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TEADUSMINISTEERIUM

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Concept “Equal opportunities in lifelong learning for parents of young children”

Summary

Estonian Strategy of Education 2020 serves as the source document in the education of Estonia. One of the document’s primary strategic goals is to ensure equal opportunities in lifelong learning for the population. Project *European Agenda for Adult Learning* aims at addressing the issue as one means for achieving the goal. Duration of the project is 1 November 2015 – 31 October 2017 and it is coordinated by ETKA Andras in cooperation with the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research.

The theoretical standpoint of the project lies in the fact that several surveys in Estonia as well as worldwide have confirmed – there is a relation between the parents’ level of education and their children’s educational advancement. Therefore, parents of young children with lower levels of education are focused on as the target group of the current project. The parents with lower levels of education are defined within the project framework as the parents whose level of education is basic or lower and whose children are up to seven years of age.

The number of parents of young children with lower levels of education is quite remarkable in Estonia and it varies in terms of counties. E.g., in Järva, Viljandi, Lääne, Valga, Põlva, Jõgeva, Lääne-Viru and Rapla counties 26–31% of the parents of young children have lower levels of education. Several surveys have confirmed that if a person interrupts their education, they are very likely to continue it later. Adult learners have difficulties in returning to education, as they have mostly negative experience from school. Very often these difficulties are accompanied by family obligations and possible financial problems. The adult learner that has discontinued their studies needs to have strong motivation in order to be able to start again.

The current project aims at increasing this motivation and supporting the parents of young children with lower levels of education to return to the education system. In addition to the direct target group, activities of the project also involve the indirect target group that includes different adult education stakeholders who can support the direct target group’s return to lifelong learning. Such stakeholders include local governments, communities and nursery schools.

12 trainings in at least six counties are held in the project framework, where parents of young children are informed about the possibilities for learning and motivated to continue their studies. The training curriculum includes the topics of self-regulation, personal development and subsistence. During the training, participants develop their personal career plans and analyse their abilities and opportunities for coping with different roles that learning in adulthood is accompanied by.

In addition to the trainings the project offers various dissemination activities that address wider public. These activities aim at raising the awareness among the people who do not belong to the target groups to be able to recognise, encourage and motivate people with lower levels of education. Dissemination is also carried out among the local governments and communities in order to enhance their ability to offer support services (such as transport, childcare, etc.) with the aim of removing obstacles that impede the target group from continuing their studies.

The concept is disseminated among the staff of nursery schools, employees of local governments, education specialists at county governments, NGO-s, networks coordinated by ETKA Andras and other relevant stakeholders. The greater is the public awareness of the problems related to participation in lifelong learning, the higher is the probability that people with shorter educational path behind them return to lifelong learning. Dissemination is facilitated by the Estonian Association of Heads of Pre-school Education.