



Estonian Educational Personnel Union

*Umbrella organization  
of local teachers' unions in Estonia*

# Topics

- Overview of EHL
- Current state of education
- Teachers in Estonia





# Overview of EHL



# The Role of EHL

- **Why do we exist?**

Because education shapes the future.

We make sure every education worker feels valued, heard, and supported.

- **How do we work?**

By defending rights and well-being, shaping education policy, and empowering members to lead change.

- **What do we do?**

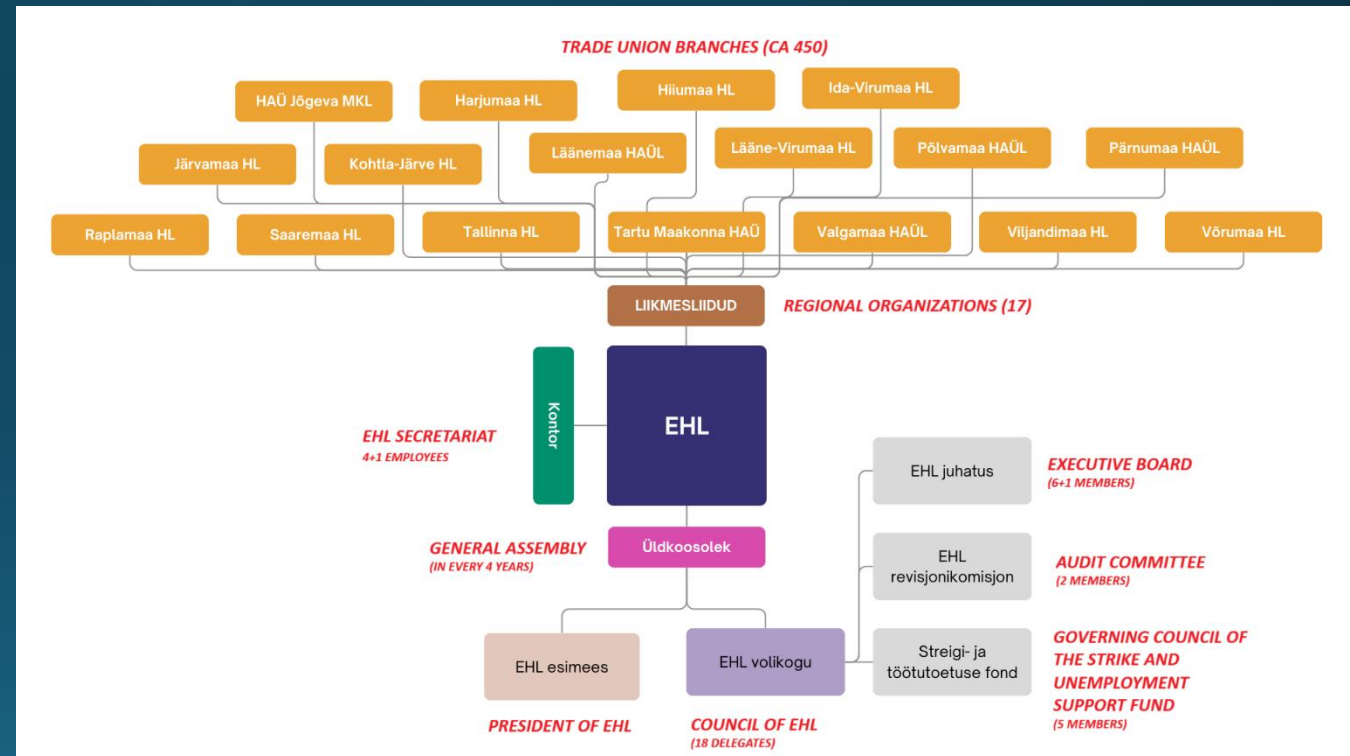
We advocate, negotiate, and provide support.

Above all, we amplify the voice of every education worker.

# EHL structure and overview



- Largest organization uniting education workers.
- Umbrella organization:
  - 17 regional member organizations.
- Ca 7000 members across Estonia (ca 450 branches)
  - ECE, GE, VET and hobby education;
- Partner for education institutions' principals, municipalities, and the state.



# Key areas of activity



- Salaries, working conditions, legislation
  - Centralized model.
- Legislative obligation - annual minimum wage negotiations
  - in 2025 GE 1820€ (20-24 contact hours per week)
  - ECE 90% GE teachers' salaries – 1638€ (ECE with Masters' degree 100% GE teachers' salary)
  - +20% per teacher as „differentiation fund“ for additional tasks (to KOV)
  - no mandate for the representatives of local municipalities
- No collective agreement, but:
  - from 2015 „The Good Will Agreement“ - guiding principles for working conditions;
  - from 2024 „The Education Agreement“ - aimed at ensuring career opportunities, salaries, and workload for general education teachers.
- Active member in multiple working groups

# Membership benefits

Membership fee: 1% from monthly gross salary.

- Legal assistance
- Trainings and joint activities
- Right to strike
- Strike and unemployment support
- Accident insurance
- ITIC Teacher Card
- Discounts from partners (e.g. fuel, accommodation, and sports discounts)



# Current state of education



# Current state of education

- The number of students has increased in the last 10 years
  - 264,000 students in Estonia
- Early childhood education/kindergartens
  - an educational institution for a relatively small fee
- Basic education
  - school at the age of 7
  - lasts 9 years
  - no tuition
  - compulsory education until the age of 18
- Secondary education/high school
  - 3 years
- Vocational education
  - typically 3-4 years
  - the percentage of young people enrolled could be higher

# Education governance – KG, PS, G



- Kindergartens are managed by the local government (KOV)
  - the entire cost is the responsibility of the KOV
  - A place must be available for all children
- The majority of primary schools are also managed by the KOV
  - but the difference is in the financing - the money for teachers' salaries comes from the ministry to the local government.
- Some private primary schools and kindergartens
- Some gymnasiums are managed by the state, most still by local governments
  - **A plan to bring all post-basic education under state management by 2035**

# Education governance - VET



- Most VET institutions state-run, overseen by Ministry of Education
  - 99% of students in publicly funded places
  - Tuition-free: free school meals and learning materials
- Structural and Curriculum Reforms
  - Tallinn reform: 6 vocational schools → 2 vocational colleges
  - Launch in autumn 2026: 4-year programmes
  - New specialisations: wind energy, drone technology, green tech
  - Goal: efficient school network, labour market alignment (OSKA analysis)
- Digital Reform: AI Leap
  - Nationwide programme introducing AI tools into education
  - Extension to vocational education in 2026
  - Involvement: ~38,000 students and 2,000 teachers
  - Aims: reduce teacher workload, support personalised learning, build AI/digital competences

# Academic year at school



- 175 study days
- Summer vacation at least 8 weeks
  - In addition:
    - 1 week at the end of October
    - About 2 weeks during Christmas
    - 1 week at the end of February
    - 1 week in the second half of April
- Students must learn at home 😊



# Teachers in Estonia

# Teachers in Estonia



- There are approximately 27 000 teachers
  - 17,000 in general education schools (PK and G)
  - 2,000 in vocational education
  - 8,000 in kindergartens
- The number of vocational education and kindergarten teachers has been stable.
- In basic education, the number of teachers has increased by 2,500 in 10 years.
- The average age of teachers is increasing
  - 54% of teachers are older than 50 years.
  - The 60+ age group has increased by 50% in the last 10 years.
- Teacher shortage is a big problem
  - The biggest problem is with the succession of mathematics and science teachers.
  - This autumn, the number of teacher training students was increased (by 19%).
  - Scholarships for students of education majors were also increased (since 2023/2024).
  - Systemic exceptions in the conditions for free studies in teacher education.

# Teacher qualification and career:



- A teacher must have higher education and, in addition, a teacher's qualification (aligned with the international professional system)
  - A Bachelor's and Level 6 is required in kindergartens.
  - In school, minimum is Master's and Level 7.
- Career system:
  - For now, all teachers have the same salary level, that does not depend on seniority or other factors.
  - „The Education Agreement“ **establishes teachers' career model (from 2026)**: a four-tier career model supports teachers' professional development and sets clear frameworks for career opportunities and salary ranges.



To conclude



# We are *lucky* to have education-oriented government *BUT...*



- Narrow spectrum of TU work, focuse more on:
  - *the image of the profession*
  - *teacher students - quality and compliant education*
  - *young teachers*
  - *CPD*
  - *health and safety*
  - *training the union reps*
- No national collective agreements
  - *GE, ECE, VET*
  - *weak employers' organization*
  - *need of better legislation*
- Weak local TU organisations
  - *low membership/high average age*
  - *low attractiveness of trade unionism*
  - *most chairmen work on social basis*
  - *EHL's structure to match with the national administrative reform*



Thank you!