

Mapping child protection systems in the EU (27)

Estonia

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Contents

1. Legislative and regulatory framework and policies	3
1.1. Overview of normative and regulatory framework	3
1.2. Legal provisions in constitutional, civil, criminal, and administrative law related to children in need of protection.....	3
1.3. Policy framework.....	6
1.4. Particular groups of children: information on legislative and policy developments (if any) related to their protection	8
1.6. Orientation/fragmentation of national child protection policy and legislation.....	18
1.7. Development in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges.....	19
1.8. Promising practices	19
2. Governance, coordination structures, and services	20
2.1. Primary institutions and main service providers responsible for child protection	20
2.2. Civil society organisations active in the area of child protection. Please consider also including information on the role of religious institutions and groups active in the area of child protection.....	52
2.3. Inter-agency cooperation in the area of child protection.....	54
2.4. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges	61
2.5. Promising practices	64
3. Capacities (human and financial resources)	66
3.1. Information on budget allocation and funding.....	66
3.2. Information on human resources, qualification requirements, and training	77
3.3. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges	89
3.4. Promising practices	90
4. Care	93
4.1. Prevention measures and services.....	93
4.2. Identification and reporting procedures.....	99
4.3. Referral procedures(s) and investigation and protection	105
4.4. Placement decisions – care orders.....	118
4.5. Types of care with focus on alternative care	120
4.6. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges	140
4.7. Promising practices	143
5. Accountability, data collection, and monitoring mechanisms	145
5.1. Accountability mechanisms.....	145
5.2. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges	153
5.3. Promising practices	154
6. General education, promotion, and awareness raising	156
6.1. Education on child rights.....	156
6.2. Promotion and awareness raising.....	157
6.3. Promising practices	158
7. Child participation and community engagement	159
7.1. Complaint procedures.....	159
7.2. Feedback mechanisms	160
7.3. Promising practices	160

1. Legislative and regulatory framework and policies

1.1. Overview of normative and regulatory framework

Please provide an overview of the normative legal and regulatory framework of the national and sub-national child protection system. Include information on the scope of the child protection system, the specific needs it addresses, the human and financial resources allocated, and any relevant cultural, social, and historical factors. Please indicate the current priority areas in child protection.

New Child Protection Act (Lastekaitseadus) was adopted by the Estonian Parliament on 19 November 2014 and became effective on 01 January 2016. One specific provision became effective from 01 January 2020 – this is article 19 – requirements for child protection officials. The need for the delay in the enforcement of the said provision is the requirement that all child protection officials must have professional qualification and higher education. The additional time was necessitated by the need to allow practicing child protection officials to make provisions for the acquirement of these conditions.

The Ministry of Social Affairs commissioned a report from PWC in 2013 to address the matters of priorities in child protection and related factors. (The document can be provided upon request and is openly available). The main conclusion of this report, uncontested says: “We indeed found that the Estonian child protection system does not have one central coordinating and implementing organisation, which would be responsible for ensuring that different stakeholders co-operate effectively and efficiently and that the protection of children’s rights is assured in all the domains of government intervention that have a direct or indirect impact on children”.

Estonian Chancellor of Justice was given the additional role to function as the Ombudsman for Children since 2011. At the moment, there are 5 employees with the task of implementing this role. The office conducts regular visits to establishments and issues reports on relevant topics. See more specifically: <https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/en/protection-rights-children-and-youth>

The Ministry of Social Affairs has claimed as priority areas in child protection attention to vulnerable groups: children who are abused, who are separated from families, children with disabilities or behavioural problems: <https://www.sm.ee/lapsed-hoolekanne-ja-vordne-kohtlemine/lapsed-ja-pered>

The financing of child protection system is combined from state and municipal sources.

Attention to the protection of children was mentioned as priority areas by all major political parties participating in recent elections to the Estonian Parliament in March 2023.

There are no specific cultural, social or historical factors which would differentiate Estonian system of child protection from in the European context. It deserves to be added, that during the first independence period existed Estonian Union for Child Welfare (1919 – 1940), whose activity is continued by the present Union: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/et/organisatsioon/pohikiri/>

1.2. Legal provisions in constitutional, civil, criminal, and administrative law related to children in need of protection

Question	YES	NO	Comments
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1.2.1. Does the constitution contain any provisions on children's rights and child protection?	YES	<p><u>Right to citizenship</u>: § 8. Every child of whose parents one is an Estonian citizen has the right to Estonian citizenship by birth.</p> <p><u>Right to care</u>: § 27. Parents have the right and the duty to raise and care for their children.</p> <p><u>Right to health</u>: § 28. Families with many children and persons with disabilities shall be under the special care of the state and local governments.</p> <p><u>Right to education</u>: § 37. Everyone has the right to education. Education is compulsory for school-age children to the extent specified by law, and shall be free of charge in state and local government general education schools.</p> <p><u>Right to privacy</u>: § 44. An Estonian citizen has the right to access information about himself or herself held in state agencies and local governments and in state and local government archives, pursuant to procedure provided by law. This right may be restricted pursuant to law to protect the rights and freedoms of others or the confidentiality of a child's affiliation, and in the interests of combating a criminal offence, apprehending a criminal offender, or ascertaining the truth in a criminal procedure.</p>
1.2.2. Is there a single legal instrument devoted to child protection and child rights, e.g. a Children's Act?	YES	Child Protection Act (Lastekaitseadus) entering force in 2016, replacing the previous Act adopted in 1992.

1.2.3. Please provide an inventory of key child protection related legislation, including hyperlinks, date of adoption and the areas covered. Please include civil, criminal, and administrative legislation covering different areas of child protection (please add rows, as needed).

Legislation	Date passed	Child protection areas covered
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Constitution of the Republic of Estonia (<i>Eesti Vabariigi Põhiseadus</i>)	28 June 1992	<p>Hyperlink: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/530122020003/consolide</p> <p>Covers areas of right to private and family life, right to education, duty of care, obligations of the public authorities.</p>
Children Protection Act of the Republic of Estonia (<i>Eesti Vabariigi lastekaitse seadus</i>)	19 November 2014	<p>Hyperlink: law: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/516112022003/consolide/current</p> <p>Regulates the rights and freedoms, and related responsibilities towards a child, based on international standards. Children Protection Act is a legal basis for other acts regulating childrens' rights and their protection in Estonia.</p>
Family Law Act (<i>Perekonnaseadus</i>)	18 November 2009	<p>Hyperlink: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/501022023005/consolide</p> <p>Regulates the rights and responsibilities stemming from the kinship relations, general legal relationships between a child and a parent, parental rights and duties and regulations related to adoption and custody.</p>
Penal Code (<i>Karistusseadustik</i>)	06 June 2001	<p>Hyperlink: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/530092022005/consolide</p> <p>Regulates criminal offences – Chapter 11 'Offences against family and minor'. Also sexual offences against minor in Chapter 9 subchapter 7.</p>
Social Welfare Act (<i>Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus</i>)	09 December 2015	<p>Hyperlink: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/504042016001/consolide</p>

<p>Basic School and Upper Secondary School Act (<i>Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi seadus</i>)</p>	<p>09 June 2010</p>	<p>Regulates social welfare benefits, including children benefits, childcare services, alternative care (residential, foster care), responsibilities of different actors in alternative care provision.</p> <p>Hyperlink: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/13332410</p>
<p>Employment Contracts Act (<i>Töölepingu seadus</i>)</p>	<p>17 December 2008</p>	<p>Regulates the operation of schools, including school curricula, services provided at school to children.</p> <p>Hyperlink: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/519012023009/c/onsolide</p>
<p>Social Benefits for Disabled Persons Act (<i>Puuetega inimeste sotsiaaltoetuste seadus</i>)</p>	<p>27 January 1999</p>	<p>Regulates the employment of minors (§7 and §8).</p> <p>Hyperlink: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/509052022002/c/onsolide</p>
<p>Victim Support Act (<i>Ohvriabi seadus</i>)</p>	<p>17 December 2003</p>	<p>Disability benefits, including those for children.</p> <p>Hyperlink: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/513052020004/c/onsolide</p> <p>Regulates the rights for victim support services for minors who are victims of human trafficking and sexual abuse.</p>

1.3. Policy framework

Question	YES	NO	Comments
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<p>1.3.1. Is there a specific national or sub-national policy framework and/or a national or sub-national strategy on child rights and/or child protection?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, does it require an integrated approach to child protection?</p>	NO	<p>The Welfare Development Plan was approved by the Estonian Government in February 2023. The development plan will help to implement the objectives and goals set in the long-term national development strategy “Estonia 2035”, and supports the achievement of the UN global sustainable development goals and takes into account the European Union directions and internationally assumed commitments. The Welfare Development Plan 2023–2030 is a continuation of the previous development plan by the same name which directs the objectives of the employment and social sectors. The concept of “welfare” is delimited through the policy fields within the competence of the Ministry of Social Affairs – the welfare of families and children, gender equality and equal treatment, employment, long and high-quality working life, social welfare corresponding to the need for assistance, reduction of social inequality and poverty, and supporting the elderly. Compared to the previous welfare development plan, children and families as well as the elderly are under increased attention as separate target groups in the new development plan. There was a specific development plan for children and families, but now the welfare development plan also covers the children and families policy.</p>
<p>1.3.2. Are there national or sub-national plans for action or policies targeting specific groups of children or particular areas, e.g. children with disabilities, children in care?</p>	YES	<p>The Ministry of Social Affairs has in 2021 proposed a Welfare Development Plan plan for 2023 – 2030: https://sm.ee/en/media/3110/download. The Estonian Government approved the proposal on 23 February 2023. The plan contains the goal, in reference to children, to achieve a situation where Estonia is the best place for creation of a family and raise children, and that Estonian children are happy and raised in a caring and safe environment</p>

1.3.3. Are there national or sub-national child protection policies regarding children in the digital space and when using online media?		NO	
1.3.4. Is there a (regular) child participation policy and/or mechanism and/or body related to child rights and/or other child-related governance at national or sub-national level to ensure children have a (direct) voice in or can indirectly influence policy making, e.g. children's rights forum, child surveys, child participation platform? <u>If yes,</u> are appropriate child protection and safety measures in place?		NO	

1.4. Particular groups of children: information on legislative and policy developments (if any) related to their protection

Please report on any significant developments in the last five years and comment briefly.

When answering you should consider all relevant civil, criminal, and administrative legislation, including regulations, ordinances, codes, ministerial decisions. On policy developments please include any relevant action plan, protocol, procedure, or guidance issued by competent authorities. Please always specify how children's participation in any respective judicial (civil, criminal, and administrative) proceedings are regulated and supported (e.g. procedural safeguards to be in place, ensuring children's right to be heard).

1.4.1. Children victims of abuse, exploitation, or neglect

In the areas of online and offline sexual abuse, pornography, exploitation and child labour, trafficking; domestic violence and gender-based violence including harmful practices, such as genital mutilation, child/forced marriage, honour-related violence; abuse or discrimination; ICT and cyber bullying; school bullying; neglect and children at risk of abuse and neglect, including street children (begging or selling things)

Policy developments	Legislative developments
<p>There is policy initiative to impose an obligation to local municipalities to organize the care of children who are neglected by their parents, together with additional financial resources allocated to these municipalities from the state budget.</p>	<p>According to the amendment into Criminal Records Database Act from 01 October 2022, a person who is allowed to work with a child has the right to obtain data from archives of state databases to make certain that anyone working with a child meets the requirements of the Child Protection Act.</p> <p>The Child Protection Act foresees from 08 May 2022 special measures for assisting sexually abused children or children behaving in a sexually abusive manner.</p>
<p>1.4.2. Children with disabilities</p> <p>Please include children with learning difficulties, autism, and mental health impairments / psycho-social disabilities, severe chronic illnesses that prevent them e.g. from attending onsite school or sports activities</p>	
Policy developments	Legislative developments
<p>The number of children with disabilities in Estonia is estimated at around 9 000. There is considerable social pressure to raise support for families raising children with disabilities, and also to initiate measures to enhance inclusive education. This is based on the general policy goal to minimize inequalities in the society.</p> <p>The social committee of the Estonian Parliament organized a public hearing in 2021, where was voiced a goal to be guided by a standard of the best interests of the child regardless of the particular possibilities of each family.</p> <p>The listing of rare disabilities has been consistently increased, leading to possibly support mechanisms for respective families.</p> <p>In 2021 – 2023 the state supported local municipalities in paying for support services through the ESF funds. As of 2023 the state no longer provides this support.</p>	<p>As of 2018 the parents raising children with severe disabilities have the right to have their student loan waived.</p> <p>As of 01 January 2020, the amount of support for raising children with disabilities was raised.</p> <p>During the period of COVID-19 was created a special mechanism for supplementary support for parents raising children with disabilities, the goal being to support those parents who cannot go to work because they need to take care of the child with disabilities at home due to the educational facility being closed.</p> <p>On the basis of Supreme Court judgment in case 3-20-130, the Social Welfare Act was amended in 2022, where the definition of what constitutes an assistance to someone. The list was supplemented with assistance to manage medical treatment.</p> <p>As of 01 January 2023 the Children Welfare Act was amended and child protection specialists in local</p>

<p>There is an ongoing policy change focusing on three main challenges: bureaucratic hurdles of accessing the services, repetitive assessments of the disability, shortage of specialists.</p>	<p>municipalities now have access to data about children with disabilities, towards whom an application has been issued for financial support.</p>
<p>1.4.3. Children in the context of migration</p> <p>Specific thematic areas: unaccompanied-separated children from third countries and within the EU; children in undocumented – irregular migrant families; asylum seeking children; refugee children</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Policy developments</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Legislative developments</p>
<p>In connection with the crisis of resulting from the war in Ukraine, there are manifold policies to integrate Ukrainian children who have fled to Estonia into educational establishments. There are initiatives to include them into regular classes and at the same time provide instruction of the Estonian language. Local municipalities are all having specific measures to enhance the support. The measures are reported to be effective.</p>	<p>An amendment into the Child Protection Act stipulates that as of 20 November 2022, a child from another EU Member State may be placed in Estonia without the previous consent of the Social Insurance Board only with the Child’s parent.</p> <p>Courts are authorized under the amendment into the Civil Procedure Act to appoint a temporary custodian to the child from 20 November 2022, provided that the child possesses sufficient discretionary and decision-making capabilities..</p> <p>An amendment into the Code of Civil Procedure and Code of Enforcement Procedure Implementation Act as of 8th of June 2022 applicable through 4th of March 2025 stipulates special rules for appointing a legal guardian to a minor who is not a citizen or permanent resident of Estonia and that time limit provided by subsection 5 of § 555 of the Code of Civil Procedure does not apply when appointing a temporary legal guardian under the rules for interim protection of persons’ rights to a minor who is not a citizen or permanent resident of Estonia. In a situation mentioned in the first sentence of this</p>

	subsection, the temporary guardian may not be appointed for longer than one year. The change was caused by the war in Ukraine.
1.4.4. Children in alternative care	
Specific thematic areas: residential – institutional care; foster care; adoption (including international adoption)	
Policy developments	Legislative developments
The policies as of 2018 are based on three strategic goals: increase the scope of family based alternative care; increase the quality of alternative care; improve the preparedness of exit from alternative care to independent life, as well as monitoring of the implementation.	As of 01 January 2018, the Victim Support Act stipulates that if minor victims of trafficking in human beings, sexually abused minors or minors specified in the Act are in need of safe accommodation, alternative care service may be provided instead. Child Support Act article 29 imposes an obligation upon local authority to initiate services for the protection of the child
1.4.5. Children affected by custody disputes, including parental abduction	
Policy developments	Legislative developments
The discretion of courts reviewing abduction cases was changed as of 20 November 2022. Before the legislative change, the courts has the obligation to hear a child who was at least 10 years old, now the age of the child is not determined.	On 01 September 2022 was enforced the Act on State-Funded Family Mediation Services, which has the goal of enhancing parental cooperation in the raising of children and achieve the child’s well-being. This service is free of charge and based on the concept of family autonomy. Civil Procedure Act article 552 ¹ (1) provides that the court will hear the child who is capable to express the views in a safe environment for the child – in force since 20 November 2022.
1.4.6. Missing children	
Policy developments	Legislative developments

<p>In connection with the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Estonian Red Cross has opened a website section providing information to families who are searching the misplaced or missing children. Family members are encouraged to call the general European hotline 116 000 where conversation can also be held in the Estonian language.</p> <p>The following principles are applied: a) the Red Cross helps to look for only the closest relatives, i.e. parents, children, siblings. The Red Cross is not searching for more distant relatives with whom there has been no contact for years; b) it is necessary to have very detailed personal data about the person being searched for: the exact date of birth and the last address where the person being searched lived before the loss of contact; c) the searcher also has to give her data and consent to the processing of the data.</p> <p>For more information, and updates, please visit:</p> <p>https://www.kriis.ee/en/security-situation-europe/ukrainian-war-refugees/bringing-family-members-together-missing-children</p> <p>The Development Plan for children and families 2012 – 2020 (DPCF), which can be viewed as a policy document, contains a requirement that the hotline for missing children needs to be operational 24/7.</p>	<p>No developments.</p>
<p>1.4.7. Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, or severely materially and socially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity (AROPE)</p>	
<p>Policy developments</p>	<p>Legislative developments</p>
<p>In the context of the 2023 March Parliamentary elections, several political parties emphasized in their campaigns the</p>	<p>Legislative developments include the support measure for families with at least three children under 19 to acquire a home. https://kredex.ee/et/kodutoetus</p>

need to substantially raise the state financial support to families with three children or more.

Since 2022 is implemented through the Ministry of Culture a measure which enables in cooperation with schools and local municipalities to subsidies extracurricular activities of children in material difficulties, such as attendance of cultural events.

The Ministry of Science and Education had in 2020 a measure to provide computers to every child who had such a need. The ministry also adopted the action plan for youth 2021 – 2035:

https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/no_ortevaldkonna_arengukava_2021-2035_kinnitatud_12.08.2035.pdf

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare has issued several policy recommendations to the public authorities, for instance:

<https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/et/2022/12/lastekaitse-liidu-poordumine-seoses-perehuvitiste-seaduse-ja-perekonnaseaduse-muutmise-seadusega-703se/>

https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/1-8-2-23-1_Arvamus-uhistranspordiseaduse-muutmise-seadusele.pdf

Support of single parents per child raised to 80 euro from 2023 Allowance for families with many children will be 450 euros for families with three or more children and 650 euros for families with seven and ore children (entry into force 01.01.2024).

1.4.8. Children belonging to minority ethnic groups, e.g. Roma, Sami, etc.

Policy developments	Legislative developments
There exists since 2008 the Cultural Advisory Board of Ethnic Minorities, which operates as an advisory unit to the Ministry of Culture. Estonia has the Supporters of	N/A

Integration Foundation, which is supported by four ministries – culture, finance, foreign affairs and education/science. This Foundation has a strategy 2020 – 2025 which defines as one of the main target groups for integration permanent residents of Estonia from other nationalities.

Estonian Statistics Board gathers data about the ethnic background on persons habiting Estonia, which allows to have general information about the figures. If the question about identifying children from different minorities in Estonia concerned the possibility to identify whether a child is from a specific ethnic background, then such information is not part of e-governance solutions, which means that data about someone’s (including children’s) ethnic background is not gathered.

1.4.9. Children involved in judicial proceedings as victims or witnesses or parties

Policy developments	Legislative developments
<p>There is a policy to prefer conciliation procedures related to the rights of the child, as compared to court proceedings.</p> <p>There is also a preference to decide matters in court on the basis of an amicable agreement rather than a judgment of the merits.</p>	<p>The Estonian Government initiated in 2019 a legislative amendment into the Civil Procedure Act, whereby the limitation was lifted that the courts need to hear in person only a child starting from the age of ten years. According to the amendment, the courts have to hear the child in person, when the child is capable of expressing and having opinions. The amendment was approved by the Estonian Parliament on 26 October 2022.</p>

1.4.10. Children involved in judicial proceedings as suspects or accused persons

Policy developments	Legislative developments
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No developments.	Changes done in Code of Criminal Procedure in 2019 related to application of Directive on Procedural Safeguards for Juvenile Suspects or Defendants (paragraph 34 of Code of Criminal Procedure - https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/508052023001/consolide).
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1.4.11. Children at risk of harmful practices, including female genital mutilation; child /forced marriages, honour-related violence

Policy developments	Legislative developments
N/A	<p>Before 01.11.2022 Family Law Act stipulated that a court may extend the active legal capacity of a person who has attained at least 15 years of age pursuant to the provisions concerning the extension of active legal capacity of minors for the performance of acts required for the contraction of marriage and for the exercise of the rights and performance of the obligations related to marriage. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have pointed to the issue in their reviews that Estonia must eliminate child marriage, as it is not in line with the convention.</p> <p>Amendment to the act repealed the provision from 01.11.2022. Age for marriage in any case must be at least 18 years as of 01.11.2022. Amendment to the act repealed the provision from 01.11.2022. Age for marriage in any case must be at least 18 years as of 01.11.2022.</p>

1.4.12. Children whose parents are in prison/custody

Policy developments	Legislative developments
No specific developments. There have been some roundtable discussions by the initiative of the Ombudsman of the Children. In particular, the Ombudsman has consistently emphasized the need	No developments

to strengthen contact rights between the children and their parents in custody, for instance: https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/sites/default/files/field_document2/Kokkusaamiste%20korraldus.pdf

The prison authorities have confirmed that the practice has changed, for example there no longer are searches of children prior to these meetings.

Estonian Union for Child Welfare has translated various materials regarding specific rights of children maintaining contact with parents in custody.

1.4.13. Children who drop out of compulsory education and working children under the legal age for work

Policy developments	Legislative developments
<p>The City of Tallinn was involved in 2016 an international project to study the reasons for drop-out and suggest policy developments. The recommendations are not available.</p> <p>The State Shared Service Center implemented a project to enhance the capability of local municipalities in offering support services to children in the danger of drop-outs.</p> <p>There are some studies conducted by educations scientists into the statistics. These studies reveal that around 5,7% of the children who are of the age to attend compulsory education are not engaged in school. There are three main reasons: serious disabilities, children who study abroad, and children who do not fulfil the obligation to study.</p> <p>There is a comparative study on the engagement of children in the workforce for the years 2015 – 2021. This shows that an average of 0.33% of children in</p>	<p>The Employment Contracts Act has an amendment from 01 January 2023 that After having received the information of the employment of a child aged 7 to 12, the labour inspector is required to verify that the work is not prohibited for a minor, the minor’s working conditions are in accordance with the requirements provided by law and the minor wants to work – article 8 (5).</p> <p>Social Welfare Act § 151 assessment of need for assistance of young persons states that a person who is 16-26 and who doesn’t work, study and so on, may need an assessment.</p>

<p>the age group of 7 – 12 are involved in some capacity in the workforce.</p> <p>Youth Guarantee Support System has been set place: a query twice a year to different national registers system to detect youth in NEET and proactive service provision for those young people basing on the results of query in local governments.</p>	
<p>1.4.14. Please insert any other group of children that is not listed above, such as children with drug or alcohol addictions (<i>add rows as needed</i>)</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Policy developments</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Legislative developments</p>
<p>The Mental Health Action Plan 2023 – 2026, issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs, stipulates the need to concentrate, inter alia, on children in the risk of committing suicide.</p> <p>1.01.2018 Juvenile Punishment Act Law was annulled and reform of special treatment of minors who have offending behavior (intervention must follow quickly, child and family have to be part of decision making process, analyze the needs and risks, restriction freedom - last measure) - secure care service was created. Secure care is offered children who pose danger to themselves or others. We also have open centre for children who have addiction (https://www.ivkh.ee/et/raviteenused/soltuvusprobleemidega-noorukite-ravi-ja-rehabilitatsioonikeskus.html) The National Institute for Health Development is offering support and developing interventions for children having addiction problems and NGO-s (f.e. https://peaasi.ee/) is offering support in mental health issues.</p>	<p>No developments.</p>

1.5. Contradictions, conflicts, or gaps between national legislation/policies on child protection and international / EU standards

Are there any contradictions, conflicts, or gaps between national legislation/policies on child protection and international / EU standards that have been pointed out by international bodies, national human rights institutions, ombudspersons, or civil society organisations? Please also refer to any contradictions within national and sub-national legislation.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child issues on 08 March 2017 findings and suggestions regarding Estonia in fulfilling the obligations under the Convention of the Rights of the Child. The Committee recommended that the State further regulate the obligations of local governments with regard to by-laws on establishing the position of child protection workers. The Committee further recommender to develop a comprehensive policy that encompasses all areas of the Convention and ensures coordination and complementarity. The Committee furthermore recommended to ensure the independence of the Ombudsman for Children and increase the visibility of this office. The document provides a long list of additional recommendations in various areas related to the rights of the child, for instance civil rights and freedoms, violence against children, etc, with specific referrals to international standards and national legislation, and calls for awareness raising and legislative changes.

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare is the main civil society organisation dealing with the protection of children rights. The Union is frequently issuing opinions and notifications to governmental institutions and the general public about various matters related to obligations originating from European Union law and policies. For example, the Union issued on 29 March 2021 an opinion to the Ministry on Social Affairs on the matter how to implement in Estonia the Action Plan of European Pillar of Social Rights.

Concerning children right (Convention on the Rights of the Child, act 12) that a state should assure to the child the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, needs better practise. Year after year it is more applicable, but needs more attention.

1.6. Orientation/fragmentation of national child protection policy and legislation

Based on the above information please assess and explain if the national child protection policy and legislation is fragmented and if the child protection system is oriented towards prevention and/or intervention.

The respective policy and legislation is oriented towards prevention of child abuse and enhancing the involvement of parents through state aid, if necessary, in the upbringing of their children. State intervention is foreseen only in the event when all other possible remedies turn out to be ineffective. For instance, courts practice is rarely resorting to the usage of force for the protection of children. Court bailiffs are authorised to use force only if expressly allowed by a court resolution. The focus is on knowledge enhancement and cooperation between various stakeholders in guaranteeing children's rights. However, there is a concern that exchange of information between various institutions involved in child protection – such as social, educational, health and judicial – is fragmented and the division of responsibilities remains unclear. There is also a concern of uneven protection in different regions, especially in rural areas.

1.7. Development in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges

Based on the output of the 2014 mapping exercise, please briefly describe the development of the child protection legislation and policies in the past 8 years, incl. achievements and (persisting) gaps and challenges.

There is a persisting gap of legislative unclarity of responsibilities in child protection in many areas between various public entities, including social, judicial, labour and health institutions. The challenge is to coordinate exchange of information, and likewise make certain that developments of the EU legislation reach swiftly all necessary levels and institutions.

There is a challenge to resolve discretionary responsibilities between local municipalities and the state, for instance in organizing primary and secondary education.

There is also an ever-continuing challenge of allocating sufficient funding for local municipalities to meet their obligations towards children living in their areas.

The positive developments include emphasis on the continuing support of families with several children, and also single parents. The goal is to achieve equality of children regardless of concrete family situation in terms of location and material resources.

There is an ongoing discussion about the rights of children raised in families of same-gender parents. The society is divided about the question of adoption and custody rights in these relationships.

A major challenge towards children with special needs is the absence of coordination in handling the situation as one. There is no cross-usage of data submitted to various institutions, despite Estonia being recognized as an advanced e-state.

1.8. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any promising practice in child protection legislation and policies that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

The Minister of Social Affairs adopted in 2022, in consultation with the Estonian Union for Child Welfare, the Plan of Action for Child Welfare, based on the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

The public policy has the view to strengthen the capability of parents raising children alone in providing these children with comparable living standards as children who are raised in families with both parents. There is also a strategy to substantially raise family support when a family has at least three children under 19.

There is a clear policy development to prioritize family-based measures in safeguarding children rights as opposed to care provided by local municipalities and other public institutions.

2. Governance, coordination structures, and services

2.1. Primary institutions and main service providers responsible for child protection

Question	Yes	No	Comments
<p>2.1.1. Is there any lead institution/body (e.g. child protection agency, ministry, etc.) primarily responsible for child protection at the national level?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please provide the name in the comments box.</p>	x		<p>According to the current law, Child Protection Act § 11 child protection shall be organised by the Government of the Republic, prevention council, Ministry of Social Affairs, Social Insurance Board and local authorities based on the functions provided for in this Act. See amendment in National Gazette [RT I, 06.08.2022, 6 – entry into force 16.08.2022]</p>
<p>2.1.2. Are there different structures sharing the primary responsibility (e. g. departments in the same or different ministries, different agencies etc.)?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please provide the name under the comments box and please also mention which body has the lead in coordinating child protection policies and actions.</p>	x		<p>The responsibilities are also regulated by the Child Protection Act §12-17 § 12. Function of Government of the Republic</p> <p>The function of the Government of the Republic upon the organisation of child protection shall be the development and approval of relevant draft legislation and national strategies and ensuring sustainable financing.</p> <p>§ 13. Functions of prevention council</p> <p>[RT I, 06.08.2022, 6 – entry into force 16.08.2022]</p> <p>(1) The prevention council is a government committee, the functions of which in the organisation of child protection policy are:</p>

		<p>1) to establish the strategic objectives and priorities and co-ordinate cross-sectoral activities;</p> <p>2) to submit proposals concerning the protection of children’s rights and ensuring the well-being of children to the Government of the Republic and other relevant institutions;</p> <p>3) to review the recommendations to the state submitted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and to co-ordinate the activities related therewith.</p> <p>(2) The membership, management and the rules of procedure of the prevention council shall be established by a regulation of the Government of the Republic.</p> <p>[RT I, 06.08.2022, 6 – entry into force 16.08.2022]</p> <p>§ 14. Functions of Ministry of Social Affairs</p> <p>(1) The functions of the Ministry of Social Affairs upon the organisation of child protection are:</p> <p>1) to develop the child protection policy and to coordinate the implementation thereof;</p> <p>2) to submit reports to the Government of the Republic concerning the situation of children and families;</p> <p>3) the national coordination of child protection and supervision thereof;</p> <p>4) to participate in the formation of international child protection policy and cooperation;</p> <p>5) to organise the performance of child protection studies and analyses and to plan and develop child protection measures;</p>
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6) to develop instructions, implementing guidelines and other informative materials for the protection of children's rights and ensuring children's well-being and notification of the public thereof;

7) to organise the further training of child protection officials.

(2) The conditions of and procedure for the further training of child protection officials shall be established by a regulation of the minister in charge of the policy sector.

(3) The performance of functions specified in clauses 5–7 of subsection 1 of this section may be assigned to a person in private law with an administrative contract.

§ 15. Functions of Social Insurance Board

(1) The functions of the Social Insurance Board upon the organisation of child protection are the implementation of state child protection policy, application of national strategies and coordination of cross-sectoral cooperation and prevention concerning child protection.

(2) Based on the request of the local government, the Social Insurance Board shall apply the following state measures supporting children and families:

1) provision of counselling to the local governments upon the preparation of development plans supporting the well-being of children;

2) mediation of individual international child protection cases to the local government and provision of counselling to the local government thereon;

3) provision of assistance to the local governments upon resolving child protection cases;

		<p>4) supporting the local governments upon the establishment of suitable measures for children or families from amongst the existing state measures.</p> <p>(3) The Social Insurance Board shall apply the following state measures supporting children and families:</p> <p>1) organisation of national and international adoption and servicing the international adoption committee;</p> <p>[RT I, 21.12.2016, 2 - entry into force 01.01.2017]</p> <p>11) assessment of suitability of foster families and performance of acts relating to the preparation of foster families;</p> <p>[RT I, 28.11.2017, 2 - entry into force 01.01.2018]</p> <p>2) collection of child protection statistics;</p> <p>3) 24-hour counselling of state and local government agencies, the officials thereof and legal persons in public and private law for the assistance of children in need of assistance or children in danger;</p> <p>4) organisation of notification related to child protection;</p> <p>5) organisation of employment counselling of the child protection officials of a local government;</p> <p>6) maintenance of child helpline service 116 111;</p> <p>61) provision of measures provided for in § 291 of this Act for assisting sexually abused children or children behaving in a sexually abusive manner;</p> <p>[RT I, 28.04.2022, 1 – entry into force 08.05.2022]</p>
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		<p>7) exercise of state and administrative supervision on the bases provided for in this Act.</p> <p>(4) The performance of functions specified in clauses 4–6 of subsection 3 of this section may be assigned to a person in private law with an administrative contract.</p> <p>(5) The Social Insurance Board as the Central Authority shall perform the functions prescribed for in points (a), (b), (f) and (g) of Article 79 and in Articles 80 and 82 of Council Regulation (EU) 2019/1111 on jurisdiction, the recognition and enforcement of decisions in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility, and on international child abduction (recast) (OJ L 178, 02.07.2019, p. 1–115).</p> <p>[RT I, 10.11.2022, 1 – entry into force 20.11.2022]</p> <p>§ 16. Functions of county governor</p> <p>[Repealed – RT I, 28.11.2017, 2 - entry into force 01.01.2018]</p> <p>§ 17. Functions of local government</p> <p>(1) The functions of a local government upon the organisation of child protection are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) to follow the principles ensuring the rights and well-being of children in the local government development plan;2) to develop programmes and projects ensuring the rights and well-being of children and the application thereof in its administrative territory to prevent and decrease the risks that endanger children;3) upon becoming aware of a child in need of assistance, to immediately assess the child’s need for assistance and to provide measures for assisting the child;
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		<p>4) to provide measures to a child separated from family and to his or her family;</p> <p>5) to organise supervisory control over the internal evaluation of child care institutions administered by the local government;</p> <p>6) to collect necessary information concerning the situation and needs of children and families in order to create an environment supporting the child's development and to improve the coping of children, families with children and persons raising children in its administrative territory;</p> <p>7) to exercise state supervision on the bases provided for in this Act.</p> <p>(2) The local government shall create conditions for the performance of child protection work with the purpose of ensuring the performance of functions listed in subsection 1 of this section. The committee of children and families shall be established at local governments as an advisory body, if necessary.¹</p>	
	<p>2.1.3. Are there child focal points or similar in different ministries or agencies?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, in which ministry are they located, what are they called, and what role/functions do they have? How do they coordinate?</p>	<p>x</p>	<p>Local government officials for child protection (lastekaitseametnik) are the first contact points for child care issues.</p> <p>At the state level there is a focal point in the Sotsiaalkindlustusamet (Social Insurance Board) with the telephone number and email address where the children can call or send an email with their problems. See more here:</p> <p>https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/abivajav-laps-ja-taiskasvanu/laste-ja-perede-abistamine/lasteabi-telefon-116111</p>

¹ Child Protection Act, RT I, 06.12.2014, 1, Adopted 19.11.2014, enforced 01.01.2016, partly enforced 01.01.2020, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/516112022003/consolide>

			<p>https://lapsesobralikmenetus.just.ee/et/kontaktid-kontaktid/lastekaitse</p> <p>https://www.lasteabi.ee/</p> <p>https://sova.ee/info</p> <p>The children's home is a child-friendly interdisciplinary service that we offer to help children who have been sexually abused, are suspected of being sexually abused, or have harmful sexual behavior. More info available here: https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/abivajav-laps-ja-taiskasvanu/laste-ja-perede-abistamine/lastemaja</p> <p>Closed child care institution service (secure care for children and youth)</p> <p>If the child endangers their own or other people's life and health with their behaviour, and no other service or intervention (family therapy, social program, psychologist service, etc.) in which they have participated alone and/or together with the child under the guidance of the child protection worker of the local government, has not yielded results , it may be necessary to restrict the child's freedom and placed temporarily to secure care t More information available here: https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/abivajav-laps-ja-taiskasvanu/laste-ja-perede-abistamine/kinnise-lasteasutuse-teenus</p> <p>Currently there are four institutions that provide this service. Hiiumaa Sotsiaalkeskuse noortekodu, Maarjamaa hariduskolleegium (Valgejõe õppekeskus ja Emajõe õppekeskus), Tallinna Laste Turvakeskus, MTÜ Virumaa Tugiteenused</p>
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Please provide in the table below a list of the national/regional/local bodies or authorities having certain responsibilities related to child protection, e.g. child ombuds institution.

Please note: For the regional and the local levels please indicate only the type of body, do not list all different bodies at regional/local level in the country.

Name of the body	Level (national/regional/local).	Area of responsibility and roles in child protection <i>(for example coordination, legislation, policy making, training, monitoring, financing, implementing)</i>	Comments <i>(for example in case of ombuds institution, compliance with the Paris Principles)</i>
Children Ombudsman <i>(Lasteombudsman)</i>	National	Monitoring the protection of rights of children in all areas (including legislation); resolving complaints; training, studies and awareness raising.	Ombudsman for Children was created on 19 March 2011 when the Chancellor of Justice took over the tasks to protect and promote children's rights.
Ministry of Social Affairs, Department of Children and Families <i>(Sotsiaalmisteerium)</i>	National	Overall coordination of child protection and welfare policies. That includes legislation, policy making, monitoring, financing and implementing. Child Protection Act paragraph 14 https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/510042023004/consolide/current (1) The functions of the Ministry of Social Affairs upon the organisation of child protection are:	Department for Children and Families was created in 2011. Please consult the link here about the name: https://www.sm.ee/en/contact#unit-department-of-family-wellbeing-and-safe-relationships

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) to develop the child protection policy and to coordinate the implementation thereof; 2) to submit reports to the Government of the Republic concerning the situation of children and families; 3) the national coordination of child protection and supervision thereof; 4) to participate in the formation of international child protection policy and cooperation; 5) to organise the performance of child protection studies and analyses and to plan and develop child protection measures; 6) to develop instructions, implementing guidelines and other informative materials for the protection of children's rights and ensuring children's well-being and notification of the public thereof; 7) to organise the further training of child protection officials. 	
Ministry of Justice	National	Policy-making, legislation, monitoring and financing related to:	The agreement on the principles of cross-sectoral prevention. From 2022

<i>(Justiitsministeerium)</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - violence against children or violence committed by children; - crime prevention; - children in judicial proceedings; - juvenile prisoners - cross border claims in family matters 	<p>the secretariat of the Prevention Council is located at the Ministry of Justice.²</p> <p>Brussels II regulation contact point.</p>
Ministry of Education and Science <i>(Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium)</i>	National	Policy-making, legislation, monitoring and financing related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - general education, pre-school childcare and education, including special schools; - youth policy, including the juvenile commissions. 	The Ministry of Education and Science has also focused on fighting the school bullying.
Ministry of the Interior <i>(Siseministeerium)</i>	National	Policy-making, legislation, monitoring and financing related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - police; 	

² <https://www.just.ee/ennetusnoukogu#item-1>

		- children in migratory situation, primarily related to children seeking international protection (application process) and children in detention.	
Social Insurance Board (<i>Sotsiaalkindlustusamet</i>)	National	Child Protection Act art 15 § 15. Functions of Social Insurance Board	

(1) The functions of the Social Insurance Board upon the organisation of child protection are the implementation of state child protection policy, application of national strategies and coordination of cross-sectoral cooperation and prevention concerning child protection.

(2) Based on the request of the local government, the Social Insurance Board shall apply the following state measures supporting children and families:

- 1) provision of counselling to the local governments upon the preparation of development plans supporting the well-being of children;
- 2) mediation of individual international child protection cases to the local government and provision of counselling to the local government thereon;
- 3) provision of assistance to the local governments upon resolving child protection cases;

4) supporting the local governments upon the establishment of suitable measures for children or families from amongst the existing state measures.

(3) The Social Insurance Board shall apply the following state measures supporting children and families:

1) organisation of national and international adoption and servicing the international adoption committee;

[RT I, 21.12.2016, 2 - entry into force 01.01.2017]

11) assessment of suitability of foster families and performance of acts relating to the preparation of foster families;

[RT I, 28.11.2017, 2 - entry into force 01.01.2018]

2) collection of child protection statistics;

3) 24-hour counselling of state and local government agencies, the officials thereof and legal persons in public and private law for the assistance of children in need of assistance or children in danger;

4) organisation of notification related to child protection;

5) organisation of employment counselling of the child protection officials of a local government;

6) maintenance of child helpline service 116 111;

61) provision of measures provided for in § 291 of this Act for assisting sexually abused children or children behaving in a sexually abusive manner;

[RT I, 28.04.2022, 1 – entry into force 08.05.2022]

7) exercise of state and administrative supervision on the bases provided for in this Act.

(4) The performance of functions specified in clauses 4–6 of subsection 3 of this section may be assigned to a person in private law with an administrative contract.

(5) The Social Insurance Board as the Central Authority shall perform the functions prescribed for in points (a), (b), (f) and (g) of Article 79 and in Articles 80 and 82 of Council Regulation (EU) 2019/1111 on jurisdiction, the recognition and enforcement of decisions in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility, and on international child abduction (recast) (OJ L 178, 02.07.2019, p. 1–115).

[RT I, 10.11.2022, 1 – entry into force 20.11.2022]			
Local government (kohalik omavalitsus)	Local	Monitoring of quality of social services offered to children and families; decisions on providing or denying social support and services and other types of aid and the legality of these decisions; schooling and education in the county's kindergartens and schools; training courses and counselling for child protection officials in schools and rural municipalities, the collection of child	Local government provides the following care services: private help, disability transportation, adjustment of accommodation, shelter homes, shelters, social housing, care within the family, social counselling and care service.

			protection statistics, adoptions, financing of substitute home services, etc.	
Ministry of Economics and communication Majandus ja kommunikatsiooni ministeerium	National		Cooperation with the ministry of Internal Affairs and Social Affairs.	Following the security of internet.
	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Välisministeerium	National	Cooperation and coordination to find the relatives living abroad. Cooperation with the Social Security Agency.	Child protection cases are resolved upon the request and with the help of Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security Agency.
2.1.4. Please indicate if there were in the past five years any important changes concerning the child protection mandate/roles/responsibilities and outline what caused or influenced these changes (for example, a transfer of responsibility for child protection from one ministry to another ministry or a body or merging of responsibilities, etc. Please indicate notably if an integrated approach has been sought and/or achieved.				
“In the last five years, there have been no significant changes in the area of responsibility for child protection. Child protection organization and legislation continues to be under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Affairs, family law is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, and the organization of child protection at the local level is the responsibility of local governments.” ³ Nevertheless there have been				

³ Lauri, Interview

some changes in the field of child protection as new Child Protection Act was adopted in 2014 and enforced in 2016 and after that there have been several amendments.

In Estonia, child protection is organized by the Government of the Republic, Prevention Council⁴ the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Social Insurance Board and local government units on the basis of the Child Protection Act.

The task of the Government of the Republic is to develop drafts of child protection legislation and national strategies, as well as budget planning
The Prevention Council is a government commission that collects information on child protection, on the basis of which policies for children and families are formed

The task of the Ministry of Social Affairs is to organize national child protection and to formulate policies for children and families

Persons can apply for state subsidies and services for families with children through the Social Insurance Board. The Child Welfare Department (Laste heaolu osakond).

of the Social Insurance Board offers support to specialists working with children and organizes nationwide prevention and cooperation between different fields (social, education, medicine, law enforcement). Before this was under the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The local government organizes child protection at the local level and creates the necessary conditions to ensure children's rights and well-being in their city or municipality.

In January 2018, the practice of investigating and solving crimes committed by minors was changed. In addition to the changes that came into force in the laws, the previous law on the means of influencing minors, which also regulated the work of juvenile commissions, was repealed. These changes put a more important responsibility than before on the prosecutor and the local government for influencing minors. In 2018 the Juvenile Commission were abolished.⁵ From now on, the work of the juvenile commission related to criminal proceedings began to be done by the prosecutor in cooperation with the local

⁴ Art 13 Child Protection Act

⁵ <https://www.prokuratuur.ee/et/alaaliste-oigusrikkujate-erikohtlemine>, 08.02.2023

government and other cooperation partners. The purpose of the change was simple - to speed up and improve the investigation of crimes involving minors. Abolishing the Juvenile Commission as an intermediate stage, so to speak, accelerated the process of reaching a decision.⁶

In 2018 Victim Support Act was amended with following article:

§ 31. Provision of victim support service to minor victims of trafficking in human beings and sexually abused minors

(1) If minor victims of trafficking in human beings, sexually abused minors or minors specified in subsection 3 (22) of this Act need safe accommodation, replacement care service may be provided instead of the service specified in clause 3 (2) 3) of this Act on the terms and conditions of the Social Welfare Act. [RT I, 28.11.2017, 2 - entry into force 01.01.2018]

(2) If replacement care service is provided to a person specified in subsection (1) of this section, the Estonian National Social Insurance Board shall prepare a case plan for such person on the terms and conditions and pursuant to the procedure provided for in §§ 9 and 10 of the Social Welfare Act. The case plan is signed by a representative of the Estonian National Social Insurance Board and a legal representative of the minor. [RT I, 28.11.2017, 2 - entry into force 01.01.2018]

Social Welfare Act was amended in § 10. Which deals with the Case plan of child.

§10 (1) Case plans for children shall be prepared on the basis of the provisions of § 9 of this Act, considering the specifications provided for in this section.

(2) Before referral to alternative care the local authority performing the duties of or appointed as the guardian of the child shall prepare a case plan for a child specified in subsection 1 of § 459 of this Act. Before referral to continued care the local authority performing the duties of the guardian of the person or the local authority of the residence of the person if the person becomes an adult shall prepare case plans for the persons specified in subsections 1 and 11 of § 4516 of this Act. [RT I, 22.03.2021, 2 – entry into force 01.04.2021]

In 2018 alternative care measures were introduced in the Social Welfare Act § 4510 state the provision of alternative care service.

⁶ <https://www.prokuratuur.ee/et/alaaliste-oigusrikkujate-erikohtlemine>, 08.02.2023

§ 45¹⁰ §(1) An activity licence is required for the provision of alternative care service, except for the provision of alternative care service in a foster family, pursuant to clause 2 of § 151 of this Act.

(2) If alternative care service is provided in a foster family, the service may be provided by a natural person whom the Social Insurance Board has entered into the register created under subsection 1 of § 141 of this Act. [RT I, 28.11.2017, 2 – entry into force 01.01.2018]

§ 45¹¹. Funding of alternative care service

(1) Alternative care service shall be financed from the budget of the local authority performing the duties of the guardian of the child receiving the service or in the absence thereof, from the budget of the local authority of the child's residence entered in the population register, and the income of the child receiving alternative care. [RT I, 28.11.2017, 2 – entry into force 01.01.2018]

(2) The maintenance of a child and additional needs arising from special needs are also financed from the income prescribed to the child from the state budget for monthly maintenance and for the partial compensation of additional costs related to a disability. [RT I, 28.11.2017, 2 – entry into force 01.01.2018]

(3) The average monthly sum that should be spent to cover the personal expenses of a child 240 euros and no less than 2880 euros per year. [RT I, 28.11.2017, 2 – entry into force 01.01.2018]

(4) A foster parent shall receive an allowance in the amount of at least one-half of the minimum monthly wage established under subsection 5 of § 29 of the Employment Contracts Act for one child in his or her care. [RT I, 09.04.2020, 14 – entry into force 01.07.2020]

The prevention council was established in 2022 by the Government regulation.⁷Law Enforcement Act § 20 regulates the work of the Prevention Council⁸

The Prevention Council (hereinafter the Council) is a government commission whose task in organizing cross-sectoral prevention, criminal, drug and child protection policy is: 1) implementation of the principles of cross-sectoral prevention, including the preparation, approval and monitoring of the implementation of a long-term cross-policy action plan; 2) coordinating the implementation of drug policy and setting goals; 3) coordinating crime prevention and setting criminal policy goals; 4) coordination of activities necessary for the implementation of the child protection policy stipulated in § 13 of the Child Protection Act; 5) advising local governments and supporting the improvement of preventive work competence; 6) making proposals and

⁷ Vabariigi valitsuse määrus nr 108, Ennetusnõukogu koosseis, juhtimine ja töökord, Vastu võetud 08.11.2022,

⁸ [RT I, 06.08.2022, 6 - enters into force. 16.08.2022]

expressing opinions to the Government of the Republic and other relevant institutions; 7) awarding the badge of honor for civic courage; 8) awarding a recognition award for violence prevention.⁹

SKA was given the task of evaluating and preparing foster families in 2018 (previously it was organized by the KOVs), and the task of organizing the adoption fell to the SKA in 2017 (before county governments).

From 01.09.2022 the National Family Reconciliation Service Act, which enables families to receive a free family reconciliation service and which is also part of the child-friendly procedure during which a parenting agreement is concluded. The service is coordinated by the Social Insurance Board.

Social Insurance Board (SKA) got a role to be a national coordination focal point.¹⁰ Children houses (lastemaja) have been created in 2017. The children's home is a child-friendly interdisciplinary service that offer to help children who have been sexually abused, are suspected of being sexually abused, or have harmful sexual behaviour.¹¹

The government does not issue any more the development plan for children and youth, now this is covered in a smaller amount in the State development plan Strategy 2035.

Instead of the general state development program for youth and children, local municipalities have their own development programs for the child protection which is then published in State Gazette. For example, Saaremaa¹² issued a development plan for years 2020-2030.

In 2022 three important changes were inserted to the Child Protection Act. § 27¹. Ascertaining children in need of assistance

⁹ Law Enforcement Act, Passed 23.02.2011, RT I, 22.03.2011, 4, Entry into force 01.07.2014

¹⁰ <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/abivajav-laps-ja-taiskasvanu/laste-ja-perede-abistamine> , 23.02.2023

¹¹ <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/abivajav-laps-ja-taiskasvanu/laste-ja-perede-abistamine/lastemaja>, 23.02.2023

¹² <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/417032020014>

(1) The local government of the child's residence entered in the population register shall have the right, for the purposes of ascertaining children in need of assistance, process in the register of social services and benefits, the data on such children in case of whom the Social Insurance Board has been submitted an application for the establishment of the degree of disability according to the Social Benefits for Disabled Persons Act.

(2) For the purpose specified in subsection 1 of this section the local government shall process the following personal data: 1) given name and surname of the child;

2) place of residence and whereabouts of the child; 3) personal identification code of the child; 4) information on whether or not a degree of disability has been established; 5) information on the grant of disabled child allowance to a child with rare disease disability; 6) if a degree of disability has been established, the degree and duration of the disability and functional deviation; 7) name and personal identification code of the parent or guardian or the registry code and contact details of a legal person; 8) place of residence and whereabouts of the parent or guardian according to the population register; 9) date of death of the child.[RT I, 28.04.2022, 1 – entry into force 01.01.2023]¹³

§ 29¹. Measures of Social Insurance Board for assisting sexually abused children or children behaving in sexually abusive manner

(1) A local government agency shall notify the Social Insurance Board immediately after becoming aware of a child in need of assistance if the child:

1) has been sexually abused or in case of suspicion thereof;

2) is a suspect or a person subject to proceedings in a sexual offence or the sexual behaviour of the child threatens the wellbeing of other persons or the child.

(2) The Social Insurance Board starts to perform the functions provided for in this section also based on the inquiry of another agency or person or based on the information received through the child helpline. In such case the Social Insurance Board shall notify the local government agency responsible for the child's case management, and in case of criminal proceedings, taking into account the provisions of § 214 of the Code of Criminal Procedure on the disclosure of data in pre-trial procedure.

(3) To support the wellbeing of a child specified in subsection 1 of this section, the Social Insurance Board shall:

¹³ <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/516112022003/consolide>, 23.02.2023

1) provide a child-friendly environment for making child protection and offence proceedings acts with regard to the child and providing services supporting the rehabilitation of the child;

2) hear the child, if necessary, to ascertain the abuse and shall video record the hearing to use it as evidence in offence proceedings;

3) assess the need for assistance resulting from the abuse of the child or associated with the abusive behaviour and also the risks associated with the abusive behaviour of the child, by involving a relevant specialist therefor, if necessary;

4) support and counsel the child and persons close to the child;

5) monitor the performance of measures applied for assisting the child.

(4) The video recording of hearing a child specified in clause 2 of subsection 3 of this section shall be preserved by the Social Insurance Board for up to six months following the date of the video recording. The conditions of and procedure for preserving the recording shall be provided for in the regulation established under subsection 5 of this section.

(5) The specific conditions of and procedure for the performance of functions specified in subsection 3 of this section shall be established by a regulation of the minister in charge of the policy sector.[RT I, 28.04.2022, 1 – entry into force 08.05.2022]¹⁴

And § 34¹. Placement of child from another Member State in Estonia

(1) The Social Insurance Board processes, on the basis of Council Regulation (EU) 2019/1111, the requests related with the placement of a child from another Member State of the European Union (hereinafter Member State) in Estonia.

(2) The list of information on the request for placement of a child shall be established by a regulation of the minister in charge of the policy sector.

(3) The local authority and competent authorities shall be required, upon request of the Social Insurance Board, collect and submit information connected with the proceedings of placement of a child from another Member State in Estonia.

(4) In case of establishment of guardianship proceedings concerning another Member State, the Social Insurance Board shall verify, in case of placement of a child in Estonia, whether the potential guardian complies with the requirements for a guardian provided for in the Family Law Act.

¹⁴ <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/516112022003/consolide> 23.02.2023

(5) In case of other proceedings related with the placement of a child in Estonia, the Social Insurance Board shall verify whether the person specified in the application complies with the provisions of clauses 1–7 of subsection 1 of § 4513 of the Social Welfare Act.

(6) Upon making a decision on the placement of a child from another Member State in Estonia, the Social Insurance Board shall account for all the circumstances pertaining to the child and assess the potential effect of placement on the child’s rights and wellbeing.

(7) A child from another Member State may be placed in Estonia without the previous consent of the Social Insurance Board only with the child’s parent.

[RT I, 10.11.2022, 1 – entry into force 20.11.2022]¹⁵

Feedback from the officials of local municipality highlighted that the role of the child protection worker has become more clearly defined. Child protection is now treated as a case management in a bigger network. Child protection official in the local government is as an advocate for children's well-being.” I like that as a result of child protection work, children and families can have more of a say and be heard in decisions that affect their lives. I work every day for families to take more responsibility themselves. I have understood that there have been changes in terms of obligations at the local government level, but I myself do not perceive them.”¹⁶

Child Protection Specialist is now a case manager, so that it can coordinate the process itself, coordination of the role of the network, whose responsibility and there is more clarity of roles. Like what is the role of the school? The role of a parent? After analysis and coordination it may turn out that there is no need for child protection intervention.¹⁷

¹⁵ <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/516112022003/consolide>, 23.02.2023

¹⁶ Karro,K Interview

¹⁷ Karro,K.Interview

2.1.5. Please indicate, in the table below, the major service providers at national level in the area of child protection. Include family support services /measures (i.e. counselling, financial assistance) that are part of the overall social protection/welfare system for children in risk.

Service providers <i>(include the name and the type of institution i.e. public authority, NGOs, religious institutions, private)</i>	Type of services <i>(Include counselling, care institutions, day care centres, financial assistance, legal advice, rehabilitation services for victims, education awareness –training activities, etc.)</i>	Target groups <i>(For example, children with disability, children in risk of or living in poverty, immigrant children, children deprived from parental care, child victims of abuse or exploitation. When relevant, please indicate if third country nationals and irregular immigrants are entitled to such services)</i>	Funding <i>(national budget, EU funded, other)</i>
Social Insurance Board <i>(Sotsiaalkindlustusamet), public authority</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child & family benefits payments; ● Victim support services for adults and minors ● Alternative care for unaccompanied minors. ● Children’s house (Barnahus model). The Barnahus model is a service whereby different specialists, such 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Victims of human trafficking; ● Victims of sexual violence (minors); ● Unaccompanied minors (accommodation services). ● Children of victims (applicable to women's support centre services) ● Child victims of crimes, incl of domestic and sexual violence and 	<p>State budget</p>

	<p>as child protection officials, the police, prosecutors, psychologists and many others work together to ensure the welfare of children. The Barnahus team assesses the child's health, social situation and need for further assistance, carries out investigative operations necessary to resolve the case and offers the child the help he or she needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating programmes for children with risky behaviour (multidimensional family therapy, social rehabilitation service for children in need, secure care, restorative justice, "Out of the round") 	<p>children (as adults) who have witnessed those crimes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with risky behaviour and complex problems • Children with disability 		
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	<p>network model, youth guarantee system)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rehabilitation services for children with disability and children with complex problems <p>SKA's service (from 2023) is also the organization of trainings for substitute and family homes and shelter workers. Also organizing trainings for child protection workers.</p> <p>.</p> <p>.</p>			
<p>Hiiumaa Sotsiaalkeskuse noortekodu</p>	<p>According to § 130¹ Social Service Act is a service that is provided 24/7 to a child whose freedom has been restricted on the basis of court order. The purpose of the closed child care institution service (secure care for children and youth) is to</p>	<p>Children with the court decision to be placed in the closed facilities.</p>	<p>State budget</p>	

	<p>support the child's psychological, emotional, social, educational and cognitive development in order to achieve permanent changes that enable the child to successfully cope with his own life, health and development and the lives and health of other persons in a normal environment after the end of the restriction of freedom without harmful behaviour.</p> <p>[RT I, 25.10.2017, 1 - entered into force. 01.01.2018]¹⁸</p>			
Tallinna Laste Turvakeskus	<p>Closed child care institution. Same as above</p>	<p>Children with the court decision to be placed in the closed facilities.</p>	<p>State budget</p>	
MTÜ Virumaa Tugiteenused	<p>Closed child care institution. Same as above</p>	<p>Closed institution. Same as above</p>	<p>State budget</p>	

¹⁸ § 130 1 Social Welfare Act, RT I, 30.12.2015, 5, Entry into force 01.01.2016, 18.01.2016, 01.07.2016, 01.01.2018, 01.07.2018 and 01.01.2020, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/519012023005/consolide>

<p>Local government social worker (<i>sotsiaaltöötaja</i>) and/or child protection official (<i>lastekaitsetöötaja</i>)</p>	<p>Social welfare for children and families;¹⁹ Child protection.²⁰</p>	<p>All children residing on the territory of local government who are identified as in the need of care.</p>	<p>State budget, local government budget</p>
<p>Substitute homes (<i>asenduskodu</i>) They can be run by physical or legal person, by local government or the state.</p>	<p>Children homes (former orphanages)²¹</p>	<p>All children under age of 18 whose parents' parental rights have been taken away, suspended (parents in prison) on whose parents are dead. There are also separate homes for youth (aged 16 and older) who are in education system.</p>	<p>State budget, renovation of homes has been financed by ERF, private donations. Substitute care is financed from three sources: the local government's budget (the state provides funds) and if necessary, other funds from the local government's budget and from the child's income.</p>

¹⁹ Estonia, Social Welfare Act, RT I, 30.12.2015, 5, Entry into force 01.01.2016, 18.01.2016, 01.07.2016, 01.01.2018, 01.07.2018 and 01.01.2020, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/519012023005/consolide>

²⁰ Estonia, Republic of Estonia Child Protection Act (*Eesti Vabariigi Lastekaitse seadus*), RT 1992, 28, 370, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/516112022003/consolide>

²¹ Estonia, Social Welfare Act, RT I, 30.12.2015, 5, Entry into force 01.01.2016, 18.01.2016, 01.07.2016, 01.01.2018, 01.07.2018 and 01.01.2020, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/519012023005/consolide>

<p>Shelter homes (<i>turvakodu</i>) and shelters (<i>varjupaik</i>).</p> <p>They can be run by physical or legal person, by local government or the state.</p>	<p>Accommodation and living; day care centres; victim support services²²</p>	<p>Children in need of care because their safety is at risk. Women who have been victims of violence (physical, mental, sexual or economic violence) and their children.</p>	<p>Local government budget, project funding (including EU funding), private donations.</p>
<p>Maarjamaa Hariduskollegium²³</p>	<p>Closed childcare service provider school services for children with mental disorder and behavioural difficulties²⁴</p>	<p>Allocated in 2 places, Emajõe study centre (Kastre vald, Tartumaa) and Valgejõe study centre at Tapa vald, Lääne Virumaa). The school accepts students who need to apply for the service of a closed children's institution. Students, generally from the age of 12 to the age of 17, are referred to school based on a court order or regulation. The study is conducted on the basis of the</p>	<p>State budget, Ministry of Education and Science, Project funding from EU etc.</p>

²² Estonia, Social Welfare Act, RT I, 30.12.2015, 5, Entry into force 01.01.2016, 18.01.2016, 01.07.2016, 01.01.2018, 01.07.2018 and 01.01.2020, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/519012023005/consolide>

²³ <https://mhk.edu.ee/>, 27.02.2023

²⁴ Estonia, Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumiseadus*), RT I, 2010, 41, 240 [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/509112022002/consolide>]

		national curriculum of elementary school and the simplified national curriculum of elementary school in both Estonian and Russian. Since 2014, the school has been organizing hospital training in the region of Southern Estonia (Viljandi, Tartu).	
Schools for pupils with special needs	School services for children with special needs, which can be behavioural, mental disorders, hearing and speech issues etc.	Children with disabilities or other special needs. The allocation can be found from the map provided here: https://www.hm.ee/uldharidus-ja-noored/alus-pohi-ja-keskharidus/toe-vajadusega-opilased-oppekorraldus-ja-tugiteenused	State budget, project funding
Estonian Union of Child Welfare (<i>Eesti Lastekaitseliit</i>) ²⁵			

Counselling (incl. hotline), legal advice, training, awareness, advocacy for children’s rights and well-being; participation in the policy and law-making progress;

National as well as international projects and programmes; research and analyse the situation and opinions of children;

²⁵ <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/en/about-organisation/>

provide information materials and publications.	Awareness: whole society; Training: professionals working with children; Legal advice: to those in need.	State, EU funding, including project-based competitions, other (Norwegian funds, international and local donors, private donors).	
Estonian Children's Fund (Eesti Lastefond)	Financial support, training, awareness, advocacy.	Whole society, parents and children.	State, EU funding, including project-based competitions, other (Norwegian funds, international and local donors, private donors).
<i>NGO-s Omapere MTÜ, Igale lapsele pere MTÜ²⁶ etc.</i>	Substitute care.	Children, parents, children deprived form parental care	Private and public funding, project based funding.
2.1.6. Please indicate if any child participation or feedback mechanisms are part of child protection services.			
Yes, children have a right to participate in the child protection mechanisms. The law (§5 Child protection Act) provides that in all actions concerning children the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration and every child has the right to independent opinion in all matters affecting the child and the right to express his or her views. ²⁷			

²⁶ <https://kasupered.ee/> 23.02.2023

²⁷ <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/516112022003/consolide>

In 2017 Estonian Union of Child Welfare did a research²⁸ on the participation of the child. The first research in Supporting children's participation and involvement in decision-making processes" was done between years 2012-2013. The study "Supporting children's participation and involvement in decision-making processes" conducted in 2013 confirmed that children and young people have a lot of suggestions about the living arrangements of their place of residence, and the prerequisite for their meaningful involvement is consistent cooperation between children and young people and the local government.²⁹ At the municipal level, the use of various forms of involvement of children and youth has increased. In addition to the fact that the involvement of children and youth through children/youth organizations and student councils has increased, direct involvement has also increased - both by addressing children individually and involving children through families.³⁰ Almost a third of the respondents stated that their opinion has not been considered in the organization of local life (reason: not asked, no feedback given). According to children and young people, children's opinions are taken into account in Russian-language schools slightly more than in Estonian-language schools. Consideration of the opinion of children and young people has decreased in both youth centres and youth organizations.³¹ Children and young people want their suggestions to be heard and considered. Several respondents emphasize that if children's and young people's opinions and suggestions were listened to more, children would participate more.³²

The National Family Reconciliation Service Act stipulates the inclusion of children in the family reconciliation service. In 2021, the Child Protection Department of the Social Insurance Board conducted a child care awareness survey, where, among other things, children's awareness of the service was investigated. 11% of the respondents had spontaneous recognition of the possibilities of receiving public assistance aimed at children/youth. In the target group of children and young people, 80% of the respondents considered the child helpline very or rather necessary. The result is higher than during the previous survey (then it was 77%). The Children's Helpline continues to introduce the service to the population. In 2021, there were a total of 12,855 appeals after one year, and 16,133 a year later. We are developing a feedback questionnaire on children's satisfaction with the service.³³ The Tallinn Social and

²⁸ <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/et/lapse6igused/laste-ja-noorte-kaasamine/osale-uuringus/>

²⁹ <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/et/lapse6igused/laste-ja-noorte-kaasamine/osale-uuringus/>

³⁰ MTÜ Lastekaitseliit, Laste osaluse toetamine ja kaasamine otsustusprotsessides, 2017, Pg. 53

³¹ Ibid Pg. 55

³² Ibid, Pg.56

³³ Lauri, interview and email 10.02.2023

Health Board has developed a feedback form for children and families about child protection work, the questionnaire was piloted by 2 districts in 2022. The questionnaire is planned to be introduced as part of the introduction of the Tallinn information system TASHIS.³⁴

In the case of the secure care for children and youth (KLAT)³⁵ service, there is a mailbox system, that the children can put the complains and feedback to the mailbox. The children are encouraged to give feedback different incidents in secure care and opportunities to do that have been set by secure care providers. Also children give feedback after leaving care to the service providers. Social Insurance Board has developed a child advisory board (CAB) and is carrying out workshops this year with children who have left secure care to develop more child friendly system for children in care to inform about incidents in secure care as well as how to implement children's rights better.

There is and intention to change the Child Protection Act to improve feedback and inclusion of children. At the moment, SKA supervises the child protection work of the municipality.³⁶

The representatives of the child are always included to the decision-making and child related processes. It is regulated by the Child Protection Act §8, see more here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/516112022003/consolide>

The Child Protection Act §7 regulates the liability of parents and persons raising the child and it says that” The primary liability for ensuring the child’s rights and well-being lies with the parent or with the person raising the child.” It is the obligation of the state and local governments to support the parent or the person raising the child.

The same art 8 regulates that “in order to ensure the child’s rights and well-being, state and local government agencies and the officials thereof, legal persons in public and private law shall cooperate with each other upon the planning, financing and application of all measures targeted to children **by involving the children, parents, persons raising children, interest groups and the public therein.**”

³⁴ Vetemaa, K. interview 17.02.2023

³⁵ Closed children's institution service, <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/spetsialistile-ja-koostoopartnerile/laste-ja-noortega-tootavale-spetsialistile/klat>, 23.02.2023

³⁶ Raag, interview 21.02.2023

2.2. Civil society organisations active in the area of child protection. Please consider also including information on the role of religious institutions and groups active in the area of child protection.

Question	YES	NO	Comments
<p>2.2.1. Is there a registry of civil society organisations operating in the child protection area?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, briefly provide information on the legislative-regulatory framework and the responsible authority.</p>		x	<p>The organisations, including not-for-profit that provide alternative care services or childcare services need to register themselves in the Register of Economic Activities. Civil society organisations are functioning as MTÜ (Non profit NGO) or SA (Foundations).</p> <p>There is no separate registry of civil society organisations operating the child protection area, however, the list of substitute homes and childcare providers can be accessed through this registry.</p> <p>Undertakings operating in the areas of activity subject to special requirements are being registered in the Register of Economic Activities.</p> <p>Non-profit organisations are governed by the, Non-profit Associations Act³⁷. In order to enter a non-profit association in the register, the management board of the non-profit association shall submit a petition which sets out the information specified in § 10 of this Act and is signed by all members of the management board. The following shall be appended to the petition: 1) the memorandum of association and the articles of association approved thereby; telecommunications numbers (telephone, facsimile, etc.); other documents provided by law.</p> <p>Info about the registry is available here: https://www.rik.ee/en/e-business-register</p>
<p>2.2.2. Is there a legal obligation for the accrediting; licensing; registering; inspecting the activity of any type of civil society organisations, e. g. NGOs, charities, church organisations, etc. in the area of child protection?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, which is the responsible authority? How frequent are reviews and inspections?</p>	x		<p>There is no special registry on local or county management level. At the state level there is a registry of economic activities https://mtr.ttja.ee/infoleht/22?m=129 where the licenses are registered.</p> <p>Activities like: Rehabilitation service, Alternative care service, Child day-care service, Special welfare service, Occupational health service are licenced.</p> <p>and are regulated by Occupational Health and Safety Act; Social Welfare Act. The childcare service provides and substitute home services provides have</p>

³⁷ <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/501022023003/consolide>

			<p>to be registered in Register of Economic Activity. Their licence data can be accessed through this registry. The ban on working with children is regulated in the Child Protection Act and Social Welfare Act.</p>
<p>2.2.3. Are there cooperation agreements/partnerships between government and the civil society at national or local level?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, What is the prevalence of this practice?</p> <p>Please provide <u>indicative examples</u> and information regarding the main areas covered, type of services targeted, and financial aspects of such partnerships (i.e. if done in view of accessing EU funds).</p>	<p>x</p>		<p>Strategic partnership is a form of cooperation with NGOs. Strategic partners support the achievement of the performance goals of the ministry's governance area and contribute to policy implementation and design. Application rounds are announced for specific topics. Project based funding can be obtained by NGOs from different Ministries for different activities. In 2019 there were signed strategic partnerships for max 3 years. Applications needs to be submitted to the Ministries. More information can be obtained from: https://www.sm.ee/asutus-ja-kontakt/asutus/strateegilised-partnerid#taotleja-ja-partneri</p> <p>Estonian Association of Families with Children: Project: Family-friendly and child-rich Estonia, Project partners: Regional organizations, OÜ Sensus ETC, MTÜ Vaikuseminutid, Estonian Imago Relationship Therapy Association, Pere Sihtkapital. As a strategic partner, we contribute to the formation of a family-friendly society, so that more children grow up in Estonian families, family relationships are positive and lasting, and the wealth of children is a valued value. The project focuses on increasing the well-being and functional capacity of families with children, ensures the availability of need-based services and training, and increases the involvement of families in society.</p> <p>Child Protection Union. Project: Cooperation for children and families! Brief summary of the project: The goal of the "Working together for children and families!" project is to support and promote positive parenting in Estonia, interventions aimed at children in need of help, protection of children's rights, develop child protection work and empower child protection workers. The guarantee of children's well-being is awareness of children's rights and their implementation in society. Systemic approach and cooperation of various organizations promotes the well-being of children and families and contributes to the prevention of child abuse and the worsening of the need for help.</p>

		Child Welfare Development Center Foundation. Project: Family-friendly and child-rich Estonia. Brief summary of the project: Today, work with children in Estonia primarily deals with consequences. The goal of the project is to support the emergence of new quality at the local level in supporting children and families through the development of preventive services and the launch of systematic preventive activities. To this end, communal prevention and family work centers will be established across Estonia in cooperation with local governments, which will offer families timely, appropriate and professional support in raising children, being parents and partners, and supporting children's developmental needs.
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2.3. Inter-agency cooperation in the area of child protection

Question	YES	NO	Comments
<p>2.3.1. Is there <u>coordination between national, regional, or local authorities</u> in developing and implementing policies and legislation in the area of child protection?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, how is this done? Please comment on the strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p><u>For example</u>, is this cooperation – coordination regulated by the legislative framework? Does cooperation take place ad hoc, e.g. addressing specific issues and on specific thematic areas of interest or is it a key feature of the system?</p>		x	<p>There is no formal cooperation network among the national, regional and local authorities. Ad hoc request. The cooperation is not very systematic.</p> <p>The Ministry of Social Affairs has limited capacities to coordinate the whole array of the child protection and has pointed to the need for the strong coordinating national child protection agency. SKA as a new implementing agency will have the responsibility of coordinating and assisting the work of local governments in child protection issues.³⁸ Through the Union of Estonian Cities and Towns, Tallinn is participating in local government law-making through the EIS (draft information system). Draft Information System (EIS) is a working environment where documents are coordinated between agencies, forwarded and submitted to the government session, as well as public consultation. In addition to domestic documents, drafts of European Union legislation and other documents related to the decision-</p>

³⁸ Pg 16 https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Lastekaitse/klat_uurimisulesanne_4_valdkondade_koostoo_klat-is_viibivate_laste_huvanguks_kitsaskohad_ja_lahendused.pdf 23.02.2023

			<p>making process of the European Union are available in the EIS.³⁹</p> <p>Most of the coordination activities are done by the SKA now.</p> <p>SKA (Social Insurance Board) is regulated by the Statute of the Social Insurance Board. See more information from here: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/101022019018?leiaKehtiv Art § 1. Regulates the Status of the Social Insurance Board</p> <p>(1) The Social Insurance Board (hereinafter referred to as the Board) is a government institution operating under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Affairs, which performs tasks arising from legislation in its field of activity and carries out state supervision and applies state coercion on the basis and to the extent prescribed by law. (2) In performing its tasks, the agency represents the state.</p> <p>According to § 2 of the same act, the agency is accountable to the minister responsible for the field, who directs and coordinates the agency's activities and supervises the agency in accordance with the procedure provided by legislation.</p> <p>According to art 3 of the same act, the costs of the Agency are covered from the state budget. The agency has its own budget, which is approved, changed and executed by the minister responsible for the field.</p>
<p>2.3.2. Is there inter-agency <u>cooperation between the relevant actors</u> having responsibility in the area of child protection (including civil society organisations)?</p>		x	<p>The Prevention Council (Ennetusnõukogu) as a governmental committee was established in 2022. The membership of the council would consists of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Education and Science, Justice and the Interior as well as state</p>

³⁹ Vetema, interview 17.02.2023

<p>If yes, please mention <u>how this is done</u> (for examples are there standing inter-agency committees or meetings, are digital tools used?). Which actor has a leading role?</p>		<p>agencies and civil society representatives.⁴⁰ The role of the council will be to set the goals of the child protection policy and to coordinate the prevention work across the sectors.</p> <p>The Child Protection Act §8 regulates the cooperation. § 8. (1) In order to ensure the child's rights and well-being, state and local government agencies and the officials thereof, legal persons in public and private law shall cooperate with each other upon the planning, financing and application of all measures targeted to children by involving the children, parents, persons raising children, interest groups and the public therein. (2) Based on an international agreement, EU legislation or other legislation, state and local government agencies and the officials thereof, legal persons in public and private law shall cooperate with each other in order to ensure the rights and well-being of children and involve a competent authority of another state or a person authorised therefor, if necessary.</p> <p>Ministry of Social Affairs and SKA has cooperation with the Union of the cities and counties.</p> <p>The competence of the Ennetusnõukogu is regulated by the Government regulation no 108 adopted 08.11.2022 please consult here: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/109112022019?l=eiaKehtiv</p> <p>Functions of prevention council in the field of child protection are regulated by the Child</p>
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⁴⁰ <https://www.just.ee/ennetusnoukogu> 23.02.2023

		<p>Protection Act art 13 [RT I, 06.08.2022, 6 – entry into force 16.08.2022]</p> <p>According to this article, “the prevention council is a government committee, the functions of which in the organisation of child protection policy are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) to establish the strategic objectives and priorities and co-ordinate cross-sectoral activities; 2) to submit proposals concerning the protection of children’s rights and ensuring the well-being of children to the Government of the Republic and other relevant institutions; 3) to review the recommendations to the state submitted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and to co-ordinate the activities related therewith.”
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2.3.3. What are the main challenges regarding effective cooperation and coordination? *(For example, lack of clarity regarding responsibilities and roles of actors, overlaps of responsibilities, and communication between organisations is not adequately structured and resourced)?*

Ca. 200 words

The new Child Protection Act is regulating the cooperation but in practice there is still room for development. Social workers highlighted the issue of feedback that the feedback system is not yet developed.

Child welfare professionals feel that sometimes the network expects too much from them and puts all the responsibility for solving the child's case on them. The problems that arise from the interviews were following:

- Difficult to find common meeting times where all network members can participate.
- Attendance is uneven and people's involvement is random.
- According to representatives of state institutions, there is no continuity in networking.
- Low involvement of health care in child protection work, which is mainly caused by the data protection law.
- Ambiguity of the role of the child welfare specialist, if the network is convened by another party, the child welfare specialist is involved in this case, but the responsibility is unclear. Ambiguity of roles, excessively high expectations for child protection, being too stuck in one's field/position. There is no clear action plan/systematic approach.

- Lack of clarity regarding the responsibilities and roles of actors, overlapping responsibilities, and inter-organizational communication not being sufficiently structured and resourced. Who leads, who has what tasks, who is responsible, duplication.
- Lack of shared values or the same will to act.
- Willingness and capacity to cooperate to understand that everyone should contribute for the best interest of the child.
- Feedback issues and disappointment, burnout, labour shortage, burnout and constant rotation of officials lead to lack of continuity.
- Work overload. The choice of a simpler solution. Lack of needed services or sources to provide the needed services.
- Lack of support from local authority leaders in some cases.
- Hierarchy of professions must also be avoided, as it is an obstacle to cooperation. If the cooperation network does not work, it leads to more stress for the child and the parents.
- Child protection is involved when everything has already been tried and nothing brings the desired change. Usually by then things are already very complicated. If the cooperation would have started earlier, the responsibility would not be taken away from the families. The family should be involved from the start in the decision-making processes then the result would be better. There is definitely big gap in interaction and communication. The shortage of specialists and lack of proper help is also a real challenge (e.g. access to medical and psychological health care).
- Some matter can be resolved within the school, but not all parties are immediately involved as it should be. The family will be checked and local government child protection will be contacted immediately. Also the family should make realistic promises for themselves. The youngsters can be explained their own responsibility and consequences of misbehaviour. Also further agreement with parents on how they should behave when the child finally comes home.
- Local governments offer services to families. Creative therapy, psychologist, family counselling, family support workers to improve parenting skills. New project Wonderful Years - parenting program has been promoted.
- Willingness to accept help is not always available from the family or the child. ⁴¹

LaSTEKs - Commission for Children and Families state the obligation to cooperate but this is not always the case. Child protection does not only take place in the local government, but is cross-sectoral, and all institutions that come into contact with children at work deal with the protection of children's rights. According to § 8 of the Child Protection Act, in order to ensure the rights and well-being of the child, the authorities of the state and local government units and their officials, as well as public and private legal entities, must cooperate with each other across fields in the planning, financing and implementation of all measures aimed at children, involving children, parents, persons raising children, interest groups and the public. Multidisciplinary cooperation is important, because one specialist (e.g. child protection) cannot assess all the areas that are important to define in the case of a child in need, when helping a child in need, cooperation and responsibility are evenly distributed in network work, which helps prevent specialist burnout, professionals participating in network work can share their best practices and experiences that make helping a child more operative and effective.⁴²

There are many commissions like this. As these are established at the local government level, therefore it would be difficult to collect this information from all local governments that have established these commissions.

⁴¹Vetemaa, Lauri, Saar Interviews, February 2023

⁴² Raag, Interview, 21.02.2023

The Child Protection Act (LasteKS) describes the tasks of the local government unit (KOV) in the organization of child protection. The local government must respect the rights and well-being of the child in its development plan ensure principles, develop and implement support for children and families and risks preventive and mitigating measures and constantly collect the necessary information about their children and about the situation and needs of families. All these tasks help ensure the purpose of LasteKS is to establish values that value children, promote their development and support their well-being and interests the environment.

In order to ensure that the local government fulfils these goals, the conditions for child protection work must be created in the local government to do. It should be taken into account that there is a sufficient number in the area with appropriate preparation child protection workers and created opportunities for child protection cooperation with others with fields. Each local government can decide for itself what decisions to make child protection worker alone and which are done collegially. LasteKS has one format of children and families proposed for cross-disciplinary cooperation and collegial decision-making commission.

The Children and Families Commission is advisory in nature, so it must not act for punitive purposes, but must contribute to the improvement of child protection work and the field into development. A confidential one-on-one is better suited to listen to the child's and family's concerns customer work; the commission format is more suitable for the development of cooperation between specialists, for discussion and information exchange. These Commissions can be established at the local level and SKA has issued guidelines who should participate in these Commissions. Further contact is also provided, <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/spetsialistile-ja-koostoopartnerile/laste-ja-noortega-tootavale-spetsialistile/lastekaitse-noustamine>

An example of one commission can be found from here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/412112020005>. This commission is established by Local Government regulation.

For example the Kuusalu country has stated the following tasks for the commission:

- 1) enhancing the municipality's child protection work and developing the field;
- 2) planning preventive activities and ensuring children's rights and well-being in the region;
- 3) preparation and addition of local government development documents, including child rights and planning development plans and activities that ensure well-being;
- 4) making proposals to the Kuusalu Municipal Government that would help the well-being of children and families better provide;
- 5) it is difficult to provide assistance to the child, the family, and the specialist in the educational and social fields in the case of solving case procedures, to which measures have not been applied before

effective enough;

6) development of services supporting families and family relationships;

7) smooth communication of sensitive information between the members of the cooperation network and effective cooperation based on confidentiality.

The Commission has the right to: 1) involve professionally trained experts and specialists from outside the commission; 2) to receive materials and information regarding issues within the commission's field of work from the local government and other persons and institutions; 3) conclude agreements with the parties concerned based on the best interests and needs of the children; 4) make proposals to the municipal government and the council on matters concerning children and families; 5) participate in the planning of the development plan of the local government, assessing the well-being of children and families at the local level. The Commission's decisions are advisory.

Question	YES	NO	Comments
2.3.4. Are child protection authorities engaging in <u>transnational cooperation</u> in the area of child protection, for example with regards to missing children, parental abduction, or migrant children?	x		NGOs have cooperation partners from Norway, Denmark, Finland. Networking at the EU level in the EUROCHILD programs, Smart Internet program. Ministry of Social Affairs is cooperating with Finnish KELA, Ireland, Iceland. In search of best practices, the contacts are developed with those countries where there are interesting.

If yes, please briefly comment and include information on transnational agreements-protocols of cooperation as well as on the interaction between child protection authorities and other actors involved in transnational cooperation processes, for example law enforcement and judicial authorities, migration authorities, social services, Central Authorities under Brussels IIbis Regulation/Hague Convention, consular or diplomatic authorities. Are there any challenges relating to transnational cooperation? Are the challenges different for cross-border cases among EU countries or with third countries?

Please provide information on main relevant agreements – cooperation schemes in two of the following areas: missing children, parental abduction, inter-country adoption, migrant children (family tracing-family reunification –return-relocation).

Ministry of Justice (Justiitsministerium) and Social Insurance Board (SKA) are the central agencies for:

-Brussel II regulation LKS § 34¹

Ministry of Justice (Justiitsministerium) central agency:

-Convention of 25 October 1980 on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction;

-Convention of 19 October 1996 on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Co-operation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children;

-Council Regulation (EC) No 2201/2003 of 27 November 2003 concerning jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility, repealing Regulation (EC) No 1347/2000.

The transnational cooperation is carried out through these conventions and there are no other cooperation agreements or protocols according to the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry is the central authority that receives the requests and then transfers them to respective authorities (courts, social workers/child protection officials).

In inter-country adoptions Estonia follows the Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, concluded at The Hague on 29 May 1993 and that came into force in Estonia in 2002. The bilateral cooperation agreements are followed with Sweden and Finland based on the convention.

Family tracing is carried out by the Red Cross Estonia. Return of irregular migrants and children is coordinated by the International Organisation of Migration Tallinn Office and financed through the EU Return Fund in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior.

Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Justice:

-Council of Europe Convention on the prevention and suppression of violence against women and domestic violence

2.4. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges

Based on the output of the 2014 mapping exercise, please briefly describe the development of the child protection governance, coordination structures, and services in the past 8 years, incl. achievements and (persisting) gaps and challenges.

In 2016 a new Child Protection Act was established which resolved many problems that were highlighted in 2014 report. New protection mechanisms have been introduced like Children's house⁴³, foster care system⁴⁴ and register of foster families and secure care for children and youth (KLAT)⁴⁵ was introduced.

Foster care was taken over from the state by the local government to stay closer to the clients. The age of sexual self-determination was increased from 14 to 16 years.⁴⁶

In 2016, a child protection department was established at the Social Insurance Board to support the child protection work of local governments on a daily basis. The role of the Child Protection Department is to provide professional and legal advice, collaborative case management, finding and offering suitable services to help the child, developing the field of children and families, and solving individual cases of international child protection. They are responsible for organising training activities for child protection administrators at local government.

⁴³ <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/abivajav-laps-ja-taiskasvanu/laste-ja-perede-abistamine/lastemaja>, 23.02.2023

⁴⁴ <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/abivajav-laps-ja-taiskasvanu/asendushooldus-ja-kasuvanemlus> 23.02.2023

⁴⁵ <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/spetsialistile-ja-koostoopartnerile/laste-ja-noortega-tootavale-spetsialistile/klat>, 23.02.2023

⁴⁶ <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/et/2022/11/eestis-tousis-seksuaalse-enesemaaramise-epiir-16-eluastale/> 23.02.2023

In addition, the Social Insurance Board's duty is to provide round-the-clock advice to state and local government authorities and their officials, as well as public and private legal entities, to help a child in need or in danger. From the beginning of 2018, the children's helpline 116 111 will fulfil this role.

Child helpline offers a nationwide, round-the-clock, toll-free telephone and internet counselling service to support and enhance the well-being of children and families. This service is available to both children and adults seeking guidance or information on matters related to children, as well as to report child in need or in danger.

The number of contacts (calls, chats, e-mails) is increasing every year. In 2022, there were 16,133 children in child care, of which 37% were in need and 5% were related to a child in danger. Due to the Child Protection Act, the child helpline receives reports about children in need and in danger of emergency and forwards them to the local government for further action. Information is exchanged through the national information system STAR.

If the person reaching out to child helpline is either the child or someone else describing a situation in which the child is in imminent danger, the child helpline counsellor will immediately get in touch with emergency number 112. They will convey the information provided by the caller and request feedback from the police or ambulance services at the location. If it becomes apparent that, alongside notifying the local government, it is necessary to involve the police (for instance, cases involving non-urgent incidents of violence or school bullying not warranting a 112 emergency response), the child helpline counsellor will relay the information to the Police and Border Guard Bureau."

The National Family Reconciliation Service was developed in 2015, when the Ministry of Social Affairs created the intention to develop the service (document). In the period 2020-2022, preparations of the legal space for the launch of the national service were supported, including information and training activities only through Norwegian grants (the project will last until 2024). From 2022, the service is financed from the state budget and is offered free of charge to Estonian parents nationwide. The service is coordinated by the Social Insurance Board.

In 2017 the Children Protection Council was established. <https://www.sm.ee/lastekaitse-noukogu> This has been abolished in 2022. A new entity Ennetusnõukogu - the prevention council was established in 2022.⁴⁷ It is a government committee, the functions of which in the organisation of child protection policy are: 1) to establish the strategic objectives and priorities and co-ordinate cross-sectoral activities; 2) to submit proposals concerning the protection of children's rights and ensuring the well-being of children to the Government of the Republic and other relevant institutions; 3) to review the recommendations to the state submitted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and to co-ordinate the activities related therewith.

COVID situation has worsened the mental situation of children.⁴⁸ The public's attention was focused, among other things, on issues that broadly related to the child's right to self-determination and the child's right to health. The debate on children's sexual self-determination, which has been the subject of

⁴⁷ <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/109112022019> 27.02.2023

⁴⁸ Sotsiaalministeerium. 2021. Sotsiaalkaitseminister: noorte vaimne tervis vajab eritähelepanu, 31.03.2021

discussions for more than ten years, has reached the phase of amending the law - having broad social support.⁴⁹

In light of mental health problems, the government's proposal to reduce interest activity support allocated to municipalities from 2022 despite Estonia's economic growth caused opposition. Organizations in the field of youth made a public appeal to abandon the cuts,⁵⁰ the Union of Estonian Cities and Towns, the Union of Children's Protection sharply criticized the decision, which ignores the interests of children.⁵¹

Unfortunately, not all state decisions always support children's coping - for example, the Social Insurance Board's decision to change the practice of identifying disabilities, as a result of which some disabled children were not diagnosed with disabilities in the future, and the children were deprived of the necessary help.⁵² The Parliament adopted the necessary amendment to the law,⁵³ but there are still children with multiple diagnoses who are diagnosed with a milder disability compared to before or who are not diagnosed with a disability at all.⁵⁴

The need for support specialists has been talked about for years. According to the National Audit Office, helping children with special needs can get stuck behind an excessively fragmented, time-consuming and bureaucratic support system⁵⁵ Support for children with special educational needs was also jeopardized during the state of emergency declared due to the spread of COVID-19. The launch of the reform of the support system for children with special needs was positive.⁵⁶ *Signs of Safety model has been introduced in the case work with children but it is not known if this is practiced and how?*⁵⁷

The Committee on the Rights of the Child finds that while domestic legislation is largely in compliance with the Convention, their practical implementation is not always so. The problems are still the same,⁵⁸ whether it is the high number of advocates of corporal punishment, the uneven availability of services, regional inequalities, the insufficient level of participation of children or the increasing number of child

⁴⁹ Oja, B. 2021. Ühingu toetavad seksuaalse enesemääramise piiril viieaastast vanusevahet, ERR, 19.04.2021

⁵⁰ EANÜ. 2021. Noortevaldkonna organisatsioonide avalik pöördumine peaminister Kaja Kallase ja minister Liina Kersna poole, 29.04.2021

⁵¹ Lastekaitse Liit. 2021. Lastekaitseliidu hinnangul eirab praegune valitsus oma otsustes laste ja noorte huvisid, ERR, 01.06.2021.

⁵² Habicht, A. 2019. Ringmäng puudega lapse ümber, ERR, 30.10.2019.

⁵³ Riigikogu. 2020. Sotsiaalhoolekande seaduse, puuetega inimeste sotsiaaltoetuste seaduse ning tööturuteenuste ja -toetuste seaduse muutmise seadus, 08.04.2020.

⁵⁴ Helika Saar, Lapse õigused 2020-2021, Lastekaitseliit

<https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Peatukk-2020-2021.pdf>

⁵⁵ Riigikontroll. 2020. Hariduse tugiteenuste kättesaadavus, 25.11.2020.

⁵⁶ Sotsiaalministeerium. 2021. Valitsus toetas erivajadusega laste tugisüsteemi reformi, 29.04.2021.

⁵⁷ Vetema, interview 17.02.2023.

⁵⁸ Saar, H. 2019. Lapse õigused 2018–2019

support debtors. In the 2020 joint report for Estonia's third general periodic review, the Equal Treatment Network pointed to the same, presenting relevant proposals for solutions.⁵⁹

The state also does not plan separately also prepare a new development plan for children and families as it used to be before, but the plan is to integrate topics from other areas next to the welfare development plan 2023-2030.

2.5. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any promising practice in governance, coordination structures, and services that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

Ca. 250 words

In April 2021, from the perspective of the child's rights, the Parliament changed the Act on Psychiatric Assistance so that a child with sufficient discretion may in the future turn to a psychiatrist for help independently, without the permission of the parents.⁶⁰

The number of appeals to children's help phone line is increasing and one of the main concerns of children is loneliness - in many cases, children do not dare to tell their parents about their worries. But 55% of 12-year-old children in Estonia know what rights children have, a third have heard of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Among younger people, there are significantly fewer people who have heard about rights and the Convention.⁶¹

Positive steps were taken in the introduction of restorative justice (from 2017). Introduction of volunteer based system offering restorative justice focusing on young people's conflicts.

- Estonia's third children's house was opened in Jõhvi.⁶² In 2020, 428 children were assisted in the children's houses of the Social Insurance Board, where children who have been sexually abused or who are suspected of being abused end up. The number of cases in various children's houses is increasing regularly. In 2023, we have four children's houses in Estonia as already mentioned in other locations of the current report. The last one was opened in Pärnu, in 2022.

As one of the last EU member states, Estonia approved the Safe Schools Declaration in April 2020, the purpose of which is to protect the child's right to education and facilitate the continuation of education in conflict situations.

In August 2020, the Government of the Republic approved the youth development plan 2021-2035, which sets the vision is that in 2035, young people in all regions of Estonia will live a healthy and fulfilling life

⁵⁹ Eesti võrdse kohtlemise võrgustik. 2020. Ühisaruanne Eesti kolmanda üldise korralise ülevaatus (UPR) jaoks.

⁶⁰ Pulk, M. 2021. Alla 18-aastased saavad edaspidi pöörduda iseseisvalt psühhiaatri juurde, 17.03.2021, Postimees.

⁶¹ Soo, K., Kutsar, D. 2020. Kuidas elad, Eestimaa laps? Ülevaade 8–12-aastaste laste subjektiivsest heaolust.

⁶² Sotsiaalkindlustusamet. 2020. Jõhvis avatakse kolmas lastemaja, 17.08.2020.

and are empowered to change the community and the country in such a way that Estonia has the best environment in the world for growth, living and self-realization.⁶³

STAR – data register of social services and benefits was established:
<https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/spetsialistile-ja-koostoopartnerile/star>⁶⁴

The Incredible years parenting program is organized by the Health Development Institute (TAI).

Perepesad - <https://www.perepesa.ee/> - viib ellu Lapse Heaolu Arengukeskus

Training for the child (Koostöös lapse heaks), based on the 2014-2016 EU MAppchip project

A functioning committee for children and families at the local level.

SKA (before TAI) trainings, network supervisions, providing mentorship and advice for local government officials.

Child Protection Association (LL) seminars and summer school (19+3 – another 4+2 planned for 2023-2024)

Network models have been created - MARAC (<https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/MARAC>), “Out of the circle (<https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/spetsialistile-ja-koostoopartnerile/laste-ja-peredega-tootavale-spetsialistile/ringist-valja-mudel>) ”

Family-based intervention to support young people using multidimensional approach - MDFT (<https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/spetsialistile-ja-koostoopartnerile/laste-ja-peredega-tootavale-spetsialistile/mitmedimensiooniline>)

Family nests (Perepesad) - <https://www.perepesa.ee/> is implemented by the Child Welfare Development Center.

The parenting program "Caring fathers" is aimed at fathers who have used or are using violence against their children or their children's mothers. See: <https://vaiter.ee/hoolivad-isad/>

Continue despite the complex involvement of parents with the Wonderful Years parenting program. More outreach with motivational stories to engage uncooperative parents.

See also: <https://tarkvanem.ee/koolitused/imelised-aastad/>

SPIN - <https://www.spinprogramm.ee/>

STEP - <https://step.ee/>

⁶³ <https://www.hm.ee/ministeerium-uudised-ja-kontakt/ministeerium/strateegilised-alusdokumendid-ja-programmid> , 02.02.2023

⁶⁴ Lauri, interview 14.02.2023

3. Capacities (human and financial resources)

3.1. Information on budget allocation and funding

Question	YES	NO	Comments
3.1.1. Is budget allocation on child protection incorporated into legislative and policy instruments?	X		<p>In Estonia, all strategic development plans must have budgets. This is regulated by the State Budget Act⁶⁵ and the regulation of the government that establishes procedures for developing, reviewing, implementing, evaluating and reporting about the development plans.⁶⁶ Similarly all draft legal acts must be supported by the budget calculation based on the Government's regulation.⁶⁷</p> <p>In Estonia, the Children and Families program 2022-2025 (<i>Laste ja perede programm 2022-2025</i>) has approved, which is in line with <u>earliest</u> Development Plan for Children and Families 2012-2020 (<i>Laste ja perede arengukava 2012-2020</i>) and with <u>current</u> Welfare Development plan 2016-2023 (<i>Heaolu arengukava 2016–2023</i>).</p> <p>The preface of the program states that the program focuses on children and the availability, quality and adequacy of measures <u>that increase the well-being of families</u>. The planned activities are necessary to ensure children's rights and well-being, to support the daily livelihood of families and to create prerequisites for the sustainable development of society and for the population to last. Additionally, it is stated in preface, that ensuring the rights and well-being of the child is a <u>cross-disciplinary task</u>.</p>

⁶⁵ Estonia, State Budget Act (*Riigieelarve seadus*), RT I, 1999, 55, 584, §10 [available at <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/733542>]

⁶⁶ Estonia, Types of Strategic Development Plans, Rules of Development, Updating, Implementing and Reporting (*Strateegiliste arengukavade liigid ning nende koostamise, täiendamise, elluviimise, hindamise ja aruandluse kord*), RT I, 2005, 67, 522 [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/12790098>].

⁶⁷ Estonia, Good Practices in Developing Legal and Normative Acts (*Hea õigusloome ja normitehnika eeskiri*), adopted 22 December 2011 No 180 [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/H%C3%95NTE>].

		<p>Accordingly, the Child Protection Act is available to ministries, state institutions, local governments and third parties (including private individuals) have the obligation to take into account their effects on children with their actions and refrain from activities that have a harmful effect on children.</p> <p>The purpose of the Children and Families program is to increase the well-being of children and families and to improve the quality of life, thereby encouraging the birth of children. The program planed total budget for 2022-2025 is 3,372,282€ (average 843,070 mln € per year).⁶⁸</p> <p>From 2023, the Children and Families programme is incorporated in the new Estonian Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030, which focuses on five strategic objectives: well-being of children and families, labour market, well-being of the elderly, social protection, and gender equality and equal treatment policies . The Welfare Development Plan will have yearly renewable operational programs for each strategic objective. The program is directly linked to state budget, therefore yes, budget allocation on child protection is incorporated into legislative and policy instruments.⁶⁹</p> <p>Children Ombudsman does not have a separate budget line in the State budget. The costs of the Children Ombudsman are included in the Budget line for Chancellor of Justice.</p>
<p>3.1.2. Is the budget allocated to child protection (alternatively on children’s rights or on social welfare) clearly specified in the annual national budget?</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>In Estonia, the annual State Budget 2022 shows allocations for Children and Families program under the Ministry of Social Affairs.</p>

⁶⁸ Estonia, Ministry of Finance (2021). State budget strategy 2022-2025 and stability programm (Riigi eelarvestrateegia 2022-2025 ja stabiilsusprogramm). Tallinn.

⁶⁹ Estonia, Ministry of Social Affair, e-mail correspondence with Ms Liisa-Lotta Raag, Head of Department of family Wellbeing and Safe Relationships, 14 March 2023.

<p>Please refer to the specific budget item allocated to this in 2022?</p>		<p>Group of services/ year <u>2022 budget</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organization and development of alternative care: budget of 22 603 845 € - Providing and developing services for children with special needs: budget of 23 187 725 € - Organization and development of child protection: budget of 2 403 846€ - Victim support services for children and families: budget of 1 248 396€ - The family reconciliation service - Providing and developing services for at-risk children and young people: budget of 3 566 392€ - Developing parenting skills: budget of 927 257 €. <p>TOTAL expenses (Ministry of Social Affairs) for the protection of children's rights 53 937 461 euro.</p> <p>The proportion of (Ministry of Social Affairs) children's rights expenses from the State Budget is of 0,38%.</p> <p>Regarding <u>Organization and development of child protection</u>: Among the services under the activity, the largest budget is the child protection telephone service (0.8 million euros), which is a 24-hour, all-Estonian free telephone and internet counseling service, where both children and adults can contact and inform about a child in need of help. Child protection telephone services include the children's helpline 116111, the missing children's phone</p>
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		<p>116000 and round-the-clock counseling, outreach and awareness assessment by specialists as a complex service.</p> <p>As an important service, the operation also includes the service for sexually abused children (0.7 million euros), which is a national service created on the basis of the Nordic model (Barnahus) and the quality requirements of Barnahus, for children who are sexually abused or suspected of being sexually abused, who are offered child-friendly, integrated support.⁷⁰</p>
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3.1.3. What percentage of the total state budget was allocated to child protection in the last five years? If data is not available, please provide information on the budget allocated to social protection/social welfare in general.

Compared to other countries, the Estonian social protection system is characterized by the small share of social protection costs in the GDP (*gross domestic product*) and the dominance of financial benefits over services. For example, in 2019, according to Eurostat data, the share of expenditure on social protection benefits in Estonia totaled 16.1% of GDP, financial benefits made up 11.1% of GDP and non-financial benefits only 5.0%.⁷¹

Budget allocated to social protection/social welfare was as following:

2022: general social protection/social welfare costs 6 723,44 €⁷² (48 % of total State budget)

2021: general social protection/social welfare costs 5 888,73 €⁷³ (48 % of total State budget)

2020: general social protection/social welfare costs 5 277,43 €⁷⁴ (45 % of total State budget)

2019: general social protection/social welfare costs 4 587,96 €⁷⁵ (41 % of total State budget)

⁷⁰ Estonia, Ministry of Finance (2021). Explanatory Note of the 2022 State Budget (2022. aasta Riigieelarve seaduse eelnõu seletuskiri). Tallinn. [Available at: <https://embed.documentcloud.org/documents/21072294-2022-riigieelarve-seletuskiri/?embed=1&responsive=1&title=1>]

⁷¹ Estonia, Welfare Development plan 2016-2023 (*Heaolu arengukava 2016–2023*). [Available at: <https://www.sm.ee/heaolu-arengukava-2016-2023>]

⁷² Estonia, Ministry of Finance (2021). Explanatory Note of the 2022 State Budget. Tallinn. [Available at: <https://embed.documentcloud.org/documents/21072294-2022-riigieelarve-seletuskiri/?embed=1&responsive=1&title=1>]

⁷³ Estonia, Ministry of Finance (2020). Explanatory Note of the 2021 State Budget. Tallinn [Available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/7219963-2021-aasta-riigieelarve-seaduse-seletuskiri>]

⁷⁴ Eurostat. Database: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/spr_exp_sum/default/table?lang=en

⁷⁵ Eurostat. Database: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/spr_exp_sum/default/table?lang=en

2018: general social protection/social welfare costs 4 239,77 €⁷⁶ (41 % of total State budget)

Question	YES	NO	Comments
<p>3.1.4. Is the existing budget and funding of child protection services/institutions considered sufficient <u>and</u> sustainable (as compared to only project based for a limited period of time)?</p> <p><i>(Please consider available studies, reports at national level conducted by public or private institutions, child protection organisations, civil society, human rights institutions, academic community, and other sources such as the concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on country reports etc.)</i></p>		X	<p><u>General comment:</u></p> <p>In Estonia, local governments, which fulfil the tasks arising from the Social Welfare Act (social services and subsidies), play an important role in financing support (allowances and benefits) for children and families and child welfare. Since the size and administrative and financial capacity of local governments varies greatly across Estonia, the problem is regional differences in child protection services, both in terms of availability and quality of services.⁷⁷</p> <p><u>State funding:</u></p> <p>The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its final conclusions of Estonia's second to fourth periodic report⁷⁸ emphasized the concerns that the State party lacked a comprehensive a cross-sectoral child rights policy that would ensure that all national policies and programmes comply with the convention. The Committee recommends, among other things, to establish the necessary regulations and also make budget allocations for the current legislative measures, including for the effective implementation of the Child Protection Act.</p> <p>Based on the Children and Families Program budget for 2022 (in the State annual budget), the funding is directed to allowances and</p>

⁷⁶ Eurostat. Database: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/spr_exp_sum/default/table?lang=en

⁷⁷ Estonia, Chancellor of Justice (2015). Report of the Chancellor of Justice of the Republic of Estonia on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Regarding the third and fourth periodical reports of the Republic of Estonia (*Eesti Vabariigi õiguskantsleri raport ÜRO lapse õiguste konventsiooni täitmisest Eesti Vabariigi kolmanda ja neljanda perioodilise aruande kohta*). Tallinn.

⁷⁸ The UN Committee on the Rights of the (2017). Final conclusions of Estonia's second to fourth periodic report (Lõppjärelused Eesti teise kuni neljanda perioodilise aruande kohta). ÜRO Lapse Õiguste Komitee, Genf. [Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/EST/2-4&Lang=en]

		<p>benefits (benefits and subsidies for children and families and subsidies for children with disabilities). Compared to the expenses for allowances and benefits, the expenses for child protection services are several times smaller⁷⁹.</p> <p>However, several changes have been made to the procedure for paying family and child-related allowances and benefits - the amount paid for family allowances has increased sharply in the last three years. In 2017, a total of 446.7 million euros were spent on various benefits (child benefit, parental benefit, birth benefit, child care fee, etc.), which was 14% more than in 2016 and as much as 68% more than in 2014. The number of most beneficiaries has remained almost the same. The largest of the changes that entered into force in 2017 concerned families with children. Starting from July 1, 2017, a family with three to six children received an additional 300 euros per month in addition to the existing child allowance. Support for families with at least seven children increased to 400 euros per month. It took 33.8 million euros to pay additional support to families with children, which was 8% of the total family support budget. The largest part, or almost half, of family allowances was paid for parental allowances and over a third for child allowances⁸⁰.</p> <p>From 2018, coefficient-based financing has been applied to child substitute care services in order to develop family-based foster care. Coefficient-based financing led to surpluses in local governments' budgets in the early years of the system's implementation (2018-2020). For municipal department heads and child protection specialists, coefficient-based</p>
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⁷⁹ Estonia, Ministry of Finance (2021). Explanatory letter of the 2022 State Budget (2022. aasta Riigieelarve seaduse eelnõu seletuskiri). Tallinn. [Available at: <https://embed.documentcloud.org/documents/21072294-2022-riigieelarve-seletuskiri/?embed=1&responsive=1&title=1>]

⁸⁰ See: <https://www.stat.ee/et/uudised/artikkel-2018-06-18-sotsiaalse-kaitse-kulutused-on-tousuteel>

		<p>financing is not completely clear, and they do not perceive specific advantages in it, for example, compared to providing funds on a revenue basis. It is considered that this type of financing does not affect the choice of the form of foster care, since, if possible, foster care is preferred based on the child's interests. It has pointed out that the obstacles to placement in to foster families are not budgetary, but rather stem from the lack of foster families. Thus, coefficient-based funding has rather not been an appropriate measure to develop foster care, considering that the choice of form of substitute care does not depend on funding, but is based on the child's needs⁸¹</p> <p>On December 15, 2022, Estonian Union for Child Welfare made proposals to political parties to ensure the rights and well-being of Estonian children, with the wish that they reach the political parties' election programs; The Union stated: "The field of child protection and welfare in Estonia has been developed primarily on a project basis, without a long-term funding perspective. The state does not have an overview of the effectiveness of the use of resources directed to child protection, including no information on where and how exactly local governments direct financial resources. In the country, the impact of the money allocated from the state budget on the protection of children's well-being and rights is not evaluated, nor is the corresponding analysis applied."⁸²</p> <p><u>Local government funding:</u></p>
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⁸¹ Estonia, HAAP and Stories for Impact (2022). Substitute care study: assessing the impact of TAT activities and changes to the Social Welfare Act 2014–2020 (*Asendushoolduse uuring: TATI tegevuste ja sotsiaalhoolekande seaduse muudatuste mõjude hindamine 2014–2020*). Tallinn.

⁸² Estonian Union for Child Welfare (2022). Proposals for political parties to ensure the rights and well-being of Estonian children.

			<p>The study of 2017⁸³ conclude: The state has not taken a strong enough role as a coordinator and leader in the field of child protection, the main difficulty of financing and organizing the field of child protection are largely on local governments; In order to make child protection work more effective, there is a need for sufficient financial resources for the functioning of the necessary services; Child protection workers assess the budget shortfall the biggest obstacle in the provision of services. Getting financing however, to necessary services is project-based which creates additional obligations and uncertainty. At same time, Estonia's regional inequality and its worsening continue to be a big problem.⁸⁴</p>
<p>3.1.5. Do EU funds play a substantial role in the funding of the national child protection system and/or related policies?</p> <p>Please provide information on the child protection areas and related services incl. providers that use EU funds (including what type of funds for which period of time).</p>	X		<p>Yes. ESF is used to help to reform the child protection system, invest in prevention and develop services for children with complex needs. These are long term changes that create positive change and that are sustainable financial wise⁸⁵.</p> <p>For the period 2021-2027, 3.37 billion euros of EU cohesion policy subsidies will be allocated to Estonia. One of the areas of support is More Social Estonia (<i>Sotsiaalsem Eesti</i>) of 682 mln €</p>

⁸³ Viira, A. (2017). Increasing the effectiveness of child protection work at the local level and sustainable development (*Kohaliku tasandi lastekaitsetöö tulemuslikkuse suurendamine ja jätkusuutlik arendamine*). Ministry of Social Affairs. [Available at https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Ministeerium_kontaktid/Uuringu_ja_analuusid/Sotsiaalvaldkond/kohaliku_tasandi_lastekaitsetoo_tulemuslikkuse_suurendamine_ja_jatkusuutlik_arendamine.pdf]

⁸⁴ Kattai, K., Lääne, S., Noorkõiv, R., Sepp, V., Sootla, G., Lõhmus, M. (2019). Main challenges and policy recommendations in local government and regional level development. Final analysis report (*Peamised väljakutsed ja poliitikasoovitused kohaliku omavalitsuse ja regionaaltasandi arengus. Analüüsi lõpparuanne*). Tallinn University. [Available at: https://www.riigikogu.ee/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/L%C3%B5ppraport_V%C3%A4ljakutsed-ja-soovitused-KOV-ja-regionaalarengus_31.01.2019.pdf]

⁸⁵ Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs, e-mail correspondence with Ms Liisa-Lotta Raag, Head of Department of family Wellbeing and Safe Relationships, 14 March 2023

		<p>support money, of which, in turn, 73 million is planned for children and families well-being.⁸⁶</p> <p>Children and families wellbeing and child protection - there are three sub-support measures⁸⁷:</p> <p>One of the sub-support measures is the development and creation of family-oriented services in local governments, with total budget of 2 mln € (including 30% is State funding). During the structural support period, two tenders will be held: in the first quarter of 2023 (500,000 euros) and at the beginning of 2025 (81.5 million euros). Local governments can apply for funding.</p> <p>Second sub-support measures is supporting children with a high need for help and trauma experiences and their families, with total budget 6 428,571 € (including 25% state co-financing and 5 % self-financing). Primarily the target groups are: children living in substitute care, abused children, children with special needs and children with complex problems and with high care needs. Plan of Social Ministry is to develop new interventions and therapies.</p> <p>The third sub-support measure is the development of the Child Protection organizational model, with total budget 42 075,077 € (including 30% state co-financing). Focus-activities: trainings for child protection workers, developing a standard for child protection case management, increasing management competence in the field of child protection and developing the user-friendliness of the data register.</p>
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⁸⁶ See: <https://www.rtk.ee/toetusfondid-ja-programmid/euroopa-liidu-valisvahendid/2021-2027-toetusperiood>

⁸⁷ See: <https://www.rtk.ee/toetusfondid-ja-programmid/euroopa-liidu-valisvahendid/2021-2027-toetusperiood>; see also: Estonia, Ministry of Finance (2021). Explanatory Note of the 2022 State Budget (2022. aasta Riigieelarve seaduse eelnõu seletuskiri). Tallinn. [Available at: <https://embed.documentcloud.org/documents/21072294-2022-riigieelarve-seletuskiri/?embed=1&responsive=1&title=1>]

			<p>However, the project-based developments cause dissatisfaction in the field of child protection. The Study of 2017⁸⁸ points out: The reason for the dissatisfaction of child protection workers and local government managers in the provision of services on project-based. Case-based work and provision of related services according to specialists, should be financed more stably so that services can exist ensure for a longer period of time.</p>
<p>3.1.6. Is corporate social responsibility developed at national level in relation to child protection services?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please provide information on major child protection national programmes and actions that are primarily funded by the private sector or by public-private schemes/ synergies.</p>		X	<p>There is no reference to corporate social justice in child protection legislation or policies. There is <u>no</u> practice of private sector funding to the child protection programmes or actions or public-private schemes.</p>
<p>3.1.7. Has the involvement of the private sector in child protection recently significantly increased? Are there projects or programmes receiving governmental funding which outsource protection services for children? Please include civil society organisations and private companies contracted by government/local authorities to provide services.</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please explain the changes and the reasons hereof. Please provide information on the legal provisions</p>	X		<p>There are <u>no legal limitations</u> for private sector to provide child protection services as long as the legal requirements set in the Social Welfare Act (<i>Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus</i>) are met.</p> <p>As an example: SOS Children`s Village Estonia (SOS Lasteküla Eesti Ühing) is an NGO that runs 4 children villages (substitute homes) and 2 youth homes (also substitute homes). The funding for the NGO comes from the government based on the Social Welfare Act (<i>Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus</i>) § 155 as well as from private donations.</p> <p>It is hard to clearly estimate any increase of private involvement and/or funding for child</p>

⁸⁸ Viira, A. (2017). Increasing the effectiveness of child protection work at the local level and sustainable development (*Kohaliku tasandi lastekaitsetöö tulemuslikkuse suurendamine ja jätkusuutlik arendamine*). Ministry of Social Affairs. [Available at https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Ministeerium_kontaktid/Uuringu_ja_analuusid/Sotsiaalvaldkond/kohaliku_tasandi_lastekaitsetoo_tulemuslikkuse_suurendamine_ja_jatkusuutlik_arendamine.pdf]

<p>regulating this and on the main services / groups of children that are covered. Provide information based on indicative examples.</p>		<p>protection as there is no such data collected for evaluation. According to the representative of Estonian Union of Child Welfare⁸⁹: if to observe how many private sector associations have received funding through the <i>Strategic partnership of the Ministry of Social Affairs</i>, we can observe the involvement of the private sector in child protection.</p> <p>More precisely: Up to 2020, the most important source supporting the activities of non-profit associations was the Council Of Gambling Tax, which supported educational, research, social and cultural projects as well as children’s and youth projects. Non-profit associations could submit to the Council Of Gambling Tax annual applications to apply for funds for the organisation, and it was also possible to submit applications for small projects each month.</p> <p>From 2020, the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs have a strategic partnership program which is the cooperation form with NGOs.</p> <p>Strategic partners support the achievement of the performance goals of the ministry's governance area and contribute to policy implementation and design. Support is given to projects related to promotion of children’s well-being, rights and inclusion. Application rounds are announced for specific topics, the aim is to provide long-term financing (minimum 2 years per round) and in addition to a meaningful action plan, the organizational development of the partner organizations is promoted.</p> <p>For example, in the 2022 application round, three applicants received support from the program: the Viljandi Hospital Foundation, the non-profit organization Family for every Child</p>
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⁸⁹ Estonia, Estonian Union for Child Welfare, e-mail correspondence and meeting in Zoom with Ms Helika Saar, Child Rights Program Coordinator, 22 February 2023.

		<p>(<i>Igale lapsele pere</i>), Estonian Union for Child Welfare – in total 699 980,40 €. ⁹⁰</p> <p>In sum: It is possible for NGOs to be involved and financed through <i>Strategic Partnership Program</i>. However, in a sense, the end of the work of the Council Of Gambling Tax annual reduces operational capacity of small NGO-s.</p>
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3.2. Information on human resources, qualification requirements, and training

Question	YES	NO	Comments
<p>3.2.1. Are the allocated human resources in the area of child protection at all levels sufficient? (services, institutions etc.)?</p> <p><i>(Please consider available studies, reports at national levels conducted by public or private institutions, child protection organisations, civil society, human rights institutions, academic community, and other sources such as concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on country reports etc.)</i></p>		X	<p>Already in 2011, Ministry of Social Affairs has set the target to have as optimal one child protection official per 1000 children in each local government⁹¹</p> <p>The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended in the final conclusions of Estonia's second to fourth periodic report in 2017 that the country should additionally regulate the obligations of local governments in creating positions for child protection specialists.⁹²</p> <p><u>Local level:</u></p> <p>After the administrative reform of 2017, the number of child protection specialists has decreased, although the number of children in need has increased. A big problem is the overload of child protection workers and the risk of burnout. There is often not enough time for preventive work, which would help to reduce</p>

⁹⁰ See: <https://www.sm.ee/asutus-ja-kontakt/asutus/strateegilised-partnerid#tulemused>

⁹¹ Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (2012). 'Laste ja perede arengukava 2012-2020' (Development Plan for Children and Families 2012-2020) [available at: <http://valitsus.ee/et/valitsus/arengukavad/Peresobralik-riik/laste-ja-perede-arengukava-2012-2020>]

⁹² The UN Committee on the Rights of the (2017). Final conclusions of Estonia's second to fourth periodic report (Lõppjärelused Eesti teise kuni neljanda perioodilise aruande kohta). ÜRO Lapse Õiguste Komitee, Genf. [Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/EST/2-4&Lang=en]

			<p>the workload in the long run⁹³ . There is also a high turnover of caregivers in substitute homes, but unfortunately there is no statistics on this.</p> <p>It is predicted that between 2020 and 2030, the need for social workers and counselors, child protection specialists, family workers and support persons with children with special needs will increase; however, the number of graduates has decreased the most in the main professions of social workers and counselors and child protection and family workers.⁹⁴</p>
<p>3.2.2 Are the allocated human resources competent in the area of child protection and appropriately trained?</p> <p><i>(Please consider available studies, reports at national levels conducted by public or private institutions, child protection organisations, civil society, human rights institutions, academic community, and other sources such as concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on country reports etc.)</i></p>		X	<p>According to study of 2017, the proportion of child protection workers with formal education was the highest in the northern region of Estonia (80% of child protection workers) and the smallest in the western region, where 64% of child protection workers had the appropriate professional training.⁹⁵</p> <p>According to a study by the Institute of Health Development (2021), the most important subject areas in which there is a need to improve the knowledge and skills of child protection workers are: Communication and disputes between parents, reconciliation; Legal bases of child protection, court proceedings; In foster care, including supporting a child in a closed children's institution and working with child`s</p>

⁹³ Viira, A. (2017). Increasing the effectiveness of child protection work at the local level and sustainable development (Kohaliku tasandi lastekaitsetöö tulemuslikkuse suurendamine ja jätkusuutlik arendamine). Ministry of Social Affairs. [Available at https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Ministeerium_kontaktid/Uuringu_ja_analuusid/Sotsiaalvaldkond/kohaliku_tasandi_lastekaitsetoo_tulemuslikkus_e_suurendamine_ja_jatkusuutlik_arendamine.pdf]

⁹⁴ Estonia, Kutsekoda (2021). Labor demand monitoring and forecasting system OSKA Future view of labor and skills demand: social work. (Tööjõuvajaduse seire- ja prognoosisüsteem OSKA Tulevikuvaade tööjõu- ja oskuste vajadusele: sotsiaaltöö). Tallinn. [Available at: https://oska.kutsekoda.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/OSKA_sotsiaaltoo_uuringuaruanne_tervikekst_2021.pdf]

⁹⁵ Viira, A. (2017). Increasing the effectiveness of child protection work at the local level and sustainable development (Kohaliku tasandi lastekaitsetöö tulemuslikkuse suurendamine ja jätkusuutlik arendamine). Ministry of Social Affairs. [Available at https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Ministeerium_kontaktid/Uuringu_ja_analuusid/Sotsiaalvaldkond/kohaliku_tasandi_lastekaitsetoo_tulemuslikkus_e_suurendamine_ja_jatkusuutlik_arendamine.pdf]

		<p>family; Child's mental health and support; Children with special needs and support.⁹⁶ Additionally, building a collaborative relationship with an involuntary parent is challenging⁹⁷. currently not enough of these trainings are offered, but there is a need.</p> <p>The OSKA Social Work study, completed in 2021, thoroughly describes the increasingly necessary basic knowledge that is important in all basic professions of social work. In the case of child protection and family workers, the professional knowledge and skills that are in growing need and need to be developed are the following (pages 51-52):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trauma awareness, which makes it possible to better advise a client with a trauma experience, including relatives and family; • different addiction-related knowledge, for example digital addiction counseling skills; • broad and interdisciplinary knowledge, ability to cooperate between fields; • legal knowledge and skills and conciliation skills; • (co)operation with a forced client, e.g. a parent who does not want to cooperate, who may not see a need in life change something; • knowledge of "child-centered child protection", which is provided by versatile knowledge and skills, personal qualities (including empathy, caring, thoroughness), listening skills, finding out the child's opinion and
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⁹⁶ Estonia, Rumvolt, L. (2022). Analysis of the training needs of child protection workers (*Lastekaitsetöötajate koolitusvajaduse analüüs*). Tallinn, Tervise Arengu Instituut. [Available at: <https://www.tai.ee/sites/default/files/2022-04/2022.%20aastal%20valminud%20kordusanal%C3%BC%C3%BCs%20lastekaitset%C3%B6%C3%B6tajate%20koolitusvajaduse%20kohta.pdf>]

⁹⁷ Kallas, K; Toros, K; Falch-Eriksen, A (2022). Building a collaborative relationship with an involuntary parent in child protective services, *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.15270/58-2-1040>

		<p>taking it into account, and the ability to establish contact with child.⁹⁸</p> <p>In context of substitute care, the lack of trauma-awareness of caregivers is evident and both substitute care caregivers as well as child protection workers, and more wider network, need awareness and competencies in dealing children with traumatic experiences.⁹⁹</p> <p>It is positive that since 2016, the Health Development Institute has been offering systematic further training opportunities for child protection workers. At the same time, the child protection workers who participated in the 2013-2019 seminars of the NGO Estonian Union for Child Welfare "On the same side - on the child's side" series have repeatedly indicated the need for additional training in their feedback. The problem is that the trainings are <u>too Tallinn-centric</u>, insufficient support from the management, payment difficulties and the fact that there is no time to participate due to overload.¹⁰⁰</p> <p><u>COVID pandemia and capacities:</u></p> <p>In Estonia, as in worldwide, the pandemic of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID19) affected children and families, also child welfare system and child protection workers. Various communication skills, including communication with the media, became more and more necessary. Child protection workers had to</p>
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⁹⁸ Estonia, Kutsekoda (2021). Labor demand monitoring and forecasting system OSKA Future view of labor and skills demand: social work. (*Tööjõuvajaduse seire- ja prognoosisüsteem OSKA Tulevikuvaade tööjõu- ja oskuste vajadusele: sotsiaaltöö*). Tallinn. [Available at: https://oska.kutsekoda.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/OSKA_sotsiaaltoo_uuringuaruanne_terviktekst_2021.pdf]

⁹⁹ Sindi, I; Strömpl, J; Lust, M. (2021). Trauma-informed care. A report of a survey of the literature, training programs and experiences of children's foster parents, carers and staff. (*Traumateadlik asendushooldus. Kirjanduse, koolitusprogrammide ning laste kasuvanemate, hooldajate ja töötajate kogemuste uuringu aruanne*). Tallinn. [Available at: https://www.tai.ee/sites/default/files/2022-05/Traumateadlik%20asendushooldus_uuringu_aruanne.pdf]

¹⁰⁰ Estonia, Saar (2019). Child-friendly child protection – the child protection worker's perspective (*Lapsesõbralik lastekaitse – lastekaitsetöötajate vaade*). Tallinn, Lastekaite Liit. [Available at: <https://www.tai.ee/et/sotsiaaltoo/lapsesobralik-lastekaitse-lastekaitsetootajate-vaade>]

		<p>manage remote work and build relationships via veeb¹⁰¹, to design and develop networks, supervise group work and institution's employees needed to develop study and digital skills, including the use of e-learning solutions.¹⁰² In order to reflect work processes in new circumstances, during the crisis the need for work counseling or supervision and covision grew. The challenge turned out to be monitoring the maintenance of communication between the parents. During the pandemic situation, there were many parents who prevented communication between the child and the other parent under the pretext of an emergency situation. For example, one parent forbade contact with the other parent until the emergency was over. So it could happen that the child did not see his/her other parent for almost half a year. At the same time, the experts emphasized that laws and regulations, including communication regulations, apply even during a state of emergency (pandemia).¹⁰³ The Ministry of Justice also gave guidelines on how to act in matters of communication issues (and also alimony) under the conditions of a special situation. In the instructions, it was said that the agreements on the order of communication and the court rulings made in this regard continue to apply even in a special situation, but their implementation must be based on the purpose of the restrictions imposed due to the special situation.¹⁰⁴</p> <p>The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its final conclusions on Estonia's second to</p>
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¹⁰¹ Toros, K., & Falch-Eriksen, A. (2020). Lastekaitsetöö COVID-19 pandeemia ajal: Eesti lastekaitsetöötajate väljakutsed laste ja perede toetamisel. *Sotsiaaltöö*, 3, 82–87.

¹⁰² Estonia (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on the need for labor and skills in the field of social work (COVID-19 mõjust sotsiaaltöö valdkonna tööjõu ja oskuste vajadusele). Tallinn, Kutsekoda. [Available at: <https://oska.kutsekoda.ee/covid-19-mojust-sotsiaalto-valdkonna-toojou-ja-oskuste-vajadusele/>]

¹⁰³ See: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/et/2020/04/lapse-oigused-peavad-olema-kaitstud-ka-eriolukorras/>

¹⁰⁴ See: https://www.just.ee/sites/www.just.ee/files/eriolukord_majandusraskused_ja_elatiste_maksmine_ao.pdf

		fourth periodic report in 2017 ¹⁰⁵ , has recommended that the state should conduct regular trainings for all occupational groups that work for or with children, including trainings for judges.
<p>3.2.3. Is there a <u>compulsory certification or licencing</u> process for social workers and other professionals who work for child protection?</p> <p>If <u>yes</u>, briefly describe the process.</p>	X	<p>Social workers have professional standards (III, IV and V, III being the lowest). Obtaining III-level standard requires professional higher education, one year of professional work experience. Level IV requires same conditions as level III with the exception of 5 years of professional work experience and one published article or special training. Level V requires, in addition to above, master's degree or higher, at least 10 years of professional work experience, public articles/trainings.¹⁰⁶</p> <p>Child protection work can be studied in Tallinn University's Social Pedagogy and Child Protection master's program. From beginning of 2023, the master program is named `Child Welfare`. The child protection specific topics in master program curricula are: Trauma-informed child welfare; Child protection strategies and policies; International Child Protection Perspectives and Practices; The Basic Course of the Protection of Children's Rights; Protection of the child's rights in civil proceedings; Child's Rights Seminar; Case work; Assessment, analyses and decision making; Supervision in the practice of child protection work.¹⁰⁷ Child protection and family topics are also an important part of Social Work BA curricula. The Social Work BA curriculum has two child</p>

¹⁰⁵ The UN Committee on the Rights of the (2017). Final conclusions of Estonia's second to fourth periodic report (Lõppjärelused Eesti teise kuni neljanda perioodilise aruande kohta). ÜRO Lapse Õiguste Komitee, Genf. [Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/EST/2-4&Lang=en]

¹⁰⁶ Estonia, 'Sotsiaaltöötaja III, IV, V. Kutsestandard' (Social worker III, IV, V. Professional standards), Tervishoiu ja Sotsiaaltöö Kutsenõukogu [available at: <http://www.kutsekoda.ee/et/kutseregister/kutsestandardid/10435172/lae/sotsiaaltöötaja-iii-iv-v-04juunipdf>]

¹⁰⁷ See: <https://www.tlu.ee/yti/lastekaitse#oppekava-ja--ained->

		<p>protection subjects, namely Child protection work and Social work with families, but discussions on child protection topics also take place in other subjects such as "Service planning and organization", "Case management and networking", and it is also possible to take subjects that deal with children as one target group such as "Social work with different social groups", "Social rehabilitation", "Promotion and prevention of health and well-being". The subject "Child and crisis" is important course focused on the target group of children.</p> <p>Accordingly, from the Child Protection Act, a child protection worker <u>must</u> have professional training and higher education and he/she must acquire no later than two years after starting work as a child protection worker social worker with specialization in child protection. In other sample occupations of the main profession for employment, the <u>recommended</u> educational preparation is professional higher education in either social work, in the curricula of psychology or social pedagogy.</p>
<p>3.2.4. Are there any selection criteria (for example qualification requirements) and vetting procedures for volunteers working with children in various areas?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please describe briefly.</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>According to the Child Protection Act (EV Lastekaitse seadus) a person who has been found guilty based on number of Penal Code sections where the criminal record has not been erased or have been erased and archived is <u>not</u> allowed to be working with children.¹⁰⁸ However, <u>no</u> vetting procedures are in place. There are no other regulations stipulated in Child Protection Act or Social Welfare Act (<i>Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus</i>) regarding the volunteers working with children in care.</p> <p>The information portal for volunteers <i>Vabatahtlike Värav</i> states, that there are no legal regulations regarding the clear definition of a volunteer as well as the framework of the volunteer work; but there is <i>Good Volunteering</i></p>

¹⁰⁸ Estonia, Republic of Estonia Child Protection Act (Eesti Vabariigi Lastekaitse seadus), RT I, 06.12.2014, 1

		<p><i>Practice</i> as well as plenty of guidance on ways to engage volunteers.¹⁰⁹</p>
<p>3.2.5. Is there <u>regular training</u> on issues related to the identification, referral, and intervention for children delivered to specialists involved in this area?</p> <p>If <u>yes</u>, please include information on the training of law enforcement officials (judges, persecutors, police), health and education personnel (doctors, nurses, teachers, school counsellors).</p> <p>Please provide information on the mandatory nature of training, its frequency, funding, if it relates to specific needs of children, etc.</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>In § 14 of the Child Protection Act, the Estonian state has foreseen the need to organize additional training for child protection workers in order to support them as provided for in this act or other legislation when performing tasks. Before the amendments to the Child Protection Act entered into force in 2016, one of the <u>goals of the training was to harmonize the level of knowledge and skills of child protection workers across Estonia.</u></p> <p>The Health Development Institute was organizing trainings since 2016, and it was preceded by an analysis of training needs in 2014-2015 year. A training council of experts in the field was involved in the development of the training plans. The trainings are divided into basic training, with a volume of 108 academic hours, and additional trainings on necessary topics that do not fit into the basic training. The basic training modules have content related to prevention, strategic planning and community work, legal bases with sub-topics of child rights, court proceedings, custody and communication rights, guardianships, as well as child welfare assessment and case management and communication between the family system and parents and the child. There are ten additional trainings in the program so far and they have covered such subject areas as intimate partner violence, supporting a child in foster care, sexual abuse of children, "Let's Talk About Children" intervention training, working with a parent who uses drugs, etc¹¹⁰.</p>

¹⁰⁹ Vabatahtlike Värav. <https://vabatahtlikud.ee/vabatahtlik-tegevus/vabatahtliku-tegevuse-hea-tava/>

¹¹⁰ Estonia, Rumvolt, L. (2022). Analysis of the training needs of child protection workers (Lastekaitsetöötajate koolitusvajaduse analüüs). Tallinn, Tervise Arengu Instituut. [Available at: <https://www.tai.ee/sites/default/files/2022->

		<p>Until 2023, the Institute of Health Development is responsible for providing advanced training. From 2023, the Social Insurance Board will organize further training. The Estonian Union of Child Welfare has provided free additional training for child protection workers: since 2013 the training "On the same side - on the child's side" (a total of 19 training courses) and since 2020 annual summer schools. In addition, training for local government networks "Working together for the good of the child!" (a total of 16 trainings took place in previous years).¹¹¹</p> <p>The Chancellor of Justice in its report on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (2015) points out that the Chancellor of Justice has organized various trainings for professionals working with children (e.g. teachers, social and child protection workers, teachers, judges); however, there is a need for training for all professionals who come into contact with children in their work (judges, prosecutors, police officers, lawyers, teachers, doctors, etc.) <u>regarding the assessment of the child's best interests</u> and, more broadly, the child's well-being. Based on the experience of the Chancellor of Justice, professionals working in the legal field have received training in this field, but it is obvious that the assessment of the best interests of the child does not arise only in court proceedings.¹¹² It is also known that judges are occasionally offered child-related training, but there is no regular training. Trainings related to children are rather aimed at</p>
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04/2022.%20aastal%20valminud%20kordusanal%20C3%BC%C3%BCs%20lastekaitset%20C3%B6%C3%B6tajate%20koolitusvajaduse%20kohta.pdf]

¹¹¹ See: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/et/organisatsioon/meie-tegevused/>

¹¹² Estonia, Chancellor of Justice (2015). Report of the Chancellor of Justice of the Republic of Estonia on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Regarding the third and fourth periodical reports of the Republic of Estonia (*Eesti Vabariigi õiguskantsleri raport ÜRO lapse õiguste konventsiooni täitmisest Eesti Vabariigi kolmanda ja neljanda perioodilise aruande kohta*). Tallinn.

		<p>communicating with problematic children, as well as establishing contact with the child.</p> <p>There are <u>no</u> regular compulsory trainings on children rights for teachers. The schools, that in Estonia are run by the local governments, have to provide the services of psychologist and social pedagogue who support teachers in children rights and child protection issues. It is the responsibility of the school and the owner of the school (local government) to provide the abovementioned services.</p>
<p>3.2.6. Are child rights and child protection topics included in the curriculum of studies for professionals other than social workers and psychologists involved in child protection systems? (Please include information regarding law enforcement officials, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, health, and education personnel)</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please describe briefly.</p>	<p>x</p>	<p>It was <u>only</u> found that in Tallinn University, The Law master study program involves: Protection of Children`s Rights course.</p> <p>The Children's House of the Social Insurance Board (Barnahus) organized a training series where professionals working with children learn to listen to children with special needs. The trainings were held in 2019 as a part of BADEV project.¹¹³The need for training arises from the fact that often not enough attention is paid to the right of opinion of children with special needs and it is not customary to ask their opinion. During the training, skills are trained in order to notice the child's special needs early in the procedural process and to treat the child accordingly in the best way. In training, in was practiced to listen the child's opinion according to age and maturity, whether she/he is a victim of violence, a bystander or an offender¹¹⁴.</p> <p>Additionally, The Estonian Union for Child welfare developed a multidisciplinary network training program "Working together for the good of the child" (see more information below, in section 3.2.7).</p>

¹¹³ See: <https://www.terviseinfo.ee/et/uudised/5195-koolitus-opetab-spetsialiste-paremini-kuulama-erivajadusega-last>

¹¹⁴ See: <https://bioneer.ee/koolitustel-r%C3%A4%C3%A4gitakse-erivajadusega-lapse-s%C3%B5na%C3%B5igusest>

		<p>In basic training for secure care for children and youth centre workers (developed in 2023) there are training days about children's right.</p>
<p>3.2.7. Are there <u>joint training activities</u> involving professionals and personnel from various disciplines in place?</p> <p>Please provide some examples.</p>		<p>The Estonian Union for Child welfare developed a multidisciplinary network training program "Working together for the good of the child" in order to adapt international experiences to Estonian conditions so that the program could be used in every Estonian municipality. The program introduces the local network to child protection work, the rights of the child, the concept of well-being and the child-oriented approach. It is discussed in training at how to act at the local level for the wellbeing of children. Collaboration means sharing experiences, work methods and resources. The program also introduces sectoral regulations and looks at bottlenecks and limitations that arise in cooperation. The goal is to develop teamwork skills and the ability to act together both in prevention work and in supporting a child in need. Training should lead to a better exchange of information and mutual understanding.</p> <p>The professionals of local network participates in the training (including child protection worker(s), family doctor, district police officer, heads of educational institutions and support specialists, youth police officer, youth worker(s), school nurse, etc.). If everyone knows what someone is doing, it is easier to trust each other and cooperate more effectively. Cooperation between competent specialists and fields brings support closer to children and families in need and helps to use available resources more effectively. Cooperation with the Association of Estonian Cities and Towns continues, so that from 2020 municipalities can order training from</p>

		<p>Estonian Union for Child Welfare for their multidisciplinary cooperation network¹¹⁵.</p> <p>Social Insurance Board is implementing “Out of the Circle” model where interdisciplinary network is participating in a joint training (child welfare workers, prosecutors, police, teachers etc).</p>
<p>3.2.8. Outline briefly the main challenges and/ or gaps relating to human resources, qualification requirements and training underlined the relevant authorities and/ or child protection civil society organisations.</p>	<p>Regional inequality and its worsening continue to be a major challenge in Estonia. Statistics and various studies point to inequalities in health, differences in, among other things, services, availability of support specialists, interest education, etc. Inadequacy of child protection workers in places also continues to be a problem. After the administrative reform of 2017, the number of child protection specialists has decreased, although the number of children in need is increasing. If there are not enough child protection workers, ensuring the well-being of children in the municipality is jeopardized, and we cannot talk about effective prevention. Whereas the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its final conclusions on Estonia's second to fourth periodic report in 2017, has recommended that the state additionally regulate the obligations of local governments regarding the creation of positions for child protection workers.</p> <p>A big problem is the overload of child protection workers and the risk of burnout. There is often not enough time for preventive work, which would help to reduce the workload in the long run; the high number of cases per one child protection worker.</p> <p>Child protection work requires skills and knowledge, as well as constant self-improvement and learning. According to study of 2017, the proportion of child protection workers with formal education was the highest in the northern region of Estonia (80% of child protection workers) and the smallest in the western region, where 64% of child protection workers had the appropriate professional training. It can be thought that without appropriate preparation (knowledge, competences) the risk of burnout is also greater in practice.</p>	

¹¹⁵ Estonia, Saar (2019). The training "Cooperation for the Child" supports local cooperation networks. (Koolitus „Koostöös lapse heaks” toetab kohalikke koostöövõrgustikke). Sotsiaaltöö [Available at: <https://www.tai.ee/et/sotsiaaltoo/koolitus-koostöös-lapse-heaks-toetab-kohalikke-koostöovorgustikke>]

3.3. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges

Based on the output of the 2014 mapping exercise, please briefly describe the development of the child protection capacities in the past 8 years, incl. achievements and (persisting) gaps and challenges

For almost a decade Estonia had the Strategy of Children and Families 2012-2020 (Laste ja Perede arengukava 2012- 2020) with the purpose of guaranteeing clear development trends in the state for supporting the well-being and coping of children and families. The aim of the strategy was to ensure that all children in Estonia can grow and live in a safe and human-friendly environment. The strategy includes the programme for children and families, currently valid for 2022-2025¹¹⁶, which focuses on ensuring available and high-quality measures to increase the well-being of children and families to achieve the main goal, that is increasing the well-being of children and families and improving the quality of life, thereby promoting the birth of children.

From 2023 the programme for children and families is incorporated in the new Estonian Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030, which focuses on five strategic objectives: well-being of children and families, labour market, well-being of the elderly, social protection, and gender equality and equal treatment policies¹¹⁷. The Welfare Development Plan will have yearly renewable operational programs for each strategic objective. The program is directly linked to state budget, therefore it is positive that budget allocation on child protection is incorporated into legislative and policy instruments.

More targeted and effective services (including rehabilitation services) are needed. As to child protection system, innovation and changes within the system using the available sources is possible. In 2020-2022 the Ministry of Social Affairs carried out and commissioned several analyses and studies on the quality and processes of child protection work to evaluate the implementation of the Child Protection Act, its impact on children and families, and the need for legislative changes. Based on this work a reform in child protection has been initiated and the proposal for draft law was presented in June 2023. The proposal outlines the need to bring a more systemic approach to both prevention and provision of assistance to children and families. This can be achieved by clarifying the tasks of local municipalities, supporting them in developing a modern and inclusive organisation where specialists can thrive and perform better results, and implementing a uniform child and family centred casework model.¹¹⁸ Also, that is important to bring out the recent changes in legislation regarding Barnahus service in Estonia. Barnahus target group includes since May 2022 children with harmful sexual behaviour, in addition to sexually abused children. Operation of Barnahus is regulated by the Child Protection Act § 29¹ as follows:

§ 291. Measures of Social Insurance Board for assisting sexually abused children or children behaving in sexually abusive manner

(1) A local government agency shall notify the Social Insurance Board immediately after becoming aware of a child in need of assistance if the child:

1) has been sexually abused or in case of suspicion thereof;

¹¹⁶ Available in Estonian: <https://www.sm.ee/et/sotsiaalministeeriumi-valitsemisala-tegevuspohine-eelarve>

¹¹⁷ Available in Estonian: <https://www.sm.ee/et/heaolu-arengukava-2023-2030>

¹¹⁸ Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs, e-mail correspondence with Ms Liisa-Lotta Raag, Head of Department of family Wellbeing and Safe Relationships, 14 March 2023.

2) is a suspect or a person subject to proceedings in a sexual offence or the sexual behaviour of the child threatens the wellbeing of other persons or the child.

(2) The Social Insurance Board starts to perform the functions provided for in this section also based on the inquiry of another agency or person or based on the information received through the child helpline. In such case the Social Insurance Board shall notify the local government agency responsible for the child's case management, and in case of criminal proceedings, taking into account the provisions of § 214 of the Code of Criminal Procedure on the disclosure of data in pre-trial procedure.

RT I, 28.04.2022, 1 – entry into force 08.05.2022] In addition to legislation changes, the Regulation nr 51 of the Minister of Social Affairs entered into force of 1.07.2022, which regulates the assistance rules for the sexually abused children¹¹⁹.

Nevertheless, the project-based developments cause dissatisfaction in the field of child protection.

3.4. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any promising practice in child protection capacities that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

In January 2017, the Children`s House (Barnahus) service was launched in Estonia, within the framework of which children who have been sexually abused or who are suspected of having been sexually abused can receive help and social and legal protection from one place and in an integrated manner. The idea of the children's house model is to offer coordinated and effective help to children under one roof and to prevent re-victimization of the child during criminal proceedings. Also, that is important to bring out the recent changes in legislation regarding Barnahus service in Estonia. Barnahus target group includes since May 2022 children with harmful sexual behaviour, in addition to sexually abused children. : Operation of Barnahus is regulated by the Child Protection Act § 29¹ as follows:

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RT I, 28.04.2022, 1 – entry into force 08.05.2022]

¹¹⁹ See: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/128062022029>.

In addition to legislation changes, the Regulation nr 51 of the Minister of Social Affairs entered into force of 1.07.2022, which regulates the assistance rules for the sexually abused children¹²⁰.

Children come into contact with sexual topics earlier than before, the children's own awareness is increased. The Children`s House (Barnahus) team has given out useful advice on how to talk to a child about sexuality, the flag system introduced in 2020 supports the child's healthy sexual development and also prevents sexual violence¹²¹.

More and more efficient and child-friendly collaborative methods are being used in work with juvenile offenders, e.g. conflict mediation based on restorative law, restorative discussion circles, Family Conference (Pere Lahendusring), "Out of the Circle" etc¹²². In addition, greater attention to the implementation of the principles of child-friendly procedures in police work is developed¹²³.

Restorative justice-based interventions are available to children and young people caught up in conflict and crime, and to communities affected by traumatic events. According to those who participated in the restorative justice process, what they experienced was safe, fair and brought about positive changes. The application of restorative justice increases the well-being of victims and reduces the need to use punitive justice. Professionals working with children and young people are aware of restorative justice services and use the principles of restorative justice in their work. Victim Assistance is a restorative justice competence center that is responsible for the training of volunteers and other specialists implementing restorative justice and supports the quality assurance of services.

Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDFT) is an evidence-based, family-centered program for youth and their families with severe risk behaviors and multifaceted support needs. The service is offered to up to 250 children per year.

On 01.01.2018, amendments to the Social Welfare Act came into effect, which concern replacement and follow-up care services and the system of their organization and financing. In order to increase the importance of family-based foster care, a foster care financing scheme was created, which motivates the placement of children in a foster family rather than in an institution. The amendment to the law stipulated the quality principles that every service provider must follow when providing social services.

Social Insurance`s Board`s social campaign "A child is waiting for a family" made 5% of Estonians seriously consider to become a foster family.¹²⁴

In the light of the cases of child abuse that have repeatedly come to light in recent years, it is positive that the Estonian Anti-Doping and Sports Information Foundation (EADSE) has prepared, in cooperation with various experts, a code of conduct for sports personnel to prevent child and youth abuse and to resolve cases.

¹²⁰ See: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/128062022029>.

¹²¹ See: <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/spetsialistile-ja-koostoopartnerile/laste-ja-noortega-tootavale-spetsialistile/sensoa-lipusustem>

¹²² See: <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/taastavoigus>

¹²³ See: <https://lapsesobralikmenetus.just.ee/et/spetsialistile-minu-vorgustik/politsej>

¹²⁴ See: <https://tarkvanem.ee/kasupere-artiklid/teavituskampaania-laps-on-pereootel-2021-vahekokkuvote/>

Although there are still few child-centered statistics in the mainstream statistics and the data related to children is fragmented, it is positive that a large part of the statistics and studies related to the rights of the child can be found in a consolidated manner on the website of the Chancellor of Justice.¹²⁵

A characteristic feature of a child-friendly society is consideration of children and their participation in deciding issues related to them. Researchers are increasingly emphasizing a child-centered approach in research and the importance of asking children themselves.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ See: <https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/et/statistika-ja-uuringud>

¹²⁶ Estonia, Estonian Union for Child Welfare (2021). Children`s Rights 2020-2021 (Lapse õigused 2020-2021). [Availabe at: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Peatukk-2020-2021.pdf>]

4. Care

4.1. Prevention measures and services

4.1.1. Please provide information on the interaction between the child protection system and the social welfare and social protection system in place. Is there an inherent coordination of measures and interventions? Are responsible authorities and service providers the same or different?

In Estonia, the organization of social protection falls under the competence of the state and local governments. The organization of national social protection in Estonia is under the competence of the Ministry of Social Affairs, which has various departments. The main task of the Department of Family Welfare and Safe Relationships is to promote the rights of the child and to plan and coordinate child and family policies and measures to support victims of violence. The department plays a leading role in shaping the services and benefits supporting the well-being of children and families, as well as the child protection and victim assistance system¹²⁷. The organization of social protection at the local government level is regulated by the Social Welfare Act¹²⁸, according to which the local government unit is tasked with organizing the provision of social services, unavoidable social assistance and other assistance, and the determination and payment of social benefits.

Child protection in Estonia is organised by the Government of the Republic, prevention council, Ministry of Social Affairs, Social Insurance Board and local authorities based on the functions provided for in Child Protection Act (CPA, 2014).¹²⁹

- The function of the Government of the Republic upon the organisation of child protection is the development and approval of relevant draft legislation and national strategies and ensuring sustainable financing (CPA 2014, §12).
- The prevention council (entered into force 16.08.2022) is a government committee, the functions of which is development of child protection policy and establishment of the strategic objectives of child protection, the prevention council also has to review the recommendations to the state submitted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and to co-ordinate the activities related therewith (CPA 2014, §13).
- The functions of the Ministry of Social Affairs is to develop the child protection policy and to coordinate the implementation thereof, to submit reports to the Government of the Republic

¹²⁷ Estonia, Statute of the Ministry of Social Affairs (Sotsiaalministeeriumi Põhimäärus). Ministry of Social Affairs. [RT I, 25.03.2014, 9](#) § 17 (4). [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/106092022004?leiaKehtiv>]

¹²⁸ Estonia, Social Welfare Act (Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus). [RT I 1995, 21, 323](#) [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/118042013008?leiaKehtiv>]

¹²⁹ Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitse seadus*). Ministry of Social Affairs. RT I, 06.12.2014, 1, §11 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/510042023004/consolide/current>]

concerning the situation of children and families, to participate in the formation of international child protection policy and cooperation, to organise the performance of child protection studies and analyses and to plan and develop child protection measures, to develop instructions, implementing guidelines and other informative materials for the protection of children's rights and ensuring children's well-being and notification of the public thereof, and to organise the further training of child protection officials (CPA 2014, § 14).

- The Social Insurance Board, as an implementation unit of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the central coordinating body for child protection, performs various tasks in the field of social protection and carries out national supervision, the implementation of national child protection policy strategies and corresponding measures, coordinates cross-disciplinary child protection in prevention and cooperation, and organizes domestic and international adoption. (CPA 2014, §15). Social Insurance Board (state) also develops services for particularly troubled target groups, for example services for young offenders¹³⁰. Since 2016 the Social Insurance Boards Child Protection Department has units in each of the four 14 regions of Estonia.
- The functions of a local government upon the organisation of child protection are: to follow the principles ensuring the rights and well-being of children in the local government development plan, to develop programmes and projects ensuring the rights and well-being of children and the application thereof in its administrative territory to prevent and decrease the risks that endanger children, upon becoming aware of a child in need of assistance, to immediately assess the child's need for assistance and to provide measures for assisting the child, to provide measures to a child separated from family and to his or her family, to organise supervisory control over the internal evaluation of child care institutions administered by the local government, to collect necessary information concerning the situation and needs of children and families in order to create an environment supporting the child's development and to improve the coping of children, families with children and persons raising children in its administrative territory (CPA 2014, § 17).

Thus, responsible authorities are different. The first three (Government of the Republic, Prevention council, Ministry of Social Affairs) are mainly responsible for policy making and developing regulations in the child protection field, Ministry of Social Affairs is also responsible for coordinating the field. The Act strictly lay out the role of each of the mentioned actors.

¹³⁰ Linno, M. & Strömpl, J. (2023). Child Protection Systems in Estonia and Latvia. In: Jill D. Berrick, Neil Gilbert, & Marit Skivenes (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Child Protection Systems*. (444–467). Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197503546.013.15.

The Child Protection Act, which entered into force in 2016, imposed broader obligations on local governments in the field of child protection than before.¹³¹ The Social Insurance Board helps implement the child protection policy and coordinate cooperation and prevention in the field of child protection. The Act strictly lay out the role of local government and Social Insurance Board in the field of child protection.

According to para. 8, Section 2 of the Child Protection Act, in order to ensure the rights and well-being of the child, the authorities of state and local government units and their officials, as well as public and private legal entities, must cooperate with each other across fields in the planning, financing and implementation of all measures aimed at children, involving children, parents, persons raising children, interest groups and the public. Thus, the law emphasizes the importance of cross-disciplinary child protection work. Coordinating cross-disciplinary child protection cooperation and prevention is also one of the tasks of the Social Insurance Board¹³².

A number of specialists are involved in child protection work: several ministries and state institutions are involved in the development and practical side of the field, as well as several non-profit organizations, educational, welfare and health institutions. However, most of the work and responsibility rests with the local governments, which have a direct obligation to help the people living in their administrative territory.¹³³

NGO Estonian Union of Child Welfare (*Lastekaitseliit*)¹³⁴ is an organization that acts in the public interest; which was re-established in 1988, and whose goals are also to protect the rights and interests of the child on the basis of the statute, to develop child protection activities, to participate in the development and implementation of child and family policy. This NGO is not mentioned in the Child Protection Act. However, as this is most renowned child rights NGO in Estonia, who actively participates in law-making (for example, in the sessions of the Social Committee of the Parliament of Estonia) and also actively presents opinions in society on the topics and discussions of children's rights

¹³¹ Viira, A. (2017). Increasing the effectiveness of child protection work at the local level and sustainable development (*Kohaliku tasandi lastekaitsetöö tulemuslikkuse suurendamine ja jätkusuutlik arendamine*). Ministry of Social Affairs. [Available at https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Ministeerium_kontaktid/Uuringu_ja_analuusid/Sotsiaalvaldkond/kohaliku_tasandi_lastekaitsetoo_tulemuslikkuse_s_uurendamine_ja_jatkusuutlik_arendamine.pdf]

¹³² Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitseadus*). Ministry of Social Affairs. RT I, 06.12.2014, 1 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/510042023004/consolide/current>]

¹³³ Viira, A. (2017). Increasing the effectiveness of child protection work at the local level and sustainable development (*Kohaliku tasandi lastekaitsetöö tulemuslikkuse suurendamine ja jätkusuutlik arendamine*). Ministry of Social Affairs. [Available at https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Ministeerium_kontaktid/Uuringu_ja_analuusid/Sotsiaalvaldkond/kohaliku_tasandi_lastekaitsetoo_tulemuslikkuse_s_uurendamine_ja_jatkusuutlik_arendamine.pdf]

¹³⁴ Available at: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/en/>

and well-being (the advocacy role), then that's why it is important to highlight this NGO in this context.

4.1.2. Is there evidence that families are supported in their role of primary caregivers? Is the primary position of families in child caregiving and protection recognised and supported through universal and targeted services and through every stage of the intervention, particularly through prevention? Which type of support (incl. financial, medical, psycho/social advice, legal advice, care staff, care equipment, guidance and training etc.) is available to families in need.

Development Plan for Children and Families 2012-2020¹³⁵ set as one of its strategic goals that Estonia is a country that supports positive parenting, where necessary support is offered in raising children and being parents in order to improve children's well-being and future prospects. The results of the research¹³⁶ show that parents are often alone with their concerns about raising a child, because they do not know where to go for advice and help or do not dare to do it. Based on the survey, the main burden of raising a child in Estonia continues to be on mothers, and often young women need help and support in raising a child.

In Estonia, **Children and Families program 2022-2025** (*Laste ja perede programm 2022-2025*) has approved, which is follow up plan to earliest Development Plan for Children and Families 2012-2020. The preface of the program states that the program focuses on children and the availability, quality and adequacy of measures that increase the well-being of families. The planned activities are necessary to ensure children's rights and well-being, to support the daily livelihood of families and to create prerequisites for the sustainable development of society and for the population to last. **The purpose of the Children and Families program** is to increase the well-being of children and families and to improve the quality of life, thereby encouraging the birth of children.

From 2023, the Children and Families programme is incorporated in the new Estonian Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030, which focuses on five strategic objectives: well-being of children and families is one of strategic goal (the other strategic goals are - labour market, well-being of the elderly, social protection, and gender equality and equal treatment policies). In this context, it is significant to point out that ESF money will be used to help invest in prevention (also to reform the child protection system and develop services for children with complex needs)¹³⁷. For the period 2021-2027, 3.37 billion euros of EU cohesion policy subsidies will be allocated to Estonia. One of the areas of support is More Social Estonia (*Sotsiaalsem Eesti*) of 682 mln € support money, of which, in turn,

¹³⁵ Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (2011). Development Plan for Children and Families 2012-2020 (*Laste ja perede arengukava 2012-2020*). Tallinn. [Available at: www.sm.ee/fileadmin/meedia/Dokumendid/Sotsiaalvaldkond/lapsed/Strategy_of_Children_and_Families_2012-2020.pdf].

¹³⁶ Estonia, Praxis (2018). Child Rights and Parenting Survey (*Laste õiguste ja vanemluse uuring*). Tallinn. [Available at: <https://www.praxis.ee/tood/lapse-oigused-ja-vanemlus-2018/>]

¹³⁷ Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs, e-mail correspondence with Ms Liisa-Lotta Raag, Head of Department of family Wellbeing and Safe Relationships, 14 March 2023

73 million is planned for children and families well-being.¹³⁸ One of the sub-support measures is the development and creation of family-oriented services in local governments, with total budget of 2 mln € (including 30% is State funding). Although strategic directions have increasingly been taken to develop services and support families, Estonian researchers (Linno & Strömpl, 2023) point out: typical to the Estonian child protection system, there has been a lack of preventative services—such that service provision only starts when the problems of the family are already noticed¹³⁹. In child in need and family assessment processes, a deficit-based approach (i.e. parents are viewed as lacking capabilities) dominates¹⁴⁰ regardless of the clear aim stated by law to enhance the capability of parents in their role as carer.

As a universal (comprehensive) prevention, the "Smart Parent" website¹⁴¹ has been developed to support parenting; the website offers knowledge and recommendations on different topics regarding children's well-being and parenting, as well as short video trainings. During recent years, efforts have been made to introduce programs financed by the state to support parents. *The Incredible Years* parenting program has been adapted from 2014. In cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Health Development Institute, a basic program for parents of children aged 2-8 years (Preschool Basic) and a follow-up program aimed at parents of children aged 3-12 years (Advanced) have been brought to Estonia. Training is funded by State, and is available to parents in every region of Estonia. Short videos explaining the content and purpose of the training are available on website¹⁴².

The main goal of the program is to help parents develop effective parenting coping strategies in order to increase children's social competence, including the ability to solve problems, communicate with peers, and assert themselves. The website has information for parents: parents are encouraged to ask the child protection worker in their area about training near home.

¹³⁸ See: <https://www.rtk.ee/toetusfondid-ja-programmid/euroopa-liidu-valisvahendid/2021-2027-toetusperiood>

¹³⁹ Linno, M. & Strömpl, J. (2023). Child Protection Systems in Estonia and Latvia. In: Jill D. Berrick, Neil Gilbert, & Marit Skivenes (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Child Protection Systems*. (444–467). Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197503546.013.15.

¹⁴⁰ Toros, K., DiNitto, D. and Tiko, A. (2018). Family engagement in the child welfare system: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 88: 598 – 607 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.03.011>. Toros, K. and LaSala, M. (2018). Estonian child protection workers' assessment perspectives: The need for competence and confidence. *International Social Work*, 61(1): 93–105. 10.1177/0020872815603788.

¹⁴¹ <https://tarkvanem.ee/>

¹⁴² See: <https://tarkvanem.ee/koolitused/imelised-aastad/>

According to an survey conducted by the Health Development Institute in 2021, the program reaches its aims as changes in parent behaviour occurring.¹⁴³ More specifically: in 2020, 114 basic program training groups were conducted in 55 local governments and 3 children's mental health centers. 1585 parents started the training and 1184 parents completed the 4-month process, or 75%. However, 25% of those who started dropped out or did not attend enough to finish. In 2019, there were 83% of graduates and in 2018, 81%, i.e. a higher proportion than in 2020. At the end of the training, parents' parental competence increased, difficulties related to various aspects of children's behaviour decreased, and prosociality, i.e. willingness to help and care, increased.

Multidimensional family therapy (MDFT, funded by the state) has been offered since 2015 for children/young people and families with multiple problems. The Social Insurance Board's website emphasise¹⁴⁴: The MDFT is aimed at changing the behaviour of young people aged 11-18 with serious risk behaviour and diverting them away from problems in cooperation with the young person's relatives. A child/youth can be referred to family therapy by the local government (in addition, the police, prosecutor's office, court, probation officer can be referred). In order to make a program referral, the actor named above must contact their regional supervisor to assess the suitability of the program for the youth and family. One evaluation of implementation (made by Center for policy studies Praxis, 2017) have found it to be helpful and useful, with school truancy and delinquency diminishing¹⁴⁵

4.1.3. When a child in need of care is identified, who coordinates support to the family and the child to ensure protection and prevent abuse and/ or placement of the child and how?

In Estonia, the child's right to family is a core principle in child protection work and parents have the main responsibility in ensuring the child's well-being. When a child in need of care is identified, the main responsibility according to Child Protection Act, for providing support rests on local government¹⁴⁶. However, due to disparities in human resources and financial capacity between municipalities, the availability, quality, and diversity of social services and family support measures differ greatly between municipalities¹⁴⁷ If the child protection worker has received information about

¹⁴³ Trummal, A. (2021). The 2020 results of "The Incrediblae Years" parenting program (*Vanemlusprogrammi „Imelised aastad“ 2020. aasta tulemused*). Tallinn: Tervise Arengu Instituut. (Available at: <https://tai.ee/sites/default/files/2021-06/Vanemlusprogrammi%20raport%202020.pdf>).

¹⁴⁴ See: <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/spetsialistile-ja-koostoopartnerile/laste-ja-peredega-tootavale-spetsialistile/mitmedimensiooniline>

¹⁴⁵ Aaben, L., Tammik, M. and Kallavus, K. (2017). Mitmedimensioonilise pereteraapia tõhususe uuring [The efficacy of multidimensional family therapy]. Poliitikauuringute keskus [Center for policy studies] Praxis

¹⁴⁶ Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitseadus*). Ministry of Social Affairs. RT I, 06.12.2014, 1 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/510042023004/consolide/current>]

¹⁴⁷ Viira, A. (2017). Increasing the effectiveness of child protection work at the local level and sustainable development (*Kohaliku tasandi lastekaitsetöö tulemuslikkuse suurendamine ja jätkusuutlik arendamine*). Ministry of Social Affairs. [Available at <https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content->

a child in need of help, the child protection worker must make an initial assessment within 10 days. Therefore, as soon as there is information, an initial assessment of the child's need for help must be made. When assessing the child's need for help, the child protection worker can involve relevant specialists in the network. These are professionals whose task or professional obligation is to ensure the rights and well-being of the child and who, in their work or profession, come into direct contact with the child affected (e.g. specialists and service providers in the fields of education, healthcare and law enforcement).

4.1.4. What are the crisis emergency responses in place?

According to para. 32 of Child Protection Act, a child in danger / crisis must be assisted immediately and the situation that endangered the child's life or health must be eliminated. If necessary, a child in danger/crises can be transported to safe conditions until the danger has passed, without asking for the consent of the person exercising the right of custody of the child. A child in danger/crises can be placed in to shelter (social care institution) or to crises-care family. A crisis care family offers a child temporarily separated from the family or in a crisis situation a safe opportunity to stay in a family environment until the child's future long-term living arrangement is determined. The child stays in the crisis care family from a few days to three months (longer if necessary), and the family must be ready to receive the child with two hours' notice. In 2022, children stayed in crisis care families 12 times, from five days to exceptionally five months. Single children as well as two or three children of one family were placed in crisis care families at the same time. The youngest child who needed urgent help from a crisis family last year was 1 year old and oldest child was 15.¹⁴⁸

As a result of new Victim Support Act psychosocial support in an event of crisis is provided 24/7 since 2023. So far one third of the cases in half year of 2023 have been crises events with child victims (suicide, fatal accidents, traffic accidents, drowning deaths etc).

4.2. Identification and reporting procedures

Question	Yes	No	Comments
4.2.1. Is there an identification/reporting obligation	X		According to para. 26-27, Section 6 of Child Protection Act, all persons who have information about a child in need have an obligation to report.

[editors/Ministeerium kontaktid/Uuringu ja analuusid/Sotsiaalvaldkond/kohaliku tasandi lastekaitsetoo tulemuslikkuse s uurendamine ja jatkusuutlik arendamine.pdf](#)]

¹⁴⁸ See: <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/uudised/kriisihoidusperesid-eestis-praegu-kokku-kuus-aga-vajadus-suurem>

<p>foreseen in the legislation?</p> <p>If <u>yes</u>, please provide the relevant provisions and indicate authorities and/or individuals that have identification/reporting obligations.</p>		<p>A child in need of help must be reported immediately to the local government unit or to the child helpline 116 111.</p> <p>According to para. 31, Section 7 of the Child Protection Act, all persons who have information about a child in danger have the obligation to report a child in danger. A child in danger must be reported immediately to the emergency number 112.</p>
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4.2.2. Please describe available national and/or sub-national reporting procedures for cases of abuse, exploitation, violence, harassment, discrimination, or neglect against children in all available reporting mechanisms, including, helplines and hotlines. Include the legislative and regulatory framework, actors involved (e.g. police, child protection centres, victims support organisations), and timeframe.

Please provide details such as if there a common or different procedures or helplines/hotlines for specific issues. What is the profession of the staff receiving the reporting? Is the staff competent and trained for the purpose?

In cooperation with the Children's Ombudsman and the Data Protection Inspectorate, the guide *Reporting a child in need and data protection* has been issued¹⁴⁹. The guide provides an overview of in which cases, to whom, which information, and using which channels can be communicated about a child in need without the consent of the child and/or his/her legal representative (parent or guardian) and which legal provisions to rely on. Available reporting mechanisms are: the call to local municipality and/ or to children's helpline at the number 116 111 (if there is child in need), and the police at the number 112 (if there is child in danger/crisis).

It is explained in the guide *Reporting a child in need and data protection* that:

- the child protection worker of municipality is the central and responsible specialist of the network surrounding the child and the main aggregator of information about the child's need for help and organizer of help (the legal basis is Child Protection Act, 2014).
- The children's helpline 116 111 works around the clock. To the phone corresponding child protection workers who receive reports of children in need of help and advise applicants (the legal basis is the Child Protection Act, 2014). If the specialist of helpline has received the notice about the child in need, she/he must forward this notice immediately to the local government of the residence of the child. The law also stipulates that the child protection official or in special cases other responsible person, must decide within 10 days after receiving the notice about the child in need,

¹⁴⁹ Estonia, Reporting a child in need and data protection (*Abivajavast lapsest teatamine ja andmekaitse*). Tallinn: Laste Ombudsman ja Andmekaitse Inspeksioon. [Available at: <https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/sites/default/files/JUHEND%20-%20abivajavast%20lapsest%20teatamine%20ja%20andmekaitse%20%28jaanuar%202021%29.pdf>]

to initiate the case or not or on passing the case to other relevant authorities. The decision not to open the case can be made only in the situation where the needs of the child can be resolved with the single interference.¹⁵⁰

In certain cases, it is necessary to contact the police in the first instance, especially in cases of great danger and violations of the law. Child protection units have been formed in the crime bureaus of the North, South and East prefectures of the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board. In Western bureau, crimes against children are processed by investigators from police stations. Each prefecture has youth police officers, who primarily deal with prevention activities aimed at children and solving problems (The legal basis is Police and Border Guard Act, 2009). When the circumstances of the crime appear, the police and the prosecutor's office is obliged to carry out criminal proceedings. The Prosecutor's Office manages the pre-trial proceedings, ensuring its legality and effectiveness, and represents the state prosecution in court. (The legal basis is Criminal Procedure Code, 2003).

As a result of new Victim Support Act changes were made in Child Welfare act as well that if local government becomes aware of a child who is being raised in a family of high risk domestic violence the local government unit must initiate a case management to provide assistance to the child and cooperate with the Social Insurance Board and other agencies assisting the adult victim (paragraph 29, 31

Question	Yes	No	Comments
<p>4.2.3. Do children have the right to report independently?</p> <p>If <u>yes</u>, please provide information on the availability of <u>age-appropriate and child-friendly</u> reporting procedures (to whom and how children can report child rights' violations and abuse). Is the anonymity and confidentiality of the child in the reporting protected? Please comment briefly.</p>	X		<p>Para. 19(1) of the Law on the Chancellor of Justice¹⁵¹ states: Everyone has the right to turn to the Chancellor of Justice for the protection of their rights with a request to check whether a state institution, a local government institution or body, a public legal person or a natural or private legal person performing public duties (hereinafter the supervised institution) complies with fundamental rights and - the principle of guaranteeing freedoms and the practice of good administration.</p> <p>The Children's Ombudsman's website contains information (child-friendly version) about the role and tasks of Children's Ombudsman, as well as information about who can contact the Children's Ombudsman and on what topic the</p>

¹⁵⁰ Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitseadus*). Ministry of Social Affairs. RT I, 06.12.2014, 1 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/510042023004/consolide/current>]

¹⁵¹ Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/126052020011?leiaKehtiv>

		<p>application/complaint can be submitted about. It has also been explained that an application/complaint can be submitted to the Children's Ombudsman in several different ways (as an e-mail, to a postal address). Therefore, on the website, children are informed about this right.¹⁵²</p> <p>Senior adviser of the Chancellor of Justice (Children`s Ombudsman) stated that: Complaints may be filed by children themselves or on behalf of children, by any mean and in free format. In 2021, there were 258 complaints concerning rights of the child, mainly from parents. In 2017-2021, 34 complaints were filed by children. Complaints are mainly written in Estonian but also in Russian and in English. In addition, the Chancellor`s advisers talk directly with children (in Estonian, in Russian and in English, if needed) whenever paying an inspection visit to a children`s institution in order to discuss their lives and concerns.¹⁵³ According to Senior adviser of the Chancellor of Justice (Children`s Ombudsman), the age of children is not directly asked when filing complaints, but most complaints are from teenagers.¹⁵⁴</p> <p>Thus, children can draw the attention of the Chancellor of Justice (Children`s Ombudsman) to the problems concerning children in Estonia.</p> <p>Para. 27, section 6 of Child Protection Act¹⁵⁵ allows children to report independently. The Act states: All persons who have information about a child in</p>
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¹⁵² See: <https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/sites/default/files/Lasteombudsmani%20tutvustav%20voldik%202015.pdf>

¹⁵³ Estonia, Chancellery of the Chancellor of Justice, E-mail correspondence with Margit Sarv (senior adviser of the Chancellor of Justice /Children`s Ombudsman), 11 April, 2023

¹⁵⁴ Estonia, Chancellery of the Chancellor of Justice, E-mail correspondence with Margit Sarv (senior adviser of the Chancellor of Justice /Children`s Ombudsman), 17 May, 2023

¹⁵⁵ Estonia, Child Protection Act (Lastekaitseseadus). RT I, 06.12.2014, 1 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/510042023004/consolide/current>]

		<p>need have an obligation to report a child in need. This means that if the child her-/himself has information about a child in need, than child has the right to inform. According to the law, a child in need of help must be reported immediately to the local government unit or to the child helpline 116 111. The anonymity and confidentiality of the child in the reporting protected.</p> <p>The age-appropriate and child-friendly reporting procedures (to whom and how children can report child rights' violations and abuse) is introduced on website of Chancellor of Justice (Children`s Ombudsman).¹⁵⁶</p> <p>In addition, on 01.03. 2022, the online chat environment https://sova.ee started working on the initiative of SOS Children`s Village Estonia (SOS Lasteküla). Its purpose is to offer all Estonian children the opportunity to talk about their concerns with a reliable and trained person, get advice if necessary and sometimes just be a good and friendly listener. The chat environment is intended for children aged 7-15, and child can discuss her/his concerns/problems anonymously. The chat is in Estonian and child can chat every day between 14:00 and 22:00. The team has over a hundred members aged 19-47 so that every child in need can quickly receive the necessary support and be heard. Most of them are people with a degree in psychology, social work or pedagogy¹⁵⁷.</p> <p>In addition to the above, already in June 2011, the Police and Border Guard Board has established an online constable service – online police officers (veebikonstaabel) working on the Internet There are three web police officers (veebikonstaabel)¹⁵⁸ operating in social media networks. They respond to online reports, complaints and letters and educate children and adults about internet safety.</p>
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¹⁵⁶ Available at: <https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/sites/default/files/Lasteombudsmani%20tutvustav%20voldik%202015.pdf>

¹⁵⁷ <https://perejakodu.delfi.ee/artikkel/96071603/sos-lastekula-avas-spetsiaalselt-lastele-moeldud-veebichati>

¹⁵⁸ Estonia, Police and Border Guard. Web-constables (*Veebikonstaablid*). [Available at: <https://abiksohvri.ee/abi/veebikonstaablid>]

		<p>Therefore, the main goal of web police officers is to give advice, they do not prosecute complaints or crimes themselves.</p> <p>The web police officers receive questions mainly regarding traffic but also cases concern of bullying or child sexual abuse. The officers are available via different channels (Facebook, Twitter) that are used by children, young people and adults. The police advise children of Facebook users to add the web police officer to their friends list.</p>
<p>4.2.4. Are children informed of their right to report and how they can do it? If yes, by whom and how?</p>		<p>Yes and no. In general, children are informed about their right to report and how they can do it (see information in 4.2.3). However, there are no special measures or project that would promote children's awareness about the right to report. Children Ombudsman's website http://lasteombudsman.ee/ is designed in child friendly manner and the child helpline 116 111 is also supported by the website https://www.lasteabi.ee/</p> <p>Children's rights topics (including UN CRC) are introduced and discussed in schools rather randomly (not systematically), there are no uniform requirements (for example, in the curriculum) for addressing children's rights topics</p>
<p>4.2.5. What are the main challenges and/or gaps relating to identification and reporting procedures underlined by relevant authorities and/or child protection civil society organisations?</p>		
<p>In Estonia, the guidelines on website are available about <i>Reporting a child in need and data protection</i> since 2011 ¹⁵⁹, which provide clear regulation about reporting child in need and child in danger (crisis).</p> <p>It is emphasised in guidelines that both adults and children can call and write to the children's helpline 116111, if they wish they can remain anonymous.</p> <p>The Social Insurance Board have pointed out that It doesn't matter if the child lives in a foster family or a biological family, in a family or foster home, at home, in an educational institution, on the street or elsewhere - we have to notice what is happening around us, we have to react when a person is in</p>		

¹⁵⁹ Estonia, Reporting a child in need and data protection (*Abivajavast lapsest teatamine ja andmekaitse*). Tallinn: Laste Ombudsman ja Andmekaitse Inspektsioon. [Available at: <https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/sites/default/files/JUHEND%20-%20abivajavast%20lapsest%20teatamine%20ja%20andmekaitse%20%28jaanuar%202021%29.pdf>]

trouble.¹⁶⁰ Thus, everyone's duty to inform about a child in need is pointed out and such a way of thinking is cultivated in society.

However, there are shortcomings in the mechanism following the notification, which must ensure the analysis of the information and, if necessary, the planning of interventions. **Child protection workers have pointed to the problem of lack of clear criterias and regulations on how to proceed in cases of child in danger (crises)**¹⁶¹ - if certain criteria (such as child suicidality, physical and sexual abuse of a child, neglect of a child and deep need for help in all areas of life) are met, the case should be treated as a case of a child in danger and intervene as soon as possible. The lack of clear instructions lead to the situation where child protection workers presented different reporting mechanisms in cases of child in danger. In addition, in the opinion of child protection workers, it is healthcare specialists and education workers who should inform child protection more about children in need or children in danger. Therefore, in the recent analysis of child protection work, a proposal has been made to describe the tasks of the network in the law - the obligation to inform, the obligation to participate in network work and the obligation to share information.

4.3. Referral procedures(s) and investigation and protection

4.3.1. Please describe the referral mechanisms in place following reporting and identification procedures.

In the answer please include the legislative and regulatory framework, interagency protocols and guidelines, the actors involved and their role and responsibilities, as well as the applicable timeline. Please also specify the procedure, if different, for other groups of children (e.g. with disabilities, migrant, victim of a particular form of violence etc.)

At the local level, the child protection worker is the first point of contact for children in need for help. There is no strict procedure on how the child protection worker takes contact with a child. Contact and communication with the child can be different, depending on where and from whom the information about the child in need of help has come. A child protection worker can meet the child for an initial interview at school or make a home visit or invite the child to the child protection office

¹⁶⁰ Estonia, Social Insurance Board (2020). Reporting a child in need is everyone's responsibility! (*Abivajavast lapsest teatamine on igaihe kohustus!*). [Available at: <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/uudised/abivajavast-lapsest-teatamine-igauhe-kohustus>]

¹⁶¹ Estonia, Analysis of today's child protection, case management and data protection and e-services (Tänapäevase lastekaitse, juhtumikorralduse ja andmekaitse ja e-teenuste analüüs, Tallinn: Civitta. 2022. [Available at: <https://civitta.ee/articles/lastekaitsetoo-kaasajastamine>

According to para. 28-29, Section 6 of Child Protection Act¹⁶², before applying a suitable measure to a child in need, the child's need for help must be assessed. Thus, the child protection worker first identifies the needs of a child in question – risk factors, situations or events that affect child wellbeing and development and how to react to them. Identification of child's needs is the first step in the referral procedures, investigation and protection. According to Child Protection Act, when assessing a child's need for help, a child protection worker (or a person working with a child) must assess: 1) the child's physical, health, psychological, emotional, social, cognitive, educational and economic condition; 2) the parenting skills of the person raising the child. Also, a child protection worker or a person working with a child must include the child and the person raising the child or the child care institution where the child lives in the assessment of the child's need for help.

The law also stipulates that the child protection official (or in special cases other responsible person), must decide within 10 days after receiving the notice about the child in need, to initiate the case or not or on passing the case to other relevant authorities. The decision not to open the case can be made only in the situation where the needs of the child can be resolved with the single interference (measure). Thus, if during the initial identification and assessment it is determined that it is not possible to help a child in need with one measure, work must be continued based on the principle of case management.

The *Child welfare assessment manual* (2017)¹⁶³ has been issued by Social Insurance Board to support child protection workers in the tasks assessment of child's need for help and well-being. The manual point out that case management is essential in ensuring that children's needs are identified, their needs are correctly assessed and that they receive cross-sectoral support, until there has been a positive outcome for that child and/or family. Also Child Protection act stipulates that networking shall be applied upon the provision of assistance, following the principles of case management.

In Estonia, there is no clear and agreed national definition of what referral mechanisms means and common understanding of how it function. However, the law¹⁶⁴ also stipulates that provision of assistance for a child in need of assistance means the application of measures supporting the child's well-being in a manner which improves the relations between the child and the person raising the child. Thus, the child's (close) relationships must put at the centre in context of referral procedures, investigation and case management.

According to para. 33, Section 7 of Child Protection Act, the local government unit or the Social Insurance Board can separate the child from the family and, if necessary, determine the communication procedure between the child and the parent before a court order restricting the right of custody, if leaving the child in the family or communication between the parent and the child

¹⁶² Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitseadus*). Ministry of Social Affairs. RT I, 06.12.2014, 1 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/510042023004/consolide/current>]

¹⁶³ This manual is based on child and family assessment tool from Sweden (BBIC system), which actually originated from the UK Common Assessment Framework. [Available at: https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Lastekaitse/Noustamisteenused/lapse_haolu_hindamise_kasiraamat.pdf]

¹⁶⁴ Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitseadus*). Ministry of Social Affairs. RT I, 06.12.2014, 1, §29 (1) [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/510042023004/consolide/current>]

endangers the child's health or life. The Law also stipulates that if a child in danger/crisis is separated from the family, her/his place of stay and, if necessary, the communication procedure between the child and the parent will be determined for up to 72 hours from the time the child is separated from the family. At the same time, within 72 hours, the local government unit or the Social Insurance Board must assess the child's situation and need for help and apply to the court to limit the right of custody and, if necessary, the right of communication on the grounds provided in the Family Act.

According to the Social Welfare Act § 29² the rural municipality or city government of the residence of the child or, in the case of minor victims of human trafficking, unaccompanied minors or sexually abused minors the Social Insurance Board (*Sotsiaalkindlustusamet*) shall prepare a case plan for each child who is separated from the family.¹⁶⁵ A case plan is a written document consisting of an evaluation to a person's need for assistance and the activity plan for resolving his or her problems. According to Child Protection Act § 29⁵ when assessing the well-being of a child in need and providing help, the local government unit must find out and document the child's opinion and add it to the mandatory case plan.

Question	Yes	No	Comments
4.3.2. Are there applicable standards in the form of legal provisions, guidelines, protocols, interagency agreements or regulatory frameworks regarding investigation and assessment procedures following reporting and identification procedures?	X		<p>Please see section 4.3.1 above.</p> <p>More specifically, according to the Social Welfare Act (<i>Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus</i>) § 29¹ and 29² the local government has to develop a case plan (<i>juhtumiplaan</i>) in situation when the child will be placed to substitute home or foster care.</p> <p>A case plan is a written document consisting of an evaluation to a person's need for assistance and the activity plan for resolving his or her problems. A case plan is informative and should be reviewed at least once a year. The standard format of the case plan has been established by a regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs¹⁶⁶.</p> <p>The case plan consists of the assessment of the following parts: data and information about the person; assessment of the situation of the person (including previous assessments, if any); activity plan that includes problems, resources, obstacles, objectives, activities, timeframe and responsible</p>

¹⁶⁵ Estonia, Social Welfare Act (*Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus*), RT I 1995, 21, 323, § 29², [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/514012014004/consolide>].

¹⁶⁶ Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (2008). 'Juhtumiplaani vormi kehtestamine' (*Regulating the case plan form*). Adopted on 06.05.2008 No 24 [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/12960327>].

		<p>actors. The case plan also includes separate sections for interim assessment and final assessment¹⁶⁷.</p> <p>Since 2016 (when Child Protection Act came into force), info about children in need who have reached the local government's point of view and the procedural actions of local governments (including children's case plans) must be reflected in the central national electronic database (STAR). Thus, documenting the cases has moved from a paper to an electronic environment.</p>
4.3.3. Is the assessment carried out by a multidisciplinary team of professionals?	X	<p>As stated above, in process of assessment, the child protection workers are required to cooperate with the family members, other persons, professionals and authorities concerned – the network must be implemented, following the principles of case management¹⁶⁸. However, there are no regulatory mechanisms that regulate such cooperation among different professionals in network.</p>

4.3.4. Please provide information on who is responsible to investigate and assess the situation of the child and the family and how this is done. Please provide information and describe the role and responsibilities of judicial authorities in the reporting and referral procedure.

The child protection worker of the local government is responsible to investigate and assess the well-being and situation of the child in need and the family. This is done based on the case plan template (see sections 4.3.1. and 4.3.2 above).

As stated above (section 4.3.1), when assessing a child's need for help, a child protection worker or a person working with a child must assess: 1) the child's physical, health, psychological, emotional, social, cognitive, educational and economic condition; 2) the parenting skills of the person raising the child. Also, a child protection worker or a person working with a child must include the child and the person raising the child or the child care institution where the child lives in the assessment of the child's need for help. The Law also stipulates that providing help to a child in need is the application

¹⁶⁷ Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (2008). ' Juhtumiplaani vormi kehtestamine' (*Regulating the case plan form*). Adopted on 06.05.2008 No 24 [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/12960327>].

¹⁶⁸ Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitse seadus*). RT I, 06.12.2014, 1) [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/510042023004/consolide/current>]

of a measure that supports the child's well-being in a way that improves the relationship between the child and the person raising the child¹⁶⁹.

According to para. 33, Section 7 of Child Protection Act, the local government unit or the Social Insurance Board have right to separate the child from the family and, if necessary, determine the communication procedure between the child and the parent before a court order restricting the right of custody, if leaving the child in the family or communication between the parent and the child endangers the child's health or life. The Law also stipulates that if a child in danger/crisis is separated from the family, her/his place of stay and, if necessary, the communication procedure between the child and the parent will be determined for up to 72 hours from the time the child is separated from the family. At the same time, within 72 hours, the local government unit or the Social Insurance Board must assess the child's situation and need for help and apply to the court to limit the right of custody and, if necessary, the right of communication on the grounds provided in the Family Act¹⁷⁰. Thus, the legislation describes roles, responsibilities and timeframe to actions.

Court may separate a child from the parents only if damage to the interests of the child cannot be prevented by other supporting measures applied in the relationship between the parents and the child. Upon hearing a matter concerning substantial restriction or deprivation of the right of custody over person in full, a court shall include a rural municipality or city government in the proceedings for the purpose of hearing its opinion.¹⁷¹

In case of unaccompanied minor and the minor victim of human trafficking, a Social Insurance Board (*Sotsiaalkindlustusamet*) is responsible to provide the substitute care services during his/her stay in Estonia (The Law on Obligation to Leave and Prohibition of Entry, 1998 § 12 lg9) .¹⁷² The Social Insurance Board is also responsible for assessing and organizing international child protection cases; the European Union Council Regulation 2019/1111¹⁷³ provides a framework for cross-border cooperation in matters dealing with parental responsibility. In cases of child abduction (or if there is doubt about child abduction), the Ministry of Justice handles the case proceedings, based on Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitseseadus*). RT I, 06.12.2014, 1) [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/510042023004/consolide/current>]

¹⁷⁰ Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitseseadus*). Ministry of Social Affairs. RT I, 06.12.2014, 1 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/110112022007?leiaKehtiv>]

¹⁷¹ Estonia, Family Law Act (*Perekonnaseadus*), RT I 2009, 60, 396, § 135 (1), (2), (3) [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/530102013016/consolide>]

¹⁷² Estonia, The Law on Obligation to Leave and Prohibition of Entry (*Väljasõidukohustuse ja sissesõidukeelu seadus*). RT I 1998, 98, 1575 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/106082022011?leiaKehtiv>]

¹⁷³ Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ET/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019R1111>

¹⁷⁴ Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (*Lapseröövi suhtes tsiviilõiguse kohaldamise rahvusvaheline konventsioon*), concluded at the Hague on 25 October 1980. RT II 2001, 6, 33). [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/78339>]

Question	Yes	No	Comments
4.3.5. Are the roles and responsibilities of the various actors and professionals involved in these procedures (including civil society organisations) clearly stated in the legislative and regulatory framework?	X		<p>The current legislation provide roles and responsibilities of the various actors and professionals involved in referral procedures and investigation.</p> <p>According to Child Protection Act para.17, Section 4, a child protection worker is an official (public servant) of the Social Insurance Board or a local government unit who fulfills the tasks provided for in Child Protection Act or other legislation in ensuring the rights and well-being of the child. The law specifies (§28 lg 1) that a child's need for help is assessed by a child protection worker or a person working with a child, but at the same time, the law does not specify who, for example, can be a person working with a child.</p> <p>The institution of Children Ombudsman was established on 19 March 2011¹⁷⁵, that has the following tasks: dealing with the complaints submitted by or on behalf of children; carrying out the investigations and preparing proposals in the field of children rights; monitoring child rights; carrying out the control visits to children institutions; teaching the rights of child including creating awareness about the UN Convention on the Rights of Child; carrying out training as well as awareness campaigns on the rights of child; carrying out research and analysis and establishing cooperation with children and youth organisations, civil society organisations and research and state institutions.</p>
4.3.6. Are there any inter-agency cooperation protocols and agreements in place to strengthen cooperation between actors with responsibility in the	X		The Social Insurance Board offers recommended guidelines and forms for organizing child protection work, including inter-agency

¹⁷⁵ Estonia, Amendment Act to the Chancellor of Justice Act (*Õiguskantsleri seaduse muutmise seaduse eelnõu*), 915 SE, adopted on 17 February 2011.

<p>referral procedure and enhance the efficiency of their actions?</p>		<p>cooperation protocols; these are available on the website¹⁷⁶.</p> <p>Nevertheless, recent research findings (2022)¹⁷⁷ conclude that the main bottlenecks in child protection work are deficiencies in case management work, including a lack of analytical approach to assessing the need for help, as well as a lack of common goals setting in inter-agency cooperation.</p> <p>In addition, in cases of closed children's institution service (and before the service), the inter-agency cooperation is weakly coordinated, cooperation is not consistent, grasping and coordinating the whole process is fragmented.¹⁷⁸</p> <p>According to Social Welfare Act § 130¹, the service of a closed children's institution (a child is sent to a closed children's institution by court order) offers temporary round-the-clock support and security to a child or young person whose behaviour seriously threatens their own or others' life, development and/or health, which is why their freedom must be restricted. The purpose of the service is to support the child's psychological, emotional, social, educational and cognitive development in order to achieve lasting changes that will enable him to cope successfully in a normal environment after the end of the restriction of freedom without behaving in a way that harms the life, health and development of himself or others¹⁷⁹.</p>
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¹⁷⁶ Available at: <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/spetsialistile-ja-koostoopartnerile/laste-ja-noortega-tootavale-spetsialistile/juhendid-ja-vormid>

¹⁷⁷ Estonia, Analysis of today's child protection, case management and data protection and e-services (Tänapäevase lastekaitse, juhtumikorralduse ja andmekaitse ja e-teenuste analüüs, Tallinn: Civitta. 2022. [Available at: <https://civitta.ee/articles/lastekaitsetoo-kaasajastamine>

¹⁷⁸ Saia, K., Liik, K., Schults, A., & Malmberg, J. (2022). Cooperation of child protection, education, social and law enforcement systems for the benefit of children in closed children's institutions: bottlenecks and solutions. Research report. (*Lastekaitse-, haridus, sotsiaal- ja õiguskaitseüsteemi koostöö kinnise lasteasutuse teenuse laste hüvanguks: kitsaskohad ja lahendused. Uuringuraport*). Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikool, CIRIC.

¹⁷⁹ <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/125102017001>

<p>4.3.7. Is it likely that procedures will differ, depending on the migration – residential status of the child concerned? <i>Please also consider potential divergences depending on main actors involved.</i></p>	<p>X</p>	<p>The research results have concluded that in a smaller community, where everyone knows everyone, networking and procedures are easier than in larger municipalities. Thus, in small communities due to the physical proximity and familiarity of actors involved the procedures are established based on the everyday practice. In larger municipalities, however, the cooperation is depending on specific circumstances of each case. The cooperation and procedures are sometimes complicated by the lack of knowledge of potentially important network members about child protection work.</p> <p>In addition, child protection workers from local governments with significant socioeconomic impact (these are larger local governments in the centers of the region, where there are greater job opportunities, services are developed, etc.) have been most exposed to international child protection cases, and child protection workers from the periphery of the region and small municipalities to a lesser extent.</p>
<p>4.3.8. Are affected children heard as part of the procedures?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, are the hearings child-sensitive and designed age-appropriately and in child-friendly language? Do children receive information and support by competent and trained professionals?</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), children have the right to voice their opinions and participate in decision-making in matters affecting their lives. In accordance with CRC Article 12, the Estonian Child Protection Act stresses that children should be able to express themselves freely in juridical and administrative proceedings, as appropriate depending on the age and maturity of the child (see more in section 4.4.3). Furthermore, professionals working with children have the responsibility to always make the best interests of the child the priority when contemplating decisions that have an impact on the child, including by ensuring that the child’s concerns are paid attention to and their opinion is taken into consideration. However, Estonian studies, all of which have focused on children's participation experiences in child protection procedures,</p>

		<p>indicate that the opposite to UNCRC and Child Protection Act occurs in practice and that decision-making in child protection cases often excludes children's views¹⁸⁰, including in context of alternative care¹⁸¹ and in context of children's closed institution's service.¹⁸²</p> <p>In 2020, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and the Children's house (Barnahus), an educational video lecture on the Child-friendly procedure was completed.¹⁸³ The goal of the educational video is to introduce the most important principles of how to treat and support children in the proceedings to professionals working with children in the police, prosecutor's office, courts and elsewhere. Together with the video lecture, the website of the child-friendly procedure¹⁸⁴ was also made, which provide information (including about child's right to be heard) to children, parents/ guardians and specialists.</p>
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¹⁸⁰ Arbeiter, E., & Toros, K. (2017). Participatory discourse: Engagement in the context of child protection assessment practices from the perspectives of child protection workers, parents and children. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 74, 17–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2017.01.020>.

Lauri, K., Toros, K., & Lehtme, R. (2020). Lapse hääl lastekaitsetöös— Laste osalemiskogemused. *Sotsiaaltöö*, 2, 79–85. <https://www.tai.ee/et/valjaanded/ajakiri-sotsiaaltoe/sotsiaaltoeoe-2020-2/lapsehaeallastekaitsetoeoes-laste-osalemiskogemused>

Toros, K. (2021). A systematic review of children's participation in child protection decision-making: tokenistic presence or not? *Children & Society*, 35, 395–411. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12418>.

Toros, K., Falch-Eriksen, A., Sindi, I., Lehtme, R. (2022). Children expressing their views in child protection casework: Current research and their rights going forward, *Child & Family Social Work*, 26, 3, 485–497. DOI: 10.1111/cfs.12831.

¹⁸¹ Saarnik, H. & Sindi, I. (2022). Well, the child can't choose, right? - Foster Children's Participation Experiences of Child Protection Removal Practices, *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. DOI: 10.1007/s10560-022-00911-y.

¹⁸² Sindi, I., Lehtme, R., Toros, K. (2022). *Kohaliku omavalitsuse ja tugivõrgustiku pakutav abi lapsele ja perele enne kinnise lasteasutuse teenuse (KLAT) osutamist, teenuse ajal ning pärast teenust*, Tallinna Ülikool, CIRIC. [Available at: https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Lastekaitse/klat_uurimisulesanne_2_kov-i_ja_tugivorgustiku_pakutav_abi_lapsele_ja_perele_enne_klat-i_osutamist_teenuse_ajal_ning_parast_teenust.pdf]

¹⁸³ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nm4IRvlf77c>

¹⁸⁴ Available at: <https://lapsesobralikmenetus.just.ee/>

<p>4.3.9. Are there mental health support services available for affected children?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, how are services working together? How is it ensured that the child is informed and can make use of these services?</p>		X	<p>In April 2021, the government approved the Green Book on Mental Health¹⁸⁵, which is a policy document that describes the existing organization of mental health care, gathers the problem areas of the field with a focus on prevention and timely help, and makes proposals for the further directed development of the field. According to statistic presented in Green Book on Mental Health, in 2017, 13.2% of the population in Estonia suffered due to a mental health problems. In the youngest age groups, up to 4 years old, the most common mental health disorder diagnosis is autism (44.5%), among 5-14 year olds behavioural disorders (32%), attention and hyperactivity disorders (22.7%) and anxiety disorders (22.6%)). Among 15-19 year olds, anxiety disorders (18.5%) and behavioural disorders (17.3%) and depressive disorders (14.9%).</p> <p>As primary health care services for children/young people in each county, there are: child and adolescent mental health offices, the purpose of which is to provide mental health services at the child's place of residence. It is an integrated social and healthcare service, the main content of which is to clarify the problem and assess the condition, counselling, supporting family and support network members, and it is one solution to improve the availability of mental health services. The target group of the services offered are children and adolescents up to the age of 18, their parents/guardians and specialists dealing with children. The team, which includes a mental health nurse, a clinical psychologist and a social worker, bases its work on the child's individuality and considers his best interests. The work of the cabinet team also includes prevention of mental health problems and cooperation with other specialists dealing with children. If necessary, the child or young person will be referred to a psychiatrist or hospital.</p>
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¹⁸⁵ Available at: https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/news-related-files/vaimse_tervise_roheline_raamat_0.pdf

		<p>In addition, four regional Children's mental health centers have been established in Estonia. The main task of the centers is to organize diagnostics and treatment of mental health disorders of children and young people. In order to make the work more efficient, specific trainings have been carried out for specialists dealing with children at the primary level, for early detection of children's mental health problems and to increase awareness of them.</p> <p>The Social Insurance Board organizes a social rehabilitation service for children who have been assigned a disability and for children with complex needs. During the social rehabilitation service, the person's ability to cope and the need for additional assistance are assessed and performed suggestions for adapting the home, work and study environment, obtaining and using an aid, and counseling in various areas to improve future social coping. Taking the individual's needs into account, a personal rehabilitation plan is drawn up, which includes the services of a healthcare worker, therapist and special pedagogue.</p> <p>The strategic partners of the Ministry of Social Affairs, NGO Peaasi and NGO Mental Health and Wellness Coalition (VATEK), help to raise society's awareness about mental health issues and where to get help. The webpage of NGO Peaasi¹⁸⁶ includes a wealth of information on mental health topics, also aimed at children and young people. The website also has short tests, based on which the child/teenager can assess their mental health, and advice and recommendations are given, information is shared.</p> <p>However, the services still not work together in best way. According to study (Praxis, 2017)¹⁸⁷, the system of mental health support services in</p>
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¹⁸⁶ <https://peaasi.ee/meist/>

¹⁸⁷ Veldre, Aaben, Nurm (2017). [Interim evaluation of the population health development plan 2009–2020. Mental Health Field Report \(Rahvastiku tervise arengukava 2009–2020 vahehindamine. Vaimse tervise valdkonna aruanne\)](#). Poliitikauuringute keskus PRAXIS

		<p>Estonia continues to be fragmented, its funding is heavily biased towards specialized medical care (and this help is far from sufficient), and mental health care is regionally unequally available. It is pointed out in recent study that there is a great need for treatment home-type institutions and open care services, so that children with intellectual disabilities, mental disorders and other specific special needs and their families are guaranteed timely help and support close to home that meets their needs.¹⁸⁸</p> <p>In its recommendations to Estonia in 2017, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasized that Estonia must further strengthen the availability and quality of mental health services for children. The state must also strengthen its efforts to prevent adolescent suicide, including expanding available psychological counseling services and the availability of support staff in schools and communities, while ensuring that all professionals working with children are adequately trained to recognize and respond to suicidal tendencies and mental health problems.</p> <p>In 2020, the Estonian Union of Child Welfare indicated that 14 children and young people under the age of 19 committed suicide. Therefore, there is a significant need to increase the number of places where psychiatric help is available for minors¹⁸⁹.</p>
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4.3.10. What are the main challenges and gaps in the referral and investigation highlighted by relevant authorities, child protection, and civil society organisations? Briefly describe.

¹⁸⁸ Sindi, I., Lehtme, R., Toros, K. (2022). *Kohaliku omavalitsuse ja tugivõrgustiku pakutav abi lapsele ja perele enne kinnise lasteasutuse teenuse (KLAT) osutamist, teenuse ajal ning pärast teenust*, Tallinna Ülikool, CIRIC. [Available at: https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Lastekaitse/klat_uurimisulesanne_2_kov-i_ja_tugivorgustiku_pakutav_abi_lapsele_ja_perele_enne_klat-i_osutamist_teenuse_ajal_ning_parast_teenust.pdf]

¹⁸⁹ Estonia, *The opinion of the Union of Child Welfare about the availability of psychiatric help for minors* (Lastekaitse Liidu arvamus psühhiaatrilise abi kättesaadavuse kohta alaealistele). 20.10.2020. Helika Saar speech at the discussion of the Social Committee of the Parliament. [Available at: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/et/2020/10/lastekaitseliidu-arvamus-psuhhiaatrilise-abi-kattesaadavuse-kohta-alaealistele/>]

The research, the purpose of which was to map the help (subsidies and services) offered to a child with a high need for help and his/her family before, during and after the service of a closed children's institution, results¹⁹⁰ indicate, that early detection in grassroots institutions (kindergartens, schools, hobby education and medical institutions) must be made a systematic part of everyday work. Professionals working with children must have the obligation and habit to react earlier, i.e. to share information and involve network members and the family already at the first signs of danger and negative changes, in the early stages of a possible case. It is not possible to achieve quick changes here, but it is important to systematically teach the principles of early detection and networking and to develop a corresponding mindset both through the curricula of vocational and higher education institutions and in various additional trainings. Attention must be paid to prevention and early intervention more attention than before, investing time, money and human resources in order to reduce the number of extremely advanced severe cases and referrals to secure care. Additionally, case management is often weakly coordinated and lacks consistency in child protection cases. It is assumed that the child protection worker of the local government acts as a case manager (including the network convener) role, but she/he does not always do it, for example due to a heavy workload.

Regional inequality and its worsening continue to be a major challenge in Estonia¹⁹¹, while the problem is often the lack of child protection workers in places. If there are not enough child protection workers, ensuring the well-being of children in the municipality, effective prevention work and assessment of the needs of children in need of help are jeopardized. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its final conclusions on Estonia's second to fourth periodic report in 2017¹⁹², has also recommended that the country additionally regulate the obligations of local governments regarding the creation of positions for child protection workers.

It has pointed out by The Social Insurance Board¹⁹³ that the initial assessment of a child's need for help is often incomplete, including that some important information about children in need of help is not entered into the electronic *Data register of social services and benefits*. Due to the incomplete data set, there is a risk that the child protection worker does not consider all the circumstances when assessing and deciding on the child's need for help, and the child does not receive the support or services that she/he actually needs. In addition, it takes a lot of time for the child protection worker

¹⁹⁰ Sindi, I., Lehtme, R., Toros, K. (2022). *Kohaliku omavalitsuse ja tugivõrgustiku pakutav abi lapsele ja perele enne kinnise lasteasutuse teenuse (KLAT) osutamist, teenuse ajal ning pärast teenust*, Tallinna Ülikool, CIRIC. [Available at: https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Lastekaitse/klat_uurimisulesanne_2_kov-i_ja_tugivorgustiku_pakutav_abi_lapsele_ja_perele_enne_klat-i_osutamist_teenuse_ajal_ning_parast_teenust.pdf]

¹⁹¹ Kattai, K., Lääne, S., Noorkõiv, R., Sepp, V., Sootla, G., Lõhmus, M. (2019). *Main challenges and policy recommendations in local government and regional level development. Final analysis report*. (Peamised väljakutsed ja poliitikasoovitused kohaliku omavalitsuse ja regionaalatasandi arengus. Analüüsi lõpparuanne) Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikool. [Available at: https://www.riigikogu.ee/wpcms/wpcontent/uploads/2014/11/L%3%B5ppraport_V%3%A4ljakutsed-ja-soovitused-KOV-jaregionaalarengus_31.01.2019.pdf]

¹⁹² The Committee discussed Estonia's combined second to fourth periodic report (CRC/C/EST/2-4) at its 2167th and 2169th meetings (CRC/C/SR. 2167 and 2169) held on 17 and 18 January 2017 and adopted its 2193rd meeting held on 3 February 2017. Final conclusions on Estonia's second to fourth periodic reports. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. CRC/C/EST/CO/2-4. [Available at: <http://www.sm.ee/et/lapse-oigused-ja-heaolu-0>]

¹⁹³ Laur, (M). Development of the preliminary assessment of the child's need for help in the data register of social services and benefits (*Lapse abivajaduse eelhindamise arendus STAR-is*). Sotsiaaltöö [available at: <https://www.tai.ee/et/sotsiaaltoo/lapse-abivajaduse-eelhindamise-arendus-star>]

to manage data in different systems and it is inefficient. However, In order to facilitate the complex work, the development of the preliminary assessment of the child's need for help was created when updating the electronic data register of social services and benefits.

4.4. Placement decisions – care orders

4.4.1. Following the investigation and assessment of the child’s situation, who is responsible to decide upon issuing a care order/decision and the placement of the child in alternative care?

As stated above (in section 4.3.4), according to para. 33, Section 7 of Child Protection Act, the local government unit or the Social Insurance Board have right to separate the child from the family and, if necessary, determine the communication procedure between the child and the parent before a court order restricting the right of custody, if leaving the child in the family or communication between the parent and the child endangers the child's health or life. The Law also stipulates that if a child in danger/crisis is separated from the family, her/his place of stay and, if necessary, the communication procedure between the child and the parent will be determined for up to 72 hours from the time the child is separated from the family. At the same time, within 72 hours, the local government unit or the Social Insurance Board must assess the child's situation and need for help and apply to the court to limit the right of custody and, if necessary, the right of communication on the grounds provided in the Family Act¹⁹⁴.

Question	Yes	No	Comments
<p>4.4.2. Are there legislative and or regulatory provisions clearly stating the criteria that should be taken into consideration in the assessment of the situation and in the decision-making process?</p> <p>Are there provisions specifying the criteria that should be considered when deciding to remove the child from its family? Are the principles of</p>	X		<p>Based on Child Protection Act (2014), the local government unit or the Social Insurance Board have right to separate the child from the family <u>if leaving the child in the family or communication between the parent and the child endangers the child's health or life</u> .</p> <p>Additionally, Para. 34 in section 8 of Child Protection Act emphasise clear criterias in the assessment of the situation and in the decision-making process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When choosing a guardian for a child separated from the family, giving consent for adoption, assessing the suitability of a foster

¹⁹⁴ Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitseadus*). RT I, 06.12.2014, 1 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/110112022007?leiaKehtiv>]

<p>necessity and appropriateness considered?</p>		<p>family and placing the child in foster care, the local government unit must proceed <u>from the continuity of the child's upbringing</u>, taking into account the <u>child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic origin</u>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The child protection worker of the local government unit, in cooperation with the person raising the child or the children's institution where the child separated from the family is staying, <u>is obliged to provide the child with information about his origin, the reasons for separation from the family and further care issues concerning him and, if possible, to maintain and support the child who is away from the family and his family relationships between</u>. - <u>Separating siblings</u> after being separated from the family can only be an extreme measure in a situation where their staying together significantly threatens their well-being or rights. - <u>The child protection worker of the local government unit prepares the case plan</u> and ensures that it is periodically reviewed and, if necessary, amended in cooperation with the child and the person raising the child.¹⁹⁵ <p>The principles of necessity and appropriateness are not enshrined in the legislation.</p>
<p>4.4.3. Are there provisions requiring that the views of the child should be taken into consideration in the decision-making process?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please specify if this is mandatory or left to the</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>Para. 21, section 5 of Child Protection Act makes a clear connection between the child's best interest and child participation, emphasising the child's fundamental right to be heard and the importance of communicating and listening to the child's opinion throughout child protection removal processes¹⁹⁶. In accordance with CRC Article 12, the Estonian Child Protection Act stresses that</p>

¹⁹⁵ Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitseseadus*). RT I, 06.12.2014, 1 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/110112022007?leiaKehtiv>]

¹⁹⁶ Estonia, Child Protection Act (*Lastekaitseseadus*). RT I, 06.12.2014, 1 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/110112022007?leiaKehtiv>]

<p>discretion of the responsible authorities, and if there are age-related requirements.</p>		<p>children should be able to express themselves freely in juridical and administrative proceedings, as appropriate depending on the age and maturity of the child. The Child Protection Act does not set an age limit for children’s free expression throughout child protection decision-making processes. The Estonian Code of Civil Procedure § 552¹ stipulates since 2022 that in a case concerning a child, the court hears the child, who is capable of holding their own opinions. Thus, there is no age related requirements. In Estonia, children can participate directly in child protection decision-making meetings, including in court proceedings where decisions about removal are made. Alternatively, children can participate indirectly through a legal representative e.g., the child expresses their views to a child protection worker or advocate, who then represents this view in the court either orally or in written form¹⁹⁷.</p>
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4.5. Types of care with focus on alternative care

Types of care existing in the country	Yes	No	Who is offering such services? (State, regional, local authorities, civil society, religious institutions)	Please make differences between the different types of care explicit
Foster care	X		Private individuals are recruited by the local authorities to become foster parents. Foster care is effected on the basis of a written contract entered into between the rural municipality or city government and the caregiver ¹⁹⁸	

¹⁹⁷ Linno, M. & Strömpl, J. (2023). Child Protection Systems in Estonia and Latvia. In: Jill D. Berrick, Neil Gilbert, & Marit Skivenes (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Child Protection Systems*. (444–467). Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197503546.013.15.

¹⁹⁸ Estonia, Social Welfare Act (*Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus*), [RT I, 30.12.2015, 5](https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/514012014004/consolide), § 15 (2), [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/514012014004/consolide>].

		<p><u>Crisis care family</u> and <u>special care family</u> are specific forms (types) of foster care. A crisis care family offers a child temporarily separated from the family or in a crisis situation a safe opportunity to stay in a family environment. . The crisis care family must be ready to accept the child at short notice (2 hours). During the child's stay in the family, the crisis care family ensures the satisfaction of the child's basic needs, emotional support, continuation of education, etc. The crisis care family service lasts up to 90 days, if necessary until the final judgment is made (until the child's future long-term living arrangement is determined).</p> <p>A special care family provides short- or long-term care or upbringing in a family for children with specific special care needs. The special care family service is intended for children who need individual commitment and ongoing informed support.</p> <p>Both the Crisis care family service and Special care family service project, which started in 2020, will continue in 2023. As a result of the tender, SOS Children`s Village Estonia will continue to coordinate the provision of services and provide support to families.</p> <p>Before offering the service of a crisis care family or a special care family, the family must: pass the assessment and preparation of the foster family by the Social Insurance Board in the form of PRIDE pre-training and trauma training. Suitable families who have passed the assessment and necessary preparation sign a cooperation agreement with SOS CV Estonia, on the basis of which the family receives family support services, support with networking and a fee.</p>
Residential – institutional care	X	<p>In Estonia, there are no large scale institutions. After the substitute care reform, the large children`s homes are closed and small houses have been built in residential areas. These are <u>substitute homes</u> and <u>family homes</u>. They can be established by physical or legal person, local government or the state can run homes. In many cases substitute homes are run by not-for-profit NGOs.</p> <p>State is financing (per head system), but covering the costs of alternative care services is to the task of local governments.</p>

		<p>According to Social Welfare Act, the provision of residential (institutional) care in substitute home is service with caregivers who work in shifts in substitute home with up to six children at the same time¹⁹⁹.</p> <p>The provision of residential (institutional) care in family homes is service with up to three family parents (caregivers), with up to six children at the same time.²⁰⁰</p> <p>Therefore, based on Social Welfare Act, if the number of children allowed in a substitute and in family home is the same (up to 6 children), the main difference is that in a substitute home, caregivers work in shifts, but in a family home, caregivers are with the children for a longer period of time, and daily shifts are thus minimized. These developments are in line with overall policy developments.</p>						
Other forms of family-based or family-like care placements	X	<p>Other forms, as opposite to service of a Crisis care family or a Special care family, are shelter homes or shelters²⁰¹. They can be established by physical or legal person, local government or the state can run homes. In many cases shelters are run by not-for-profit NGOs. A child can stay in a shelter for up to 1 month.</p> <p>If the child is placed in the shelter, per head state financing is applied as for the substitute homes.</p> <p>Children placed to shelter homes, in aged 0-17²⁰².</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="679 1312 1402 1453"> <tr> <td data-bbox="679 1312 927 1453">The number of children who stayed at the</td> <td data-bbox="927 1312 1023 1453">2017</td> <td data-bbox="1023 1312 1118 1453">2018</td> <td data-bbox="1118 1312 1214 1453">2019</td> <td data-bbox="1214 1312 1310 1453">2020</td> <td data-bbox="1310 1312 1402 1453">2021</td> </tr> </table>	The number of children who stayed at the	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
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¹⁹⁹ Estonia, Social Welfare Act (*Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus*), [RT I, 30.12.2015, 5](#), § 45⁸ (1), [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/514012014004/consolide>].

²⁰⁰ Estonia, Social Welfare Act (*Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus*), [RT I, 30.12.2015, 5](#), § 45⁷ (1), [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/514012014004/consolide>].

²⁰¹ Estonia, *The procedure for providing the shelter service (Turvakoduteenuse osutamise kord)*, (2020). RT IV, 30.06.2020, 39. (Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/430062020039>]

²⁰² Data is obtained from the website of the Chancellor of Justice: statistics and reports.[available at: <https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/et/statistika-ja-uuringud#1.%20LAPS%20JA%20PERE>]

			shelter service during the year																													
				703	850	784	676	660																								
Supervised independent living arrangements for children	X		Many substitute homes have created a separate youth home or youth house which resembles supported independent living arrangements for children aged 15 and above. These homes are still part of the substitute home itself.																													
Question	Yes	No	Comments																													
4.5.1. Is there data available on the number of children in care (disaggregated by type of care, gender/age, length of placement, etc)?			<p>Statistical information about the current situation is not publicly available, but a request must be made to the Social Insurance Board in case of interest.</p> <p>Total number of children in Estonia and children aged 0-17 in foster care and in residential care²⁰³:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2017</th> <th>2018</th> <th>2019</th> <th>2020</th> <th>2021</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Total number of children</td> <td>249 780</td> <td>249 780</td> <td>249 780</td> <td>249 780</td> <td>249 780</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The number of children aged 0-17 in foster family</td> <td>143</td> <td>117</td> <td>127</td> <td>128</td> <td>139</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The number of children aged 0-17 in substitute homes and family homes (residential care)</td> <td>824</td> <td>803</td> <td>742</td> <td>745</td> <td>735</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>							2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total number of children	249 780	249 780	249 780	249 780	249 780	The number of children aged 0-17 in foster family	143	117	127	128	139	The number of children aged 0-17 in substitute homes and family homes (residential care)	824	803	742	745	735
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			The (residential) institutional care is prevailing over foster care for children in Estonia.
4.5.2. Is there data available on the number of children placed in alternative care that disappeared and/or went missing from residential care institutions?		X	<p>The Ministry of Social Affairs do not collect data about children who have went missing as there have been no need to collect such data. There are no children reported missing from the residential care institutions in last three years.</p> <p>The law does not regulate on who, where and how has to report about the missing child. Such issues are regulated in between of the alternative care institutions and local governments.</p>
4.5.3. Is there a <u>national registry of foster care families</u> ? How many children can be fostered in one family?	X		<p>There is a nationwide register of foster families and those wishing to become adoptive parents, where the data of persons who have passed the family assessment are entered.</p> <p>According to Social Welfare Act²⁰⁴, one family can foster up to 4 children including children less than 14 years who live in the same household and other people who are in the need of care. There may be more than four dependents in a foster family if:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) children of one family need placement or there is another situation in which it is necessary to ensure the possibility of children growing up together; 2) it is in the interest of children in foster care; 3) the legal representatives of the children placed in the family and to be placed in the family give their consent; 4) it is coordinated with the Social Insurance Board.
4.5.4. How and by whom foster families are <u>recruited, vetted, and trained</u> ? Provide information on the legal framework and responsible authorities, recruitment requirements, selection criteria, reimbursement of costs, etc.			

²⁰⁴ Estonia, Social Welfare Act (*Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus*), [RT I, 30.12.2015, 5](#), § 45⁶ (3), [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/514012014004/consolide>].

According to regulation of Social Welfare Act²⁰⁵, a person wishing to become a foster family submits an application to the Social Insurance Board, which performs actions related to the assessment and preparation of the suitability of a foster family.

The Social Insurance Board does the following²⁰⁶:

- 1) advises those wishing to become a foster family and refers them to additional training;
- 2) checks the compliance of the foster family with the requirements;
- 3) checks compliance with the requirements of the physical environment (living conditions)
- 4) conducts a family survey.

Therefore, the counselling of those who wish to become a foster family and the family examination, including the verification of the family's compliance with the requirements and the living conditions, are carried out by a specialist of the Social Insurance Board.

In terms of preparation, it is mandatory for foster families to undergo PRIDE preliminary training²⁰⁷, which was coordinated by the Institute of Health Development since 2002. From January 1, 2023, foster care trainings will be organized by the Children's Welfare Department of the Social Insurance Board instead of the Institute of Health Development training center.

The purpose of the preliminary training is to prepare families to take into account the child's background and characteristics. The training consists of a 9 sessions, each session lasts 4 academic hours. The sessions are as following:

- 1: Joining the PRIDE (Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education) programme (getting to know each other, the legal framework, the principles of the foster care service);
- 2: Family relationships, family roles;
- 3: Main issues in children upbringing, overview of the long-lasting affectionate relationships with children;
- 4: Child development issues: understanding the loss, different phases of loss, how to help children to deal with loss;
- 5: Relationships with biological family;
- 6: Discipline issues;
- 7: Continuous family ties and relationships;

²⁰⁵ Estonia, Social Welfare Act (*Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus*), [RT I, 30.12.2015, 5](#), § 45⁶ (4), [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/514012014004/consolide>].

²⁰⁶ On the basis of the Social Welfare Act (§ 45⁶, 5), The list of documents and data to be submitted by the Social Insurance Board for assessing the suitability of a foster family, as well as the procedures for assessing the suitability of a foster family, shall be established by a regulation of the minister responsible for the field. The regulation is available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/121122017044>

²⁰⁷ PRIDE pre-training has been represented in the United States and has been used in several European countries as a family-based program from the foster care preparatory training program.

- 8: Planning the change: how the foster kid affect the foster family relationships, how to prepare foster family members;
- 9: Being a foster family (practical issues).

Training can be completed over a period of 2-4 months.

In addition to the preparation aspect, PRIDE pre-training is coordinated with the family selection and evaluation process - the trainers make their own assessment of the suitability of the families to be foster families, and share information with specialists of Social Insurance Board

Thus, the assessment and preparation (including adding information about the foster family to the electronic data register) is centrally carried out by the Social Insurance Board.

After the child reaches to the foster family, additional (need-based) support for foster families continues to be provided by the local government. The child protection workers of the municipality are the main contact for providing additional support and necessary services.

4.5.5. Are any types of care (foster homes, residential care, other form of care arrangements) monitored once children are placed therein? If so, provide information on the applicable legislative provisions on monitoring procedures. Please specify the difference between the monitoring of different types of care. How frequently are they monitored, how and by whom?

According to the Social Welfare Act²⁰⁸, the child protection official is required to review the foster care contract and the child's case plan that is Annexed to it at least once a year together with the caregiver and integrate changes if needed into the documents. There is no procedures for if the care in foster family lasts less than a year. There is also no accurate overview of foster care breakdown. There are small-scale studies that raise the problem of foster care breakdown and it's negative impact on the child²⁰⁹.

The Social Insurance Board, based on Social Welfare Act²¹⁰, carries out national and administrative supervision over the compliance and quality of social services and services in other fields of activity of the Social Insurance Board, in order to ensure the best way of life for the recipient of the service. When performing monitoring, the officer of the Social Insurance Board has the right to enter the monitored social service institution for the purpose of monitoring (even without prior notice), obtain information necessary for monitoring, see relevant documents, receive free copies of them, carry out on-site observation, including taking photographs, opening doors, questioning the head of the institution, employees and customers.

²⁰⁸ Estonia, Social Welfare Act (*Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus*), [RT I, 30.12.2015, 5](#), § 10, [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/514012014004/consolide>].

²⁰⁹ Dunets, J. (2021). *The breakdown of care in foster families from the point of view of child protection workers and the expert*. Master's thesis. Tallinn University

²¹⁰ Estonia, Social Welfare Act (*Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus*), [RT I, 30.12.2015, 5](#), § 157 lg 1 and 3, [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/514012014004/consolide>].

Question	Yes	No	Comments
<p>4.5.6. Are children placed in foster care homes geographically <u>close to their biological families</u>, school, friends, and/or community?</p>	X		<p>Since the responsibility of the placement orders lies in local governments, children are placed usually in foster care or substitute homes within the same or neighbouring municipalities. The Child Protection Act (2014) does not directly regulate the geographical placement of the child. It only states that when choosing an alternative care form and placing the child in alternative care, the local government unit must proceed <u>from the continuity of the child's upbringing</u>, taking into account the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic origin. Therefore, geographical proximity or distance is not directly mentioned in the law, but the law does indicate the continuity of the child's upbringing (including the child's connections and belonging in the geographical area).</p>
<p>4.5.7. Is there a <u>national registry</u> of residential institutions for children?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please provide information regarding the existent number of residential institutions and their capacity (beds).</p>	X		<p>All organisations (residential institutions) that provide substitute home services are required to apply for activity licence for the validity for five years. The registration of the licence is recorded in the Register of Economic Activities (Majandustegevuse register)²¹¹. The data about the licences provided to the substitute homes is publicly accessible through this register.</p> <p>Currently there are 36 substitute homes/family homes all over Estonia as of 10 April 2023.</p>
<p>4.5.8. Are there <u>accreditation and licensing procedures</u> for residential institutions in place?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please provide information on the legislative framework, the responsible authority and procedure.</p>	X		<p>It is necessary to apply for an activity license if the organization (residential institution) wants to provide foster care services in a family home and/or in a foster home. The activity license is issued by the Social Insurance Board. An activity license is issued for an indefinite period, if the applicant for an activity license does not apply for a fixed-term activity license.</p> <p>The Health Board (<i>Terviseamet</i>) shall, before issuing an activity licence verify the compliance of the place of business with the requirements established on the basis of the Public Health Act (<i>Rahvatervise seadus</i>) on the basis of</p>

²¹¹ Available at: https://mtr.ttja.ee/juriidiline_isik

the application of the applicant for an activity licence and issue a certificate concerning the compliance of the place of business with health protection requirements. The Rescue Board (*Päästeamet*) shall, before issuing an activity licence verify the compliance of the place of business with fire safety requirements on the basis of the application of the applicant for an activity licence and issue a certificate concerning the compliance of the place of business with fire safety requirements.

Social Welfare Act regulates what kind of documents need to be provided to the Social Insurance Board in licensing procedure.

In order to obtain an activity licence, the following requirements must be met:

- there must be a certificate from the health board on the compliance of the place of service provision with health protection requirements;
- there must be a certificate from the rescue agency on the compliance of the place of service provision with fire safety requirements;
- there must be a health certificate of the carers about passing a health check-up for infectious diseases;
- the applicant for an activity license must meet the requirements set forth in the Social Welfare Act;
- persons directly raising a child, caregivers, must meet the requirements stipulated in the Social Welfare Act and § 20 of the Child Protection Act;
- if the alternative care service is provided in the residence of the person directly raising the child, the consent of the owner of the residence must be additionally submitted for the provision of this service;
- in the event that the alternative care service is provided in the living quarters of the person directly raising the child, the adult using the same living space as the person directly raising the child must submit a health certificate for passing a health check-up for infectious diseases and meet the requirements set forth in the Social Welfare Act and § 20 of the Child Protection Act.

4.5.9. Are there national applicable standards relating to the operational framework of such institutions (requirements or quality standards related to the personnel, the infrastructures, the living conditions, and daily care of children)?

Standards are set in Social Welfare Act (*Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus*):

§ 45⁷ Requirements for substitute home service in family homes: A family home consists of up to three family parents (carers) and with up to six children at the same time.

§ 45⁸ requirements for substitute home service in substitute homes: A substitute home consists of up to six educators (carers) and with up to six children at the same time.

Both in family homes as well in substitute homes, there may be more than six children if:

- 1) children of one biological family need placement or there is another situation in which it is necessary to ensure the possibility of children growing up together;
- 2) it is in the interest of children in care;
- 3) the legal representatives of the children placed in the family give their consent;
- 4) it is coordinated with the Social Insurance Board.

§ 45¹³. Requirements for the person directly raising the child and her/his family members:

- 1) The person directly raising the child must meet the following requirements:
 - she/he is a capable, self-sufficient person who lives permanently in Estonia;
 - she/he is of legal age, except for the parent of the family, who must be at least 25 years old;
 - she/he has the necessary personal qualities to raise a child;
 - she/he has not been deprived of the right of custody on the grounds provided for in the Family Act or has not been restricted;
 - she/he has not been removed from fulfilling the duties of a guardian;
 - she/he meets the requirements set forth in § 20 of the Child Protection Act;
 - she/he is not addicted to alcohol or narcotic or psychotropic substances;

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - she/has experience working with children, except for the parent of the foster family; - she/has at least a secondary education; - she/ he has to submit a health certificate for passing a health check-up for infectious diseases, and in the future will periodically undergo a health check-up; - a family parent, a substitute home educator and assistance of family home parents or educators must have completed the additional training or must undertake to complete it within one year of starting employment. <p>The renewed health requirements and living conditions are set in the degree of the Minister of Social Affairs as of 03.02.2018²¹²: The residential building where the service is provided must be limited by a hedge or fence, and at least 40% of the surrounding area of the residential building must be landscaped. The rooms and the interior of the rooms must meet the age and needs of the child and be safe and secure. The rooms must have enough space for playing and movement to safely carry out child-developing and other necessary activities. Artificial lighting must ensure sufficient uniform and diffused light in all rooms. The premises and furnishings must be clean. The food must be safe, age-appropriate and meet the child's physiological needs.</p> <p>The standards are set for the quality institutional service and thus do not depend on the character of the service provider (public or private).</p>
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4.5.10. How is the residential care staff recruited, vetted, and trained?

As stated above, the Social Welfare Act sets the requirements for residential carers. The provider of the substitute home/ family home must verify the compliance of carers with these requirements. There are no other institutions that carry out the recruitment or vetting of the employees. However, the Social Insurance Board in his mandate as monitoring and supervisory institution of childcare services in the area has the right to verify compliance with the requirements.

All substitute - and family home staff are required completion of in-service training.

²¹² Estonia, Minister of Social Affairs. Health safety requirements for substitute homes and family homes. (Tervisekaitzenõuded asendushooldusteenusele pere- ja asenduskodus) [RT I, 31.01.2018, [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/12855667?leiaKehtiv>].

From January 1, 2023, the in-service training of substitute- and family home staff was transferred from the Health Development Institute to the Social Insurance Board.

The curriculum of additional training offered by the Social Insurance Board must ensure the necessary preparation for the person directly providing the service to the child when providing substitute care services and support him in fulfilling the tasks assigned by law or other legislation, ensuring the well-being and development of the child, protecting the rights and interests of the child, and providing measures necessary to raise and help the child²¹³. The in-service training is 160 academic hours. An employee in the foster care or family home education area must complete the training within a year of starting work. In addition, trainings for heads of institutions are offered, in total of 110 academic hours.

Question	Yes	No	Comments
<p>4.5.11. Are children placed in alternative care allowed to <u>lodge complaints</u> against the personnel /foster parents and care workers and report abuse or violations of their rights? Are these procedures child-friendly and respective of confidentiality?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, briefly describe to whom and how children can lodge complaints.</p>	X		<p>Para. 36, section 9 of Child Protection Act²¹⁴ regulates clearly the procedures for the lodging complaints by children in alternative care. It states that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A child staying in a children's institution has the right to contact the person raising the child, the child protection worker of the local government unit of the child's place of residence entered in the population register, and the Chancellor of Justice (Children Ombudsman), and submit opinions and complaints to them about the activities of the children's institution. - The children's institution must create conditions that help ensure the child's right to make complaints. - The children's institution must provide the child an independent opportunity to submit opinions and complaints about the activities of the children's institution. The children's institution must register the child's opinions and complaints and give the child appropriate feedback about them without

²¹³ Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs. Conditions and procedures for further training of the person directly providing the service to the child in the provision of substitute care service and safe home service (Asendushooldusteenuse ja turvakoduteenuse osutamisel lapsele teenust vahetult osutava isiku täienduskoolituse tingimused ja kord). RT I, 21.12.2017, 43. [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/121122017043?leiaKehtiv>]

²¹⁴ Estonia, Child Protection Act (Lastekaitseseadus). RT I, 06.12.2014, 1 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/110112022007?leiaKehtiv>]

		<p>delay. If necessary, changes in the organization of the day-to-day life of the children's institution or in other areas of life important to the child must be foreseen.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The children's institution shall not disclose the identity of the child who submitted an opinion or complaint about the children's institution, or the fact of submitting the opinion or complaint, except in criminal proceedings. - Thus, children have a right to lodge complaints, and residential institution must guarantee the child the possibility to lodge complaints and opinions. A child who is placed in the alternative care institution has the right to contact independently his/her parent, guardian, child protection official or Chancellor of Justice (Children Ombudsman).
<p>4.5.12. What is the <u>assistance available to adolescents that leave alternative care</u> to live independently?</p> <p>(e.g. financial, housing, vocational, educational, employment, life skills, mental health services, social or emotional)?</p> <p>Briefly describe who is responsible for such assistance?</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>In 2018, an <u>aftercare service was created</u> as a follow-up service to alternative care, the purpose of which is to support young people leaving alternative care to become independent and to continue their studies. The local government unit must provide aftercare service to a young adult, who after acquiring basic-, secondary-, vocational - or higher education continues to study in the following academic year in higher education (university bachelor's or master's studies) or integrated studies of bachelor's and master's studies until the interruption of studies or the end of the primary nominal study period, until the person turns 25 years old. The local government can also guarantee aftercare service for a young person up to the age of 21 who was in alternative care, regardless of whether the young person is studying or not. The local government assesses the situation of each young person individually together with the young person²¹⁵.</p> <p>In addition to aftercare service, the young person leaving care <u>has the right to use the support person service and other social services</u> that the local government is able to provide, in order to better support their pathway to</p>

²¹⁵ Estonia, Social Welfare Act (Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus), RT I, 30.12.2015 [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/514012014004/consolide>].

	<p>independent living. The purpose of the support person service is to help a young person start an independent life more smoothly from alternative care.²¹⁶ The support person can be either a trusted support person who is a person familiar and close to the young person (e.g. foster parent), a professional support person who is not familiar to the young person from before, or a young person who has been in alternative care (care-experienced person) who can manage well independently and has completed support person training.</p> <p>In general, the support person service is offered up to six months before the planned entry into independent life, but if the support person is the young person's current educator, family parent, foster family parent or guardian, the service can only start after leaving foster care or guardianship. The service is also provided to young people who have previously left alternative care, but who have encountered difficulties in coping independently. The support person's work is remunerated, the exact conditions are agreed in the contract between the support person and between the service provider. The service is mostly financed for up to one year, in justified cases it is possible to extend the service provision period.</p> <p>Since 2016, <u>the support person service was organized by the Social Insurance Board</u> and was financed from the funds of the European Social Fund 2014-2020 project "Raising the quality of substitute care".</p> <p>From the beginning of 2022, the Social Insurance Board stopped organizing and financing the service, because the service was organized and financed from ESF grant funds. So the financing of this service also ended at the end of the ESF period. Today, <u>local governments continues with providing support person service</u>. The Social Insurance Board will continue to offer training and supervision to support persons, and will also continue to advise local governments.</p> <p>In addition, young people aged 16-19 growing up in alternative care are also offered the opportunity to</p>
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²¹⁶ Estonia, Social Insurance Board. Support services for family-based foster care providers (Tugiteenused perepõhise asendushoolduse pakkujatele). [Available at: <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/et/lapsed-ja-pere/lastekaitse/asendushooldusetugiteenused#Tugiisikuteenus%20asendushoolduselt%20elluastuvatele%20noortele>]

participate in the "My Life" development program, which consists of a series of seminars where, over three weekends, young people can communicate with each other, discuss life issues, practice cooperation, self-expression and communication skills through role-playing and playful activities. Up to 20 young people can participate in one group and the same young people participate on all three occasions. Participation in the program is free for young people, and by the fall of 2021, the program had been organized for four youth groups (in the Eastern, Southern and Northern regions). The organization of the program is coordinated by the Social Insurance Board and is supported In addition, young people aged 16-19 growing up in alternative care are also offered the opportunity to participate in the "My Life" development program, which consists of a series of seminars where, over three weekends, young people can communicate with each other, discuss life issues, practice cooperation, self-expression and communication skills through role-playing and playful activities. Up to 20 young people can participate in one group and the same young people participate on all three occasions. Participation in the program is free for young people, and by the fall of 2021, the program had been organized for four youth groups (in the Eastern, Southern and Northern regions). The organization of the program is coordinated by the Social Insurance Board and is supported by the funds of the European Social Fund 2014-2020 project "Raising the quality of substitute care".²¹⁷

4.5.13. What assistance is provided to families - while the child is placed to alternative care - to support the return of the child in the family? By whom? Who coordinates the assistance? Please briefly describe.

The Social Welfare Act states that a rural municipality or city government shall, if necessary, provide assistance to a family from whom a child has been taken in order to help establish the prerequisite conditions for the child to return to the family. However, the law does not provide the list of services which should be provided to biological family. The availability of services varies greatly in the municipalities and in many instances necessary services are not available. For example there are long waiting lines to receive professional psychological help and the provision of state supported

²¹⁷ Estonia, Report of a survey of young people surviving foster care (Asendushoolduselt elluastuvate noorte uuring_aruanne), Tallinn: Civitta. 2022. [Available at: <https://www.praxis.ee/tood/asendushoolduselt-elluastuvate-noorte-uuring/>]

rehabilitation services for substance and alcohol abuse are minimal and in most municipalities completely absent. In many municipalities the material help is often provided by various charitable organisations such as Food Bank (*Toidupank*) or the Red Cross (*Punane Rist*).

4.5.14. Is any assistance provided to children and families upon return of the child in the family? Briefly describe. Who is responsible for such assistance?

Is there any monitoring and follow-up of such cases?

Who is coordinating assistance and support?

X

According to the Family Law Act²¹⁸, the child has the right to communicate with the parent personally, if the right to communicate is not restricted. However, the child cannot be forced to communicate with the parent - it is her/his right, not the obligation.

As stated by the senior advisor of the Department of Children and Youth Rights in the Office of the Chancellor of Justice²¹⁹, the reasons why a child is separated from the family and placed in foster care are different. Mainly the parents have neglected or abused the child, but the reason can also be the parent's inability to care for the child in the necessary way (e.g. due to limited capacity or illness). The extent to which it is in the child's best interest to support their relationship with their biological parents and whether or not to work towards family reunification also varies. In some cases, it is possible to work with the parent to improve their parenting skills in caring for the child and raising the child without violence, or to resolve child neglect or other causes of abuse (e.g. alcohol or drug addiction). Sometimes the parent does not have to handle the daily care of the child, but is nevertheless a caring and important person in the child's life (e.g. a parent with limited capacity who lives in a nursing home). The need to place a child in alternative care may be temporary (e.g. due to a parent's long-term illness or stay in prison), after which the child is expected to return to the family. Thus, for a child in alternative care, it is important to continue social work with the biological parents and provide assistance for them in order to preserve the relationship between the child and the parents, if possible, and to work for the return of the child to the family, if this is in the best interest of the child. However, even if family reunification is not in the best interest of the child, the continuation of communication

²¹⁸ Estonia The Family Law Act (Perekonnaseadus), RT I 2009, 60, 395. [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/13330603?leiaKehtiv>]

²¹⁹ Sarv, M. (2022). Communication of a child living in a foster home or a family home with a biological parent (*Asenduskodus või perekodus elava lapse suhtlus bioloogilise vanemaga*). Sotsiaaltöö. [Available at: <https://www.tai.ee/et/sotsiaaltoo/asenduskodus-voi-perekodus-elava-lapse-suhtlus-bioloogilise-vanemaga>]

			<p>between the child and the parents during foster care may be justified.</p> <p>The above proves that there is a way of thinking in Estonia about the necessity of supporting the biological family and communication between child and biological family.</p> <p>Para. 34 (2), section 8 of Child Protection Act ²²⁰ also stipulates the obligation of the local government and the institution providing alternative care to support and coordinate the relationship between the child and biological family. According to Para. 21(1) of the Act, when making all decisions affecting the child - thus also when organizing communication between the child and the parent - the child's interests must be identified and based on them as a primary consideration. The best interests of the child, including the child's opinion on how to organize communication with the parent, are determined by the local government as the child's guardian. In doing so, the local government must consult with a foster family or substitute home who is familiar with the child's daily life and wishes. It is important to emphasize that the child's opinion is not the only one, but one of several factors, on the basis of which to decide on the best way of communication for the child.</p>
<p>4.5.15. Are decisions of placement in alternative care reviewed?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, please provide the applicable legislative provisions. How frequently is this done? By whom?</p> <p>Are the children's views taken into consideration?</p>		X	<p>Social Welfare Act § 45⁹ only states, that child protection official must visit the child receiving the substitute home service for the examination of the development and evaluation of the welfare of the child at least twice a year. The act also states, that if a circumstance that caused the separation of the child from the family cease to exist, the child shall be assisted in returning to his or her home and family.²²¹ However, there is no clear regulation as to how this review has to take place. In most cases case management plan is used. There is no requirement to review the placement into substitute home or separation from parents by the court.</p>

²²⁰ Estonia, Child Protection Act (Lastekaitse seadus). RT I, 06.12.2014, 1 [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/110112022007?leiaKehtiv>]

²²¹ Estonia, Social Welfare Act (Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus) RT I, 30.12.2015, 5 [available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/514012014004/consolide>].

4.5.16. Is there a legal framework regarding adoption? Briefly describe the core elements and responsible authorities, also considering differences between within-country and between-country adoptions. Is private adoption permitted in the country?

Yes. The Family Law Act chapter 11²²² regulates the adoption. A person with active legal capacity who has attained at least 25 years of age may be an adoptive parent. A court may, as an exception, allow a person who has attained at least 18 years of age to adopt if he or she adopts his or her spouse's child or if there is any other good reason for adoption. A child who is at least 10 years of age may be adopted only with his or her consent. The wishes of a child younger than 10 years of age shall also be considered if the development level of the child so permits. A child may be adopted only with the consent of his or her parents (the parent's consent is not required if she/he is permanently unable to submit an application, if her/his living place are permanently unknown or if the parent has been completely deprived of the right to personal care of the child). Consent of a parent shall not enter into force before eight weeks have passed from the birth of the child. So, before the parent's consent takes effect, the adoption application cannot be submitted to the court (child cannot be adopted).

Activities related to adoption preparation are organized by the Social Insurance Board (both domestic and international adoption). In all questions related to adoption (including questions related to finding your own origin data), person must contact a specialist of the Social Insurance Board. A Social Insurance Board is required to examine the living conditions at the place of residence of the person wishing to adopt and verify the suitability of the living conditions for raising a child. A person wishing to adopt have to complete an appropriate training programme prior to adoption. The same training is provided to the adoptive parents as to the foster parents (Please see more information in section 4.5.4. above). Adoption is decided by the court based on the application of the adopter.

International adoption does not include intra-family adoptions, if the child's mother or father's new spouse adopts the child within the family. International adoption means that a child living in one country moves permanently to live in another country with an adoptive parent from another country. Children can be adopted from Estonia to a foreign country only in exceptional cases - when it is not possible to take care of the child to the necessary extent in Estonia. International adoption and the work of the international adoption committee are also organized by the Social Insurance Board. If the place of residence of the adopter or the adoptee is not in Estonia, the court may decide on the adoption to a foreign country only with the consent of the International Adoption Commission²²³.

Estonian adoption laws do not directly regulate the possibilities of adoption for homosexual couples. Rather, it is a question of assessing the suitability of parenting and whether there is a reason to believe that a parent-child relationship will develop between the person (family) wishing to adopt and the child. If the homosexual couple who wish to adopt pass the assessment and participate in

²²² Estonia The Family Law Act (Perekonnaseadus), RT I 2009, 60, 395. [Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/13330603?leiaKehtiv>]

²²³ Information available at: <https://www.eesti.ee/et/perekond/vanemateta-lapsed-ja-laste-turvalisus/lapsendamine-eestkoste-asendushooldus-ja-turvakodu>

recommended pre-training, and an adoption suitability assessment is given, then they can adopt the child. There are also examples in Estonia where homosexual couples have adopted a child.

4.5.17. What are the main challenges encountered and gaps at the policy and legislative level in relation to alternative care? *Please consider available studies reports at national levels conducted by public or private institutions, child protection organisations, civil society, human rights institutions, academic community, and other sources such as concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on country reports etc.*

The amendments to the Social Welfare Act that entered into force in 2018 were based on the Green book on the policy of alternative care for children without parental care (2014)²²⁴, which was completed in 2015, where three strategic goals were set to ensure better well-being and development opportunities for children and young people: to increase the importance of family-based foster care; to increase the quality of substitute care; to improve the preparation and after care for transitioning out of alternative care.

In order to achieve the goals, the existing services in the field of alternative care were redesigned and a separate aftercare service for young adults leaving alternative care were created. The organization and financing of the field were also changed, including the creation of a financing scheme that motivates family-based foster care. The law also provides a clear guideline to prefer a foster family that provides family-based care. A nationwide register of foster families was created, assessment and preparation of foster families was brought under the Social Insurance Board.

NGO Estonian Union of Child Welfare (Lastekaitseliit) has stated²²⁵, that although since 2018, the Social Welfare Act has required preference for family-based foster care and the state has actively contributed to the recruitment of foster families in recent years, there are still 800 children in substitute - and family homes (in residential care), including 18 children under the age of 3 and only 145 children in foster families, there is a lack of support services, qualified foster care providers and special programs. To support the growth of foster families, on July 1, 2020, an amendment to the Social Welfare Act entered into force, according to which local governments have the obligation to support the foster family parents in the case of caring for one child to the extent of at least 1/2 of the minimum wage (instead of the previously valid ¼). The change stems from the need to value the activities of foster families and the fact that until now municipalities have supported foster families mainly to the extent of the minimum provided by law.

The contribution of the Social Insurance Board and the Institute of Health Development, who offer preparatory trainings and support services both to institution-based providers of substitute care as

²²⁴ Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs. Green book on the policy of alternative care for children without parental care (*Vanemliku hoolitsuseta laste asendushoolduse poliitika roheline raamat*) (2014). [Available at: www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Lapsed_ja_pered/Asendushooldus/ah_rr_dets_2014.pdf]

²²⁵ Saar, H. (2021). Rights of the child 2020-2021 (*Lapse õigused 2020-2021*). Available at: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Peatukk-2020-2021.pdf>

well as to foster, adoptive and guardian families, has also been important in the reform of foster care²²⁶.

Based on the recent results of a large review study (2020)²²⁷ main challenges are as follows:

- In addition to the traumatic experience of being separated from their biological family, young people in alternative care are exposed to alcohol and drug use and smoking, self-harm, mental and physical violence, sexual abuse and other difficult situations. In order to overcome such experiences and habits, it is important that all young people have access to regular psychological help. Unfortunately, the queues are too long, the local governments and service providers do not always refer the young person to a psychologist, and the young person her-/himself does not want or know how to seek help.

- Regarding aftercare, the ability of local governments to provide aftercare services for young people is uneven across municipalities and forms of foster care. Mainly, the different approach is caused by the different capacities and availability of resources of the local governments. However, in more complex cases, local governments also lack practice and skills. As a result, services are not equally accessible to young people.

- There is also a lack of involvement of the young person, which is why life often comes unexpectedly for the young person. Although young people generally consider their daily life skills to be good, they may not be able to adequately assess their skills and knowledge before they actually live alone, and deficiencies may only become apparent later. Therefore, it is necessary for the young person to be able to successfully start life, the opportunity for the young person to practice everyday skills in advance and to experience different situations both during alternative/foster care and through, for example, semi-independent living.

- Moreover, after alternative care and entering the workforce, it is difficult for young people to achieve independent financial support and deal with their own finances. Many young people are poorly prepared for these activities, and even the young people with care experiences rate these skills as poor.

- The preparation and transition of young people with special needs from alternative care to aftercare services is problematic. Since there are long queues for special care services such as assisted living, community living or round-the-clock care, it is necessary to plan the transition especially far in advance. Unfortunately, there is a shortcoming in assessing the needs of young people with special needs and in planning the organization of their future lives. It has a harmful effect on the young person if the end of alternative care is not immediately followed by a special care service.

²²⁶ Jõks, H. (2020). How have the changes been implemented in the field of replacement and aftercare services? (Kuidas on rakendunud muudatused asendus- ja järelhooldusteenuse valdkonnas?) Sotsiaaltöö [Available at: <https://www.tai.ee/en/node/11676>]

²²⁷ Estonia, Report of a survey of young people surviving foster care (Asendushoolduselt elluastuvate noorte uuring_aruanne), Tallinn: Civitta. 2022. [Available at: <https://www.praxis.ee/tood/asendushoolduselt-elluastuvate-noorte-uuring/>]

In 2020, 32% of the children who were referred to the services of a closed children's institution were from alternative care, many children lack the necessary family and adult support²²⁸.

There are also the following needs in the field: the need to support children in alternative care with complex trauma more effectively than before, to improve the prevention of separation of children from their families, to support the biological family and the child's communication and reunification with the family after the child's separation²²⁹.

4.6. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges

Based on the output of the 2014 mapping exercise, please briefly describe the development of the child protection care system in the past 8 years, incl. achievements and (persisting) gaps and challenges

In 2016, a new (current) Child Protection Act entered into force and a new national child protection organization was implemented on the basis of the law. The law also provides clear guidelines and tasks for the organization of child protection organization.

The *Child welfare assessment manual* (2017)²³⁰ has been issued by Social Insurance Board to support child protection workers in the tasks assessment of child's need for help and well-being. The manual point out that case management is essential in ensuring that children's needs are identified, their needs are correctly assessed and that they receive cross-sectoral support, until there has been a positive outcome for that child and/or family. The manual is not requirement, but an option. However, the manual is very well known among child protection workers and it can be believed that they truly use it on their daily basis. The manual is introduced in university courses (for example in Tallinn University Bachelor level course *Child protection work* and in master level course in *Assessment, analyses and decision-making*), and it has been also introduced in several additional-trainings organised by Social Insurance Board.

In January 2017, the Children's House (Barnahus) service was launched in Estonia, within the framework of which children who have been sexually abused or who are suspected of having been sexually abused can receive help and social and legal protection from one place and in an integrated manner. The idea of the children's house model is to offer coordinated and effective help to children under one roof and to prevent re-victimization of the child during criminal proceedings. The third Barnahus in Estonia was opened in Jõhvi (in East-Estonia) in August 2020. Fourth Barnahus was opened in October 2022 in the western part of Estonia. Thus, Barnahus exists now in four cities: since 2017 in Tallinn (northern region),

²²⁸ Estonia, 2020. Placement in a closed children's institution. Analysis of case law (*Kinnisesse lasteasutusse paigutamise. Kohtupraktika analüüs*). Tallinn: The Supreme Court. [Available at: https://www.riigikohus.ee/sites/default/files/analyyis/Kinnine_lasteasutus.pdf]

²²⁹ Jõks, H. (2020). How have the changes been implemented in the field of replacement and aftercare services? (Kuidas on rakendunud muudatused asendus- ja järelhooldusteenuse valdkonnas?) Sotsiaaltöö [Available at: <https://www.tai.ee/en/node/11676>]

²³⁰ This manual is based on child and family assessment tool from Sweden (BBIC system), which actually originated from the UK Common Assessment Framework. [Available at: https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Lastekaitse/Noustamisteenused/lapse_heaolu_hindamise_kasiraamat.pdf]

2018 in Tartu (southern region), 2020 in Jõhvi (eastern region) and 2022 October in Pärnu (western region).

Children come into contact with sexual topics earlier than before, the children's own awareness is increased. The Children`s House (Barnahus) team has given out useful advice on how to talk to a child about sexuality, the flag system introduced in 2020 supports the child's healthy sexual development and also prevents sexual violence²³¹. Unfortunately, the number of cases in various Children`s Houses (Barnahus) is growing regularly. However, given the prevalence of sexual abuse, it is necessary to increase the resources of police officers in the Police and Border Guard Board for more efficient and faster processing of sexual crimes against children, and to enhance mutual cooperation and increase the ability of information analysis to detect and prevent crimes²³².

Child Helplines are grounded in Estonia: The number of calls to the child helpline 116,111 set a record again in 2021. If in 2020 there were a total of 10,007 appeals after the year, last year there were already 12,855 appeals. 55% of the appeals were related to counseling, 26% to a child in need of help, and 4.7% to a child in danger. . In 2021, the main people who contacted the child helpline were parents (2767), who preferred to contact them by phone (2109). The second largest group were children (2,653) and young people (470), and their most preferred channel was online chat (1,619). Among the specialists, the children's aid was mainly approached by specialists in the social field (1664) and legal protection specialists (1476).²³³

The age-appropriate and child-friendly reporting procedures (to whom and how children can report child rights' violations and abuse) is introduced on website of Chancellor of Justice (Children`s Ombudsman).²³⁴, also children`s rights are introduced in child-friendly manner.²³⁵

More and more efficient and child-friendly collaborative methods are being used in work with juvenile offenders, e.g. conflict mediation based on restorative law, restorative discussion circles, Family Conference (Pere Lahendusring), etc²³⁶. Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDFT) is an evidence-based, family-centered program for youth and their families with severe risk behaviors and multifaceted support needs. The service is offered to up to 250 children per year. In addition, greater attention to the implementation of the principles of child-friendly procedures in police work is developed²³⁷.

Restorative justice-based interventions are available to children and young people caught up in conflict and crime, and to communities affected by traumatic events. According to those who participated in the restorative justice process, what they experienced was safe, fair and brought about positive changes.

²³¹ See: <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/spetsialistile-ja-koostoopartnerile/laste-ja-noortega-tootavale-spetsialistile/sensoa-lipususteen>

²³² Hillep, P., Pärnamets, R. (2020). A survey of attitudes and experiences of sexual abuse among children and young people (*Laste ja noorte seksuaalse väärkohtlemise hoiakute ja kogemuste uuring*). Tallinn: Eesti Uuringukeskus OÜ ja Norstat Eesti AS. [Available at: https://www.just.ee/sites/www.just.ee/files/laste_ja_noorte_seksuaalse_vaarkohtlemise_hoiakute_ja_kogemuste_uuring_2020.pdf]

²³³ <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/uudised/lasteabitelefoni-116-111-poordumiste-arv-tousutrendis>

²³⁴ Available at: <https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/sites/default/files/Lasteombudsmani%20tutvustav%20voldik%202015.pdf>

²³⁵ Available at: https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/sites/default/files/L%C3%95K%20voldik%202022_EST.pdf

²³⁶ See: <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/taastavoigus>

²³⁷ See: <https://lapsesobralikmenetus.just.ee/et/spetsialistile-minu-vorgustik/politse>

The application of restorative justice increases the well-being of victims and reduces the need to use punitive justice. Professionals working with children and young people are aware of restorative justice services and use the principles of restorative justice in their work. Victim Assistance is a restorative justice competence center that is responsible for the training of volunteers and other specialists implementing restorative justice and supports the quality assurance of services.

On 01.01.2018, amendments to the Social Welfare Act came into effect, which concern replacement and follow-up care services and the system of their organization and financing. In order to increase the importance of family-based foster care, a foster care financing scheme was created, which motivates the placement of children in a foster family rather than in an institution. The amendment to the law stipulated the quality principles that every service provider must follow when providing social services.

The Social Insurance Board's social campaign "A child is waiting for a family" made 5% of people seriously consider becoming a parent in a foster family.

In developing alternative care, the Ministry of Social Affairs continues to develop family-based foster care. In order to expand the possibilities of family-based substitute care, a system of professional care families will be created, which would enable to ensure family-based care also in the future, for example, in a crisis situation (instead of a safe house) or for those children for whom, for various reasons (age, several siblings, special needs, etc.), no other family-based care options have been found. In order to better support families, the provision of family-based foster care support services, which until now has been project-based, will be regulated. It also specifies the role of local government in supporting families.²³⁸

The child's right to safe and non-violent development remains concern in Estonia. NGO Estonian Union of Child Welfare (*Lastekaitse Liit*) has stated²³⁹:

- The spread of violence against children shows that the child's right to safe and non-violent development is not fully guaranteed in Estonian society. Each year, abuse affects thousands of children directly, indirectly but even more. The number of registered cases of domestic violence in 2020 slightly decreased compared to 2019, but is still unacceptably high (3,987 cases in year of 2020), including children who were either victims or witnesses of the crime in 27% of cases.
- The acceptance of corporal punishment of children among Estonian parents has not decreased compared to 2010, i.e. Estonians are not inclined to inform the relevant authorities about it. The number of appeals for children's help has increased over time, one of the main concerns of children is loneliness
- In many cases, children do not dare to tell their parents about their concerns. In addition to good relationships, it is important for children also that they would be able to turn to a reliable person with their concerns. The trend that many children do not tell anyone about their worries continues to cause concern.

In addition, the educational support for children remain concern. In 2020, every fifth child in Estonia needed some educational support service and every twelfth child a significant degree of support from the educational, social and/or health sector and was disabled, enhanced or

²³⁸ Available at: <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/uudised/sotsiaalministeerium-jatkab-perepohise-asendushoolduse-arendamist-ulevaade-ettepanekutest>

²³⁹ Saar, H. (2021). Rights of the child 2020-2021 (*Lapse õigused 2020-2021*). Available at: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Peatukk-2020-2021.pdf>

with special support, but getting help for children with special needs can get stuck in an excessively fragmented, behind a time-consuming and bureaucratic support system²⁴⁰.

Although there are still few child-centered statistics in the mainstream statistics and the data related to children is fragmented, it is positive that a large part of the statistics and studies related to the rights of the child can be found in a consolidated manner on the website of the Chancellor of Justice²⁴¹. Information the consolidation took into account the framework of the rights of the child and the thematic structure of the overviews of the rights of the child submitted to the UN.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasized Estonia's second to fourth in its final conclusions in 2017 on the periodic report that while national legislation is largely in line with the Convention, its practical implementation is not always so, for example when it comes to uneven access to services, regional disparities or insufficient levels of child participation.²⁴²

4.7. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any promising practice in the child protection care system that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

Child welfare development center (Lapse Heaolu Arengukeskus), as strategic partner of Social Ministry (which is not based on government initiative, but is partly financed by State), and whose goal is early support of children's well-being and development and prevention of problems, launched prevention and family work centers - *Family Nests (Perepesad)*- in three Estonian municipalities (in Põltsamaa, Viljandi and Türi) during the pilot project period (October 2019 to December 2021). All children of pre-school age living in the municipality with their parents are welcome to the family home. Each center has a playroom, provides short-term childcare services, provides information and training for parents by various specialists in family work, and provides effective services if help is needed.²⁴³

Pediatricians initiated a discussion on how to ensure the best interests of the child if the child needs for help is medically justified, but parents refuse treatment. Chancellor of Justice/children's Ombudsman organised the round table (held in June 2021), where pediatricians, judges, child protection specialists and representatives of Social insurance Board, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Affairs

²⁴⁰ Estonia, State Control. (2020). Availability of educational support services. Do children receive the necessary support services in kindergarten and school during their education. (Hariduse tugiteenuste kättesaadavus. Kas lapsed saavad hariduse omandamisel lasteaia ja koolis vajalikke tugiteenuseid?) Tallinn. [Available at: <https://www.riigikontroll.ee/Riigikontrollipublikatsioonid/Auditaruanded/tabid/206/Audit/2516/AuditId/462/language/et-EE/Default.aspx>]

²⁴¹ Available at: <https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/et/statistika-ja-uuringud>

²⁴² Saar, H. (2021). Rights of the child 2020-2021 (*Lapse õigused 2020-2021*). Available at: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Peatukk-2020-2021.pdf>

²⁴³ Available at: <https://www.lapseheaolu.ee/>

stated that if the child's life or health is in danger, it is necessary to intervene to protect the child, and all parties must act quickly²⁴⁴.

In the light of the cases of child abuse that have repeatedly come to light in recent years, it is positive that the Estonian Anti-Doping and Sports Information Foundation (EADSE) has prepared, in cooperation with various experts, a code of conduct *Start to talk* for sports personnel to prevent child and youth abuse and to resolve cases²⁴⁵.

Based on Union of Child Welfare report,²⁴⁶ more and more effective and child-friendly collaborations are being used in work with juvenile offenders methods, e.g. conflict mediation based on restorative law, restorative discussion circles, Family Conference, and the networking model "Out of the circle" developed by Social Insurance Board. More attention to child-friendly procedural principles in police work (The Chancellor of Justice / Children's Ombudsman in cooperation with the Police and Border Guard Board, the Prosecutor's Office and the Social Insurance Board organized cooperation seminars for police officers and prosecutors with the Ministry of Justice).

In some local governments, child protection workers has found that the regular contact (for example monthly meetings) and communication fosters collaboration across sectors. At meetings held by the Child Protection Team, information, concerns and joys are shared.

On 01.03. 2022, the online chat environment <https://sova.ee> started working on the initiative of SOS Children's Village Estonia (SOS Lasteküla). Its purpose is to offer all Estonian children the opportunity to talk about their concerns with a reliable and trained person, get advice if necessary and sometimes just be a good and friendly listener.

²⁴⁴ Saar, H. (2021). Rights of the child 2020-2021 (*Lapse õigused 2020-2021*). Available at: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Peatukk-2020-2021.pdf>

²⁴⁵ Available at: <https://human-rights-channel.coe.int/stop-child-sexual-abuse-in-sport-et.html>

²⁴⁶ Saar, H. (2021). Rights of the child 2020-2021 (*Lapse õigused 2020-2021*). Available at: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Peatukk-2020-2021.pdf>

5. Accountability, data collection, and monitoring mechanisms

5.1. Accountability mechanisms

5.1.1. Are there accountability mechanisms in place regarding the functioning of the child protection system? Is there any independent monitoring or reporting mechanisms on the performance of the child protection system? What is the role of child's ombudspersons, child commissioners or other independent national human rights institutions in monitoring child protection?

In the Republic of Estonia, the Children's Rights Protection Act adopted in 2014 regulates the protection of children's rights. The Child Protection Act is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Estonia acceded to in 1991 (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2005). (Supreme Council, 1991).

Section 7 of the Child Welfare Act states that the primary responsibility for ensuring the rights and welfare of the child lies with the parent or the person raising the child. According to Section 8, the authorities of the State and local government units and their officials, as well as legal persons governed by public or private law, must, in accordance with their competence, support the parent or the person bringing up the child in safeguarding the rights and well-being of the child. To prevent the child's need for assistance and to reduce existing problems, the authorities of the State and local authorities must develop measures, according to their capacities. To this end, they must cooperate with each other, across sectors, in the planning, financing and implementation of all actions for children, involving children, parents, caregivers, stakeholders and the public. (Parliament, 2014)

The Child Protection Act (§ 11-17) also sets out the responsibilities and tasks of child protection organization at the level of the central government, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Social Insurance Board and the local government. State supervision of compliance with the requirements of the Child Protection Act and the legislation enacted based on the Child Protection Act is conducted by the Social Insurance Board, the Consumer Protection and Technical Surveillance Authority and the local government unit under the conditions set out in Section 38 of the Child Protection Act. Sections 39 and 40 of the Child Welfare Act also describe the specific measures and derogations allowed for the exercise of state supervision.

As a unique and independent constitutional institution, the functions of the Ombudsman for Children are conducted by the Chancellor of Justice, who protects children's rights in relations with state authorities, local authorities or privately owned institutions (Chancellor of Justice, 2023).

The Handbook on Case Management issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia in 2006 explains that it is irrelevant whether a child in need is reported by telephone, electronically or by letter. Using all these channels, the municipality, the city, the social security office and the police must take measures to protect personal data, including checking their communication equipment and hardware and software. The law requires networking and case management principles to be followed when assessing a child's needs and providing assistance. Cooperation requires coordinated action and

exchange of information and data between different agencies, and communication is usually in writing in formal networks (ministry, authorities, school, nursery, hospital, family doctor, police, other service provider or organisation) and in informal networks (family, relatives, friends, acquaintances) in writing, orally by telephone or meetings.

5.1.2. How is the implementation of national action plans and strategies or other policy actions on child protection monitored? Briefly describe the established procedures and mention the actors involved and their roles.

Section 3 of the National Audit Office Act stipulates that the use of public funds for the implementation of national action plans and strategies or other child protection policy measures are controlled by the National Audit Office (NAO) during a performance audit (Parliament of Estonia, National Audit Office Act, 2002). The purpose of the performance audit is to provide the Parliament, the government and the public with comprehensive information on how well the state has fulfilled the set objectives. Most often, this consists of informing the public about shortcomings in the state's activities. However, the National Audit Office does not confine itself to identifying and characterising shortcomings, but also seeks to analyse the causes of problems and offer ideas on how to overcome them. The performance audit also aims to identify best administrative practice and contribute to its dissemination. It focuses on three main aspects: economy, efficiency and effectiveness. From the point of view of cost-effectiveness, it assesses whether the costs of achieving the objectives can be minimised. In assessing efficiency, the National Audit Office analyses the processes managed by the public sector, whether and how the same resources could be used to increase the results of activities or achieve the same results at lower cost. In assessing impact, the NAO analyses the achievement of the objectives declared in legislation and planning documents and the actual impact of the activity compared to the desired impact (if the impact indicator is lacking information or insufficient, the National Audit Office attempts to collect the necessary information itself). The National Audit Office is also interested in the preconditions for achieving efficiency and effectiveness. This means an analysis of whether the public sector is guided by good governance in the planning and implementation of its activities and whether it considers the needs of society (Annual Report of the National Audit Office, 2021).

According to the Statute of the Social Insurance Board, state supervision of the organisation of social protection and child protection is conducted by the Law and Supervision Department of the Social Insurance Board. (Social Insurance Board, 2019).

Question	YES	NO	Comments
5.1.3. Is there a child rights assessment existing or foreseen? Please note that child rights' assessment stands for the measurement of the	X		In addition to the annual performance audit conducted by the National Audit Office, the assessment of children's rights has been conducted by the institution of the Chancellor of Justice since 2011.

<p>impact of proposed or adopted legislation on children as a group. It is usually done at the parliamentary or ministerial level.</p>		<p>In 2011, the Chancellor of Justice was granted the competence of Ombudsman for Children in accordance with the Paris Principles, and the Children's Protection Act adopted in 2014 is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its additional protocols (hereinafter the Convention), the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and other relevant legislation.</p>
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5.1.4. Are there quality standards for child protection services set in the legislation (including prevention programmes)? (e.g. number of cases per case workers, requirements regarding infrastructures of residential care and number of personnel, performance, and fiscal accountability mechanisms) Please describe.

The legislation regulating the quality of child protection services is the Administrative Procedure Act and the Child Protection Act. Administrative Procedure Act § 5(2) states that administrative proceedings shall be conducted in a purposeful and efficient manner, as well as simply and quickly as possible, avoiding unnecessary costs and inconvenience to persons. To ensure the quality of child protection services, the Child Protection Act provides that child protection is organised by the Government of the Republic, the Prevention Council, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Social Insurance Board and local authorities based on the tasks laid down in the Act.

In addition, the Child Protection Act outlines the qualification requirements and restrictions for working as a child protection worker and as a person working with children (§ 18-§ 20). The competence of a social worker is set out in the professional standard for social workers at levels 6 and 7, which describes the work of a social worker and the set of skills, knowledge and attitudes required to successfully carry out the work, i.e., the competence requirements. For the conduct of procedural activities, including case management and assessment of the well-being of the child and the family, the process and procedural guidelines are described in the Child Welfare Act in the section describing the principles for the treatment of children (§§ 21-25) and in the sections regulating the protection of children in need of assistance (§§ 26-§ 29), children in need (§§ 30-§ 33) and separated children (§ 34). In addition, the Child Protection Act lays down the rights, duties and principles of internal evaluation of childcare institutions (§ 35-§ 37), to ensure the effectiveness of the organisation and working environment of childcare institutions and of their activities in safeguarding the rights and well-being of the child. In addition to the legal guidelines, the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, in cooperation with the Narva College of the University of Tartu, issued a manual on case management in 2006 to harmonise the quality of the work of child protection specialists and social workers.

There are no direct quality standards laid down in legislation, but the use of public funds for the implementation of national action plans and strategies or other child protection policy measures is subject to performance audits by the National Audit Office in accordance with § 3 of the National Audit Office Act. The purpose of the performance audit is to identify best administrative practice, to assess the effectiveness of legislation by analysing the achievement of the objectives declared in the

planning documents and the actual impact of the activities in relation to the desired impact, and to determine whether the public sector is following good governance in planning and implementing its activities and taking into account the needs of society (Annual Report of the National Audit Office, 2021).

Question	YES	NO	Comments
<p>5.1.5. Is consultation with children and families foreseen and/or taking place in the process of the evaluation of services and measures and in the development of child protection policies and legislation?</p> <p>If <u>yes</u>, at what level is this done? Please provide indicative examples.</p>	X		<p>Section 8 of the Child Protection Act stipulates that in order to safeguard the rights and well-being of the child, state and local government authorities and their officials, as well as public and private legal persons, must cooperate with each other across sectors in the planning, financing and implementation of all measures aimed at children, involving children, parents, carers, stakeholders and the public.</p> <p>During the drafting of the Child Protection Act 2012-2014, the Ministry of Social Affairs involved experts, target group representatives and the public in the development of child protection policy and legislation. A number of expert meetings and stakeholder and partner engagement workshops were organised. Children were involved through school lessons and young people were able to participate in discussions at the summer camp of the Estonian Youth Association. Workshops in the framework of the seminars discussed the principles of prevention, multidisciplinary cooperation, quality assessment and the up-to-date requirements for child protection workers (Ministry of Social Affairs, Explanatory memorandum to the draft Child Protection Act, 2014).</p> <p>Most families want to give the best to their children, and building a trusting and mutually respectful working relationship with the family is essential to understanding what is happening to the child and planning to help them. A guide to child and family assessment, produced by the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs in 2009, describes the case manager's cooperation with the child's representative at each stage of the process.</p>

<p>5.1.6. Is the responsibility for data collection on child protection determined in the legislative framework?</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>Section 17 (1) (6) of the Child Protection Act stipulates that to create an environment that supports the development of the child and to improve the well-being of children, families with children and persons raising children, it is the duty of local authorities to collect the necessary information on the situation and needs of children and families in their administrative territory within the framework and principles of case management. Case management as a working method started to be implemented at national level in Estonia in 2004 in the framework of the PHARE project "Promotion of employment of people with disabilities". The case management working method is used by social workers, employment counsellors and probation officers, for example, to identify individual client needs. It requires coordination and exchange of information and data between different agencies and is usually done in writing in formal networks (ministry, authorities, school, nursery, hospital, GP, police, other service provider or organisation) and in informal networks (family, relatives, friends, acquaintances) in writing, orally by telephone or meetings.</p> <p>According to § 28 of the Child Protection Act, the child's need for assistance is assessed by a child protection worker or a person working with the child, involving the relevant specialist if necessary. When assessing the child's need for assistance, the child protection worker or person working with the child must assess: 1) the child's physical, health, psychological, emotional, social, cognitive, educational and economic condition; 2) the parenting skills of the person raising the child.</p> <p>The client needs and resources assessment phase of case management collects data to help identify the problem(s) a person needs to address, the root cause(s) of the problem(s), the dynamics of the problem(s) over time (i.e. duration, evolution, etc.), as well as the people and situations involved. In the data collection phase, all personal data are collected that can be used to learn something about the person</p>
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		<p>specifically identified, such as the person's name, personal identification number, place of residence, place of work, school, etc. Personal data also includes sensitive (or special categories of) personal data, such as age, stage of development and state of health. The person submits to the municipality or city government the data necessary for obtaining social services, social benefits, social assistance and other assistance. The requirements and conditions for processing personal data are laid down in the Personal Data Protection Act. Personal data may be collected only to the extent necessary for the achievement of the specified purposes. The official designated by the law has the right to obtain additional information about a person from other legal and natural persons unless the disclosure of such information is prohibited by law.</p> <p>Section 15(3)(2) of the Child Protection Act obliges the Social Insurance Board to collect statistics on child protection, and Section 34¹ obliges local government units and competent authorities, at the request of the Social Insurance Board, to collect and submit information relating to the procedure for placing a child in Estonia from another Member State.</p> <p>The Child Protection Act obliges the person who employs or authorises a person to employ a child to check that the restrictions laid down in paragraphs 1 to 2 of the Act are complied with when employing or authorising a person to employ a child.</p>
<p>5.1.7. Is there a single authority responsible for monitoring data collection and centralised coordination and data sharing at national level?</p> <p><u>If yes</u>, Is there a national database (a joint database for monitoring and tracking children) for collecting data in</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>The Ministry of Social Affairs manages the STAR data register of social services and benefits, which ensures more secure protection of data, better data exchange with other national registers, and enables local social workers to organise social work and make better decisions at local and national level.</p> <p>The Ministry of Social Affairs coordinates the collection of data on children's health and development by, for example, family doctors and nurses, kindergarten teachers, schoolteachers, special needs teachers and child psychologists. Where necessary, the case manager will make</p>

the child protection area at the national, regional, or local level?		enquiries to the relevant authorities (police, children's institution, workplace, medical institution, juvenile commission, other databases (archives)) to obtain and analyse the available data on the person.
5.1.8. Are there common indicators in place to monitor the performance of the child protection system?	X	<p>The monitoring of the functioning of the child protection system is ensured by the Children and Families Programme of the Well-being Outcome Area set up to implement the Well-being 2023-2030 Development Plan and meet its objectives. The programme outlines the objective, metrics and budget of the measures to be implemented to build families, raise children, help victims of violence recover from trauma and achieve self-sufficiency. The programme's actions also support the objectives of child and family policy to improve the protection of children's rights, the economic and social well-being of families and the promotion of births (Ministry of Social Affairs, Programme for Children and Families 2023-2026, 2023).</p> <p>The indicators used are in line with the OECD's indicators on quality of life and material well-being based on the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitou's concept of well-being.</p>
5.1.9. Are there data protection protocols in place and adhered to?		As a processor of personal data, the Social Insurance Board processes data in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council, the Personal Data Protection Act, other data protection legislation and the instructions of the Data Protection Inspectorate. The Social Insurance Board processes personal data only to the extent necessary for the performance of its tasks as set out in its Statute. In the performance of these tasks, we collect personal data, including sensitive and confidential information (Social Insurance Board, Processing of personal data, 2023).
5.1.10. Are there any gaps in the data collection system related to child protection in the country, which have been identified by relevant child protection authorities/institutions, civil society organisations or other institutions active in the child protection field? Is there a systematic and		

consistent collection of data related to child protection at national, regional, or local level?
Please mention if efforts are made to address these gaps.

According to § 17 of the Child Protection Act, local authorities are obliged to provide local residents, including children and families with children, with measures to support them, i.e. services, subsidies and other assistance. The concepts of child protection published by the Ministry of Social Affairs in 2005 point out that a statistical overview of the situation of Estonian children is not sufficient for decision-making and for submitting national reports to international organisations. Obstacles include both the structure of the databases (data are collected in aggregated form) and the lack of data. For example, there is no comprehensive overview of abused children, and the aggregated nature of the data makes it difficult to get an overview of children aged 0-17 in the health sector. The child protection worker or the person working with the child must involve the child and the carer or the childcare institution where the child is staying in the assessment of the child's needs, but in the context of the data collection system, if parents do not share the child's health data, the child protection worker must only assess the child's health status in terms of what is visible to the eye. Improving the data collection and sharing system will enhance inter-institutional cooperation to assess the state of play on child-related issues, policies and activities. Improving the data collection and sharing system will enhance inter-institutional cooperation to assess the state of play on child-related issues, policies and activities (Ministry of Social Affairs, Child Protection Concept, 2005).

The Children's Ombudsman, in cooperation with the Data Protection Inspectorate, has published an information leaflet to raise awareness about reporting a child in need and data protection.

The Law on Child Protection adopted in 2014 entrusts the Social Insurance Board with the task of operating a child helpline and ensuring the round-the-clock protection and, where necessary, the separation from the family of a child in need, and regulates the procedures for ensuring the anonymity of the person reporting a child in need...

Since 2015, the Chancellor of Justice has been supervising compliance with fundamental rights and freedoms in the organisation of the collection, processing, use and monitoring of personal data and related information by the executive authorities.

The Chancellor of Justice has a mandate to issue recommendations to the Parliament (*Riigikogu*), opinions to the Supreme Court, notices to the executive branch in the format of suggestions, explanations and reports from inspection visits. The Chancellor of Justice also has the mandate to submit proposals and requests in the cases concerning constitutional review process. The decision whether to use any of these mechanisms rests upon the Chancellor of Justice. Legal entities and individuals may also turn to the Chancellor of Justice regarding respective matters, which may trigger launch of the mechanisms described. Thus, the capability of the Chancellor of Justice to influence the system of data collection is indirect, achievable through the mechanisms described.

5.2. Developments in the past years: achievements, gaps, and challenges

Based on the output of the 2014 mapping exercise, please briefly describe the development of child protection accountability in the past 8 years, incl. achievements and (persisting) gaps and challenges.

A baseline analysis of the renewal of the child protection system prepared by the University of Tartu in 2013 identifies five groups of problems in the current Estonian child protection system: 1) cross-sectoral cooperation is weak and responsibility is dispersed, prevention is uncoordinated; 2) child protection quality assurance standards are inadequate, there are no guidelines and supervision of child protection workers is lacking; 3) the shortage of child protection workers in local authorities and the capacity and quality of service provision is uneven in different regions; 4) a significant proportion of child protection workers lack professional training and there is a lack of consistent professional development of child protection workers; 5) too little attention is paid to children's views and awareness of child abuse is low. According to the authors of the analysis, the draft Child Protection Act creates the preconditions for addressing many of the previous bottlenecks in the child protection system. The aim of the new Children Act is to eliminate these problems, including the introduction of a system that focuses on effective prevention alongside dealing with the consequences and is based on the principle of early intervention. Cross-sectoral cooperation is seen as essential, as well as the provision of necessary services for both the child and the carer to ensure the best possible well-being of the child and the family. (University of Tartu, 2013)(PricewaterhouseCoopers Advisors, 2013)

A baseline analysis by the University of Tartu in 2013, the renewal of the child protection system prepared by the University of Tartu in 2010 identifies five groups of problems in the current Estonian child protection system: 1) cross-sectoral cooperation is weak and responsibility is dispersed, prevention is uncoordinated; 2) child protection quality assurance standards are inadequate, there are no guidelines and supervision of child protection workers is lacking; 3) the shortage of child protection workers in local authorities and the capacity and quality of service provision is uneven in different regions ; 4) a significant proportion of child protection workers lack professional training and there is a lack of consistent professional development of child protection workers; 5) too little attention is paid to children's views and awareness of child abuse is low. According to the authors of the analysis, the draft Child Protection Act creates the preconditions for addressing many of the previous bottlenecks in the child protection system. The aim of the new Children Act is to eliminate these problems, including the introduction of a system that focuses on effective prevention alongside dealing with the consequences and is based on the principle of early intervention. Cross-sectoral cooperation is seen as essential, as well as the provision of necessary services for both the child and the carer to ensure the best possible well-being of the child and the family (ibid).

New Child Protection Act: 1) creates prerequisites for improving the management and development of child protection with a streamlined structure for setting objectives and implementing them, as the Act defines the authority responsible for the national coordination of child protection and the development and implementation of child rights and child protection policy (the Ministry of Social Affairs); 2) Creates a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism and a framework that values cooperation, which creates the potential to address important problems such as lack of integration, cross-sectoral cooperation and communication; 3) Creates the preconditions for synergies by establishing the Social Security Agency as a completely new level of coordination; 4) the addition of the Social Insurance Board level to the child protection system will create opportunities for child protection workers in the local authorities to obtain assistance and advice in solving complex cases; 5) the introduction of a

system of regular accreditation, further training and job counselling will create the prerequisites for improving the quality of child protection work and for ensuring that child protection work is carried out by competent professionals with specialist training; 6) places prevention and early (i.e. at the earliest stage of the problem) and appropriate intervention at the heart of child protection work; 7) emphasises the value of the family by introducing the principle of the protection of the continuity of the child's upbringing; 8) supports the creation of a society that values children; 9) introduces a ban on child abuse; and 10) supports positive parenting by introducing the principle of support for carers. child protection (ibid).

The principle of the best interests of the child is enshrined in several international conventions and declarations. It was first mentioned in the 1959 Declaration on the Rights of the Child. For example, disputes concerning rights of custody and access, separation and adoption, etc. In some countries the principle was also applied to some extent in school and childcare matters.

In its 2017 Communication on Strengthening EU Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, the European Commission pledged to support EU Member States' professionals and authorities in their crucial joint action. Close cooperation at all levels - national and international - is key to ensuring that children's rights are protected and that they receive age- and gender-appropriate assistance and support, including in the areas of care, health and education. The speed of the information request process and the creation of common digital databases need to be improved.

5.3. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any promising practice in child protection accountability that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

A survey report commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and published in 2017, "Improving the performance and sustainable development of local child protection work", shows that child protection workers use information based on interviews and home visits rather than register data in their work. Home visits are an important source of information for almost all child protection workers. An estimated 60% of child protection workers have been involved in the elaboration of development plans and/or strategies, and the slightly higher involvement of child protection workers in small peripheral LAs in the region may be due to the fact that they generally have more roles at local level. It may also be easier to keep abreast of and contribute to decision-making processes in smaller municipalities. The survey found that covisions with a fixed regularity are a source of motivation for child protection workers. They are also organised across local authorities and allow for comparing child protection cases and learning from each other. The survey report shows that the majority, 97%, of child protection workers who responded to the questionnaire said that they had worked with other local authorities on child protection issues. The largest proportion of child protection workers had been involved in preventive activities as disseminators of information materials (64%) and as members of working groups (61%), while a smaller proportion of child protection workers had been involved in various activities as lecturers, authors of articles, experts or working group leaders. In addition to the above, child protection workers themselves were able to identify activities in which they would like to be more involved. Some examples of responses: creating a sense of community and informing about the duty to report, informing teachers in schools and kindergartens about what child protection is, working with schools in the area, organising joint preventive round tables, organising summer activities for children, organising events for families, training and counselling parents, informing the local authority about the situation of families. Here is a lengthy comment by one child protection worker, who wrote that home visits play an important role in prevention. An analysis of the breakdown of sub-activities revealed that telephone calls accounted for

37% of all documentation and procedures sub-activities, drafting of official letters and e-mails for 11%, work with the local data processing system for 8% and processing child protection cases in STAR for 8%. The remaining sub-activities in this category (such as compiling data registers or drafting child protection documents) accounted for smaller shares of all sub-activities. (Viira, 2017).

6. General education, promotion, and awareness raising

6.1. Education on child rights

6.1.1. Does education on child rights form part of the (national) formal school curricula? If yes, please provide details such as in which types of school and targeting which grade(s) (age group), as part of which school subject and for how many periods in a pupil's school career.

It is not specifically part of the national formal school curricula. However, education on rights is part of the curricula on social subjects. There is one such subject in the second level and two subjects in the third level. The curriculum addressed matters of human rights and democracy, equality, capability to understand legal texts, the matter of citizen rights, that all rights have corresponding duties. The average amount of hours for each of these subjects is 30. In particular, the curriculum also includes the goal to provide examples from legislations which safeguard the rights of children. The pupils should know children rights and obligations and enhance the capability to notice violations of children rights. The pupils are also provided knowledge to understand their individual rights and related obligations. The curriculum also includes aspects of rights to identity.

6.1.2. Please provide an overview of the most important national and/or sub-national implemented programmes and activities aiming at educating children, parents, teachers, and/or society at large about child rights and/or child protection at national or sub-national level. By which actors were those commissioned, funded, and implemented?

The Estonian Union for Child Welfare has consistently provided activities for raising awareness of various stakeholders about children's rights. For instance, in 2022 during the month of the rights of the child, the Union organized each day targeted events on the topic, such as EU strategy, issues related to violence against the children, promotion of tolerance, etc: <https://www.lastekaitseliit.ee/et/organisatsioon/meie-tegevused/lapse-oiguste-kuu-2022/>

Targeting parents through their awareness raising is part of these activities mentioned. The focus of targeting upon parents is related to specific information how to detect and prevent drugs usage, and minimize negative effects from digital devices usage.

The events were financed through support from various Estonian ministries, as well as some professional organizations, such as the Estonian Bar Association, and some embassies (Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway).

The Ombudsman of Children has an ongoing project "With Children and for children", where recognition is given to individuals and organizations whose new initiatives or long-term activities have positively influenced families in local or national levels. The project is financed by various public and civil society organizations, for example including the Office of the Estonian President.

6.2. Promotion and awareness raising

6.2.1. Please provide information on awareness raising and/or promotion campaigns or relevant activities on child rights (possibly including on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights) and/or protection issues targeting the general public or children in general at national or sub-national level. Please provide information on the most recent and representative awareness raising campaigns, including information on the target groups, the thematic areas covered, the actors involved, funding, the method of dissemination chosen and the impact of the campaign, if assessed.

The Estonian Ombudsman of Children has a website which provides links to many relevant issues related to children's rights. This is a permanent website with information frequently renewed, it cannot be termed as a campaign or activity, nevertheless it provides information for awareness raising: <https://www.oiguskantsler.ee/et/infomaterjalid> The thematic areas are: rights and obligations of the child, rights and obligations of parents, information materials, statistical information, Facebook links, young guardians of election rights.

The Police and Boarder Guard Board has initiated several awareness raising campaigns, such as information to the parents about the safety of children, digital security, security in public spaces and at home, usage of public transportation.

There is no information on awareness raising and/or promotion campaigns or relevant activities on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

There is no information about the assessment of impact of these activities.

6.2.2. Are there any awareness raising activities regarding complaint mechanisms at national or sub-national level, e.g. for the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights on a communications procedure²⁴⁷? Please briefly describe.

There are none. Although an extensive edited volume issued by the Ombudsman of Children in 2021 "Children in the Estonian Society" contains many referrals to the UN child protection system, it does not include information about the Optional Protocol.

²⁴⁷ URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-rights-child-communications> [12/12/2022]

6.2.3. Are there any awareness raising or training activities at national or sub-national level on digital literacy, privacy and online safety for children, parents, teachers, and other relevant professionals?

Specific attention has been paid to disseminate knowledge about safe usage of the Internet. For instance, the project “Wise in the Internet” organized events in schools introducing to the children safe ways for using various digital devices. The project was co-financed by the European Union.

The Estonian Police and Border Guard Board has initiated several public campaigns against abuse of children rights in the Internet. Inter alia, the Board has at its website specific information with links to applicable recommendations to safeguard the rights, as well as articulation of possible remedies against violations.

Several public universities, including Tallinn University and the University of Tartu, have included the promotion of digital literacy into their teacher education curricula. This means, that individuals graduating and proceeding to work at schools have obtained knowledge how to disseminate the concepts of digital literacy to the children.

Since Estonia is considered to be a highly advanced digitalized country, digital literacy is considered standard knowledge by the majority of persons using digital space.

6.3. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any challenges and promising practice regarding child rights and/or child protection outreach activities/measure targeting relevant groups of society or society at large that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

There is a growing practice to provide access to all children to extra-curricular activities. Various civil society and activist lead initiatives have the goal to provide to all children the possibility to attend theatre and cultural events and attend sports clubs.

One of the main challenges is to protect children in the digital environment. Since adolescents spend a considerable time every day in the cyber-reality, it is important to secure safe environment. Educational establishments are all aware of the need to disseminate to children the understanding of responsible usage of the Internet, which would not infringe someone else’s rights.

7. Child participation and community engagement

7.1. Complaint procedures

Question	YES	NO	Comments
7.1.1. Are there independent child complaints procedures (e.g. an ombuds institution) that are fully compliant with the Paris Principles ²⁴⁸ in place, with an ability to hear, review and enforce individual complaints from children?	X		The institution of the Ombudsman of the Children has the ability to hear and review individual complaints. The question asks whether the Ombudsman institution has the ability to enforce individual complaints. However, such discretion does not emerge from the Paris Principles, <u>nor</u> has the Estonian Ombudsman for Children such discretion.
7.1.2. Are there specialised Courts and compliant procedures with international standards in place for children in contact with the law and for children to access justice and seek redress and remedies for violations of the child protection rights?		X	<p>There have never been specialized courts in Estonia to hear complaints from children. However, there is a policy towards specialization of judges, which means that some judges would focus on respective complaints. There is also a policy to have judicial disputed resolved in pre-trial proceedings if at all possible. There are no specialized chambers or hearing rooms for children in contact with the law.</p> <p>Although Estonia does not have specialized courts, a special room for the hearing of a child is planned for each new or renovated courthouse. As of now, there is such a room in Harju County Court. In 2022, the Ministry of Justice also equipped all county courts with child-friendly procedure boxes. Through the design of the box it is possible to create a safe and appropriate environment for the child even</p>

²⁴⁸ URL: [https://qanhri.org/paris-principles/#:~:text=The%20Paris%20Principles%20\(%27Principles%20Relating,are%20pluralism%2C%20independence%20and%20effectiveness](https://qanhri.org/paris-principles/#:~:text=The%20Paris%20Principles%20(%27Principles%20Relating,are%20pluralism%2C%20independence%20and%20effectiveness) [12/12/2022]

			in those courthouses where there are no specially adapted rooms yet.
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7.2. Feedback mechanisms

Question	YES	NO	Comments
7.2.1. Are there government support fora such as children’s groups established at local/community level, and is a formal mechanism in place through which national/sub-national/local government receive and respond to the feedback and ideas from children and children’s groups who have received child protection services?		X	There are several initiatives and mechanisms in place for receiving such feedback, but these do <u>not</u> contain direct government support fora. At the same time, support from public funding is indirect, since the government finances various public institutions, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Police and Boarder Guard Board, who gather such feedback.
7.2.2. Are community-based mechanisms functional across the country where necessary and per applicability and per protocols and procedures? Is their effectiveness monitored by independent accountability mechanisms?	X		The main independent monitoring is exercised through the Office of the Ombudsman of Children. There is no specific information regarding the effectiveness of community-based mechanisms.

7.3. Promising practices

Please list and briefly describe any challenges and promising practice regarding child participation and community engagement that you come across. (if available please include references to documents or URLs in case of online tools/mechanisms)

The promising practice is related to the philosophy of child protection, where focus from social welfare is moving to a broader level of safeguarding the well-being of children. There is a trend to change language in respective offices and public communication.

It deserves to be highlighted, that there are many occasions where the communities have stood behind children in need of urgent financial support and have collected within relative short periods of time considerable donations to help to pay for complicated and expensive medical treatment, or to purchase medicine.

Almost every municipality organizes various community engagement events, which include involvement of children.

Possibly the main challenge is related to the discrepancies between access to social services and cultural events between the rural and urban areas. It is also connected to the availability of financial resources at municipal levels.

A major challenge, but which is of global nature, is to counter the negative effects upon young people due to PUI (problematic usage of the Internet). It needs a coordinated effort between stakeholders, national and European institutions and academics to address the problem and find mitigating solutions.