

DISABILITY RIGHTS IN ESTONIA

UPR PRE-SESSION



EESTI PUUETEGA INIMESTE KODA
ESTONIAN CHAMBER OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Since 1993, Chamber has been advocating for the human rights of people with disabilities and chronic illnesses, promoting their full social inclusion, equal opportunities, and participation in all aspects of society.

Our mission is to raise awareness, challenge barriers, and ensure that every individual can live with dignity and equality.

The Chamber is a network that includes 15 county-level chambers of persons with disabilities and 36 nationwide associations and unions focused on specific disabilities or chronic illnesses, in addition to 5 supporting members. Collectively, the network represents nearly 300 organizations across Estonia.

POVERTY AMONG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- The overall rate of people living in relative poverty remains the same, but for people with disabilities it has almost doubled (in 2011: 26.1% vs. in 2023: 41.1%). Relative poverty among disabled persons is high, people's economic situation is fragile.
- Recent tax changes have reduced household income and subsistence and hit the economically worse off people hardest, e.g. people with disabilities and the elderly.
- The impact of tax increases is not linear, it intersects with several factors that have the effect of increasing vulnerability (e.g. age, disability, income, family composition), which have an amplifying effect when they occur at the same time.

DECLINING NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- The national definition of disability remains narrower than established under the CRPD. As noted in the previous reporting period, changes to administrative procedures for assessing disability have resulted in many children and adults previously recognised as persons with disabilities losing that status.
- There has also been a notable statistical decrease in the number of persons officially recognised as having disabilities.
- Since 2018, the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities has raised concerns about changes in assessment practices, particularly in repeated evaluations, where decisions often lack adequate reasoning.
- In 2015, an estimated 145,000 persons, or 11 per cent of the population, were recognised as having disabilities. By June 2025, this figure had fallen to 104,000, or 7.6 per cent of the population. This decline indicates that many individuals in need of support are no longer receiving appropriate assistance, as access to a wide range of state and municipal services and benefits remains dependent on the formal determination of disability severity.

RESTRICTION OF LEGAL CAPACITY AND GUARDIANSHIP

- Article 12 of UN CRPD Equal recognition before the law was ratified by Estonia with a declaration. Estonia is utilising the substituted judgment model, which gives the legal guardian right to decide instead of the person with disabilities.
- Legal provisions for supported decision making are not available in Estonia.
- Lack of legal capacity is adversely affecting the rights and interests of an individual. Over the past decade, the number of adults placed under guardianship has doubled (from 2,958 in 2013 to 6,036 in 2023), a trend that current data cannot adequately explain.
- The proportion of wards without the right to vote has also significantly increased (10% in 2013, 88% in 2023).
- Full guardianship is imposed far more often than partial.