**Situation in Estonia by Federation of Estonian Student Unions**

Federation of Estonian Student Unions (EÜL) is an umbrella organisation of students whose aim is to stand for the rights, needs and interests of students on a national level and to support student unions in carrying out their work. EÜL was founded on November 23, 1991 by nine Student Unions.

The situation in Estonia is relatively good when it comes to recognizing the human right to education. This right is stated in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia: “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be compulsory for school-age children to the extent specified by a law, and shall be free of charge in state and municipal general education schools.” The Constitution also states that in order to make education accessible, the state and municipalities shall maintain the requisite number of educational institutions (*The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia*, 2020).

The main challenge that we are facing in Estonia is the language which is used in educational institutions. Since we have the background of being occupied by the USSR, we still have some schools where the teaching process is in Russian. Our parliament decided last year that we will gradually move to all schools using Estonian in teaching during the next few years but we can see how that process will go (*The Government Has Approved Activities to Ensure a Quick Transition to Estonian-Language Education*, 2022).

The language problem is also a current issue in the higher education system. We don’t have tuition fees for degrees taught in Estonian and our higher education system is very underfunded (“Rectors: Underfunding Estonian Higher Education Is a Security Risk,” 2022). Because of that we have a situation where degrees taught in English have better quality than those taught in Estonian. Some politicians have also been starting to say that we shouldn’t have degrees in English because we should only carry on our own culture and language.

The language part is also in our Constitution which clearly states that everyone has the right to be taught in Estonian but the language of instruction in national minority educational institutions shall be chosen by the educational institution (*The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia*, 2020).

In the Republic of Estonia Education Act it is stated that the state and local governments shall ensure that everyone in Estonia has the opportunity to fulfil the obligation to attend school and the opportunity to engage in lifelong learning, under the conditions and pursuant to the procedure prescribed by legislation (*Republic of Estonia Education Act*, 2022). This means that education is available to all by law but when it comes to higher education, society tends to forget about the hidden costs of studying in university. “The structure of the education system, along with the national standards of education, shall provide opportunities for everyone to move from one level of education to the next” - is what is written in the Act. And yes, we don’t have tuition fees but our social guarantees system for students isn’t up to date so students still have problems covering the basic costs of living. That means that higher education isn’t accessible to all and many students sacrifice their health when working full-time while studying.

In our opinion the right to education is considered as a justiciable right in Estonia. We have the school obligation until the end of 9th grade. In 2021 13,027 students graduated from the 9th grade in Estonia (*Üldharidus*, 2022). In the same year 7,005 students graduated from high school (*Üldharidus*, 2022). Both numbers have been growing 1-2% every year (*Üldharidus*, 2022). In Estonia there is also an option to study after the primary school in vocational schools which is getting more popular each year. In 2021 8,891 students graduated from vocational institutions (*Kutseharidus*, 2022). This is 7% more than the year before (*Kutseharidus*, 2022). In 2021 there were 44,611 students studying in the higher education system (*Kõrgharidus*, 2022). These numbers are pretty good because the population of Estonia is just 1.3 million people.

The OECD data «Education at a Glance 2022» states that 43% of Estonians aged between 25–34 have a higher education degree. That percentage has been growing every year (OECD, 2022).

In our organisation’s view, the main challenges that Estonia faces in implementing the right to education are connected to higher education, since we are a student organisation. The most vital topic right now is the state funding of higher education since with the current funding it is not possible to have good quality education available to everyone. The other important issue is to improve our social guarantees system which would help to cover the hidden costs of studying in a university, such as accommodation, food and study supplies.

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