



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS



Welfare Development Plan 2023–2030

Photo: Virgo Haan

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Introduction

The Welfare Development Plan 2023–2030 is the successor to the previous development plan of the same name, which guides labour and social policy objectives for the next eight years and covers the performance area 'Well-being', which is one of the 17 performance areas of the State Budget Strategy.

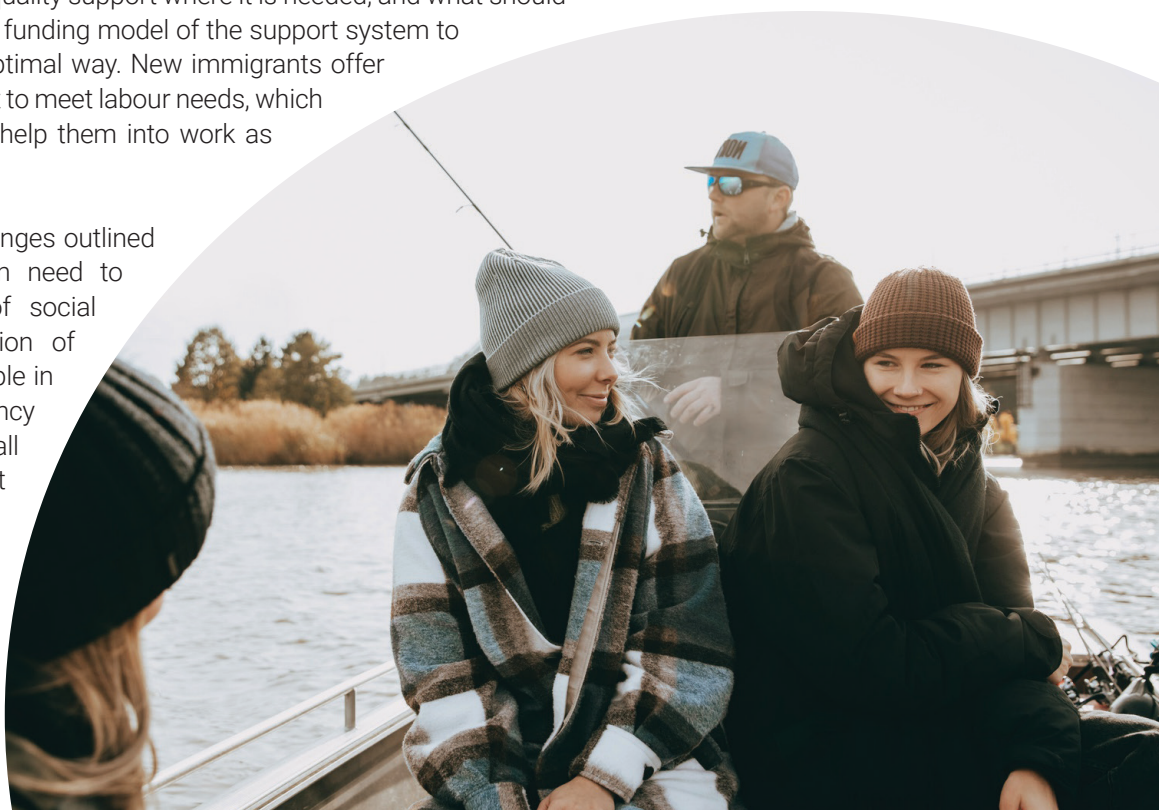
We have defined well-being through the policy areas under the remit of the Ministry of Social Affairs – child and family well-being, gender equality and equal treatment, employment, a long and high-quality working life, social care corresponding to the need for assistance, reduction of social inequality and poverty, and supporting the elderly. While people's well-being is also influenced by a person's state of health, the objectives in the area of health are addressed in depth in the National Health Plan 2020–2030, which addresses the promotion of health risks, healthy lifestyles, environmental health and the organisation of the health system.

The Welfare Development Plan outlines the main challenges, sets strategic objectives and identifies the changes needed to achieve them between 2023 and 2030. The development plan takes into account the targets set in the country's long-term development strategy 'Estonia 2035' (in particular, the targets 'Estonia's people are smart, active and care about their health' and 'Estonia's society is caring, cooperative and open-minded'), as well as the global sustainable development goals of the UN and the European Union's directions and international commitments. In line with the guidelines of the Estonia's European Union policy framework document, the development plan will also serve as a basis for Estonia's positions on EU initiatives, including those under the European Pillar of Social Rights, in the areas of competence of the Ministry. The development plan also serves as a prerequisite and a basis for the planning and use of European funding.

A country's greatest asset is its people. To ensure the sustainability of the Estonian population, it is therefore essential to increase the fertility rate in order to reduce the negative natural increase. At the heart of the policies under the remit of the Ministry of Social Affairs are people, their well-being and health. Our activities aim to provide people with an environment that supports having and raising children, a sense of social security, to guide the creation of an inclusive society and an accessible living environment, and to create equal opportunities for participation in education, work and society, according to each person's abilities. Strengthening the social protection system shall also include support for new immigrants to cope and settle in as quickly as possible. This requires improving access to social protection for people who have come to Estonia, but also adapting the social protection system to respond to such changes. Under the conditions of an ageing population, successive crises and a shortage of skilled labour, we need to find sustainable, economical and innovative solutions to ensure that everyone's potential is maximised and valued, and to reduce pressure on social security systems. A key question is what changes are needed to prevent problems and to ensure rapid and high-quality support where it is needed, and what should be the organisational and funding model of the support system to achieve this goal in an optimal way. New immigrants offer opportunities and support to meet labour needs, which is why it is important to help them into work as quickly as possible.

The objectives and challenges outlined in the development plan need to ensure the continuity of social services, i.e. the provision of essential services to people in normal, crisis and emergency situations. The state shall do all it can to ensure that people's lives and health are not put at risk.

Photo: Susann Kõomägi



Goal and sub-goals of the Welfare Development Plan

GENERAL GOAL:

Estonia is a country where people are cared for, inequality and poverty is reducing, and a long and high-quality working life is supported for all.



Sub-goal 1: children and families

Estonia is a good place to raise a family and children, and children in Estonia are happy growing up in a caring, inclusive, safe and nurturing environment.



Sub-goal 2: labour market and working life

Matching labour supply and demand ensures a high level of employment and high-quality working conditions support long-term labour market participation.



Sub-goal 3: older people

Older people are socially included in the society, have equal opportunities and are economically well-off.



Sub-goal 4: social care

Estonia's social care system supports people's well-being and social security.



Sub-goal 5: gender equality and equal treatment

In Estonia, women and men have equal rights, duties, opportunities and responsibilities in all areas of social life, and equal opportunities for self-fulfilment and participation in society are guaranteed for minority groups.

Estonia 2035

Estonia's people are smart, active and care about their health.
Estonia's society is caring, cooperative and open-minded.
Estonia's economy is strong, innovative, and responsible.
Estonia offers a safe and high-quality living environment that takes into account the needs of all its inhabitants.
Estonia is an innovative, reliable, and people-centered country.

European Pillar of Social Rights

Equal opportunities and access to the labour market
Fair working conditions
Social protection and inclusion

UN sustainable development goals

No poverty
Zero hunger
Good health and well-being
Gender equality
Decent work and economic growth
Reduced inequalities

Indicators of the general goal of the Welfare Development Plan

GENERAL GOAL:

Estonia is a country where people are cared for, inequality and poverty is reducing, and a long and high-quality working life is supported for all.

Indicators	Reference level	Target level 2030
1. Cohort fertility rate	1.79 (2022)	1.86
2. Index of caring and cooperation	61% (2021)	>61%
3. Absolute poverty rate	2020	
<i>men</i>	2.7%	≤2.7%
<i>women</i>	1.8%	≤1.8%
<i>total</i>	2.2%	≤2.2%
4. Relative poverty and social exclusion rates	2021	
<i>men</i>	19.6%	18.5%
<i>women</i>	24.7%	23.4%
<i>total</i>	22.2%	21% ¹
5. Gender Equality Index (EIGE)	61.6 (2021)	67.5
6. Employment rate among 20–64-year-olds	2021	
<i>men</i>	81.2%	83.0%
<i>women</i>	77.5%	79.8%
<i>total</i>	79.3%	81.3%

¹ The target set for 2030 is in line with the target of the Pillar of Social Rights set by Estonia, which aims to reduce relative poverty and social exclusion by 39,000 people.

Values and principles underlying the development plan



Sub-goal 1: children and families



Photo: Aron Urb

PURPOSE:

Estonia is a good place to raise a family and children, and children in Estonia are happy growing up in a caring, inclusive, safe and nurturing environment.

Indicators	Reference level	Target level 2030
1. Difference between the desired and the actual number of children*	N/A	N/A
2. Relative child poverty and social exclusion rates	17.4% (2021)	15% ²
3. Percentage of children separated from their families	0.10 % (2021)	Decreases or stays the same
4. Ensuring nationwide access to victim support*	N/A	N/A

* Methodology under development, the reference and the target levels to be set in 2023.

² The target set for 2030 is in line with the objective of the Pillar of Social Rights to reduce the number of children in relative poverty and in social exclusion in Estonia by 13,000.

Challenges and opportunities

- Estonia's contribution to family policy is average compared to OECD countries.
- While the fertility rate is not sufficient to ensure a positive natural increase, the prospects for an increase in the fertility rate is relatively good, as the average number of children wanted significantly exceeds the number of children born. Policies to support the fertility rate therefore have an important role to play in ensuring the sustainability of the country.
- There are many factors that influence the fertility rate and the well-being of families with children, but the most direct impact comes from the benefits and services provided to families with children.
- Parental employment and adequate family income are crucial, but so is the parent's knowledge that they have access to affordable childcare and the best opportunities to combine work and family life.
- More needs to be invested in parental education and support for parenting. According to a survey, Estonian parents want more advice and help in raising their children but do not know where to turn or do not dare to ask for help, and nearly one third of the reasons for not having a child are related to problems with a partner.
- Integrated, high-quality and accessible social, education and health services focusing on the child and the family are part of a family policy that supports increase in fertility rate.
- As well as encouraging births, it is important to support those children who are already born. This means creating a child-friendly environment for all children in Estonia, with a special focus on children with special needs, children experiencing violence, children without parental care or children who need help in any other way.
- It is essential to continuously develop the victim support system, so that all victims of crime or violence receive timely, adequate and appropriate assistance.
- More broadly, in order to prevent violence and facilitate access to victim support, attention needs to be paid in the coming years to reducing stigma (especially in the case of sexual violence) and raising awareness in society, as well as to coordinating support services for victims in order to make better use of resources.
- A comprehensive and multi-faceted view of the well-being of children requires monitoring the situation of children and families in different areas and across different sectors, and assessing the effectiveness and impact of policies.

Courses of action

During the period of the development plan, attention will be paid to both the creation of a supportive environment for children and families and prevention, as well as to targeted interventions. The focus will mainly be on those areas that are problematic and have received less attention so far, and where major changes are needed. The focus is also on those areas that support children in need of support for various reasons, in line with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee initiative. Activities to develop victim support services will also contribute to the EU-level efforts to effectively prevent violence against women and domestic violence.

Designing and implementing measures to achieve sustainable fertility rate:

- » ensure that essential family benefits keep pace with increases in wages and the cost of living;
- » improve the conditions for sickness and child care benefits for parents of young children;
- » modernise and streamline the package of support measures for single-parent families;
- » improve the availability and quality of services for families with children;
- » analyse barriers to family formation and having children related to access to housing and develop measures to address them;
- » analyse the increase in pension rights linked to the number of children;
- » foster attitudes in society that value the family, having and raising children, and having larger families.

Developing services and modernising support measures to support couple and family relationships and parenting education to create a family-friendly environment:

- » create a digital environment and a model for action to assess the needs of families with and without children, to provide support and to better support families with higher needs;
- » set up community-based prevention and family work centres to provide integrated health and social services;
- » develop programmes and services to support couples and family relationships and parenting education for young people and parents, and improve the accessibility thereof.

Reforming the organisation of child protection to ensure effective and targeted assistance for children in need:

- » develop a cross-sectoral and hub-based child well-being approach that puts the child in need and their family at the centre;
- » create opportunities to anticipate and identify children's needs as early as possible and provide the necessary support in time;
- » ensure that child protection workers have motivating working conditions that support their well-being;
- » modernise and renew the system for the professional qualification and in-service training of child protection workers and the awarding of professional qualifications;
- » develop an evidence-based toolkit with guidance and assessment tools for child protection workers;
- » develop a comprehensive and systematic digital solution that allows for cross-sectoral data exchange and supports quality decision-making based on the child's needs;
- » clarify the competences and tasks of the Social Insurance Board as the national child protection authority and supervisory authority, including in supporting local authorities and monitoring the adequacy of their child protection activities and services;
- » create the possibility for effective resolution of situations seriously harming the well-being of the child, in cooperation between the local authority and the Social Insurance Board or, in exceptional cases, through supervision;

- » develop a process for identifying and learning from systemic errors in cases of child death or serious health damage;
- » establish a comprehensive quality system in the field of child well-being to ensure the level and effectiveness of support and services provided at both a local and national level, including by strengthening the state supervision capacity.

Creating a support system for children with special needs to enable early identification of needs, facilitate access to appropriate assistance and ensure the necessary support measures, particularly in the child's daily environment:

- » merge assessments of children with special needs in different areas to reduce duplication and the time it takes to get help;
- » develop a clear and simple support system for parents of children with special needs that automates data requests and reduces the time needed to submit applications;
- » develop a system to assess the impact of interventions, ensure more consistent quality of services and establish a clearer pricing and funding model;
- » renewing the content, organisation and financing of rehabilitation services, replacing individual services that do not meet the needs of the child with comprehensive services and programmes based on the child's condition;
- » create integrated support measures for children with high care dependency and severe needs to give parents a break from the constant burden of care.

Creating a seamless pathway for abused children from identification to getting help:

- » ensure child-friendly procedures and assistance for children who have experienced violence, taking into account the rights and best interests of the child, by facilitating smooth cooperation and data exchange between different agencies;
- » establish guidelines for the identification of abuse and facilitate the reporting of a child in need, both through clarification of legislation and sector-specific guidelines, and through IT solutions for rapid information exchange;
- » introduce and make available to professionals working with children assessment tools suitable for the Estonian context to ascertain child abuse, its extent and impact;
- » increase availability of necessary services and interventions for children who have experienced violence and for adults who have used violence against children (e.g. programmes for parents who have used violence, parent-child therapies).

Providing needs-based help and support for children with severe needs and complex problems and their families:

- » develop therapies and interventions to prevent children from ending up in the service of a closed institution;
- » increase the trauma awareness and competences of professionals dealing with children to work with different target groups (e.g, children with sexually deviant behaviour, children with psychopathic behaviour, children with addictions, etc);
- » create a centre of competence for children with severe complex needs to bring together both closed and open-door 24-hour rehabilitation services;
- » create a consistent follow-up support system for young people leaving 24-hour institutional services, to support children and their families leaving institutional care.

Ensuring that children in need of alternative care can grow up in families instead of in institutions and providing needs-based support for young people leaving alternative care:

- » clarify the content and quality requirements of services and ensure that services are also provided for children with specific needs, both on a family and on an institution basis;
- » create the conditions for the growth in the number of foster families and ensure a publicly regulated and funded support system for family-based alternative care providers;
- » modernise, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, the legislation on guardianship and adoption and ensure a consistent support approach that supports the child and the family in the preparation and support of family-based alternative care;
- » set clearer requirements for the planning and provision of aftercare to support young people leaving alternative care more effectively, and ensure that local authorities and the network are adequately prepared to work with the target group;
- » analyse, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Research, the needs of children in boarding schools and their families, and to develop solutions to ensure appropriate support for children in boarding schools.

Ensuring adequate and equivalent access to victim support services in different regions of Estonia:

- » define the requirements and competences of professionals dealing with victims;
- » harmonise and streamline the requirements for victim support volunteers and the system for their involvement;
- » supplement the Victim Support Act to help victims of crime and violence with regard to psychological assistance and compensation for victims of crimes;
- » supplement the legal provisions on the transfer of data between institutions.

Sub-goal 2: labour market and working life



PURPOSE:

Matching labour supply and demand ensures a high level of employment and high-quality working conditions support long-term labour market participation.

Indicators	Reference level	Target level 2030
1. Labour force participation rate among 15–74 year olds, %	2021	
<i>men</i>	74.6%	75.2%
<i>women</i>	67.8%	69.0%
<i>total</i>	71.1%	72.0%
2. Duration of working life , in years	2021	
<i>men</i>	39.1	40.3
<i>women</i>	39.0	40.0
<i>total</i>	39.1	40.2

Challenges and opportunities

- **The potential of the Estonian labour force in the labour market is not fully realised.** There are groups in the population who, for various reasons, cannot secure their economic livelihood and well-being through work, either temporarily or permanently.
- People with health problems, people with special needs, as well as the young, the elderly and people of other nationalities are disadvantaged in the labour market. In order to increase labour force participation rates, it is necessary to address the need to bring groups at risk into the labour market and to support them in staying in the labour market.
- Structural problems in the labour market are also reflected in regional disparities – a large proportion of the Estonian economy, jobs and labour force are concentrated in Tallinn and Harju County, with the largest gaps in Ida-Viru County and South-East Estonia, where unemployment is also highest.
- **In the labour market, it is becoming increasingly common to work in a variety of contractual and non-traditional forms.** The share of work contracts and agency agreements has increased, and project-based work has become common.
- The use of digital opportunities in the labour market and the **need for flexibility in working time and place** increases. The number of remote workers is increasing.
- Flexible working arrangements can help different groups of workers to participate in the labour market (eg, parents of young children, workers with special needs), but can also lead to increased workloads, blurred boundaries between working and rest time, poor working environments and increased inequalities (e.g, in income, by region, by language).
- Estonia's most important constraints on economic development are a **shortage of skilled labour and low labour productivity**. The knowledge, skills and experience of the employees are not keeping pace with the needs of the employers.
- Although the participation rate in lifelong learning has increased significantly, the increase is uneven and participation in continuing education and retraining remains low among people with lower levels of education and older people.
- Participation in continuing education, training and retraining is lower among men and varies by region.
- The increase of limited employability is a concern. **Health problems are partly caused by hazards in the work environment, which in turn reduce the number of years lived and worked in good health.**
- **Work-related health problems impose costs on society and the state and have a negative and significant impact on workers' lives, health and labour market participation.** Accidents at work happen in the workplace, with serious and fatal accidents often occurring in micro and small enterprises. Various health problems can also develop and worsen in the working environment.
- Musculoskeletal disorders caused by sedentary work and mental health problems resulting from stressful environments are common work-related health problems.³

³ This area is addressed in depth in the National Health Plan 2020–2030.

Courses of action

The activities will contribute, among other things, to the objectives of the European Green Deal, which calls for attention to be paid to the regions, industries and workers facing the greatest difficulties. Actions are also in line with the European Employment Guidelines and the EU's Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021–2027, which focuses on the green, digital and demographic transition and on managing change in the world of work, as well as on the effective prevention of occupational accidents and diseases and increasing preparedness for possible future health crises.

Implementing employment policies that are sustainable and responsive to societal and economic developments:

- » broaden the focus beyond the current target groups (unemployed and disadvantaged) to other groups weakly attached to the labour market (e.g, people with care load and migration backgrounds, people who want to continue working in retirement, inactive people, NEETs);
- » modernise existing labour market measures so that they best meet the needs of the client and are effective;
- » contribute to cross-sectoral cooperation to prevent and curb the growth of barriers to labour market integration and labour mobility within society;
- » ensure, in cooperation with the social partners, the relevance and effectiveness of employment policies and actively involve them in designing labour market policies and forward-looking careers and skills policies.

Supporting structural changes in the economy and labour mobility:

- » reduce skills mismatches in the Estonian population by increasing people's motivation to learn and awareness of learning opportunities, and by encouraging changes in the way people reconcile work, learning and family life;
- » increase unemployment insurance coverage and ensure adequacy of benefits and allowances, including non-traditional forms of work in the social protection system;
- » increase the share of unemployed people receiving unemployment benefits and implement a system of unemployment benefits that depends from economic cycles and labour market situation.

Preventing the loss of capacity to work (i.e, when temporary incapacity develops into permanent incapacity) and keeping workers in employment:

- » develop a balanced, socially inclusive and sustainable model that takes into account the needs for adapting to changing health conditions and changing working conditions and conscious behaviour.

Meeting environmental and climate objectives and achieving balanced regional development:

- » increase the share of workers with knowledge of modern technologies, energy sources and systems through mobility support through mentoring, training, retraining and other support;
- » develop labour market policies that promote regional labour market activation, geographic labour mobility, coping with change and the acquisition of new skills.

Improving the working environment and industrial relations of workers, maintaining health in the workplace and preventing injuries:

- » raise awareness among employers and employees about occupational safety and health and industrial relations;
- » plan and implement preventive actions, taking into account the specificities and needs of workers and employers;
- » support and advise employers and workers in complying with occupational safety and health requirements and in managing risks in the workplace, taking into account specific occupational hazards and health risks (including mental health, sedentary work, biological and chemical hazards);
- » develop digital solutions that make it easier for employers to comply with safety requirements;
- » develop a legal framework for industrial relations and safety at work, taking into account the expectations of workers and employers;
- » support flexible ways of working by creating appropriate opportunities for teleworking and flexible working time arrangements;
- » ensure a functioning occupational health management system and improve its quality;
- » support and recognise opportunities for workers to participate in collective labour relations, support social dialogue and collective bargaining and collective agreements;
- » share good practices on inclusion and collective working conditions, and introduce the need for and benefits of collective labour relations;
- » improve monitoring of the working environment and industrial relations, implementing enforcement mechanisms, in particular by inspecting companies and establishments with a high risk level and a high risk of harm to workers' health;
- » reduce the use of incorrect service contracts;
- » settle labour disputes quickly and efficiently when they arise.

Sub-goal 3: older people



Photo: Adobe Stock

PURPOSE:

Older people are socially included in the society, have equal opportunities and are economically well-off.

Indicators	Reference level	Target level 2030
1. Active Ageing Index	37.9 (2018)	41

Challenges and opportunities

- According to Statistics Estonia's population projections, the share of people aged 65 and over will increase to 25.6% by 2040.
- With an ageing population and an increasing proportion of people with disabilities, the biggest challenges for the social sector are how to find additional resources to ensure adequate pensions, support active and healthy ageing and prevent disability and dependency.
- **Ageing and age-friendly approaches** need to be taken into account in all national policies. Issues related to the well-being of older people are not integrated into cross-cutting policies and there is a lack of analytical data to inform policy making.
- Policies for older people will take into account the principles of an ageing society, changing life expectancy and other aspects related to ageing.
- Compared to other European countries, older people in Estonia are relatively **less involved socially**, less involved in volunteering and politics, and less involved in hobbies.
- The lack of digital literacy at a time when computer use has become a part of everyday life limits older people's access to information, services and communication. According to Statistics Estonia, only 55% of people aged 65–74 used a computer and 65% used the internet.⁴
- Compared to the rest of the population, older people are at higher **risk of poverty**. The average old-age pension (€551 in 2021⁵) represents around 40% of average net wages, providing only a basic income, keeping older people out of absolute poverty but leaving them in relative poverty.
- **The ratio of average pensions to average wages is set to fall further in the future.** Also, more and more people are working part time abroad, which in turn reduces the number of taxpayers and pension rights in Estonia.
- In 2021, 57.6% of 50–74-year-olds worked – the share is higher than among their European peers, but the number of older people who would like to have and who are looking for a job suggests that the potential to work is higher.
- Ageing-related attitudes affect the quality of life and well-being of older people – one-sided portrayals of older people contribute to age prejudice and stereotypes.
- Age discrimination is perceived and experienced most in employment. Employers attribute lower productivity or risk of absence due to health problems to older workers.
- Age discrimination also occurs in the financial world and in access to products and services such as loans, bank accounts, insurance, etc.
- Older people are also vulnerable to **abuse**, neglect and abandonment, and loss of dignity and respect.

⁴ Statistics Estonia

⁵ Statistics Estonia

Courses of action

Supporting older people's well-being and participation in society:

- » take into account the principles of an age-friendly society, empower advocacy and representative organisations of older people and their networks, support the creation of representative councils of older people, promote the development of an age-friendly society and introduce the principles of an age-friendly society;
- » involve older people in policy making to take account of their needs in all areas of life;
- » raise awareness among community leaders and volunteer workers about the possibilities of the involvement of older people and the activation of their communities;
- » create opportunities for activating activities and volunteering, with a focus on people who have recently left employment;
- » break stereotypical thinking and reduce unequal treatment and the exclusion of older workers;
- » reduce negative attitudes among employers and employees, improve employers' diversity management skills, develop services that take into account the needs of older people and increase overall social tolerance.

Improving the financial well-being of older people and designing pension systems:

- » increase people's awareness and capacity to secure their financial well-being in old age;
- » design a sustainable pension system that provides both an adequate minimum income and a satisfactory replacement for income from work, including for persons living alone;
- » assess the impact of making the second pillar of the pension voluntary and the introduction of new forms of work on people's financial well-being in the future, and create further opportunities to inject resources into the pension system;
- » conclude bilateral social security agreements with non-EU countries (due to increased cross-border working) to ensure that pension rights accumulated in another country are preserved.

Promoting preventive social work for older people:

- » create awareness-raising measures and preventive interventions, bearing in mind that current choices have a direct impact on future autonomy;
- » raise awareness among older people to ask for and get help;
- » strengthen prevention and voluntary action at local level, including by agreeing on the role and responsibilities of local authorities and making preventive social work for older people more active;

- » support regional initiatives and prevention at a local level;
- » support the mental health of older people and prevent abuse in both the home and in care institutions⁶;
- » raise awareness about active ageing.

⁶ Supporting the physical health of older people is addressed in the National Health Plan 2020–2030.

Sub-goal 4: social care



Photo: Adobe Stock

PURPOSE:

Estonia's social care system supports people's well-being and social security.

Indicators	Reference level	Target level 2030
1. Percentage of people aged 16 and over with a high caring burden (20 hours or more per week), %	2.3% (2021)	1.7%
2. Ratio of recipients of services that support independent living at home to recipients of 24-hour institutional care services	1.1 (2021)	1.4

Challenges and opportunities

- **The care system of Estonia is complex and needs modernising.** The main role of a case manager lays on people with assistance needs or their relatives who need to contact different agencies for assistance.
- People are not always aware of the possibilities and responsibilities of the state and local authorities to provide support when they need it, and there are gaps in the safety net, both within the sector and in the transition from, for example, health to care or from care to the labour market.
- The needs assessment and the provision of assistance is fragmented between different sectors (including education, health, social and employment) and levels of government (state and local), the organisation of assistance leaves the roles of the parties unclear and therefore assistance is not provided in a holistic way. As a result, the person with assistance needs does not know where to turn with their concerns, and the various help providers do not always know where to direct people in a complex system.
- **Barriers to the flow of information** between different sectors and levels are a concern. Information systems are built around a single domain and do not holistically take into account the needs of human beings.
- **Inadequate funding** in this area has led to inadequate access to services at a national and local level, as for many people the out-of-pocket costs are prohibitive. The high burden of paying for services puts service users and their families at risk of poverty and increases the burden of care.
- The **shortage of skilled labour** in the field of care and the growing need to upgrade the knowledge and skills of professionals are a concern. Working with people with assistance needs is stressful and with little positive feedback, but it is low paid and poorly valued in the society.
- Existing curricula and training opportunities in the field of care need to be further developed to meet the new needs of the labour market. There is no centralised continuing training system and there is a lack of harmonisation in the regulation of qualification requirements for social professions.
- The aim of care is to support people **to live at home for as long as possible**. At the same time, social services supported in the home environment are not sufficiently available.
- The **care home infrastructure** is outdated and there are not enough places for people with more complex care needs.
- There is a lack of services for people who can no longer live independently at home, but who do not yet need a 24-hour care service. People with a dementia diagnosis also need attention. Most local authorities lack support services to help prevent memory impairment from worsening and to help people with dementia maintain their independence for as long as possible.
- The quality of social services needs to be further developed and more practical support needs to be provided to build the capacity of local authorities and service providers.
- There is a need to ensure minimum social guarantees for **people with a care burden**, to improve their awareness and skills in both seeking help and providing care at home, and to support them in reconciling work and family life.

- The care sector needs to boost **innovation** and the uptake of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Smart solutions can improve the quality of life of people in need as well as the efficiency of the public sector and the quality of governance.
- The current **level of digitalisation and data quality of social services datasets** is not sufficient for social governance, policy making and research and development by the state and local governments.
- In Estonia, the high number of people with finance difficulties and **debts** has become a major problem, which the social care system has so far done little to address. There are gaps in debt prevention, in the availability of debt advice and in people's awareness to seek help.

Courses of action

Changes are based on the needs of the individuals. The aim is to move towards an integrated delivery of services in the social, health and work sectors that takes into account the lifecycle and the needs of the individual, supported by evidence-based, environmentally sustainable digital solutions and the integrated use of data. Social care is an integrated process that starts with identifying the person with assistance needs and assessing their needs. The courses of action are in line with EU objectives to support people to live independently and with dignity in their own homes and to improve the situation of both professional and informal carers. Also, solutions are sought to help people out of poverty, who lack sufficient means of subsistence through grants and activating services.

Organising assistance, primarily at local level:

- » build a system of assistance based on a person's holistic needs, starting at the primary level, where the person's needs are assessed and then referred to the appropriate services. If assistance is needed from more than one area, it must be coordinated;
- » develop a model for the organisation of social protection based on hubs, including both case management and service delivery;
- » support access to and quality of care at primary level;
- » agree on acceptable differences in the provision of services (accessibility and quality) between local authorities or hubs and the consequences of failing to deliver;
- » set minimum standards for services and assistance.

Improving access to measures at local level:

- » ensure a holistic approach to the allocation of the limited resources available within and between local authorities to ensure access to the necessary assistance regardless of the place of residence;
- » promote a value-based approach and motivate local authorities to prevent problems;

- » support the development of tools (including technology) for the planning and delivery of social services;
- » find ways for local authorities to make better use of public money and develop services according to the needs of the people in their area;
- » implement a person-centred model of special care services and provide support for the targeted and sustained involvement of community and voluntary resources.

Increasing the focus of public funding on developing community-based, home-based and assisted living services and the physical and social environment:

- » invest in infrastructure to modernise care facilities and provide quality services for people with more complex care needs (e.g, people with dementia) and for those who can no longer be supported to live at home;
- » provide care services in a coordinated way and in close cooperation with health and other services (including community-based services) that support people's independence and security. Independent coping can also be supported by technological aids with user-friendly design;
- » deploy assistive technologies both in the home and in service environments (eg, care homes). It is important that smart solutions become more accessible (including in terms of price). Guidance and user support must be provided when using such solutions.⁷

Developing services based on the person's holistic needs and better coordinating and integrating the support provided:

- » improve the dialogue between the state and local authorities to clarify their expectations and responsibilities;
- » improve the organisation of rehabilitation and social rehabilitation;
- » develop a debt counselling service to improve people's economic coping and to manage the debts they have incurred, and develop a cross-sectoral prevention and mitigation plan;
- » develop support services to reduce poverty and improve people's self-sufficiency, improve the system of minimum income benefits as the last resort and ensure access to healthy food aid.

⁷ Guidelines for technology-rich care are provided by the Green Paper 'Increasing the use of technology to support people's daily living and well-being at home', 2020, Ministry of Social Affairs

Strengthening cooperation and partnership between the state and local authorities, and involving community initiatives and agreeing on the rights and responsibilities that this entails:

- » for certain services, encourage at least county or regional cooperation to achieve economies of scale and the necessary pooling of expertise;
- » increase public support and guidance and encourage cooperation between the state and local authorities to improve the accessibility and quality of local services.

Ensuring a social workforce, enhancing skills and valuing:

- » modernise the regulation of qualifications and professional standards for the social workforce;
- » develop a system of continuing and higher education and training to improve the quality of the social workforce;
- » specify the content of curricula and learning;
- » improve the knowledge and skills of managers in the field and set qualification requirements for them;
- » support the advocacy activities of social workers;
- » promote the social professions in society in general, and create an incentive package and staff recognition scheme.

Developing information systems that support cross-sectoral synergies and ensuring sustainable funding:

- » create a holistic view of data sharing and a common classification;
- » implement a targeted and algorithm-based common risk assessment to identify needs in the health and social sectors;
- » address legal issues related to data exchange and create the conditions for cross-sectoral data exchange at national level;
- » make data from national information systems available to local government social workers, so that they can provide holistic advice and plan strategic developments in the field, while ensuring data protection;
- » make it easier for social workers and clients to interpret and read data using IT solutions.

Sub-goal 5: gender equality and equal treatment



PURPOSE:

In Estonia, women and men have equal rights, duties, opportunities and responsibilities in all areas of social life, and equal opportunities for self-fulfilment and participation in society are guaranteed for minority groups.

Indicators	Reference level	Target level 2030
1. Percentage of people who consider themselves as belonging to a group discriminated against in Estonia	7.3% (2021)	<7.3%
2. Gender pay gap	14.9% (2021)	8.5%
3. Accessibility index	32.6% (2021)	45.2%

Challenges and opportunities

- **Stereotypical perceptions of men's and women's roles in society** and historically and culturally developed gender systems influence people's choices and reproduce or exacerbate social and economic inequalities between men and women.
- Although the **gender pay gap** (14.9%) has been on a downward trend over the last decade, it shows significant **gender inequalities in the labour market and in the economic independence of women and men**.
- Inequalities in the labour market are also characterised by activity-based gender **segregation** (36.4%) and occupational gender segregation (34.2%).
- The unbalanced distribution of care work is most pronounced in the **gender employment gap**, which is 42 percentage points between women and men with children under 3. These gender equality bottlenecks translate into **the risk of poverty for women and single-parent children, or obstacles to leaving a violent relationship**.
- **Women and men are still unequally represented at decision-making and management levels**. There are also still gaps in **the legal framework supporting gender equality and its implementation**. Institutional **capacity** to address gender inequalities in a cross-sectoral, systematic and effective way is **uneven**.
- Compared to the EU average, Estonia stands out for its **lower tolerance and openness towards people belonging to minority groups**.
- According to the people living in Estonia, discrimination on the grounds of age, colour, ethnic origin, sexual orientation and disability is the most common. Tolerance has an impact on people's sense of security and belonging to the rest of society, and can also have an impact on participation and contribution to society (including work).
- **Limited access** to space, information, services and culture affects a large part of the population. Greater consideration must be given to children, the older people and people with special needs, as well as those who may require accessible solutions.
- **By making accessibility an integral part of public spaces and services**, we will create equal opportunities for all in society to participate and to manage independently.

Courses of action

Gender equality policies aim to promote gender equality, reduce gender inequalities and thereby support growth in people's well-being, the economy and competitiveness. Gender equality policy is based on the fact that **gender inequalities have structural causes**. The implementation of the gender equality policy presupposes compliance with the norms of equal treatment of women and men, ie, the avoidance of direct and indirect gender discrimination, and the use of two complementary strategic approaches – the implementation of specific measures aimed directly at tackling gender inequalities, and gender mainstreaming, ie, the inclusion of a gender perspective in all policies.

The scope of equal opportunities is wide due to the number of minority groups, and to ensure equal treatment and promote equal opportunities, it is necessary to focus on activities in different target groups at the same time.

Enhancing sectoral law enforcement:

- » amend the scope of the Equal Treatment Act to ensure protection against discrimination on grounds of nationality (ethnicity), race, colour, religion or belief, age, disability or sexual orientation on the same grounds;
- » modernise and streamline legislation to promote equal opportunities for minority groups;
- » increase the capacity of national institutions, including the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, to provide swift and effective support to people in cases of breaches of the principles of equal treatment and gender equality, and to increase the awareness and competence of legal practitioners, lawyers, judges and other relevant stakeholders in legal aid on sectoral law and case law;
- » raise workers' awareness of their rights and how to protect them, and develop sustainable solutions to improve employers' knowledge and skills to ensure gender equality;
- » analyse the fulfilment of the requirements laid down in the Gender Equality Act and make proposals for better implementation of the Act and for improving monitoring possibilities.

Increasing cooperation with networks, associations and organisations supporting gender equality and equal treatment and ensuring well-functioning advocacy:

- » support the activities and development of civil society organisations and networks promoting gender equality and equal treatment;
- » support the activities of the Gender Equality Council to provide the Government of the Republic with broad-based advice on gender equality issues and ensure cooperation;
- » develop cooperation with civil society organisations, involving them in sectoral policy making.

Changing societal attitudes to value and support gender equality:

- » reduce the prevalence of negative gender stereotypes and their restrictive effects;
- » integrate the principle of equality into the curricula and materials of the formal education;
- » raise awareness among key stakeholders of the manifestations of gender inequalities, their causes and related problems, gender stereotypes and their impact, and the need and opportunities to promote gender equality;
- » raise awareness among target groups and stakeholders to spot and prevent gender-based violence.

Increasing economic equality between women and men:

- » continue to identify the causes of the pay gap and design measures to improve pay transparency;
- » support employers with the knowledge and user-friendly tools to identify and reduce the pay gap in their organisation;
- » reinforce measures to improve the reconciliation of work, family and private life for women and men, and to reduce the burden of care for children and adult dependants and support a more equal sharing of care burden between women and men;
- » implement measures to reduce gender segregation in education and the labour market;
- » improve the gender balance in science, technology (including ICT), engineering and maths (so-called STEM subjects) and education, health and welfare (so-called EHW subjects).

Balanced participation of women and men at all levels of decision-making and leadership:

- » create the preconditions to support the achievement of sustainable gender balance in decision-making in elected assemblies and appointed positions at a national and local government level;
- » support political parties in promoting gender balance;
- » create supportive solutions to improve women's career prospects, increase entrepreneurship and reduce the prevalence and impact of negative gender stereotypes at decision-making and management levels in the public and business sectors to achieve gender balance, including by increasing transparency and objectivity in selection processes.

Institutional capacity building to promote gender equality and gender mainstreaming in all operational and policy areas:

- » create coordination and support mechanisms to ensure that the different situations, life experiences, needs, interests and opportunities of men and women are taken into account and that gender equality is promoted effectively at a national and local level;
- » strengthen monitoring of the quality of gender impact assessments;
- » regularly collect gender and intersectional statistics, and carry out thematic analyses and regular surveys to inform the design and implementation of gender-sensitive and knowledge-based policies in all areas.

Ensuring regular and quality data on the situation and needs of minority groups:

- » support sectoral data collection and analysis activities;
- » encourage policy makers in other sectors to collect and use data on minority groups.

Supporting knowledgeable and skilled policy makers, employers, education workers and other members of society:

- » improve the knowledge and skills of policy makers to ensure that they are able to take into account the situation and needs of minority groups when planning developments in their field;
- » raise awareness among employers, including by pursuing activities related to the implementation of the Diverse Workplace Label to promote diversity in companies and organisations;
- » raise awareness and build the knowledge and skills of education and training experts;
- » regularly carry out appropriate activities to raise awareness in society.

Improving accessibility to ensure independent living and full participation for all:

- » regulate accessibility requirements more precisely and improve monitoring of compliance;
- » raise awareness in society and increase the competence of professionals on the principles, opportunities and benefits of universal design;
- » supplement the accessibility metric to allow for an assessment of improvements in accessibility;
- » support the implementation of the policy recommendations of the Accessibility Taskforce (2020–2021).

Estimated cost of the development plan

The Welfare Development Plan 2023–2030 will be implemented through annually renewed 4-year programmes based on its sub-goals. The cost of the programmes is made up of the direct costs of providing the service covered by the programme (e.g, grants for people or the maintenance of service points) and the indirect costs of providing the service (e.g, staff and management costs of the service provider and ICT costs). The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for the implementation of the development plan, while the other ministries and organisations involved have coordinated the activities under their responsibility and are responsible for the implementation thereof.

The cost of the development plan has been calculated on the basis of the approved national budget strategy for 2023–2026, and the total cost is around €45 billion. This forecast does not imply a surge in expenditure. More detailed cost estimates are prepared each year, together with the programmes, as part of the national budget planning process. The activities of the development plan will be implemented through national budget resources, including the European Structural Funds (ESF+, ERDF, REACT-EU), the Recovery and Resilience Facility and other external funds.

	Sub-goal 1	Sub-goal 2	Sub-goal 3	Sub-goal 4	Sub-goal 5
2023	1 029 036 883	917 907 180	3 442 244 194	159 997 292	2 616 515
2024	1 076 155 740	960 346 924	3 438 716 888	156 281 116	2 775 330
2025	1 121 611 152	1 001 963 860	3 676 714 884	157 846 115	2 878 231
2026	1 166 379 761	1 040 590 069	3 900 061 920	156 989 331	2 873 523
2027-2030*	4 697 205 000	416 236 000	15 600 248 000	627 657 000	8 637 000
Total	9 090 388 536	4 337 044 033	30 057 965 886	1 258 770 854	19 780 599
In total:	44 763 949 908				

*Estimated cost based on the costs of 2026.



Photo: Günther Küttis

Governance

The Welfare Development Plan 2023–2030 is approved by the Government of the Republic. According to the State Budget Act, the Government submits a development plan to the Riigikogu for discussion before it is approved. The implementation and delivery of the development plan will be coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs through programmes covering at least one period of the national budget strategy. The programmes are approved each year by decree of the ministers responsible for the field, after the Riigikogu has adopted the state budget.

According to the State Budget Act, a programme is a development document that defines the measures, indicators, activities and financing plan aimed at achieving a sub-goal of a result area.

For the implementation of the Welfare Development Plan 2023–2030, a steering committee is set up by ministerial decree, whose main tasks are:

- » make recommendations to achieve the goals of the Welfare Development Plan and monitor the implementation thereof;
- » make recommendations to improve the performance of programmes and monitor the implementation thereof;
- » propose joint actions between different sectors, levels and organisations.

The steering committee includes the ministries most involved in the implementation of the development plan and the Government Office, the representative organisation(s) of the municipalities, the social partners and the main umbrella organisations related to the focus of the sub-goals.

A wide-ranging and multi-sectoral expert panel will be involved in the implementation of the development plan. The role of the expert panel is to provide input to the steering committee on the preparation and implementation of the Welfare Development Plan and to give feedback on the implementation of the Welfare Development Plan. To achieve the objectives of the development plan, it is important to work closely with the local government cooperation bodies. It is also important that the objectives set in the strategic documents at different levels are consistent with the planned actions.

Population is also a key focus of the Welfare Development Plan, and a Government Commission on Population Policy has been set up to coordinate this. The aim of the Commission, together with the experts in the field and representatives of the various ministries, is to coordinate the country's activities in the field of population policy, including the creation of the legislation needed to achieve the objectives of the population policy, monitoring population processes, commissioning studies, developing measures to achieve the desired development and assessing their impact, identifying relevant and up-to-date data needs for monitoring population processes and communicating the need for population statistics to data collectors and processors.

The implementation of the development plan will be reported annually as part of the national budget performance reporting process, involving both the steering committee and the expert panel. A mid-term evaluation will be carried out at the latest three years before the end of the period of implementation of the development plan to give an overview of the progress, challenges and make recommendations for new developments in the results area. The results of the mid-term evaluation will also serve as a basis for the design or refocusing of the follow-up strategy/strategies.

