Supporting young people to succeed – building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning

Introductory note for Working Group

October 2021

praxis | think tank

CIVITTA

TALLINN UNIVERSITY

Contents

1 Introduction

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) has procured the services of ICF (together with Praxis, Civitta, Tallinn University and international experts) to provide technical support in the framework of this project - "Supporting young people to succeed – building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning". The project is funded by the EU through the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP).

This document provides an overview of the project, including its scope and objectives (Section 2) and the main deliverables and tasks (Section 3). It also includes the meeting minutes from the stakeholder kick-off meeting held on 22 September 2021 (Annex 1) and a list of stakeholder organisations that are represented in the Working Group (Annex 2).

2 Project scope and objectives

2.1 General objectives

The project aims to support the better integration of non-formal[1] and formal[2] learning in Estonia (informal learning[3] is outside the scope of this project). In Estonia, non-formal education is seen as serving individuals' needs, as well as an attractive target and means to reach policy goals in the field of education and youth as well as in other policy areas. The aim of better integrating non-formal and formal learning is to maximise learning in different learning environments. This contributes to a more flexible education system which prioritises learners' unique needs, potential and motivations, promoting social cohesion and a culture of lifelong learning. The overall aim is to support individuals to succeed personally and professionally throughout their life course.

2.2 Expected impact and outcomes

It is expected that the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, having been closely involved in the design and subsequent implementation of the contract, will adopt the deliverables through its internal mechanisms and implement the recommendations and guidelines contained in the final deliverables.

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[1] Non-formal learning is understood as learning that takes place outside of a school and is undertaken with a certain objective to develop oneself. Non-formal education can take place in very different environments (for example, in hobby education or supplementary education, but also in nature), where learning and teaching may not be the only objectives. Non-formal learning has an objective in the same way as formal education, but it is voluntary. It can be carried out by professional trainers or, for example, volunteers or peers (cf Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020). In this project non-formal learning comprises youth work.

[2] Formal learning mostly takes place in a school environment and is organised on the basis of curricula. Formal education has specific objectives and is conducted by teachers who are specially prepared and qualified. Learning objectives are mostly set externally, and the learning process is monitored and evaluated. Formal learning is mandatory until a certain level or age (cf Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf). For the purpose of this project, formal education is understood to comprise education at primary and secondary level, including both general education and (initial) vocational education and training.

[3] Informal learning is, from the learner's perspective, learning without a specific objective. It takes place in everyday situations (for example, in families, at work, etc.) and therefore the results of informal learning are not directly visible for the learner (cf Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020).

Provided that these recommendations and guidelines are implemented, the expected outcomes of the project are as follows:

1. **Outcome 1:** The Estonian authorities are aware of policy options to achieve better integration of non-formal and formal learning, including legislation, funding schemes and models of governance.

2. **Outcome 2:** The Estonian authorities have co-created and validated guidelines for the integration of non-formal and formal learning together with relevant stakeholder from non-formal and formal education and local governments.

3. **Outcome 3:** The authorities have a plan for effective implementation of the reform.

3 Methodological approach

This project will assist the Estonian national authorities in improving their capacity to design, develop and implement reforms to facilitate a better integration of formal and non-formal education. We will support a policy level reform based on a thorough assessment of the governance challenges to be addressed with a broader aim of contributing to a more flexible learner-centred education system where all parties understand the importance of learner-centeredness and flexibility in supporting achievement and wellbeing.

The technical support and analysis offered through this project focuses on assisting the Ministry of Education and Research to develop recommendations on legislation and policy, as well as co-creating guidelines on their implementation with relevant stakeholders, to support a better integration of non-formal and formal learning in the Estonian education system. The recommendations and the associated guidelines will need to take account of the views of a range of Estonian stakeholders (through a consultative and co-creation process) and good practices in other European countries.

3.1 Deliverables and tasks

Overall, the project involves nine main deliverables executed over a period of 22 months. These deliverables are combined in three different phases (see Figure 1):

■ An **analysis phase** including deliverables 1-5 and corresponding to outcome 1 (as described above).

■ A **co-creation phase** covering deliverable 6 and corresponding to outcome 2.

■ A **testing and implementation phase** covering deliverables 7-9 and corresponding to outcome 3.

Figure 1 Overview of the different phases and deliverables of the project

Analysis

Deliverable 1 -
Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia
Deliverable 2 -
Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practice from other European countries
Deliverable 3 -
Reports from an online peer exchange with experts from other European countries, and a study visit
Deliverable 4 -
Impact assessment including cost-benefit analysis
Deliverable 5 - Recommendations for legislation and policy (preliminary)

Co-creation of guidelines

Deliverable 6 -
Co-creation of guidelines for the integration of formal and non-formal learning

Testing and implementation

Deliverable 7 -
Report from the piloting of the guidelines
Deliverable 8 -
Final recommendations on legislation and policy, and recommendations on implementation
Deliverable 9 -
Communication and outreach strategy

> **Phase 1** > **Phase 2** > **Phase 3**

Phase 1
aims to provide an assessment of the situation in Estonia and to draw upon European practices for inspiration and learning. The activities under Phase 1 will result in a set of preliminary recommendations for legislation and policy

Outcome 1:
The Estonian authorities are aware of policy options to achieve better integration of non-formal and formal learning, including legislation, funding schemes and modes of governance

Phase 2
is key to the reform process. The guidelines have to be strategic, manageable, capable of being implemented and aligned to the needs of different stakeholders

Outcome 2:
The authorities have co-created and validated guidelines for the integration of formal and non-formal learning together with relevant stakeholders from formal and non-formal education and local governments

Phase 3
aims to test the implementation of the co-created guidelines in order to arrive at a final set of recommendations and guidelines. The implementation of the recommendations will also be supported by a communication and outreach strategy

Outcome 3:
The authorities have a plan for the effective implementation of the reform
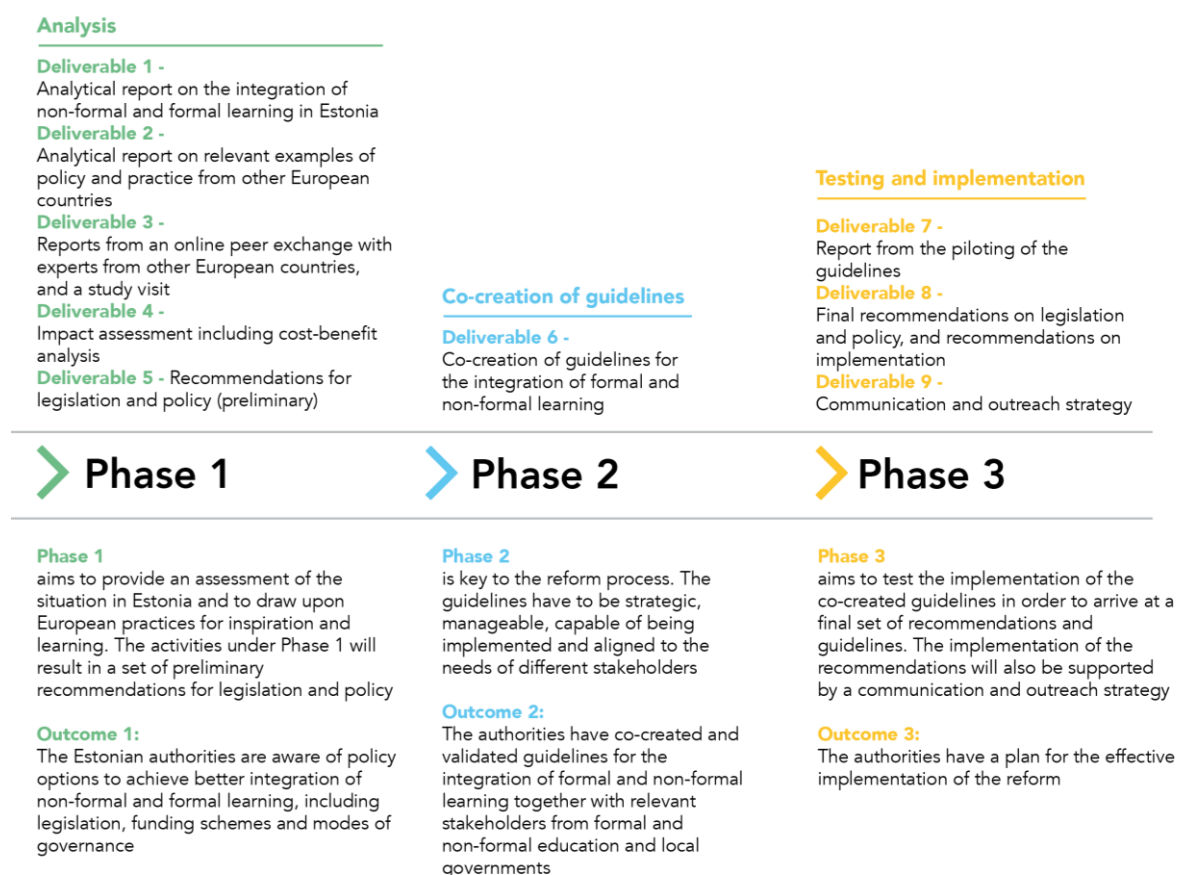
Table 1 below provides an overview of the project timeline. It shows that the analysis phase will run until mid-2022, with the co-creation phase taking place primarily during the second half of 2022 (but with revisions following the piloting). The testing and implementation phase will be delivered during the first half of 2023.

Table 1 Indicative timing of project deliverables

	Deliverable	Indicative timing
1	Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia	Oct-Dec 2021
2	Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practice from other European countries	Nov 2021-Feb 2022
3	Reports from an online peer exchange and a study visit to a European country	Feb-Jun 2022
4	Impact assessment including cost-benefit analysis	Mar-Jun 2022
5	Recommendations for legislation and policy (preliminary)	May-Jul 2022
6	Co-creation of guidelines for the integration of formal and non-formal learning	Jul 2022-Apr 2023
7	Report from the piloting of the guidelines	Jan-May 2023
8	Final recommendations on legislation and policy, and recommendations for implementation	May-Jul 2023
9	Communication and outreach strategy	Jun-Jul 2023

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3.2 Working Group

In order to support a consultative and co-creative process, a Working Group comprising a wide range of national stakeholders will be set up (see Annex 2 for a list of organisations represented). The aim of the Working Group is to discuss and give guidance on the content of the project, as well as review and validate some deliverables. The Working Group (or members of the Working Group) will play a key role in supporting the delivery of several project activities, particularly the co-creation of the guidelines (D6) and the piloting of the guidelines (D7). Members of the Working Group may also be asked to participate in semi-structured interviews and focus groups (D1), an online peer exchange and a study visit (D3), an impact assessment workshop (D4) and an international seminar (D5). The Working Group will also be given opportunities to review and provide feedback on the recommendations for policy and legislation (D5 and D8).

The Working Group will meet as a group at least 4-6 times (face-to-face and online) according to a pre-defined calendar linked to project events and milestones. A tentative list of meetings is provided below:

- Working Group meeting 1 - March 2022

- Working Group meeting 2 - June 2022

- Working Group meeting 3 - September 2022

- Working Group meeting 4 - December 2022

- Working Group meeting 5 – April/May 2023

In between meetings we will endeavour to provide regular updates on progress.

Annex 1 Stakeholder kick-off meeting minutes

Date: Wednesday 22 September 2021

Time: 13.30-17.00 EEST

Location: TTK University of Applied Sciences, Pärnu mnt 62, Tallinn (Room B306A)

A1.1 Welcome and introduction

Liina Põld from the Ministry of Education and Research welcomed all participants and presented the background and objectives of the project. She also highlighted that there are some local governments that are already implementing local initiatives to improve the integration non-formal and formal learning - for example Pärnu. This project is an opportunity to look at these in more detail and to examine the potential to scale these up and to maximise cooperation between stakeholders. Liina also highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement in the project and thanked everyone in advance for their engagement and input. She also thanked DG REFORM for funding the project.

Thomas Pritzkow from the European Commission (DG REFORM) expressed satisfaction that the project finally starting after nearly two years of discussion and preparation. He also highlighted the ambitious nature of the project which is to achieve system wide integration of non-formal and formal learning. Thomas also stressed the importance of stakeholder engagement in the project and encouraged the participants to maximise the opportunities offered by the project to inform and influence the outputs and outcomes.

A1.2 Introduction to the project

Mattias Wihlborg of ICF, together with **Eve Mägi** (Praxis) and **Kadri Kallip** (Civitta), introduced the project and the partnership that will deliver it. This partnership brings together the international expertise of ICF (and a number of international experts) and the local knowledge and presence of Praxis, Civitta and Tallin University.

The approach aims to develop recommendations that are specific to Estonia, tailored to the national/local institutional context and that bring stakeholders closer together. Stakeholders will be engaged through a consultative and co-creation process, particularly during the co-creation and piloting of the guidelines.

The project has three main phases and will be implemented over 22 months. Phase 1 concentrates on assessing the current situation and future needs in Estonia regarding the integration of non-formal and formal learning. It will also review examples from European countries and internationally to support future policy making. The analytical phase will consist of desk-research and interviews/focus groups and will be followed by an online peer-exchange and a study visit to allow a more in-depth and practical assessment of existing good practices. These meetings will also provide stakeholders with an opportunity to network with peers from other countries. Phase 1 also includes an impact assessment which aims to monetise and determine the best policy options. All of the above will help shape the preliminary recommendations on policy and legislation. The results of Phase 1 will be presented and validated at an international seminar. Phase 2 will co-create guidelines on the integration of non-formal and formal learning with stakeholders. These discussions will be done in Estonian to maximise stakeholder engagement. Phase 3 is about piloting the guidelines in four local government areas and using this experience to create the final guidance and recommendations, as well as a plan for the effective implementation of the reform. All project work will conclude in July 2023.

There will be plenty of opportunities for stakeholders to inform and influence the project, including through consultative interviews and focus groups and co-creative workshops. The next formal meeting of the Working Group is indicatively scheduled for March 2022, but updates on the project will be provided at regular intervals before then.

There were no comments or questions from the participants.

A1.3   Summary of working group discussions

Participants were divided into four smaller working groups to brainstorm on the following questions:

- What are the current challenges that better integration of non-formal and formal learning could address?

- What practices already exist that support this integration (e.g. local pilots or initiatives)?

- What opportunities do you see in terms of achieving a better integration of non-formal and formal learning? What are the main obstacles in achieving this?

This initial brainstorming discussion provided useful material to feed into the planning and execution of the project deliverables, particularly, and most imminently, Deliverable 1 (Analytical report on the integration of non-formal learning and formal learning).

A summary of the main points of discussion[4] is provided below:

A1.3.1 Current challenges that better integration of non-formal and formal learning could address

Participants highlighted several challenges that better integration of non-formal learning and formal learning could potentially address:

- Difficulties in implementing individual study pathways in formal education.

- Lack of practical elements in formal education.

- Students' time budget is constrained.

- Insufficient number of students in hobby education institutions.

- Better integration would allow more trust in the student and give them responsibility in shaping their learning path.

- Students must be at the centre of education. All the education that a young person receives, not just formal education, must be accepted and recognised.

- The teaching staff in Estonia is aging and the classic teacher profession may soon die out. The solution is to involve other specialists in education, both in the field of hobby education, youth work and specialists from the labour market. A good example of the last idea is https://edumus.org/.

A1.3.2 Obstacles to the integration of non-formal and formal learning

- There is confusion around the concepts. Non-formal learning is not-well understood and is treated differently.

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[4] This summary reflects the views expressed by individual participants and does not necessarily reflect the views and positions of the organisations represented nor that of the Ministry of Education and Research,

- Hobby schools are not defined as educational institutions - are excluded from educational planning, are not involved in discussions, teachers do not have the same benefits and cannot participate in training to the same extent as teachers in the formal education sector.

- The image of different types of learning and education - formal education is sometimes considered uninteresting, whilst hobby education is seen as a leisure time activity.

- Lack of regulations, guidelines and tools for integration.

- Limited cooperation and a lack of common networks between schoolteachers and teachers/tutors of extra-curricular activities.

- Lack of resources – time, money and people. Support in terms of didactics is needed to successfully integrate non-formal and formal learning.

- There is no/limited recognition of prior learning (RPL) in the general education curriculum.

- The identity of the teachers or tutors of extra-curricular activities is not clear - they are not part of formal education, but they themselves do not consider themselves to belong to the youth sector.

- A general education teacher does not accept the teaching of a teacher or tutor of extra-curricular activities.

- If students are assessed with exams and national tests, teachers do not want to give up any of their own lessons.

- Schools do not value students' hobbies if it conflicts with their study time (competitions, performances, etc.)

- There are curricula in both formal and hobby education, but they have different logic and are not consistent.

- According to a recent study by the Tallinn University, cooperation between teachers in schools is very low, so cooperation with teachers in hobby schools or youth workers may be even more difficult to achieve.

- Curriculum integration does not seem to be supported. It was even noted that hobby schools may be reprimanded if they teach the outputs of a (formal) school (e.g. digital competences in a hobby school).

- There is no physical space in the school building where pupils can be during breaks.

A1.3.3 Challenges of integration

- Stronger/more advanced schools/students may use the opportunities, whilst weaker ones may fall further behind - applies to both school and student levels.

- Attitudes of teachers in non-formal and formal education and officers at municipalities may restrict the potential for integration.

- Learning must be assessed for the curriculum. How can the experience or practice that a young person has gained from different places be measured on a uniform basis?

- It is important to ask what young people themselves want when designing their learning environment.

- National agreement is necessary, it should not be an individual school decision (e.g. around a quarter of the curriculum's volume is decided by each school).

- Students' transportation is already an issue - it might get even more complicated.

A1.3.4 Opportunities of integrating non-formal and formal learning

- The strategic documents in the field of education state a readiness for integration. This creates at least some precondition.

- Stakeholder discussions and agreements are needed for greater clarity of concepts.

- In both hobby schools and formal education schools, teaching is based on curricula, i.e. the system and habit of relying on curricula exists in both. Both curricula should be brought to the same system.

- At least at upper secondary school (Year 7-9), students should have more electives in the curriculum.

- Subjects can be integrated; and formal and non-formal learning can be integrated. If you go to the Nature House within the school, it is a formal study, but if the pupil goes to the Nature House after lessons, then it is no longer a formal study. Proposal is to make non-formal learning in certain volume compulsory for all. This is currently done after school.

- One possibility is that, for example, a Friday is studied at home. It would give more freedom for learning activities.

- Non-formal learning could complement formal education with practical/hands-on content, better use of resources (materials, spaces, technology, specialists and their skills, etc.).

- Work in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or voluntary organisations could be recognised in Social Science. There are also several activities in youth work that could be integrated into Social Science. There are currently no curricula in youth work, but there could be.

- The potential of museum education is underused.

- Cross-use of rooms in different environments (e.g. youth centre, hobby school rooms, university rooms, etc.). They all offer different learning environments; they should be used more.

- The training systems of general education teachers and hobby schoolteachers should be harmonised.

- Schools would need a study counsellor who, in addition to career counselling, provide talent counselling.

- The student's portfolio should be created in the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS). There could be an opportunity to enter information about non-formal learning, including hobby education and other activities. The school certificate could also contain information about non-formal learning (what the student has passed, what they have achieved).

- There are a lot of qualified teachers, tutors and supervisors in non-formal education. Many of these have also benefited from in-service training.

A1.3.5 Examples of existing practices

- "Õppida saab kõikjal" ("It's possible to study everywhere" - English) programme in Tartu municipality (https://tartu.ee/et/oppida-saab-koikjal) focused on STEM subjects.

- PÕK - Pärnu linn kui õpikeskus ("The city of Pärnu as a study centre" - English) - cooperation between kindergartens, schools, hobby schools, museums, higher education institutions, vocational education centres, other institutions and enterprises.

- In physical education, participation in sports training is sometimes recognised. For example, if a child attends swimming lessons outside of school, they do not have to complete basic swimming lessons at school.

- Compulsory creative project in basic school is done in a hobby school or training.

- Environmental Education Association's quality label "Cloudberry" for a study programme that meets the quality criteria developed by Estonian environmental education experts https://www.ekhyhing.ee/tegevused/kvaliteedi-tagamine/kvaliteedimargis

- Liikuma Kutsuv Kool - https://www.liikumakutsuvkool.ee/

- Koolitants - https://tantsuagentuur.ee/koolitants/

- School theatres

- Courses of the University of Tartu Science School - https://www.teaduskool.ut.ee/et

- Museum programmes

- Projects of the Environmental Investment Centre - https://kik.ee/en

- Mobile technology classes and workshops https://www.mobileworkshops.eu/

- Project "Sport at school" by the Estonian Olympic Committee https://www.eok.ee/liikumisharrastus/sport-koolis

- ProTERA in the Tartu Private School - cooperation with Tartu Vocational Education Centre and Tartu Art School. The electives are based on the interests of boys and girls.

- In the Tallinn 21st School, one day each week is used for distance learning which provides time resources for other activities.

- Electives in upper secondary education by out-of-school providers (VET and HE institutions).

- Common development plan for youth work and education in the Rae local municipality.

A1.4 Closing the meeting

Mattias Wihlborg noted that the discussion appeared to have been very inspiring, interesting and useful, with clear messages coming out. He was also encouraged to hear that there are a lot of practices already being implemented that can be explored further and potentially scaled up.

Riin Tamm thanked the stakeholders for their inputs to the working group discussions and for being part of the project. She also recognised that there are a number of challenges to address and that the expectations of the project are high. She noted that the project is ambitious but that it can be successfully realised with the contributions of all stakeholders.

Annex 2   Working Group member organisations

- Estonian Music School Union (EMSU)
- Union of Estonian Art Schools (EASU)
- Estonian Hobby Schools Union (EHSU)
- Estonian School Sport Union (ESSU)
- Estonian Dance Education Association (EDEA)
- Estonian STEM Education Union (ESEU)
- Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM)
- Association of Estonian Open Youth Centers (AEYC)
- Estonian Association of Youth Workers (AEYW)
- Estonian National Youth Council (ENL)
- Estonian School Student Councils' Union (ESCU)
- University of Tartu Youth Academy (UTYA)
- Estonian Association of Teachers of Estonian
- School Mathematics Association
- Estonian History and Civics Teachers Association
- Association of Teachers of Estonian as a Second Language
- Network of Estonian Teachers' Associations (NETA)
- Association of Estonian Folk High Schools
- Estonian Non-Formal Adult Education Association (ENAEA)
- Estonian Association of Teachers
- Estonian School Heads Association
- Estonian Parents' Association
- Education Cluster of Ida-Viru County
- Estonian Association for Advancement of Vocational Education (EAAVE)
- Estonian Educational Personnel Union (EEPU)
- Ministry of Social Affairs
- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Environment
- Tallinn City Government
- Tartu City Government
- Pärnu City Government
- Narva City Government
- Viljandi Rural Municipality Government

- Estonian Cultural Chamber
- Estonian National Museum
- Kumu Art Museum / Art Museum of Estonia
- Estonian Society for Music Education (TBC)
- Estonian Society for Education through Art (TBC)
- Estonian Physical Education Association (TBC)
- Association of Estonian Craft Teachers "Aita" (TBC)