



Initial education policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic: Estonia

Strengthening adaptability and resilience in the context of COVID-19

Early evidence suggests that pre-existing resources in the education system facilitated areas of Estonia's initial response. Ongoing recent efforts to strengthen digital skills in students, teachers and other adults, and to enhance the digital infrastructure of the education system likely facilitated the switch to online learning. In particular, Estonia had key tools and supports in place, such as school management platforms, digital resource banks and a team of educational technologists enabling educational actors to mobilise resources already familiar to them. As Estonia works to balance short-term responsiveness with longer-term strategic aims, priorities will evolve. For example, Estonia can continue strengthening the targeted monitoring of the ongoing response through system-level monitoring mechanisms and support collaborative efforts at an international level. Also, while much of the key information and resources available to students and families has been translated into Russian and English, given the specific equity concerns facing Russian-speaking and immigrant students, further targeted supports may be required.

This snapshot presents information originally published as part of the **Education Policy Outlook: Estonia (2020)**, available at: www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/country-profile-Estonia-2020.pdf



The Estonian education system's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic

On 13 March, [Estonia](#) announced the closure of all educational institutions except kindergartens, from 16 March 2020. A gradual reopening was scheduled from 15 May. Initial responses in light of the work of the *Education Policy Outlook* in 2020 in the context of this pandemic are:

- 1. Ensuring continued access to learning and smooth educational pathways:** The switch to distance learning saw a considerable increase in the use of digital platforms, including [eSchool](#) (2002), a school management service already used by 85% of schools, and [E-Schoolbag](#) (2016), which hosts educational resources quality-reviewed by subject experts. Estonia also launched a [platform](#) to promote distance learning opportunities for adults. From early April, weekly, [televised](#) lessons supported students in managing their learning from home. Upper secondary school-leaving examinations were postponed; it was decided that students would sit two examinations at least two weeks after schools reopen and these students would be prioritised when contact teaching resumes. For vocational programmes, flexibility would be provided to run courses and examinations during the summer, at the agreement of all parties. The [OECD](#) reported that Estonia had been able to offer career guidance remotely when it was perhaps more valuable than ever. Examinations at the end of lower secondary education were cancelled; students would graduate according to annual grades. For entrance examinations to universities and upper secondary schools, institutions would need to seek flexible solutions, including online examination. Results from the [Children's Advisory Panel's survey](#) of 10-18 year-olds indicated that students in Estonia had an above-average level of satisfaction with home learning compared to the other seven countries participating in the survey. Estonia also had the highest share of students who reported that during school closures, they had good access to the internet (73%) and to school systems (69%).
- 2. Strengthening the internal world of the student:** To allow students to have meaningful school holidays despite social distancing measures, the Ministry of Education and Research (MER), in cooperation with two media organisations, launched a website offering a range of activities and videos.
- 3. Collecting, disseminating and improving the use of information about students:** The MER issued guidance for student assessment during closures: teachers should not use numerical assessment during the first two weeks, prioritising formative verbal feedback. As distance learning would continue, a virtual development interview with students and parents was recommended. In terms of monitoring, both the [Innove Foundation](#) (2003) and the [Information Technology Foundation for Education](#) (HITSA, 2013) collated feedback from schools, teachers and parents to inform recommendations for future practice.
- 4. Providing targeted support and interventions for vulnerable children:** Schools for students with special educational needs (SEN) would open according to need and at their discretion. Estonia's network of Pathfinder Centres (2014), regional services offering support and counselling to children with SEN and their families, switched to remote services, including phone or video counselling. When schools reopen, those students finding distance learning more challenging would be prioritised for contact teaching.
- 5. Harnessing wider support and engagement at local and central level:** [HITSA](#) and [Innove](#) started running regular webinars for teachers, school leaders and parents to support distance education and several [Facebook online communities](#) were put in place. Estonia's team of educational technologists started providing remote support to teachers, parents and principals; new specialists were recruited to meet demand. Estonia has long supported Ed-Tech companies, many of whom started providing services to schools and families for free. Several joined an [international collaborative](#), offering remote learning solutions to countries across the world. This is part of Estonia's [Education Nation](#) outreach work which, during the pandemic, included a series of webinars sharing Estonia's best practices in remote learning with the world.



Table 1

Selected indicators of system readiness (OECD)		Estonia	Average	Min	Max
<i>Students' readiness (according to students' self-reports in PISA 2018)</i>					
1	Index of self-efficacy	-0.03	0.01	-0.61	0.36
2	Percentage of students in disadvantaged schools with access to a computer at home that they can use for school work	85.0%	81.5%	23.5%	96.5%
<i>Teachers' readiness (according to lower secondary teachers' self-reports in TALIS 2018)</i>					
3	Percentage of teachers with a high level of need for professional development related to ICT skills for teaching	19.2%	17.7%	5.3%	39.0%
4	Percentage of teachers agreeing that most teachers in the school provide practical support to each other when applying new ideas	78.1%	77.9%	64.7%	86.5%

Note: The information presented in this spotlight covers key measures announced or introduced **before 04 May 2020**.

For more information visit: <http://www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/>

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