and municipalities is strongly damaging the opportunities of adult learners whose need for support is especially important to cope with life events.

Another issue that deserves separate discussion is recognition of prior learning (known in Estonia as varasema õpi- ja töökogemuse arvestamist - VÕTA) in the Estonian education system. Theoretically one can use it in both general and vocational education. In theory the teachers' assessment of VÕTA was very positive. This positive attitude stems mainly from the well working system of recognising prior courses in other schools. At the same time VÕTA is not used to assess actual skills and experience. Some school staff mentioned that this system could be used to also assess these actual skills developed outside of formal education. Vocational schools thought it especially relevant for their students and the schools have already considered different opportunities to improve the current system.

*"[I] imagine, that for those who have had no contact with vocational schools, for them in Estonia the best option would be to have their competencies assessed somewhere. We are seriously considering creating a competence centre [...] because this person, who maybe hasn't studied anything for a while, she doesn't even know her own abilities and skills... so she is tested in a creative and free environment what she can do and THEN she can enter the learning market so to say."* (Vocational schools)

#### 4.3.2 Need for additional measures

As mentioned before schools' staff saw the graduation requirements and the national curriculum as barriers for students, but high requirements of Estonian language are also problematic in some regions. Continuing with the focus on adults who don't plan to return to school, respondents were asked about possible support measures that could make them reconsider. Results with information from at least 10 respondents are presented in the following table. Respondents who stated that nothing could bring them back to school were removed from the sample for this question.

**Table 7 Assessment of potential measures by people not planning to return to education (n=232)**

Support measure	% of respondents that were led to this measure (n = 232)	Barriers that led to this measure	% of respondents that found the measure potentially helpful	% people without secondary ed that could benefit from the measure
<b>National program advocating returning to school and many people following it</b>	39,2%	Fear of failure / Bad grades Lack of motivation Pressure from friends/family Age	35,2%	8%

Source: People's survey

A third of the people, who named attitudinal barriers, found that a national programme for adults to return to schools may be motivating for them. Then again, because there were very few people with these barriers who didn't rule out returning to school, all together only about 8% of people without secondary education could benefit from such a measure.

### 4.3.3 Summary

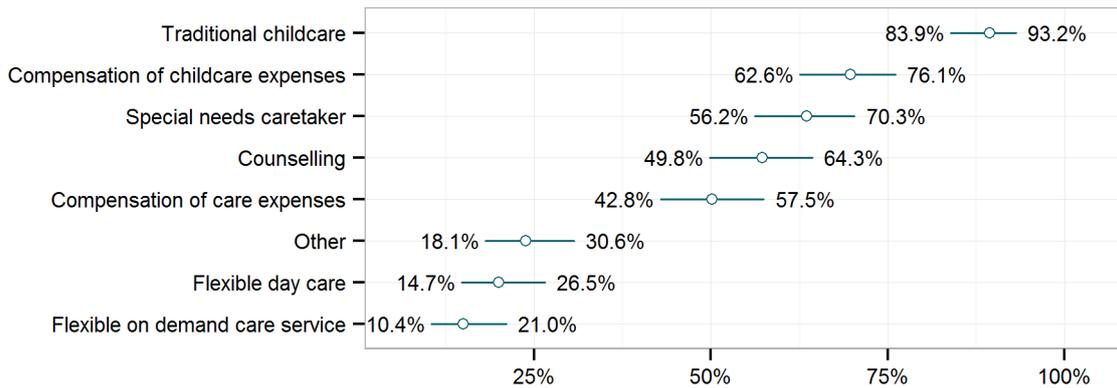
From the perspective of the schools there's a clear need to formulate the general aims and roles of different actors relating to adult formal education. Additionally it should be considered whether the current financing system corresponds to the needs of the students and schools as well as how it influences the quality of education. In both vocational and general education schools the recognition of prior learning and experiences should be developed further so that schools (or other institutions that may be brought to life for this aim) have the competences and finances needed to assess the actual skills and knowledge of students. Repeating the lessons already familiar can be tedious and adds unnecessary strain on the limited time resources of adult learners. So, in one way or another schools should move towards the assessment of actual skills and capabilities instead of just recognising finished courses from other formal education institutions.

## 4.4 Supporting adults through complementary measures

Previous chapters show that the main issues for adult learners in Estonia are financial problems and family obligations. In this chapter we will have a look at the supportive measures provided to adult learners by the Estonian municipalities and schools. We will also look at what seems to be missing in the view of (potential) students and the staff of adult education providers and which measures could be implemented for better support. As supportive measures here we will look at measures addressing barriers that cannot be resolved in the framework of education provision as such. This includes issues of transportation, childcare, accommodation, financial support etc.

### 4.4.1 Current support measures in schools and municipalities

We asked Estonian municipalities about the measures they provide for adult learners. Judging from the answers we received, there are **universal measures in the municipalities** that among others aim to help the adult learners, but coordinated measures targeted specifically at adult learners are very rare in Estonia. Nevertheless a number of municipalities said that they approach the issue of adult learners case by case according to need. In smaller municipalities the officials claimed that there were only a few if at all any adult learners and therefore there was no need for a measure as such. This is an important finding, because it shows that large scale programmes may in fact be unnecessary in many regions where a more individual approach is possible and probably is more efficient. Opting for this type of support measures means that local officials need to be well informed about adult learning opportunities and the possible problems facing those studying and also have a number of different solutions at their disposal.



**Figure 21 Universal measures in municipalities.**

*Source: Municipalities' survey*

At least as important is the need to acknowledge adult education in a wider context than simply directing people back to the labour market as soon as possible, because the officials need to understand the person they are helping. Some municipalities also answered that they didn't have measures for adult learners, because 'adults don't study; they work', which indicates that the municipality officials don't fully support the idea of lifelong learning. This point is crucial to the implementation of any measures on the level of the municipality. Without the active involvement and support of the local officials the effectiveness of any measure is likely to suffer.

On the other hand there were also answers that indicated lack of interest by the local people as the reason for no special measures or for the limited effectiveness of the measure. Also some municipalities have measures but they rarely get used. Some years there are no applicants at all, others one or two people benefit from the opportunities. Municipalities stated that people cannot be forced into studying and the people themselves need to want to participate. Nevertheless some of them were optimistic saying that any measure is worth it even if just one person is able to finish school because of it. But one could also ask whether there is enough information available about these different opportunities. We will touch on this issue in a separate chapter.

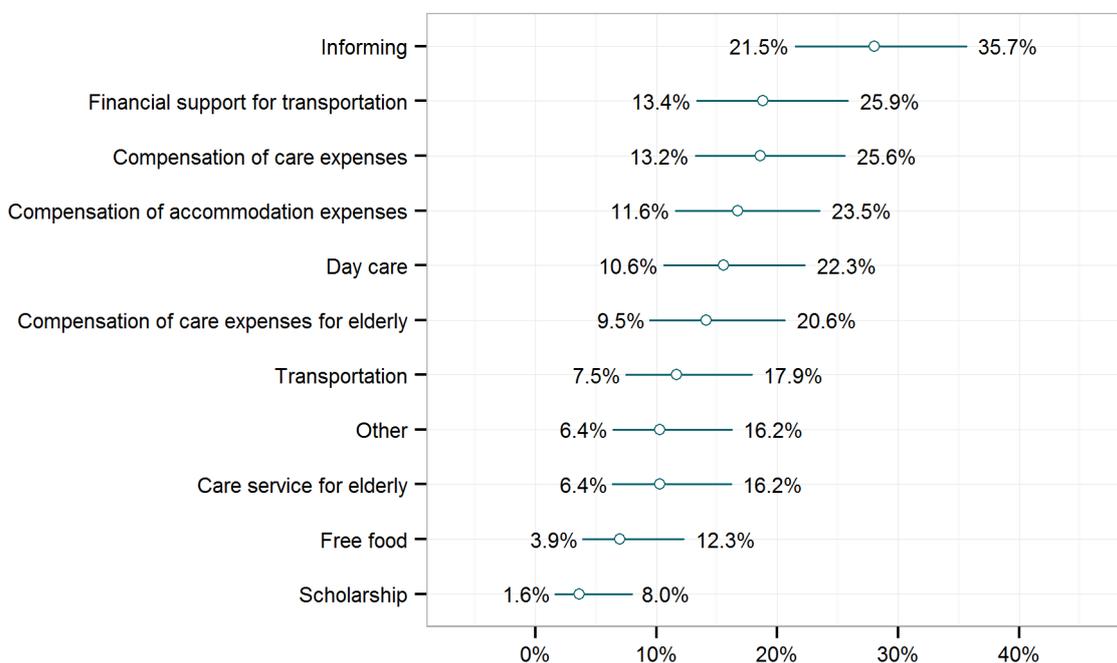
The lack of supportive measures may also be explained by how the role of the municipality is seen in this context. Again if the aim is to encourage municipalities to get more involved with supporting adults, the key may be in the more precise definition of the role of different actors. This would also make it clear who is responsible for what and (potential) adult learners would know where to turn for help.

**Supportive measures by the schools** are naturally a privilege of bigger and therefore wealthier schools because financing of schools is based on the number of students. On one hand schools are searching for ways to provide supportive measures themselves, because they see the need on a daily basis. On the other hand schools are also struggling to accept this new social function stating that social issues should be the responsibility of municipalities. This is further emphasized through the lack of funding for these social functions meaning that thus far it has never been the intention for schools to undertake these tasks. Schools are nevertheless providing aid through scholarships, free accommodation, day-care service, school financed lunches. Generally the lack of funding is very

restricting and is also the reason why some schools have not been able to provide support for their students even though they would like to.

### ***Special measures for adult learners***

Overall it is clear that adult learners are rarely seen as an important target group by the municipalities and they are more likely to benefit from universal measures. Only a few municipalities said they had special measures that are meant for adult learners. Most widespread measure is spreading information about learning opportunities which will be discussed separately in chapter 4.5. It is very likely that municipalities failed to distinguish between universal and special measures in this question, because measures which are also provided universally (such as care for elderly and children) seem to be a little more common than measures that are clearly related to learners (such as scholarships or free meals).



**Figure 22 Special measures for adult learners by the municipalities.**

*Source: Municipalities' survey*

Some municipalities named here different projects that had been financed through the European Social Fund. These were mainly directed at increasing employability through career-counselling, courses on labour market and CV writing etc. In the framework of supporting formal education these are of little interest to us.

The ESF had also been used to provide some hobby education which can be seen as encouraging learning as a whole and therefore indirectly contributes to adult formal education by creating positive learning experiences. The Ministry of Education and research has planned an evaluation<sup>16</sup> of

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.strukturifondid.ee/hindamiste-tooplaan-ja-aruanded/>

Complete list of measures: [http://esf2007.sm.ee/index.php?id=186&theme\\_id=14&county\\_id=0&target\\_id=0](http://esf2007.sm.ee/index.php?id=186&theme_id=14&county_id=0&target_id=0)

the measures regarding adult education so we will not go into more detail regarding these measures potential effect on formal education participation.

In addition to these some measures directly regarding formal education were nevertheless named. Here is a complete list of the measures municipalities named:

- Providing study opportunities for all (required by law);
- Providing courses about health and food, photography and other hobby education;
- **Providing courses about CV writing and other skills necessary for gaining employment as well as about financial literacy along loan and psychological counselling(ESF);**
- **Counselling and informing of young mothers about applying to scholarships;**
- **Increasing cooperation between schools, other training providers and the municipality as well as increasing international cooperation;**
- Counselling to maintain study motivation (in municipal schools, required by law)
- **Recognition of graduates.**

Even though we asked specifically to name measures supporting adult secondary education measures targeted at the unemployed with the explicit intent to direct them back into employment or measures promoting hobby education were also included by the respondents. The remaining measures that actually were meant to support adults in formal education addressed very different aspects of the issue.

**The counselling and informing of young mothers** who are eligible for a scholarship by the SEB Charity Fund<sup>17</sup> (MTÜ SEB Heategevusfond) if they have had a child before they were 19 and are now in fulltime education (on any level) was named by one municipality. There is reason to believe the counselling is carried out in other municipalities as well since the application needs a proof of income from the municipality as well as a recommendation letter from a teacher, child protective official, a support person or the like. Although it is likely that the majority of them are not actively seeking out this target group with the intention of encouraging them to apply. This is certainly effective for bringing young mothers back to school, but continuing success assumes that the scholarship programme by the NGO will continue. Looking at the measure from a wider perspective of finding and informing adults of their opportunities the measure is definitely a success and should be continued and encouraged elsewhere.

Better **cooperation between education providers and the municipality** addresses the issue by creating better learning and practice opportunities and thereby increasing motivation to continue studies. This specific measure was financed through the Comenius Regio<sup>18</sup> partnership programme and included both students and teachers. The programme included study trips to museums, participation in other extracurricular activities, courses for teachers on multimedia and for students on labour market skills and health. This measure had a direct influence on adults already in school whose learning motivation was increased through positive experiences.

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<sup>17</sup> SEB is a Swedish Bank operating mainly in the Nordic countries.

<sup>18</sup> More info: <http://kjugcomeniusproject.weebly.com/project-materials-of-kohtla---jaumlrve-uumlhisguumlmaasium.html>

**Recognition of graduates** through local information channels can have a positive effect on students' motivation through the psychological reward and increase positive communal attitude towards learning. This was assessed to be effective by the municipality.

### ***Child care***

Estonian municipalities have the obligation to provide each over 1,5-yearold child with a place in kindergarten. Virtually all municipalities have kindergartens or pay for kindergarten places in neighbouring municipalities. In more densely populated areas a lack of kindergarten places has been seen as a serious issue. In addition to that adult learners may need more flexible childcare opportunities like longer hours or care on Saturdays. For detailed information see Ainsaar & Soo 2012.

Do municipalities have these flexible opportunities? Again some municipalities said that the opening hours can be negotiated with the kindergarten staff and that some arrangements could be made if there was a need. Some municipalities said directly that there has been no demand for that. Others admitted that limited financial resources don't allow longer opening hours. Some also stated that there is no room for flexible usage because the kindergarten(s) are full.

Seeing the need first hand some schools have provided or provide day-care in their own facilities or have made special agreements with a local kindergarten. Other schools agreed that the need is there and if there were money for a kindergarten teacher they'd consider it. In at least one adult gymnasium the money for a day-care teacher was provided by the municipality (owner of the school). This is a good example of how municipalities can enable schools to meet the needs of adult learners with children. Taking into consideration the small amount of adult learners in a lot of the municipalities it may be more efficient to have a flexible day care in or near the schools rather than have each municipality provide flexible forms of child care. Those attending the same school most likely have similar flexibility needs which can then be effectively addressed.

*"... it's effective if the day-care is here on the spot. She comes and leaves her child here...whether for an hour or two or three, but there needs to be this opportunity." (Adult gymnasiums)*

### ***Counselling***

Adults may need different types of counselling when thinking of returning or in order to stay in school: financial or loan counselling, career counselling, psychological counselling etc. It is somewhat unclear how exactly the responsibilities for these services are distributed between different stakeholders.

*"In municipality X, near a city, its students come to our school and now the school sends the municipality a bill for support services. Municipality X says, 'Why? We have a psychologist in our municipality'." (Adult gymnasiums)*

Career counselling is available for all in unemployment insurance fund offices in county centres, but their main aim is to help people get new jobs. Vocational schools said they had had positive experiences with the fund counsellors directing people to short courses provided by the schools. But longer formal education isn't strongly supported, because entering secondary education studies means losing unemployment benefits. Society of Estonian Career Counsellors also provides charitable

free counselling to adults facing financial difficulties. Adult gymnasiums and vocational schools have career counselling in their curriculum.<sup>19</sup>

Municipalities often provide different types of counselling through social workers, but some also have separate loan counsellors, juridical counselling. These measures are not seen by the municipality as especially helpful for adult learners and are usually simply targeted at people in financial difficulties. This measure was not assessed to be effective as a support measure for adult learners in particular by any of our target groups.

Schools are now required by the state to have some assisting personnel to provide (social-) psychological counselling, but municipalities rarely find money to finance these positions. Bigger schools usually have the money to finance these positions thanks to funding based on student count. School staff agreed unanimously that supporting staff is very important to help the students cope with their different life experiences. Adult students have more fears regarding studies but also more complicated life situations that are difficult to integrate with going to school. Professional help is definitely needed to help these people continue their studies. Even by law this type of help has to be available for students. It is very important that either the municipalities start funding these positions or find a more suitable compromise with the government to find other funding schemes. It is equally important that the counselling system is put in order so that different institutions would complement each other and be capable of effective cooperation.

### ***Financial support***

Scholarships were seen by the school staff as the most important support measure of all. All of the focus groups agreed that financial difficulties are the main reason why people don't come to school and drop out over time. Most groups also found the loss of unemployment benefits when entering formal education to be a major barrier. A number of examples were told about students dropping out as soon as they found out they would lose the benefits. There's a similar situation with students entering non-stationary education, which means losing the survivor's pension<sup>20</sup>. But the staff also agreed that the scholarships that are needed have to be big enough for the students to cover their living expenses because working at the same time usually leads to dropping out.

Adults in adult gymnasiums are not eligible for any kind of allowance or scholarships from the state, but a few municipalities have this type of support. The scholarships are usually for high achieving students. Scholarships are rarely used to help those in financial difficulties. Vocational schools have a separate scholarship fund financed by the state. It is up to the schools to decide exactly how much of this is given to high achieving students and how much to those with financial needs. Nevertheless there isn't much room for variation because the size of the scholarship is fixed. This scholarship isn't used to support specifically adult learners, but they do benefit from it. The exact number of adults getting this scholarship is not known. One of the vocational schools estimated that around 1/3 of adult learners are on the scholarship, but it is likely that the proportion is different in other schools. The competition for the scholarship is quite tough for the curricula where adults dominate, because of their stronger emphasis on good grades (in comparison to younger students).

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<sup>19</sup> Detailed overview:

[http://vana.innove.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=36529/Karjaariteenuste\\_susteemi\\_uuring\\_loppraport.pdf](http://vana.innove.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=36529/Karjaariteenuste_susteemi_uuring_loppraport.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Retirement insurance law §20 states that the right to a survivor's pension have under 24-yearolds who are studying in stationary form in a gymnasium or vocational school or in other study form for medical reasons.

*„About a third, yes, of adults [get a scholarship]. In reality young people who get all fours and fives<sup>21</sup> all get and ... among younger students even those with an average of 3.7-3.8, but adult students have a very tough competition, if you look at the rankings then there a lot of those with only fives.“ (Vocational schools)*

The special allowance or scholarship is given out not based on merit but rather need and the school staff said that more and more money is given out as special allowance which they judged to be a positive trend. But they also admitted that the current size of the allowance does not cover the basic needs of students. In some schools the allowance only covers the cost of the dorm room. The special allowance requires the student to prove their need for financial support which means that applying and proceeding the applications takes a long time and the students have to manage the first month of school without any aid.

Adult students learning in the 8th or 9th Grade who are simultaneously obtaining vocational and general education (in Põltsamaa, Kivi-Vigala or Vana-Vigala schools) also lack the opportunities for financial support even though they are students at a vocational school.

So the current special allowance system provides an opportunity to support students who are struggling financially, but the lag between starting school and obtaining the allowance can be challenging for some. In addition the allowance isn't big enough to cover all living expenses which means that adult students need an alternative source for income.

Schools are obviously well-informed on these issues and some vocational schools have had special projects that include paying daily allowance. These experiences have been positive for the schools. On the other hand they also have negative experiences with students who have lost their eligibility for financial support. For example when part-time students no longer received the study allowance then the teachers noticed a downward trend in average grades. So it seems that study allowances and scholarships have previously proven effective in the Estonian context.

*"Definitely, the group that finished was motivated by the daily allowance. Usually the study allowance in vocational schools is below 40€, but the boys [in the programme] got daily allowance for one school day 3.84 plus transportation allowance. So I don't know, about 70-90€ was the allowance in a month [...] maybe up to 110€. So this group received quite good financial support, they completely had motivation." (Vocational schools)*

Alternatively all students can apply for subsistence allowance. A number of municipalities named this as a support measure for adult learners as well indicating that there was no need for a separate system.

### **School lunches**

School lunches have been an object of discussion because those aged under 20 studying in vocational schools are provided free school lunches. Therefore older people studying together with younger ones may feel out of place or discarded. Also because financial struggles are a major issue a warm meal plays a role in keeping students in school and also motivates school attendance. Some

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<sup>21</sup> Estonian grading system goes from one to five with five being the best grade, one means absenteeism and two is a non-satisfactory. Teachers may also use + and – to differentiate between grades, but these are not used on diplomas and for course grades.

municipalities said that some adult learners have received free lunches on the expense of the municipality if the financial situation of the person is critical. Again this is not handled as a separate measure but is rather used case by case.

As school staff said, it is the little things that combined help students follow through with their studies. Adult gymnasiums on the other hand found this a non-issue, because a lot of them don't have the facilities for providing warm meals anyway. Vocational schools on the other hand find the unequal treatment of students based on their age unfair and also administratively burdensome. It directly contradicts the lifelong learning principles, because of age discrimination within the same education facilities.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Transportation***

Transportation issues and insufficient funds for bus fare were named by the school staff as serious barriers to staying in education. Students not able to attend all the lessons quickly fall behind and have a hard time getting back on track. According to school staff most municipalities don't offer free transportation (or coverage of transport fares) to adult learners because of their status as part-time students or because they have set an age limit to this type of support. This information was confirmed by the municipalities themselves. Although a few offer free transportation to everyone in the municipality, most do not offer any support for adult learners.

Those who do offer support do it either as social assistance in which case the person has to apply for aid and prove their financial difficulties or as a universal measure for all students in which case official records or information from school is used to decide eligibility. As mentioned the form of assistance may be free transportation within municipality or by using school busses. Others provide a certificate or card that proves the right for free transportation. Assistance is also provided through later remuneration based on the actual cost of tickets. Neither the municipalities nor school staff commented on the effectiveness of different types in comparison. This means that the form of assistance is less important than the actual fact of providing aid. Also the total sum of transportation costs is small enough that later remuneration does not pose a problem. Municipalities that provide this transportation related assistance mostly agree that it is effective for supporting adult participation in formal education. School staff agreed that transportation support is much needed. Therefore it seems that this type of measure should be encouraged more often.

Vocational school students can apply for transportation allowance and this was generally assessed by the school staff to be definitely a need and also effective measure. Adult gymnasiums are also mostly in bigger towns and students need to travel to attend classes. Especially because of the time arrangements it may make more sense to travel from home than to relocate to live near the school. Therefore it should be considered whether the transportation support provided for vocational school students should be extended to adult gymnasiums. In near future the need for regular gymnasium students' transportation support is also likely to rise with the restructuring of the school network. So alternatively a unified system for all gymnasium students could be designed.

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<sup>22</sup> The new coalition agreement sets free school lunches for general secondary school students a priority. If this is carried out it is also important to keep in mind that the new arrangement doesn't discriminate against older students. <http://www.postimees.ee/2729412/tasuta-koolilounat-hakkavad-saama-ka-gumnasistid>

### ***Accommodation***

Interviews with school staff showed that most schools have not faced serious issues with the accommodation of students. Vocational schools usually have student dormitories and smaller schools cooperate with others to find rooms for their students. A place in the dormitory has a fairly low price starting with ~15€, but more often ranging from 30-50€. Prices depend on the location of school, number of roommates and the availability of kitchen and bathroom. It can go up to 100€ or more for family rooms. Some schools offer the opportunity to rent the room for single stays as well, although this may be more costly. Schools often try to find ways to reduce the cost of dormitory rooms for students in financial difficulties. Some also use this as a prize to motivate students to get better grades and thereby improve their chances of graduating. The money comes from the schools own budget.

Adult gymnasiums don't normally have dormitories, but they also don't see this as a big obstacle for their students. Their part-time arrangements often require attendance in classes on a couple of days a week, which means that students are more likely to travel from home than to relocate entirely.

This issue seems to be more strongly linked to vocational schools, although it may also be the case that adult gymnasiums don't see the problem, because students in need of accommodation don't even start their studies knowing that the school has no dormitory.

Municipalities sometimes offer financial assistance to those adult learners who are in financial difficulties and have trouble affording housing themselves. This is sometimes done as part of subsistence allowance; in other cases the municipality covers the costs of a dormitory room. The need is judged case by case and therefore there aren't necessarily any specific measures as such.

### ***Support from employers***

Staff of the schools all agreed that the lack of support and understanding by the employers is a major barrier to both re-entering education as well as staying in school. Very common are situations where employer is supportive in the beginning, but later grows impatient with employees who often miss work and pressures them to leave school. Others spoke of examples where employees hide the fact they are going to school from their employers because employers might react negatively. The attitude of employers was seen as a wider problem. In vocational education employers often recruit students of certain subjects without demanding that the schooling be completed which results in dropping out. This tendency decreases study motivation for both potential students, current students and those who have dropped out, because the formal education is seen as unnecessary. More generally employers underestimate the value of more educated employees who are likely to be more independent and innovative in their work.

*"I would still like to emphasize, so it's clear, a big problem IS the employers' attitude. On one hand employers are quite eager to employ people with 7 grades, or no education and on the other hand, although the law enables people to take study leave, employers DO NOT support employees studies. All these work related issues are connected to this." (Adult gymnasiums)*

On the other hand for vocational schools employers are also a partner for on the job training. Schools stated having some very good partnerships, but found that it is very hard to motivate employers to participate in this type of programme. Two potential solutions for this were offered. Firstly increasing financial motivation of employers by either subsidizing students' wages while training or by providing

other financial incentives such as tax reductions for the employer. Secondly the school staff found that employers may be more willing to accept trainees if the trainees had an insurance which would cover any damage they may bring to the machinery or otherwise thereby lowering the risk of having untrained employees.

#### 4.4.2 Need for additional complementary measures

Continuing with the focus on adults who don't plan to return to school, respondents were asked about possible support measures that could make them reconsider. Results with information from at least 10 respondents are presented in the following table. People who stated that nothing at all could help them return were removed from this subset.

**Table 8. Assessment of potential measures by people not planning to return to education (n=232)**

Support measure	% of respondents that were led to this measure (n = 232)	Barriers that led to this measure	% of respondents that found the measure potentially helpful	% of all respondents (n = 400)?
Scholarship to cover basic needs	28,4%	Need to work	71,2%	11,8%
Flexible working time	45,7%	Need to work Desire to work	60,4%	16%
Cheap accommodation near school	28,4%	Need to work	34,9%	5,8%
Free transport to school	28,4%	Need to work	39,4%	6,5%
Employer suggests enrolling in further education	56,5%	Desire to work Lack of motivation Lack of need Age	45%	14,8%
Confidence, that studying would ensure better pay and career opportunities	38,8%	Desire to work Lack of motivation Lack of need	56,7%	12,8%
Covering babysitting expenses	7,8%	Child care	61,1%	2,8%
Cheap day-care near school	7,8%	Child care	38,9%	1,8%
Cheap day-care near home	7,8%	Child care	55,6%	2,5%

Additional support measures are found to be the most effective compared to school and education level changes. This is reaffirmed by teachers and school administrators according to whom the main barriers of their students have to do with money, work and childcare.

A lot of the potential support measures would not make adults consider returning to school. The most effective according to the adults would be financial support and flexible working time arrangement. Financial problems were named as an important problem also by the school staff. For those adults who are raising children, covering day-care or babysitting expenses would be most efficient. But this result lies on very few observations.

The school staff found that an important part is played by measures designed to support financially. The most effective way to give out financial support is to tie it to school attendance. The financial

incentives are also effective in motivating the students to get good marks, which is essential to finish school successfully. There have been negative examples, when the loss of allowance also meant lower achievements in school:

*"But regarding the scholarships, now the part-time students lost their scholarships and we in our school are feeling it right away. The marks have gone down... missed deadlines, they don't try as hard."* (Vocational schools)

It was also found that there's a need for day-care, because currently a number of students are taking their children to school and even class despite the lack of necessary facilities in the schools. This lowers the quality of the studies for the parents, but may also influence other students study opportunities if the children disrupt classes. Pre-school children are often left with school employees who babysit the children to help the mothers out. This is usually done out of their normal working hours. In addition the schools are unable to provide rooms for the mothers to care for their babies.

*"We have discussed it, that we should furnish a room where they can feed the children and change diapers. Currently they have to do it in the corridors or classrooms."* (Vocational schools)

Talking of financial support a topic that came up often was support for transportation because of the quite sparse network of schools. School staff also saw the provision of free (or cheap) school meals as an important support for the adults. Taken together all the financial support measures were found to be necessary and effective by the school staff. All the different parts of financial support (transportation, coverage of living expenses, free meals) help the students withstand the need to work long hours, which often leads to dropping out, and it also keeps them motivated in class.

#### **4.5 Promotion and information availability**

Throughout this empirical study of the barriers and potential motivators to participation in formal education we can see that often enough people are simply unaware of the opportunities that are available. For example people said that they would return to school if they could study via e-schooling or if they could also study vocational education. Both of these opportunities are currently available. Also a previous study in Estonia on the image of vocational education found that people without lower secondary education are less aware of the vocational school opportunities (Pärtel & Petti 2013). It is likely that they are also less informed about other learning opportunities such as adult gymnasiums. Our theoretical perspective dictates that a person's likelihood of participation depends on their perspective of the opportunity structure. Therefore an important part of any measure is communication of the opportunities. This chapter will discuss what types of strategies municipalities and schools use to promote the measures they are offering and also on the promotion of adult education as such. We try to find out what type of strategies they should adopt.

Universal measures are usually communicated through the municipality's website and if adequate the social workers. Measures targeted at students are commonly communicated through schools without a specific strategy either through posters in schools or through school staff. Use of other mediums is rare although not without precedent. This means that most measures are not actively communicated to potential learners who are therefore unaware of the opportunities.

Schools themselves have tried to actively recruit people as well as have advertisements in local papers and up-to-date websites to increase participation. Reaching out to potential participants has been difficult for schools because municipalities don't give out personal information of these people. Although there have been some examples of success in cooperation with municipalities where municipality officials themselves have taken on the role of spreading information to potential participants in the framework of specific projects.

*"I sent almost TWO HUNDRED letters to municipalities, social workers, to reach this group that maybe isn't working or are working with envelope wages to get them to come and study. I only got two people from X municipality. "*

(Vocational schools)

This was seen as an effective measure to bring people back to school by both potential students and teachers. Schools that have had these difficulties stated that they would happily contact these people themselves if they were given the opportunity. Others admitted that it should in fact be an obligation of the municipality to track all the people out of employment or without education and to provide these people with all the information and motivation to participate.

Schools' own support measures are advertised on the school website, school staff interaction with students and direct contact with the students who are potentially in need. This is a great strategy to inform the current students of their opportunities, but again lacks in informing potential students. Although it could be questioned, whether such activities should be carried out by the schools.

Some school staff found that employers' negative or non-supportive attitudes may be due to unawareness. For examples some vocational schools have gotten quite positive feedback from events directed at encouraging employers to join workplace based studying. But the information they share mostly applies to other forms of study as well, so better informing of employers could prove very beneficial for encouraging adult formal learning.

*„In reality the problem is employers' unawareness off different forms of studies and opportunities in general. It's clear that of all the positive things that Estonia does a lot more should be written and talked about, shown, whatever. Maybe someone stumbles upon the news ...“* (Vocational schools)

There have been a few campaigns to promote lifelong learning in Estonia, but they have been rather short in length. Also these have not been directed towards adults without basic and secondary education. These campaigns may serve to develop more positive attitudes regarding lifelong learning, but they don't directly influence the target group for adult basic and secondary education. This would require a more targeted approach either by introducing the specific study opportunities or by addressing the specific target group that could benefit from formal education on this level. Nevertheless it is also important to continue the shaping of general attitudes towards lifelong learning, because according to our study the idea of adults going back to school isn't widely accepted in Estonia.

Information availability is a crucial point in helping adults participate in learning. In order for them to consider returning to education the relevant knowledge of their opportunities needs to be as

complete as possible. Therefore **a comprehensive communication strategy for the specific target groups as well as for the population as a whole is needed.**

#### **4.6 Conclusions based on empirical findings**

The previous chapters highlight a huge variety of issues regarding adult secondary education provision in Estonia. We try to now bring out the most important implications from this data.

Analysis of barriers and motivation for learning showed that financial and attitudinal barriers are the most common for potential adult learners. Additionally here and there it was evident that adults were unaware of the variety of opportunities for attaining secondary education in Estonia. Therefore the perspective of the adults was incomplete regarding the opportunity structure which may have increased the perceived barriers such as financial constraints.

Study organization was not found as a barrier for entering education by the adults with only a few exceptions. These exceptions included problems with Estonian language which is likely a bigger issue than appeared from our survey, especially in some regions. Teachers and administrators in schools found that the current volume of the curriculum may be a problem for some, but they lacked consensus on this issue. It was also proposed that a research project as a graduation requirement could be replaced with a school examination. This is especially an issue for prison school students. Another issue that was raised in the schools was the financing of support staff, which is currently lacking in most adult gymnasiums.

Discussions on the education system in Estonia and more particularly on the organisation of adult education in Estonia a number of issues were raised by the teachers and administrators. The role of adult gymnasiums and vocational schools were differently defined and views on the future of adult formal education were sometimes conflicting. It is evident that these need to be addressed by clearly articulating the roles of different stakeholders and setting targets for the future. One of the main questions could be what is the purpose of adult formal education in Estonia?

Complementary measures were assessed by both potential students and teachers and administrators as the most important factor for bringing adults back to education. Students today are often in financial difficulties and according to teachers this is a frequent cause for dropping out of adult secondary education. But they also said that every little bit helps and indicated that a comprehensive system of transportation support, financial support for living expenses and subsidised school lunches is what is needed. Schools were critical of municipalities that among other things are not providing support for adults by refusing to pay for transportation.

Generalising from the results it can be said that attitudinal barriers are not only characteristic of the potential learners but of the society as a whole. The issue of employers' negative attitude was visible from both the people's survey and from the focus groups with teachers and administrators. The survey of municipalities also showed that a number of municipalities either don't see adults as learners or do not recognise the need to support adult learners. Therefore in general the concept of lifelong learning has not been internalised by different stakeholders and this in itself is a major barrier that needs to be addressed.



## 5 Best practices from other countries

### 5.1 Introduction

Many of the measures which support adults' participation in secondary level studies are not uniquely designed for formal secondary level studies, but are aimed at continuous education more widely. An overview of international practices of these measures which are relevant in the Estonian context is given in the report Järve *et al.* 2012. They give an overview of the measures aimed at overcoming following hindrances to the participation in continuous training:

1. Monetary: different measures to overcome monetary limitations for people but in some cases also for companies;
2. Time: measures aimed at easing care obligations as well as time limits due to working;
3. Aversion to study: measures to overcome aversion to formal studies, but also more general prejudices such as being too old to study;
4. Changing the attitudes of employers: measures aimed at changing employers' attitudes towards employers schooling and stimulating increase of their input to training.

This overview is not repeated here, except some specific measures for secondary education. In following only the good practices of the measures which concern specifically **adults' participation in formal secondary level studies** are presented. The measures are selected so that these would be of value or interest in the Estonian context and in the framework of the current study. Mostly it means that we sought practices which would confirm some suggestion or deal with limitation that is present in Estonian context and is not described in the previously mentioned report. The presented practices are just some examples, which means that similar practices may be used with some variations in other countries as well. The practices presented are mainly taken from the national reports for The Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI)<sup>23</sup> and supplemented where necessary with additional materials. The presented examples are not meant for applying in Estonia, but rather to raise discussions of potential of this kind of measure also in Estonia.

The practices which are introduced fall into the following categories:

1. Large-scale programs aimed at increasing the level of education of people (Swedish Knowledge Lift of Adult Education Initiative, Finnish Noste and Portugal NOI programs)
2. Education system and school level organisation of studies
  - a. Recognizing informal and non-formal achievements in formal studies
  - b. Increasing the flexible forms of learning
  - c. The amount of studies in upper secondary level
  - d. Possibility for choice of different paths on secondary level
  - e. Certificate of unfinished studies
3. Increasing motivation for participating in formal studies and overcoming personal barriers
  - a. Sharing information
  - b. Increasing literacy

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/en/confinteavi/>

## **5.2 Large scale programs aimed at increasing level of education nation-wide**

In most countries there is present regular opportunity for adults through education system to participate in secondary level studies, if this education level is not completed earlier. In some countries there have been additionally campaign based programmes for limited time intensified participation in secondary level studies.

The three wide scale programmes introduced below are from Sweden, Finland and Portugal. In all three countries the rationale for the programme was boosting economy by increase of employment, decrease of unemployment and increase of productivity. While Swedish program took place in the second half of 1990ies, Finnish and Portuguese programs were carried out middle or second half of 2000s. Although, very large at scale, the programs were essentially different. Swedish program targeted mainly low-educated unemployed, Finnish program targeted mainly working adults between 30 and 59, and Portuguese program targeted the whole population both adults and youth. The need for wider scale program in Sweden was high unemployment during economic crisis, in Finland the need to guarantee continuous labour supply and high employment levels with contracting labour force and in Portugal increase of the country's overall competitiveness through universal increase of education level as the share of educated people in Portugal was very low. Also the specific activities taken and training programmes where participation was possible were different.

There have also been different smaller scale projects with the same aim of increasing adults' education level in order to give them better opportunities in the labour market. E.g. in Slovakia there was a program called "Completion of Elementary School" targeted to those who were unemployable because of missing elementary education. The program was tailored as an active labour market measure which enabled completion of elementary education. The teaching was carried out following experimental curricula, which took account personal needs and situation in regional labour market. In two academic years (2004-2006) 266 people took part in it and 176 completed the program. Program cost approximately 290 thousand euros. (The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic 2008)

Evidently the need for wide scale program vs designing smaller scale programs is more general question whether there is perceived need for major program. If there is special need for one-time intensified increase of education level of many people the larger scale program should be designed. In case there is mainly individual level benefits expected from the education then the regular system for adults' participation in education is enough.

### **5.2.1 'Adult Education Initiative' or 'Knowledge Lift' in Sweden**

Adult Education Initiative (AEI) was targeted primarily at those unemployed who completely or partially lacked the three-year upper secondary level of education. However, also some working low skilled and unemployed with upper secondary education participated. The general aim of the program was to reduce unemployment by half by the year 2000 (objective stated in 1995). Program lasted from 1997 to the end of 2002.

The program was unprecedented in Sweden, 10% of labour force took part in the program (Albrecht *et al* 2005:1). During the years of AEI, the Government annually financed an average of 100 000 places in municipal adult education and 10 000 places at folk high schools. In addition, local

municipalities financed around 37 000 places from their own funds per year. The number of pupils and single course participants increased almost twofold during the years of AEI, but decreased almost to the pre-program level after it was finished in 2002 (Ministry of Education and Research, Sweden 2008). In the fall 1997 about 220 000 people (aged 25-55) participated in the program, while 330 000 people studied in the general upper secondary school.

The following issues were prioritised:

- Active recruitment of prioritised participants.
- Expanding counselling and municipal counselling centres.
- Flexibility and increased accessibility.
- Validating adult knowledge and competence.
- Improving accessibility to adult education for those with functional impairments and other disadvantaged groups.

The program was backed with essential organizational measures to support participants in gaining the targeted education level. These included:

1. **Financial support** - Participants in the program received different financial support. One in four students in AEI program got support, which was equal to the unemployment insurance scheme. Such support was paid only to those who qualified for unemployment insurance benefit at the time of entry into the programme, began to acquire secondary education and were from age group 25-55. In addition, there was the right to a variety of other educational grants and loans (Albrecht *et al.* 2005).
2. **Modernization of teaching methods** – Part of the initiative was modernization of the teaching methodology and pedagogy (Albrecht *et al.* 2005).

As a conservative estimate, the state spent in the first year of the program almost 1000 SEK (116 €) per person participating in the labor force (i.e. employed and unemployed persons), for a total of 3,5 billion SEK (~ € 406 million) a year. It was paid for 100 000 SEK for each year of one student place. Financing was more than sufficient to run the program (Albrecht *et al.* 2005).

As the programme took place for some time ago by now there have been many studies on the effects of the program. Björklund *et al.* (2004) found that a large number of teachers moved from the ordinary schools to adult education. Doing so could lead to negative effects on the teaching quality in ordinary schools.

For labour market outcomes there have been different results found at different points in time. While in 2007 Stenberg concluded that during 5-6 years after the end of the program the income of the participants in AEI was lower than income of participant in shorter vocation oriented labour market trainings. As the AEI is more expensive measure his suggestion was to direct more sources to the labour market training programmes (Stenberg 2007). In 2014 Stenberg and Westerlund had possibility to assess the results of the program with 13 year perspective. They find that both general and specific labour market training are associated with earnings increase. While in short term there is advantage of specific training, during 5-7 year the results converge. Specifically they found that for females with short education the earnings are higher from general training compared to specific skill training. They suggest as has been suggested also before that general education programs might be

appropriate in periods of high unemployment when opportunity costs are low and high numbers in specific skills training programs may inflict lower marginal returns. (Stenberg and Westerlund 2014)

With such big programmes it must be borne in mind that there are also wider effects to labour market than just increase of education level of participants. Albrecht *et al* (2008) show based on calibrated theoretical model with simulating AEI, that AEI increased both wages and employment rates of the participants. Also there are present wider gains for medium skilled people, at the same time those with lower skills may suffer.

### 5.2.2 Noste program Finland<sup>24</sup>

Noste program in Finland, implemented in 2003-2009, aimed at increasing the level of education among adults with a special focus on working adults aged between 30 and 59 who had no post-compulsory qualifications, although 25-year-olds and above were also eligible for completing comprehensive school education.

Objectives of the Noste program included strengthening the participation in working life and career development of adults who only have basic education, reducing the labour shortage resulting from the retirement of the post-war generation, and improving the employment rate. Participants could complete:

- vocational upper secondary qualifications,
- vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications and their parts,
- computer driving licences and modules, and
- unfinished comprehensive school and upper secondary school education.

Studies were free of charge for students except for examination fees. Public sector support was around 125 mln Euros. The quantitative target was to reach approximately 10 per cent of the target group. In 2003–2009, a total of 25,680 Noste students began their studies and qualifications - around 7.3% of the total target group. The participants in Noste program preferred the vocational education track. The aggregate data from Finland including participants in all kinds of AE measures indicates that Noste program had positive effect to participation in vocational education but no effect or negative effect on participation in upper secondary education.

Despite not reaching the 10% participation target and participation generally not leading to new jobs, positions or a pay rise, Noste program was a success in many other aspects. Long-term follow-up and evaluation has shown that the effects of the Noste Programme were considerably more widespread and diverse than the Programme's quantitative targets. Graduates and workplace representatives thought that their professional competence and work motivation had increased because of the studies. Also, their self-esteem and sense of security in working life were seen to have improved.

According to the follow-up, the most successful studies in terms of student volumes arose as a result of tripartite cooperation, where both the employer and employee were committed to the education process. At its best, extensive networks during the Programme created new operating cultures among education providers as well.

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<sup>24</sup> The overview of the program is given based on the source: Ministry of Education and Culture Finland (2010) Noste Programme 2003-2009. Final report. Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finalnd 2010:8.

The less-educated adult group clearly highlighted the importance of personalising studies, *strengthening learning skills, guidance and support measures*. During the Programme, teachers became increasingly aware of inadequate learning skills among adults, and several educational institutions adopted, for example, screening methods for dyslexia and focused on strengthening learning skills.

In addition to students, the business and employment sector was increasingly seen as a customer of adult education. Noste training carried out alongside working provided skills in clarifying and listening to the needs of both employers and employees in planning and implementing the education.

### **5.2.3 New Opportunities Initiative in Portugal**

The New Opportunities Initiative (NOI) is a national programme of the Portuguese government to massively upgrade the qualifications of the segment of the Portuguese population that lacks basic formal educational qualifications (2006-2010). Defining the completion of secondary education as the minimum qualification level will allow young people and professionals to play a role in today's knowledge economy. The need for such programme arose because of very low attainment of secondary education in Portugal: only 20% of adult population had completed upper secondary education and 50% of active population had not finished compulsory education. The programme addresses secondary education for both adults and youth. It aims to open possibilities for low-qualified workers to build on their professional experience and skills developed through their working lives to obtain a secondary diploma. This is carried out by motivating low-skilled adults to embark in a system of informal and non-formal skills recognition, accreditation and certification, with complements of formal learning of 4th, 9th and 12th grades education or/and a vocational certification. The programme was financed by the Government of Portugal and the European Social Fund. (UNESCO, UNEVOC)

To implement the programme, a whole new framework of recognition, validation and certification of competences was developed that totally differed from the traditional curricula. Also the program aimed at raising national awareness on lifelong learning and creating information and management systems for certification system and lifelong learning.

The specific goals set for adult education were following (Carneiro 2011):

1. To disseminate the network of Skills Recognition, Validation and Certification Centres (NOC), aiming at 500 in 2010. (in 2005 there were 98 Centres in 2010 453)
2. To establish national standards to be applied in the recognition, validation and certification of skills at upper secondary education as well as for adult education and training. (the standards were set in 2006 together with new architecture for upper secondary level system)
3. To reinforce the supply of Adult Education and Training Courses, equivalent to grades 9 and 12. At grade 9, enrolments should have reach 42,000 individuals by 2010, whereas for upper secondary level the target was 65,000 adults enrolled in 2010. (By December 2010 there were more than 167,500 enrolments. The goal for compulsory level (grade 9) was exceeded, registering 88,012 enrolments. At upper secondary level (grade 12) there were 79,574 enrolments, a number that also surpassed the target.
4. To guarantee that by 2010 600,000 adults obtained a skills certificate via recognition, validation and certification processes. (255,000 in basic education and 345,000 in secondary

education). According to data available in December 2010 over 422,000 adults obtained a certification since 2006:

- a. 362,588 from Recognition and validation of competences (RVC);
- b. 58,984 from Adult Education and Training Courses;
- c. 1,403 from Paths to Conclude the Upper Secondary Level, a modality created in 2007 to allow the conclusion of upper secondary by students with a maximum of 6 incomplete curricular units from extinct plans of studies.

Thus in general all the set goals with few exceptions were achieved. Crucial points for the success were additionally to the funding from ESF, foundation of National Qualification Agency, legislation on New Opportunities Centres, expansion of recognition, validation and certification to upper secondary level and the positive response from the demand side for which media campaigns carried a decisive role.

By September 2010, eight major media campaigns had been carried out. The three first campaigns targeted to younger people by addressing misrepresentations concerning upper secondary education and the social undervaluation of Vocational Education and Training (VET), as well as the adult population by conveying the value of experience through the recognition of competences and the importance of qualification through individual pathways. Then, four national campaigns were launched: one enhanced the diversity of paths available for young people after concluding the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and two others focused on the adult population, with the aim of valuing competences recognition as a legitimate route to achieve a formal qualification and of promoting the different routes that lead to upper secondary level. Likewise, media messages emphasised the social value of investment in adult education from a lifelong perspective, including arguments of a positive economic impact. The last campaigns elicited business social responsibility in order to stimulate corporate investment and solid commitment of employers in the training of employees whose qualifications remained below grade

The research has indicated that the success of the program turned out to be popular partly due to the learning process which incorporated recognition of prior learning. Valente *et al.* 2011 claim that “providing competence-based education and making educational levels accessible by recognition of prior learning such a large scale could have been a distinguishing and valuable asset that brought educational investments back into low-skilled adults’ life”. Valente *et al.* (2011) bring out that the publicly and widely expressed idea in the slogan “now your experience counts” was a first reason to expect something different – and more attracting – from the NOI. Although most of the participants did not understand how this idea would be expressed in the learning experience provided by the NOI, it looked very promising. Moreover, large media campaigns and strong political engagement all seemed to support their decision (Carneiro 2010). Recognition of prior learning is the mean which enables also value adults’ gained competences, increases self-esteem and also helps more flexible time-use for additional learning.

People who participated in the NOI programme expected also economic gains from higher education level, but foremost valued the additional educational level itself and also the possibility for further studies. After participation people expressed remarkable “self” gains. Also there was a reported progress in key competences even in the context of RPL. One can expect from RPL more than just making prior learning visible. Added learning outcomes and remarkable self-gains show that learning

progress comes from the RPL process, at least in the context of low-educated adults (Valente *et al.* 2011).

Comparing the three campaigns it is clear that all differ in significant aspects like target groups and aims. The Portuguese campaign isn't relevant to the Estonian context as the amount of people without secondary education is much lower. So a campaign of that scale would not be realisable here. Nevertheless the Portuguese campaign had some clever aspects that could be considered in Estonia. These include the development and wide use of a system for recognising prior experiences and also thought through advertising campaigns which were of key importance in the success of the project.

The Swedish campaign, which was targeted at the unemployed, would be relevant during an economic crisis with high unemployment which would increase the profitability of choosing education instead of work. In 2013 the unemployment rate in Estonia was 8.9% which is 46 600 people. Only 6200 of those had less than secondary level education. The Finnish campaign, which was directed at raising employees' qualifications in the face of the diminishing labour force, is as relevant in Estonia. In 2013 there were 39 500 25-64-year-olds without secondary education employed in Estonia, another 22 000 were not active. The latter group would also be a good candidate for such interventions. It follows that if a large scale campaign is to be considered in Estonia clear aims need to be set. Baring in mind the current low unemployment, the campaign could have a wider target group. Planning of the campaign must involve an analysis of potential side effects and the exact need for resources.

## 5.3 Education system

### 5.3.1 Recognition and validation of non-formal and in-formal learning in formal studies

The possibilities for recognition of prior learning (RPL) are prescribed in the Estonian regulations both for vocational and general education. However, as the regulation is new, there is quite a lot of confusion among participants, how to carry it out, especially in general education field. While the system for awarding qualifications in vocational education and for vocational qualifications is already practiced to some extent, there is no practice in general education schools.

Recognition of prior learning was also part of the previously described national programmes at least in Finland and Portugal. Here however, the some specific examples, on the RPL in secondary general education and tools used for it are described. Therefore an example from the USA for an external diploma program (EDP) will be shortly presented. Individual approach, which RPL assumes, does not have to be wholly external; combination of evaluation of earlier competences and studying single subjects may be needed for example (as is possible in Norway validation example). Therefore more flexible individual approaches can also be found in different countries. In Estonia there is the possibility to draw up an individual study program for specific students, thus the recognition of prior learning is in principle possible to combine with additional learning.

Recognition of prior learning might be a key to motivate adults back to education system as showed the Portugal example. RPL shortens the additional time that is needed to spend on studying. While participating in formal studies is time consuming, RPL is the main tool which enables to shorten the time and respectively lower opportunity costs for adults legitimately. Additionally to making acquired

skills visible, RPL may operate as a tool for increasing learning skills, thus it has also value of its own. At the same time the method assumes individual assessment of each applicant, which is rather expensive. Even though the need for classes for those individuals who pass successfully RPL is smaller, there is no cost effectiveness from the side of the system expected. This is because there are new systems needed, individual assessment is expensive and additionally to those who succeed with RPL, there are those who will not. The major challenge with RPL is also the social recognition of the system and certificates that are issued within RPL. (Werquin 2008)

### ***The External Diploma Program (EDP)- USA***

In following the description of OECD (2005) of the program is given. EDP is a program for those who have not completed their upper secondary education but have the essential experiences, which is on an equivalent level with upper secondary education.

The EDP is a typical second chance education, and adopts original methods. The strategy is to detect those academic skills that are already mastered by the adult in his everyday work and professional environment. Applicants have to demonstrate that they can display core academic competence through the highly individualized preparation of documents. There is no formal classroom work, applicants decide their own pace and organize their work in close contact with an assessor. This is not a typical academic exercise since the job and home management experience of the applicant is supposed to help satisfy EDP requirements. These skills may be demonstrated through documentation of a current occupation or trade (the more frequent configuration) or of home management experience. Of course, this program is directed towards highly motivated individuals, who already have a job, some professional competences and want to complete their education. Generally speaking, EDP is associated with the perspective of a promotion within a firm or a professional track.

Given the large costs of EDP – the program is tailored to each individual and calls for close monitoring – the quantitative impact of this diploma is not very important but it is a valuable component of any adult education system. The challenge is to reveal the academic skills underlying the everyday competences mobilized on the job. Though OECD evaluation suggest for the USA that in view of the large costs of the external degree program, it could be interesting to adopt easier assessment procedures to detect the skills and competences of an employee and then propose a series of standardized modules to reach the level required for passing a standardized test, for example the General Educational Development exams.

### ***National validation project - Norway***

The description of the project is taken from Mohn (2007). Validation project's (1999-2002) main purpose was creation of a system for validation of adults' non-formal and in-formal learning without the need to undergo traditional training. Within the validation project a system for the upper secondary education level was also developed. The aim of the valuation in upper secondary level was to:

- Match learning to formal qualifications set in the national curricula and shorten the study period;
- To give the possibility for more individual and tailor made study programs
- To provide individuals with accredited certificate to gain promotion or career improvement, find a new job, increase mobility in the working life.

For upper secondary education assessment centres were established within the counties. General steps for the validation are following:

1. Information and guidance (in upper secondary level it means information and guidance by county council centres and upper secondary schools);
2. Systemising and identification (creation of portfolio by individuals and counsellors);
3. Assessment (assessment in relation to national curriculum, certified by secondary/vocational schools in cooperation with counsellors in county council centres);
4. Documentary proof (proof of competence, trade or journeyman certificate, diploma).

Both manual and computerized tools were developed and tested in vocational and general subjects. The tools are used in different ways dependent on the needs of the individual. Sometimes the assessor supplements the existing tools with locally developed tools. The methods used for validation are in general following:

1. Dialogue-based method: The dialogue-based method is based on discussions between assessor/specialist and the adult. The specialist focuses on the knowledge and experience of each individual and attends to specific problems and queries in the curriculum. The assessor/specialist can use a computerised or manual tool based on the curriculum in question.  
This method requires individual preparation and a one-to-one meeting. The dialogue-based method can be combined with portfolio assessment, self-assessment and testing. It has been tested out on a large number of candidates. The conclusion is that the method fits in with both vocational and general subjects. Yet, the degree of testing has to vary from person to person. A dialogue-based method covers tacit knowledge, and seems to be good for adults who have difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics.
2. Assessment of portfolio: Assessment on the basis of a portfolio is a method based on written documentation, photos, etc. The candidate sends a “charting” form to a “service centre” together with certificates and reports. Modules and subjects are approved on the basis of the documentation submitted, and additional education is offered so that individuals can acquire the desired certificates. This method demands good written documentation of individuals’ own skills and does not require one-to-one meetings. Undocumented and tacit knowledge is difficult to reveal. After admission to upper secondary education, a discussion takes place in order to arrange the course according to actual knowledge and skills.
3. Vocational “testing” starts off with an interview, where the background, training, work experience, language skills and objective of the adult are charted. After the first general interview a professional specialist interviews the individual in the particular subject, after which the individual shows the abilities in practice, so that both the theoretical and the practical side of the trade is assessed.

From 2000 to 2005 approximately 60 000 persons went through a recognition procedure in relation to upper secondary level. Approximately 80% of the recognition has been done in vocational subjects.

### ***My Competence Folder<sup>25</sup> – tool for RPL in Denmark<sup>26</sup>***

In Denmark an online tool was created for people, who apply for recognition of prior learning. The online tool is for creation and gathering documentation which is needed to assess prior learning. This a voluntary possibility to use this online tool or some other framework for recognition of prior learning, however, it may be used also in other different contexts such as job interviews, guidance counselling etc. The tool enables a compilation of a set of documents in framework of a CV.

In addition to this, a specific tool has been developed for describing and documenting competences acquired in association life, in voluntary social work, and in liberal adult education, respectively. This tool has been developed for the Ministry of Education in co-operation with major third sector organisations. The tool, which is modelled as a questionnaire for self-evaluation, offers a systematic clarification and identification of a number of specified competences including social and personal competences. This self-evaluation may be supplemented with an interview on the result of the questionnaire.

There have been no instances in Estonia where on secondary education level work experience has been assessed and recognised in formal education. The system is sometimes used in vocational schools, but need further development. So it could be beneficial if VÕTA system would be extended to adult gymnasiums enabling the recognition of prior knowledge and skills in general subjects. Additionally the current uses for VÕTA have to be taken into consideration and the system should be widened so that the standards for recognition are the same in all the schools to keep the cost of the system under control.

#### **5.3.2 Possibility for choice of different paths in secondary level**

The school systems differ from country to country and here only one example is presented, how more flexibility could be introduced to the system. The example of Ireland has some relevance in the Estonian situation because of an additional type of certification that was created in 1995. This upper secondary level certificate is for those who are not sure which path to choose: academic or vocational (The Department of Education and Science, Ireland 2008). The types of certificate programmes for upper secondary level are:

1. The Leaving Certificate (established)
2. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
3. The Leaving Certificate Applied

While the Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme have parallels in upper secondary education in general schools and in vocational schools in Estonia, there is no alternative upper secondary education program available. The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme has main objective to prepare a student for adult and working life. The Leaving Certificate Applied has three parts: general education, vocational education, vocational preparation. This program is intended for those people who are not adequately catered for by other programmes. Those who finish this program and wish to study in third level have to take one year Post-Leaving certificate courses.

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<sup>25</sup> [www.minkompetencemappe.dk](http://www.minkompetencemappe.dk)

<sup>26</sup> The description is given based on The Ministry of Education, Denmark (2008) The Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education. National Report of Denmark.

In the Estonian context the focus group participants found that for some students the current graduation requirements are too much. It must be stated that the focus group participants did not all agree on the subject, whether the curriculum in adult gymnasiums could and should be different from regular gymnasiums. Creating a third opportunity to graduate would solve this dilemma, but also greater freedom in subject specialisation would enable people to obtain the majority of skills and knowledge that come with a secondary education. Selection into further education or for work positions would then take place when enrolling or applying for a job and different diplomas would aid in this process.

### **5.3.3 Certificate for unfinished studies - Finland**

According to the adults' school description there are many adults' who repeatedly leave school and return after some time. In order to help these people to certify their learning in labour market, but also in order to indicate the value of learning (even if not completed) there could be considered also in Estonia setting up a certificate of unfinished studies as is in Finland.

In Finland there are three different certificates that are given in general upper secondary school depending on the rate of completion of studies. The certificates are not designed for adult education. The following certificates are used at upper secondary school (Finnish National Board of Education 2004):

1. The general upper secondary school leaving certificate is awarded to a student who has completed the entire general upper secondary school syllabus.
2. The certificate for completion of a syllabus is given to a person who has completed the syllabus of one or more upper secondary school subjects.
3. The certificate for resignation from upper secondary school (certificate of resignation) is given to a student who leaves school before completing the entire general upper secondary school syllabus.

Thus also students who have not completed the whole programme have the certificate proving their studies. This recognises students for their achievements and reduces feelings of failure because the student was unable to graduate with a full diploma. Additionally the diploma can be used to prove to potential employers the extent of studies that the student was able to finish, which would increase their chances for a job in comparison to those who for example never attended secondary school.

## **5.4 Number and organisation of classes**

One specific theme that is not touched upon in the report Järve et al. (2012) is organisation of classes. Flexibility of learning is more important for longer secondary level studies than short labour market trainings. Even though from the viewpoint of school staff this was not seen as a major problem, there are still important concerns with this issue as many people express that they would like to return to school if the scheduling of lessons would be more suitable. In secondary vocational studies there is not possible at all to study otherwise than full-time studies, which makes impossible for working adult to study on this level. In adult gymnasiums there are different organisations of lessons in different schools. However, there are present also schools where all the classes take place only on regular working time regular working days and e-learning is not taking place at all.

### **5.4.1 Increasing the flexible forms of learning (time-wise)**

### ***Lithuania – the need for increase of flexible forms of learning due to high emigration***

According to the data of the Statistics Lithuania, during 2001–2005, approximately 126 thousand people left Lithuania. People aged 25–45 accounted for the majority of emigrants. The major share of the emigrants is with secondary education (64%) and those who have not acquired any profession (37%). A certain percentage from this number emigrate without completing studies at general education or higher education schools and therefore the need arises to continue learning under these programmes in a form of distance learning. Taking into consideration this need, the number of distance education programmes is increasing and opportunity to study according to these programmes individually is provided. (Totoraitis *et al.* 2008)

Moving abroad to work was also mentioned in focus group interviews as a reason for quitting the school. Thus, Estonia faces similar problem and therefore enabling flexible learning possibilities for those who are working abroad would be of value. The flexibility should include both smaller amount of contact lessons and increased use of internet-based lessons.

### ***Cyprus- evening technical schools***

Additionally to the evening school in general education there are in Cyprus established evening technical schools, which enable adults to acquire secondary vocational education. The evening classes provide **formal secondary Technical and Vocational Education Programmes**, Programmes of short duration in modules, Programmes of continuing Technical and Vocational Education, Programmes catering for the preparation of national and other Examinations. First such school was established in Nicosia in 1999. (Republic of Cyprus, Ministry of Education and Culture 2008)

#### **5.4.2 Reduced amount of studies for adults**

Similarly to Estonia there are in many countries generally some specific requirements that are relieved for adults who participate in upper secondary education compared to regular students. In focus groups with the school staff it was brought out by some that the load of studying is too high and should be reduced as it is in Finland. In Estonia, it is obligatory to have 96 courses in regular upper secondary education studies, but in non-stationary studies 72 courses is set as a minimum (one course is equivalent to minimally 35 lessons). In Finland the number of courses in regular upper secondary level studies is at minimum 75 courses and in adult studies 44 courses (one course is minimum 38 lessons) (Finnish National Board of Education 2004). Evidently, both the total amount of lessons and reduced amount of lessons for adults are smaller in Finnish system. Unlike in Estonia all arts and physical education lessons are omitted from adults' compulsory upper secondary education in Finland.

#### **5.4.3 Modernising schools**

Some good examples for the use of ICT are from UK, where there in the framework of National Learning Network programme e-guides were trained. E-guides is a staff development model adopted in Adult and Community Learning involved in the training of e-guides who were responsible for supporting, mentoring and developing their peers. By 2008, 2000 e-guides have been trained and they have in turn supported approximately 14,000 other staff. They now form a network of expertise through which good practice and new ideas can flow. (UK National Commission ... 2008)

The government agency responsible for support to technology in education, BECTa, is currently producing a new version of its e-learning national policy, *Harnessing Technology*. This policy covers the whole of the education sector and one of its foci is the e-maturity of educational providers,

essentially, do they have the skills and understanding to make the most effective use of technology for learning in their whole organisation? The current view is that although considerable effort has been made, only a minority of providers are e-mature. This indicates that although it is relatively straightforward to introduce a degree of e-learning into a single class or programme, to integrate technology across an entire organisation is far more difficult. (UK National Commission ... 2008)

## **5.5 Increasing motivation and overcoming personal barriers for studying**

Adults' face different hindrances to participation in training and even more in formal studies as these tend to be longer, thus more time consuming and demanding more resources. In order to enable adults' to participate in lifelong learning and in formal education there are several different measures present in different countries. These include measures to overcome financial barriers, easing burden of child care and other care obligations, guaranteeing employers' cooperation. These are not touched upon here as these are covered in Järve *et al.* (2013). Some examples of measures which concern education system, organisation of lessons, recognition of in-formal and non-formal learning were discussed already above. Here only some additional examples, worth of mentioning from the point of view of the current Estonian secondary education system is presented.

In order to motivate low educated people to take part in training different motivation mechanisms have been used. In Greece those studying in second chance schools have some advantages (such as free entry into museums and concessions in public transport). Additionally in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice it was decided that the time of study in second chance schools, which function in correctional departments counts as double the time of serving the sentence. (The General Secretariat ... 2008)

In order to popularize lifelong learning different campaigns are held in other countries as well as in Estonia, for example the week of adult learner, rewards of titles such as the learner of the year/region or the like. Similar examples are present in different countries. The Slovenian Institute of Adult Education has presented three kinds of awards since 1997 to increase the participation and promote lifelong learning climate. The awards are:

- to individuals for exceptional learning results and enriching one's own knowledge;
- to groups for exceptional learning results and enriching their own knowledge,
- to individuals, groups, institutions, companies and local communities for exceptional professional or promotional or promotional achievements in the process of enriching the knowledge of others. (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education 2008)

This type of campaigns aim to conquer the attitudinal barriers in the society as a whole and thereby also for adult learners through both external and internal motivation factors. Järve *et al.* (2012) found that an appropriate measure for recognising employers may be to develop a certificate that proves that the employer is an active supporter of lifelong learning.

### **5.5.1 Simplifying the structures of adult education and information**

In several countries attempts have been made to simplify finding information on possibilities of further studies for potential learners. A similar need is prevalent in Estonia, where it appears from people's survey that there are essential deficits in information (for example people do not know that education even to adult on secondary level is free of charge, or that different adults' gymnasiums

have different scheduling of classes). Also different institutions do not have readily available comprehensive information about different non-formal and formal learning possibilities.

In the USA it was found that different state agencies have from the point of view of a person conflicting aims: On the one hand, for some programs of the Department of Health and Human Services, the participation to an educational or training program is compulsory for the beneficiary. On the other hand, for the Department of Labor the main objective is a quick reinsertion into the job market via training and education. The Department of Education has wider objectives: offer a second chance to individuals who left school without completing their education, favour the insertion of immigrant workers by English language programs and more generally provide the basis for an informed citizenship. In order to coordinate and potentially integrate locally the interventions of the Federal Departments One Stop Centers were created. The main benefit of such a system is easier access and synthesis of available information for the people. (US Department of Education ... 2008)

Nevertheless, it is not sure that the local manager of each One Stop Center can easily provide the full range of information and services that the user may like to find gathered at a single place. With modern technologies, the access to information can be warranted but the supply of courses probably cannot be totally integrated. More over the manager may face contradictory incentives, constraints or procedures concerning the same adult: is the education and training a simple transition from welfare to employment without any clear ambition of competence enhancement (this is probably the objective of the Department of Health and Human Services) or does the program selected aim at a lifelong approach of competence formation? Can short-term efficiency be made compatible with equity issues? Facing these dilemmas on an everyday basis, One Stop Centers might play an important role in detecting discrepancies and inconsistencies between various Federal programs, giving feedback to the various departments in charge and possibly proposing alternative procedures and reforms. (US Department of Education ... 2008)

Similar idea of simplifying the system was behind the reform of career information in UK. In 2006-7 the Government carried out a Review of Adult Advice and Guidance services with a view to creating a more coherent service. The outcome of this was the decision to create a new national Adult Advancement and Careers Service, to bring together and build on the work of Nextsteps and Learndirect. This service was developed progressively over the period 2008-2011, by which time it was expected to be nationally available, with additional funding of £50million. A particular feature of this service is to focus on supporting people in low skilled jobs to upgrade their skills and jobs. One challenge which the government faced in creating this service was to ensure that constraints on funding do not lead it to focus attention too heavily on socially excluded groups, leading to it being stigmatised in the public eye, and thus ceasing to be seen as a universal resource. This happened to a parallel initiative, the Connexions service, which sought to provide integrated career, education and social advice to young people, and the Government's Jobcentre Plus service, which exists to assist the unemployed back into work. Both suffer from being stigmatised in public attitudes as services only for the seriously excluded. (UK National Commission ... 2008)

Additionally the role of formal education (governed by the Ministry of Education and Research) should be reconsidered in the context of measures directed at the unemployed through the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (governed by the Ministry of Social Affairs). The main aim of the Unemployment Insurance Fund is to get people back to the labour market and even if a person lacks

significant basic knowledge the fund usually prefers short term and low cost training to financing full-time formal education studies. In certain cases giving a person a formal education might be a more effective solution and this means that clear principles should be developed to support the unemployed who could benefit from a full-time formal education.

### **5.5.2 Increasing basic literacy**

All over Europe there are different courses targeted to increasing literacy. Many countries, including Slovenia, offer courses mainly aimed at increasing literacy skills of the target group. This is an important prerequisite for adults to be able to continue learning. In the case of Slovenia, Bridge to Education is a programme intended for adults with ten years of education or less who wish to continue their education, or are already enrolled in upper secondary education. The programme's objective is to enable these adults to acquire or renew their basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy needed for contemporary life in the information society. The aims of the programme are to acquire social skills and learning techniques, as well as learning to learn skills and active citizenship. Another important aim is the motivation of participants for further education in compliance with the lifelong learning strategy. (Slovenian Institute of Adult Education 2008)

In Denmark in 2001 the Adult Education Reform was implemented. Introduction of the preparatory adult education programmes was a part of this wide reform. The aim is to offer all adults of at least 18 years of age a possibility to improve and supplement their literacy and numeracy skills so that they will be better equipped to get along on the labour market and as citizens in a democratic society. This will also enhance their opportunities for undergoing further education and training within the framework of the adult education system. Provision of this programme is the responsibility of the State (the Ministry of Education). The teaching is organised so that it will be in interplay with daily life of the participants. This means that a lot of the activities will take place at the workplace rather than in educational establishments. Literacy (reading, spelling and writing) and mathematics (numeracy comprehension, arithmetic, and basic mathematical concepts) are taught at different levels. In order to participate the person must take a half an hour test, after which her/his suitability to program and level of knowledge is assessed. Training takes place at enterprise or at an educational institution and is free of charge for the participants. (The Ministry of Education, Denmark 2008)

It is evident that in North-Eastern Estonia there is a problem because upper secondary education is in Estonian, but Estonian language skills in this region are not very good. Thus there should be specific literacy enhancing attempts for this group. On the other groups of society the need for literacy courses should be analysed first. The school personnel expressed the problems with learning skills and sometimes the need to brush up for courses in some subjects. However, these are covered within current studies and do not require developing specific literacy courses.

## 6 Policy recommendations

Policy suggestions presented below may have been initially mentioned by the schools that were interviewed, derived from people's or municipalities survey or are based on some example from abroad. We included here the suggestions that are worth considering and in some cases where there was lack of consensus we suggest to raise a wider debate to solve the situation. The tentative division of the suggestions is to general education system and school organisation and to support measures. The overarching measure for wider campaign to attract people to acquire secondary education is discussed separately.

In short the policy recommendations are as follows:

1. General governing issues:
  - a. Clearer governing structure
  - b. Strategy for adult basic and secondary education
2. Financing and organisation of support measures
  - a. Improve general financing of schools
  - b. Increase attractiveness of general education compared to unemployment
  - c. Clearer and equal opportunities support system
  - d. Increasing child care opportunities
3. The content and organisation of adult formal education:
  - a. Increase flexibility of vocational upper secondary education using modular curricula
  - b. Using recognition of prior learning in formal education
  - c. Improving learning opportunities for non-native Estonian speakers
  - d. Establish a certificate indicating unfinished studies
  - e. Adjusting the precondition of a research project for graduating
  - f. Develop e-learning possibilities and e-learning capability
4. Information and counselling:
  - a. Development of a comprehensive communication strategy
  - b. Reaching the target group

In the following subchapters all the recommendations are discussed in more detail.

### 6.1 Clear governing structure and overarching aims

#### 6.1.1 Clear governing structure

Adult education, including adult basic and secondary level education, belongs to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Research. Lifelong learning in itself is closely related to the jurisdictions of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication.

Education institutions that provide adult basic and secondary education are partly state-owned and partly municipality-owned. Adult gymnasiums belong to municipalities and vocational schools are mostly state owned. But the financing isn't dependent solely of the owner of the school – the teachers' payfund and money for textbooks comes from the state in all the schools. Other expenses are carried by the owner and different municipalities are fulfilling their obligations to a different

extent. A lot of the municipalities aren't currently funding all the positions that the law requires in a school.

The national support system is different for students in gymnasiums and vocational schools, because they are themselves parts of different systems. Vocational education is supported much like higher education, but adult gymnasiums are seen as an extension of the regular secondary schools. Additionally local support measures are highly dependent on the priorities and resources of the municipality.

The registered unemployed in Estonia receive different training opportunities from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (Töötukassa). Adult basic and secondary education are not considered to be labour market training and enrolling in this type of education means losing the benefits and services provided by the Töötukassa. This is why the consultants at Töötukassa rarely recommend returning to formal education and instead offer short-term labour market training.

All these institutions have a clear effect on the adults' participation in formal education. In order to provide every adult with equal opportunities for obtaining basic and secondary education, it is important that the governing of the issue is systematic. The government's (including ministries and related institutions), local municipalities' and schools' roles need to be clearly defined to guarantee an institutional structure that would enable the supporting of adult formal education in a systematic and versatile way.

Some steps in this direction have been put forth in the new Estonian strategy for lifelong learning 2014-2020 which was accepted in February 2014. To ensure equal access to high-quality education the continuation of separating basic and secondary schools, as well as bringing all the secondary schools under state ownership, is planned (The Republic of Estonia Government 2014). In our opinion this reform should include adult gymnasiums.

### **6.1.2 Strategy for adult basic and secondary education**

The organisational-governing issues revolving adult formal education are tightly intertwined with content issues on the level of school and education organisation. These issues also require that the aims and roles of different actors be well-defined in order to identify the next steps. More specifically this means that it should be strategically thought through how adult secondary education is and should be offered. The empirical part of the current study showed that the roles of different actors and the aim of adult formal education more widely are unclear. Some vocational schools are questioning why adult gymnasiums aren't merged with them, since they are already teaching the general subject in their vocational secondary programmes. Some adult gymnasiums on the other hand are critical of the quality and purpose of general subjects in vocational schools. It is clear that these different opinions stem from a different understanding of what is the purpose of adult formal education and what roles the different institutions should take. Is the purpose of adult formal education to imitate initial education or is the priority to give adults the skills and knowledge they will need on the labour market and/or in further education? Also the vocational secondary education organisation isn't currently flexible enough for most adults' needs. So to increase adults' participation in vocational secondary education it is important to set it as priority and to support the development of flexible solutions.

Analysing the aims of adult basic and secondary education and stating the roles of different institutions would enable better cooperation between them. Today the different institutions tend to see each other more as competitors. This is tightly connected to the reconsidering of governing structures proposed in the previous subchapter. The strategy should answer in detail these broad questions:

- What are the main aims of adult basic and secondary education?
- What are the necessary learning activities to achieve those goals?
- What is the role of adult gymnasiums?
- What is the role of vocational schools?
- What are the roles of the state and municipalities in providing education and support services?
- What are the possibilities for institutional co-operation?

Thought-out goals and the clear defining of roles is a precondition for changes that could improve the support for adult learners. Followingly we will discuss some of the sorepoints that could be cured by this.

Only a few exceptional schools are currently providing the opportunity to obtain basic education together with pre-vocational education. This requires the cooperation between general and vocational schools, because vocational schools don't have the right to give out a basic education diploma. At the same time these vocational schools have the experience of teaching general subjects and taking into consideration that the volume of general subject is about to drop in the coming years due to subject integration, it is likely that the workload of some of the teachers may fall. Therefore it should be considered whether creating a separate vocational basic education curricula would be inline with the national priorities set for providing adult formal education.

Adult gymnasiums offer flexible learning opportunities which fit most of the students' needs. On the other hand some of the schools identify themselves more as second round schools for fresh dropouts from the initial education system. Vocational schools only offer stationary full-time vocational secondary education which isn't targeted at adult learners. So from the perspective of adult learners the schools roles seem conflicting and an adult may not be able to find a suitable study arrangement from these limited alternatives.

With the reference to the aims set for adults' general education in different institutions the content and volume of the education should be analysed as well. Based on the current research project there have been different opinions whether to reduce the amount of adults' study courses or not and whether such reductions should be shown on the diploma. At the same time there is consensual support for the general reduction of course volumes in upper secondary level studies which is currently under way in all of general upper secondary programmes.

However, there is unanimous view that the outcome with regard to further learning opportunities in adult secondary education should be equal to the ordinary schools outcomes. At the same time it has been found that there are some adults who participate in secondary education studies with no aim of further studies and for whom there are some subjects, which are difficult to complete make difficult to graduate. An interesting example of a solution is to be found in Ireland where **a third possibility beside general upper and vocational upper secondary education an applied upper secondary**

**education is given.** This is something in between vocational and general education giving more flexibility to the studying.

## 6.2 Financing and organisation of support measures

### 6.2.1 General financing of schools

As a part of the general strategy **the financing of adult education should be re-evaluated so that all the actors who have been entrusted with relevant tasks would have the financial resources to carry out these tasks.** Current financing system leaves small gymnasiums into unfavourable situation as the financing takes place according to the number of students. Smaller gymnasiums are not able to hire support staff such as psychologist, social educator, and language therapist. In practice the workload of teachers' increases as they try to fulfil the role of the support staff as well. However, they lack adequate training and knowledge to provide specialised support. The bigger schools, where this kind of staff is present find it very important and necessary to back up adults' continuing and successful completion of studies. Therefore the situation, where the supporting services in smaller schools are missing, should be solved. If it is decided that small adult gymnasiums are still kept, the financing for the support staff should be provided, irrespective who will provide the financing. The conflict between municipalities and the state must be resolved and financing provided.

It was also complained in some cases that flexible forms of studying are underfinanced. Meaning that there is no incentive for a school to take extern students as it is financially costly. **The financing principles should be checked against different flexible studying methods and to assure that costs of flexible studying methods are covered the same way as the costs of ordinary studies.**

### 6.2.2 Increase attractiveness of general education compared to unemployment

On national level participation in formal education is downgraded compared to the seeking a job as an unemployed. In case of moving from unemployment to general formal education one loses health insurance and unemployment benefits. Moving to vocational secondary education one loses unemployment benefits (health insurance is still provided). Thus it is more attractive to stay unemployed than to participate in formal studies. **As a solution here there are two possibilities: one is to create a system of scholarships, the other is to retain the right of unemployment benefit on equal bases to those who are unemployed while attending formal studies. Additionally there is need to provide if necessary people in general education system with health insurance.** At the same time care must be taken so that young pupils would not take advantage of the scholarship system and move from ordinary schooling system to adult gymnasiums. This would be easily corrected with age limits. This would equalise from the person's point of view the value of being unemployed with being in the education system.

If the unemployment is not preferred to learning in formal studies money-wise, it is still necessary that people would **see studying as a viable alternative.** It is necessary that studying is offered to unemployed people as an alternative and **that the unemployment office consultants would direct people to the formal education system** as needed.

### 6.2.3 Clearer and equal opportunities support system

Today there are different frameworks for support systems for those adults who are in vocational and those who are in general secondary education studies. Also for those who study in general education institutions there are different measures applied depending on the specific municipality. Even though

there are rather few support measures present for adults; from the viewpoint of schools' staff the need for three major support measures (covering transportation costs, covering school lunch expenses, supporting learning through covering basic needs of people) was identified. This view did not differ between vocational and general education schools. The main suggestion here is that adults who are studying or consider studying should have similar opportunities and guarantees to study in different institutions if it is not decided on state level that there is strategic preference given to the vocational education schools (in which case this needs to be clearly articulated.)

Also the **support measures should apply on similar grounds to all irrespective of the municipality, where one lives**. This assumes some **simplification and clarification of systems and rules**. In order to give people equal opportunities the framework must be regulated clearly on state level. Currently, even though there are exemptions, several municipalities do not see adults' studying as legitimate activity of adults as the primary activity should be working. Even so some adults would benefit of additional formal studies, municipalities do not direct them to this path and respectively do not design measures to support studying. Also some, even though a few, municipalities support adults' transportation to school, the others do not. Thus there is different access to education in different municipalities.

However, if the regulation is set on state level raises the question of financing and administration. On the one hand there could be central regulation created and municipalities obliged to finance and administrate it. At the same time as is seen currently with support staff in schools, this might raise additional problems. On the other hand there could be similarly to vocational schools also in general secondary education schools a support mechanism provided by the state so that schools administrate it. In one or the other way, it should be possible for people to participate in education on equal basis and so that a continuous education path is possible.

Whichever administrative arrangement is chosen it is clear that adults' main barriers to learning are financial issues which **can be effectively solved only through means-tested financial support, and transportation support to increase geographical accessibility**.

#### **6.2.4 Increasing child care opportunities**

Child care seems to be an important issue according to the teachers and administrators as well as the potential students. There are some people who state that they are not able to participate in school because of child care obligations and also the description of school personnel indicates the need for some child care possibility. Schools are in a situation, where children of students come to lessons, are playing freely in the corridors during the lessons, are taken care by somebody from school personnel alongside their normal duties, etc. In some cases it is not minded by the rest of school staff and pupils, but for some his poses serious issues.

The problem has two aspects: first, despite the well-developed universal child care kindergarten system there are municipalities, where there are not enough kindergarten places. Second, the adult school lessons take sometimes place in irregular working hours, when usual child care facilities are closed. Respectively the solutions are to be developed by different actors. In general schools personnel's opinion is that they do not want to deal with general child care provision as the municipalities have such an obligation. Thus the universal day-care facilities should be provided by municipalities. However, during the lessons, especially with irregular working hours, there should be the possibility for a babysitting near school so that children would not disturb lessons if deemed

necessary by school. That is because the demand for irregular child care is concentrated to school. While there are students coming to school from different places, it is more economical to organise babysitting in school than in different kindergartens or by each person by themselves. **The babysitting in school should not aim to mimic kindergarten system but should be instead a temporary play room with babysitter just for the time of the lessons.**

There are good examples of such playrooms in some schools, which could be taken as examples e.g. in Paide and Pärnu adult gymnasiums and Tartu vocational school. **These examples should be more widely circulated** and schools should be provided with **know-how on technicalities** for creating such a facility (if necessary legal framework should be created). Though creation and running such a babysitting playroom is cheap compared to the universal kindergarten service, **financing principles should be developed** for schools that are willing to organise this.

Potential students who were unable to return to school because of childcare responsibilities saw day-care near the school as least effective (comparing to day-care near home and covering babysitting expenses). But bearing in mind the similarity of these measures and the cost-effectiveness of creating a day-care near school where a larger number of people with specific (time related) needs come together, this may be a good solution.

## **6.3 Organisation of adult secondary education**

### **6.3.1 Increase flexibility of vocational upper secondary education**

As described earlier vocational upper secondary education is offered only as full time studies and is not targeted to adult population. Vocational education institutions do not offer this education to adults and see these studies as too long for adults to participate. However, the new system which enables combining more flexibly modules of which the education consists would enable also to study longer and suitably for adults in vocational upper secondary level. **The schools should be encouraged to enable more flexible combination of different study modules and also be prepared for distance learning suitable for adults on vocational secondary level.**

### **6.3.2 Using recognition of prior learning in formal education**

In Estonia within the vocational qualification system, in vocational studies and higher education studies systems for recognition of prior learning are already under way. In general education, however, the possibility for recognition of prior learning is stipulated but rarely used. The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act (in force from Sept 2010) §17(4) says that the school may consider studies or activities falling outside the school's curriculum, as part of the teaching carried out by the school, provided that it allows the student to achieve the learning outcomes specified in the school curriculum. Also in the Strategy for Adults' Education 2008-2013 the recognition of prior learning and work experience in general education schools is mentioned. However, there is no practice in recognition out of school learning and work experience in general education. This is totally up to the decision of the school whether and how to do it. In other countries different supporting materials have been developed for this such as My Competence Map in Denmark, validation methods in Norway, which could be used as examples. **Thus, support is necessary for schools to get started and develop this recognition system.**

The possibility of recognition of prior non- and informal learning is important for adults as shown by the Portugal wide-scale campaign for increasing education level of population. Even though the

recognition of prior learning is an expensive measure from the schools point of view, **it may be essential in attracting adults to education as it enables from the student's point of view shorten time of study and respectively resources spent on the studies.** As the recognition of prior learning is an expensive measure (each individuals experience which is transferred is different and needs personal assessor and assessment), there would be **essential economies of scale if common principles and devices for assessment procedures are developed on the state level.**

The system for recognising prior experiences already exists in Estonia (it's called VÕTA), but it is mostly used in universities and vocational schools with the purpose of recognising prior formal studies when assessing the fulfilment of curricula requirements. It's necessary to widen this system to include general secondary education. The analysis of the current VÕTA system is not in the scope of this study, but it should be separately studies how the current system could be improved.

### **6.3.3 Improving learning opportunities for non-native Estonian speakers**

In general a separate need for establishing levelling courses was not prevalent, as these are done within the elected courses of current studies and by teachers' personal consultations. In some schools there are present levelling courses for all to upgrade learning skills, but there is no need for national regulation or separate program to establish these.

However, the situation is somewhat different in North-Eastern Estonia, as there is a problem with Estonian language literacy, which is the official language of studies in upper secondary level. The poor literacy skills lead people to difficulties both in acquiring necessary skills and completing examinations in the end of studies. Therefore there is a need to **increase the level of Estonian language literacy as it is precondition to participate the studies. The free language courses should be organised more widely** and including those who may already have a higher level language certificate but have lost their language skills over time.

Different courses are currently being organised and development plans are prioritizing Estonian language skills (The Republic of Estonia Government 2014), but lack of language skills is still a barrier for participating in formal education. The current framework for teaching language skills should be analysed and the reason, why these courses aren't providing the necessary level of skills, found out. Accordingly relevant measures have to be taken – as needed increase the number of courses, change the institutional framework or other.

Additionally to language skills in general the specific vocabulary of school subjects is also difficult for non-native Estonian speakers. They therefore need bilingual textbooks (and other learning material), that enable them to simultaneously learn the subject as well as the relevant vocabulary.

### **6.3.4 Establish a certificate indicating unfinished studies**

Today there is no official **certificate**, as it is for example in Finland, given **to people who leave school unfinished.** This kind of certificate would recognise the studies undertaken and would be of value to present to potential employer. It has no additional value for moving between education institutions as this information is already provided by Estonian Education Registry. This would also be a solution for those people who have otherwise completed most of the studies, but have not managed with one or two subjects. This type of recognition shows that each step in obtaining education is important and that a person has not "failed" if they have in fact completed a significant part of the studies.

### 6.3.5 Adjusting the precondition of a research project for graduating

As a precondition of the graduation from upper secondary school there is the requirement of a research project or practical work. There are extremely limited possibilities for prisoners to do the research. Therefore it would be rational to **enable those in prison to replace the research with a school exam**. Additionally it should be evaluated whether allowing other students to also opt for the examination instead of the research project could be allowed to increase flexibility.

### 6.3.6 Develop e-learning possibilities and e-learning capability

The need for distance learning and e-learning opportunities enlarges also because of increased working abroad as noted in Lithuania. Similar need is present in Estonia. Additionally, if working people are to be attracted to participate in general education, there is a need to take into account their specific needs. There are some adult schools which offer mainly e-courses with the need for physical participation once a week, but in some schools the learning takes place twice a week during regular working days and working time. Even though some schools have experienced that students do not show up if classes are held during irregular working time. There are pupils in this above mentioned e-courses from the other side of Estonia, because it enables to reconcile working life and studying more conveniently. Thus for specific groups of adults (working abroad, rigid working time arrangement) e-learning is the only way to proceed with studies, additionally e-learning possibilities could be used more during sickness, sudden need for caring obligations etc. Therefore **the e-learning possibilities should be developed further**.

At the same time it appears that from schools side that there is a rather low capability for developing e-learning materials and options. The view of school staff of e-learning is currently quite restricted in some schools. E-learning is often defined as enabling communication via e-mail and using internet to share materials. Video and Skype teaching or other interactive content opportunities are rarely acknowledged as opportunities. Therefore there is the need to raise teachers capabilities for taking advantage of e-learning opportunities. There are not enough of courses for teachers as the e-learning tools develop very fast and one-time courses are not enough for capturing all different possibilities. **Therefore an educational technology consultant is needed on everyday basis at the schools**. There are different possibilities for creating such a competence: for example there could be one consultant for many schools in the district, there could be a trained person of the school who passes knowledge to the other teachers, and there could be a distance-assistance via internet provided. The most important factor is that the assistance is accessible on an every-day basis.

## 6.4 Information and counselling

### 6.4.1 Development of a comprehensive communication strategy

The main explanations for not planning to return to school are besides economic reasons lack of motivation and age (near 40% of those who have dropped out). Thus there is problem with attitude, which is not possible to overcome without coherent and comprehensive communication strategy (which should accompany with the other described policy measures). In general there should be two wider parts:

1. **Informing about opportunities**. Estonia has a central web portal [rajaleidja.ee](http://rajaleidja.ee), which includes different information about studying possibilities and career counselling. However the information about adult learning possibilities (in formal education) should be

comprehensively and to the detail accessible from the same portal. Currently for example, if a person knows that he/she wants to study in adults' gymnasiums the information that is accessible centrally is just the names of the schools. However, this is not enough, essential is that there is readily comparable information available about contents of the studies, scheduling of classes, amount of independent learning. This information is not publicly and widely known, there are people who do not know that studying in secondary level studies is free of charge. Also the information about different scheduling in different schools is not widely known information. There were 9% of people who said that they would consider returning to school if classes would be suitably scheduled. There might be a situation, where there is not locally available suitable organisation but in more distant place might be. So a person looking at local schools would not be made aware of the opportunities elsewhere. This information about the general content and possible alternatives of studies must be accessible from the same web page.

Informing about possibilities should additionally include two wider components: information sharing on by unemployment office consultants (see chapter Increase attractiveness of general education compared to unemployment) and by local municipalities' social workers and other counsellors (see chapter Clearer and equal opportunities support system).

2. **Changing general attitude towards adults' studying on secondary education** – the idea of being too old to study on the secondary education level is outdated and should not direct person's choices. Also the schools' personnel brought out the negative image of adult gymnasiums as the second round schools. In order to change this situation if the position and idea of adult gymnasiums is specified with specific measures under way and the targets for participation rates as part of wider strategy set; a wider campaign should be planned to support the image of the schools and studying in these schools. The amount and necessity of the campaign depends on the wider general strategy. The Portugal example indicated that the right slogan might be an essential tool to support the aimed change. In case the campaign is planned the target groups and messages should be carefully considered. Different messages should be targeted at different groups e.g. for those in unemployment studying could be a useful alternative, for those in work acquiring a one level higher education with recognition of prior learning could be addressed.
3. **The wider promotion of adult learning.** Our study found that in a number of target groups (in addition to adult learners as our main interest) have not internalised the concept of adult learning. A wider support for adult learning is important for increasing individual study motivation and for providing effective support measures for the students. Important target groups in this respect are employers and municipal employees whose role has been highlighted in a number of instances in this report.

#### **6.4.2 Reaching the target group**

In addition to a general communication strategy it is important to think about the ways of actively reaching out to the target group. The schools have indicated concern that even though there are around 100 000 people without upper secondary education, there is no possibility to contact them. People do not come themselves and schools do not have access to the people contacts. One side of this is the above described problem with municipalities which do not direct people to schools; the other side is that municipalities do not give schools the contacts of the people who could attend the

school. Schools have expressed readiness to contact these people themselves. As an innovation it was proposed by schools' personnel that a system could be created where up to a certain age (e.g. 24 or 26) the status of all local people is traceable by the municipalities and if there is a person detected who is not in the list of some school, does not get taxed income, is not listed as unemployed, is not out of labour force because of caring children or having health problems there is a alarm raised. In this case the social worker has to take contact with the person and direct them back to labour market or to education system so that no person is left unnoticed.

An important aspect when designing policy measures is reaching the target group that does not wish to study. That means that demand for education must be created. The target group can't be reached without active recruiting. One possibility for this is for schools to contact students directly. Another way would be through community pressure and active support. In some cases trade unions and authorized employee representatives have been used for this purpose. Although there are quite few trade unions in Estonia, the representatives in bigger companies have good potential for recruiting. It is also important that full-time studies are offered as an alternative for the unemployed and that the Unemployment Insurance Fund consultancy would direct people into formal education as needed. Local municipalities can also contribute by using their social workers and counsellors to encourage formal education among the adults who are not active.

## Summary

The main aim of this study was to gather information on adults without basic or secondary education, the barriers and preconditions for their participation formal education in Estonia, and to analyse the study organisation in schools based on this information. For this purpose a random sample survey was carried out among the target group via telephone interviews, focus groups were held with adult gymnasiums' and vocational schools' staff, and an electronic survey was carried out among Estonian municipalities. Adults are in this context defined as 20-64-year-olds, that is the working age population, who have surpassed the usual age for graduating from basic and secondary level initial education.

Participating in basic or secondary education is a free choice for adults and they can change their mind during studies. Adults' different life and work experiences play a role in both enrolling in formal education as well as finishing the studies. Hence teaching of adults is at its core different from teaching children. Adults tend to learn what they want to learn. More generally the factors that influence adults' decision to participate can be divided into four categories: stemming from the persons socio-economic background, institutional, attitudinal and academic. The combination of different factors creates a different opportunity structure for the person to participate in formal education.

There are roughly 118 000 people with less than secondary education in Estonia. About 5000 of them are studying to obtain basic or secondary education. Most of those who are studying are attending adult gymnasiums. Quite a lot of them are also attending vocational schools, but they are mostly under 25-years old, only a couple of hundred older people are attending vocational secondary education. A third of adults who enrol in adult gymnasiums eventually drop out and a fifth of drop out of vocational secondary education. So out of all the adults without basic or secondary level education only a small part is currently trying to achieve it and even they are quite likely to drop out.

### *Institutions and regulations*

Adult education is supposed to be non-stationary education in both general and vocational education providers. General education for adults is mostly provided by adult gymnasiums, but some regular secondary schools also have a non-stationary department. In vocational schools non-stationary format is only used for vocational courses, but not for vocational secondary curricula. So adults' participation in vocational secondary education is quite limited. This is likely the reason why so few older adults enrol in these programmes.

To enrol in secondary education a person must, as a rule, have a basic education diploma, but vocational schools are now allowed to accept older students without a basic education diploma. In the latter case the competencies necessary for the diploma need to be gained in everyday life, but this type of assessments have not been practised much. According to the law general education institutions are also allowed to recognise skills and knowledge obtained outside of formal education, but this has not been practised and the schools lack the skills and knowledge of how to implement this. The recognition of individual's skills and knowledge obtained elsewhere would help to decrease study time and wider use of this would help motivate adult learners. This process can be quite expensive, because each subject for evaluation is different. So **governmental help would be needed to develop assessment systems and standards.**

Several exceptions are made for adult learners in order to facilitate their participation in formal education: enabling non-stationary studies, studying as external student, recognizing previous out of school activities as a part of studies and omitting certain subjects from the study program. However, there is no specific study programs for adults. The current system is quite flexible, therefore different schools have different scheduling of lessons and organisation of studies. However, this applies only for general education schools. As previously stated, vocational secondary education can be obtained only in full time stationary studies.

General education is free of charge. Also educational literature, additional pedagogical guidance and one year leave are provided and the individual needs of students are taken into account. However material support for covering the costs of accommodation, transportation and food, is not provided for adults in general education schools. Adult learners in difficult financial situation have the possibility to ask for help from local municipality on the same bases as other people.

In case of having a child adult learners in vocational schools are entitled to longer leave than in general education schools. Additionally, full-time students studying at the upper secondary level are entitled to receive a reimbursement of travel expenses and also a study allowance in case of good study results. These benefits are not offered to adults studying in general education schools or part-time. Free school lunches are not provided to adults in general education schools nor in vocational education institutions, similarly adult students are not entitled to study loans. In respect of the need-based financial aid, students in vocational schools can apply for the support through the school, while students in general education schools can apply only for the general subsistence allowance.

Employers have a relatively heavy burden in enabling lifelong learning as they are obliged to enable payed as well as unpaid leave, if employee would use the entitled study leave at the full extent. Also, it has to be borne in mind that employer is obligated to pay also for the substitute worker in addition to the employee at study leave. Nevertheless, one of the main barriers for participating in education is employers reluctance to fulfill these responsibilities.

With respect to benefits, being an unemployed is more attractive to adults than studying in general education, because unemployed people are entitled to labour market services, unemployment benefits and health insurance, unlike adult students of general education schools. Although health insurance is guaranteed in vocational schools, adults still lose the unemployment benefits and labour market services in case of starting the studies in vocational education institution. Therefore studying in general education or in vocational education is not an attractive alternative for unemployment at the moment. Regarding health insurance, as many other benefits, vocational education has an advantage compared to general education. Those who start studies in non-stationary form also lose a survivor's pension.

### ***Reasons for dropping out and motivation to return to school***

Regardless of the target group, the most common reason for dropping out is financial reasons (need/wish to work). For women the need to care for a child is just as important. Other reasons are less prevalent and cannot be ranked.

Among those adults who aren't studying at the moment, 2/3 have not considered returning to school. The third who have considered it, is split equally between those who have neglected the idea (ca 18%) and those who are planning to return (ca 17%).

Economic barriers (need/wish to work) are relevant for the decision to return to school as it is for dropping out. Equally important are attitudinal barriers like age, motivation, perceived need etc. Age is most common reason for over 50-year-olds. Whether a person has left school because of care responsibilities, health reasons or attitudinal barriers, most likely the same reason persists as a barrier to returning to school.

Financial reasons play important role also in dropping out from adult gymnasiums. Based on statistics and focus groups it is safe to conclude that about half of the students are expelled because of serious attendance issues or very poor performance. These issues are mostly likely a façade for other serious issues, which need schools' support personnel's intervention in order to prevent dropping out. Among other reasons for dropping out economic problems are most widely spread. This is mostly related to need for working and consequent schedule conflicts.

Most dominant motivators for adults to return to school are wish to improve career prospects, improve further education opportunities and self-improvement generally. This is in line with previous research on the subject. This is similar for those who have already enrolled and for those who are still planning to return to school. Less frequent motivators are employer's demands or setting an example for children. Although these are less spread, on individual level they are very strong motivators. People who have returned to school for these reasons are very committed students.

### ***School based measures for offering adult formal education***

It is clear from the survey that main obstacles to return to school are attitudinal and economical. It has to be born in mind that there are not many people without upper secondary education, who wish to proceed their education. Hence there is currently no significant demand for this level education and it has to be yet created. Therefore adults without upper secondary education rarely think that schools could somehow motivate them to return school. Out of the three school level measures offered (better e-learning opportunities, change of study organisation and contact from school) people saw only contact and encouragement from school as potentially influential to their returning to school (third of those who have dropped out because of lack of motivation or because of work, found that it could be helpful).

The study organisation in Estonian adult gymnasiums is flexible, so that every adult should find a suitable form of study. On the national level the variety of study forms is sufficient, but not all adults have access to every type of study organisation in their region. Therefore **different flexible forms of study should be encouraged**. It is equally important that potential students will be informed of these opportunities, as it is crucial in making the decision to return to school. So it follows that **information availability should be a priority**, because many adults are not fully aware of the available opportunities.

Vocational upper secondary education lacks flexibility and hence it does not meet the needs of adult learners. Therefore the schools could consider **enabling more flexible combination of different study modules**.

Adult learners have often forgotten previously acquired knowledge and their learning skills and habits might not be sufficient. Because of that schools offer levelling courses and also individual consultations are provided. Separate measures addressing this deficit were not considered necessary. However, there are some problems in North-Eastern Estonia, as russian-speaking population have difficulties with Estonian language literacy, which is the official language of studies

in upper secondary level. The solution could be general language courses for increasing the literacy, but also developing the special learning materials. The need for specific textbooks for adults was not perceived, as teachers are able to adapt the existing materials or create their own. Nevertheless, in North-Eastern Estonia there is a **need for textbooks that are written in more easily understandable language, are in both languages or have a thematic glossary.**

Although different solutions of e-learning possibilities are currently utilized, teachers' skills and motivation in this area are not sufficient. In order to put modern technology to better use, **an educational technology consultant is needed in schools**, who could train teachers and assist them on daily basis.

In adult gymnasiums the financing of support personnel is a problem. Although the legislation states that support personnel should be available in every school, the adult gymnasiums often lack funding for these positions. Adults with their complicated life situations are even more likely to need help from the psychologist and other supportive personnel than children. Also some schools feel the need for speech therapists for adults. Therefore the **current financing issues should be resolved, so that all schools are able to afford the support staff.**

The fact that school based measures were not found to be very important, shows that the main reason for not returning to school is general attitude and not specific school-related barriers. Therefore, if the aim is to bring as many adults to school as possible, the measures addressing the attitude should be a priority.

### ***Improving education system in order to support adult learners***

From the perspective of potential learners the more general questions regarding the education system are not common barriers that obstruct one's return to school.

The teachers raised the issues of curriculum and termination conditions. The discussion was centered around the number and volume of courses and recognizing previous out of school activities as a part of studies. There was no unanimous opinion on these matters: some teachers felt that the number and volume of courses should be reduced, while others believed that the workload should be the same as in ordinary gymnasiums. The general view was that **diplomas should be consistent**, especially on further learning opportunities for both stationary and non-stationary training. However, there is no common position on the broader purpose of adults' secondary education.

Regarding graduation requirements, the topic most debated was the compulsory research project and the ability of supervisors to guide adults to practical work instead. It was proposed **to make an exception for learners in prisons**, by replacing the requirement of research project with an exam. This is because it is not possible to access the necessary materials for research nor conduct empirical studies in prison.

The main challenges perceived by the schools were the ambiguous roles of different types of schools, the funding of schools and, more generally, the lack of a comprehensive strategy for adult education. More precisely, the following topics were discussed: which are the roles of general secondary schools and vocational schools in offering secondary education to adults, how should be the division of pupils between the adult gymnasiums and the ordinary secondary schools as well as division of adults between vocational secondary education and vocational education. The question is whether adults

should acquire secondary education in general or vocational education institution? Should adults acquire vocational secondary education or shorter and more flexibly offered vocational training in vocational schools? Do adult gymnasiums represent a second chance for those who fail in traditional education and need a simplified approach to learning or are they strong upper secondary education establishments providing flexible learning opportunities? It would be necessary to **define the role of and the need for the various institutions of adult education**. The different ownership of adult gymnasiums and (most of) the vocational schools hinders effective collaboration and development of uniform adult education infrastructure.

In adult gymnasiums the **financing was seen as a problem in a number of areas**: extern students, supervising of research projects, consultation hours, teachers with low work load, supportive staff (psychologist, career counsellor, etc.) and providing of optional courses. The problems were more prevalent in smaller schools, because the funding is strongly linked to the number of students.

In both vocational and general education schools the recognition of prior learning and experiences should be developed further so that schools (or other institutions that may be brought to life for this aim) have the competences and finances needed to assess the actual skills and knowledge of students. Repeating the lessons already familiar can be tedious and adds unnecessary strain on the limited time resources of adult learners. So, in one way or another **schools should move towards the assessment of actual skills and capabilities**.

On the level of education system it is important that clear objectives are set in adult secondary education. The current education system allows to increase flexibility for adult learners, but such changes require some kind of **consensus on the division of roles and goals of the education**.

#### ***Additional support measures***

Additional support measures are found to be the most effective compared to school and education level changes. This is reaffirmed by teachers and school administrators according to whom the main barriers of their students have to do with money, work and childcare. More than half of those who need or wish to work and/or lack of motivation felt that they would consider attending school depending on the availability of a scholarship and/or flexible working hours, but also the confidence that better education leads to higher salary. As there are relatively many people with economic and/or motivational problems, such measures would influence greater number of people compared to the other measures. Most of the people experiencing problems with childcare found that covering of childcare costs and/or childcare close to home could be a solution. As childcare availability is not very common problem among people without secondary education, it would not help many, but those, who have such a problem, consider these measures as a significant help (more than half estimate that they would consider going to school if these measures were available).

Complementary measures were assessed by potential students as well as teachers and administrators as the most important factor for bringing adults back to education. Students today are often in financial difficulties and according to teachers this is a frequent cause of dropping out of adult secondary education. But they also said that every little bit helps and indicated that a **comprehensive system of transportation support, financial support for living expenses and subsidised school lunches is what is needed**. School personnel criticized municipalities for not supporting adult students, as they are not covering even the transportation costs.

Local governments' views on supporting adult students vary. Usually municipalities offer universal support measures that among others aim to help adult learners, but coordinated measures targeted specifically at adult learners are very rare in Estonia. Nevertheless a number of municipalities said that they approach the issue of adult learners case by case. This is because in many municipalities there are only few (if at all) adult learners and therefore there is no need for specific measures for them. It shows that large-scale programmes may in fact be unnecessary in many regions where a more individual approach is possible and probably is more efficient. However, some of the local authorities do not see adults as learners but only as working people, which means that attitude towards adult students is not positive.

Despite of the well-developed universal kindergarten system in municipalities, there are not enough kindergarten places for everybody. As most of the adult students are young adults, schools see the lack of childcare possibilities as a problem. Schools do not want to deal with general childcare provision, however they have been forced to provide some kind of babysitting service for young parents. It would be reasonable for schools not to mimic the kindergarten system, but to **create temporary playrooms with babysitter for the time of lessons**. There are some good examples of such arrangements in schools and this kind of initiatives should be encouraged and supported.

**Financial support/scholarships** were considered an important measure by school staff as well as by most of the potential students. Today there is a need-based financial aid for students in vocational schools, while students in general education schools can apply only for the general subsistence allowance. Unless there is no specific reason to favor vocational upper secondary education over general upper secondary education, **there should be a single holistic financial support system across various types of educational institutions and different municipalities**. However, different question is whether the amount of the aid is sufficient to manage without additional income.

**Transportation allowance** was considered an important measure by school staff, however not many potential students found it particularly significant motivator (6,5% of people without upper secondary education would consider returning to education in case of free transportation). Regarding transportation, the students in vocational schools and those in adult gymnasiums are in different position. Vocational school students can apply transportation support from school, while adult gymnasium students may or may not receive support from their municipality, depending on the practices of a municipality.

Local governments have offered support primarily case by case, large-scale programs do not basically exist. Also, some of the local government responses seemed to indicate that the local authorities do not consider adults as students but only as workforce, and therefore the need for support is not systematically addressed. What exactly should be the role of a local government should be placed to the debate as the state has already committed distributing support to some of the students.

Employers' attitude and their support is crucial for adults in secondary education. **Flexible working schedule** was seen most often as a measure that could facilitate potential learners returning to school (16% of people without upper secondary education thought so). The importance of this measure was also underlined by the school staff.

In conclusion, in order to bring adults back to formal education **a comprehensive communication strategy as well as a financial support** should be guaranteed. The current support measures have not

addressed these issues so far. Additionally, adults in different regions have unequal opportunities regarding benefits. There are many aspects in supporting adult learners that has to be born in mind, for example the support regarding transportation, childcare as well as school lunch is important for adults already obtaining education. Adults studying in vocational schools and the students of adult gymnasiums are eligible to different benefits. **Support measures for adults should not be dependent on the specific form of study.**

Supporting adults with information in returning to school is not possible to overemphasize. Only complete information can provide the tools to make the decision to return to school. In addition, it is important that the information is targeted and understandable. **The potential of personalized appeals to people is especially great. Thus, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive information strategy** to ensure its effectiveness and purposefulness.

The last chapters of the research paper focus on the best practices on international level and policy recommendations deriving from the Estonian context and the results of the empirical analysis. In summary, a holistic approach to education system as well as to support measures is necessary. Adults' lives are more complex than lives of students in initial education and the return to school is their free choice. This is why learning has to be encouraged and supported with the involvement of various institutions in co-operation.

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## Appendix 1: Survey sample characteristics

Table 9 Sample characteristics of the people's survey.

		Currently not studying	Is currently continuing studies
Gender	Female	35,5	45,84
	Male	64,5	54,16
Age	Mean	41,215	24,658
	21-24	9,25	69,54
	25-29	16,00	15,42
	30-39	29,00	11,11
	40-49	12,50	3,93
	50-64	33,25	0
Years since school-leaving	Mean	22,43	NA
Current level of studies	Upper secondary school (for adults)	-	49,93
	Vocational + upper secondary	-	28,04
	Vocational + lower secondary	-	22,03
Type of school (previous studies)	Lower secondary	22,75	-
	Upper secondary	21	-
	Adult school	16,5	-
	Vocational school	39,75	-
Has considered continuing studies	Yes, but gave up the idea	18,25	
	Yes, plans to go back to school	17	
	No	64,75	
NUTS3 region	North	31	34,49
	West	15,25	8,26
	Centre	15,5	0,34
	North-East	9	24,39
	South	29,25	32,51
Urban or nonurban residency	Capital	18	22,7
	Town	31,75	58,37
	Country	50,25	18,93
Home language	Estonian	78,5	63,17
	Russian	20,75	36,83
	Other	0,75	
Labour force status (main)	Working full-time	59	26,95
	Working part-time	4,5	21,03
	Unemployed	9,75	9,55
	Student		30,92
	Retired	9,75	
	Retired due to disability	10	3,93
	National service	0,25	
	At home	5,25	6,94



	Other		0,68
Nr of members in household	1	19,5	13,99
	2	29,75	14,65
	3	18,75	34,26
	4	17,5	22,8
	5+	14,5	14,29
Nr of household members without income	0	49	40,87
	1	21,75	27,21
	2	16	18,33
	3+	13,25	13,58
Nr of household members and income	1 member <600€	12,5	7,74
	1 member >600€	4,5	2,05
	2 members <850€	30	15,64
	2 members >850€	14,25	24,6
	3-... members, <850€	14,5	14,57
	3-... members, >850€	13,75	16,3
	No income data	10,5	19,1
Household income	...300	13,25	9,45
	301-450	13	8,63
	451-600	17,25	10,09
	601-850	16,5	10,43
	851-1100	12	13,02
	1101-1550	6	17,33
	1551-...	11,5	11,94
	Refused to answer	2,25	2,44
	Don't know	8,25	16,66