

RE | Occupational therapists as a priority health profession in Estonia

29 September 2025

To: Ülle Ernits
Rector, Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences

Email: ulle.ernits@ttk.ee

Dear Ülle Ernits,

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) is the official international organisation for the occupational therapy profession. Federated since 1952, today the Federation represents 111 member organisations and in excess of 680,000 occupational therapists worldwide. The Estonian Association of Occupational Therapists (EAOT) was accepted for full membership in WFOT in 2006 and remains an active member.

EAOT have informed WFOT of the proposed downgrading of occupational therapists on list of priority health professions in Estonia, resulting in a potential loss of seats in the occupational therapy education programme at the Tallinn Health University of Applied Sciences. We are therefore writing at this time to support the position described by EAOT in a summary brief submitted to your Ministry.

Occupational therapists work with individuals, groups and communities in a variety of settings to promote participation in occupations that give value and meaning to life. As autonomous health professionals, occupational therapists serve in the best interests of the public, guided by a defined set of competencies, standards of practice and ethics. The role and contrition of occupational therapists is critical to society for facilitating the participation of people in the activities they want, need or expected to do.

The occupational therapy workforce unfortunately remains significantly underdeveloped with Estonia at a time of increasing population needs within the community. [Human resources data](#) collected by WFOT indicates Estonia has a very limited supply of occupational therapists to meet needs of the Estonian people, with a low per capita distribution of occupational therapists in comparison with peer European countries¹. It is therefore integral that occupational therapists remain on the list of critical health professions in Estonia to ensure growth and development of a sustainable occupational therapy workforce in your country.

WFOT is working in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) to improve access to occupational therapy as part of the [Rehabilitation 2030 initiative](#). Population needs for occupational therapy and other services involved in the delivery of rehabilitation services have grown, and continue to grow due to population ageing and increased numbers of people experiencing chronic

¹ WFOT (2025). WFOT Human Resources Project 2024. Retrieved from <https://hr-project.wfot.org/>

disease and mental health issues². WHO has therefore identified access to occupational therapy and other rehabilitation services as a priority strategy for optimising population functioning.

WFOT developed an evidence-based [Global Strategy for the Occupational Therapy Workforce](#) to provide an overarching framework that articulates key strategic directions and domains at local, national, and cross-national levels³. The Global Strategy is designed to inform and guide the development of context-sensitive situation assessments, priorities, and plans within and across jurisdictions such as Estonia for strengthening the occupational therapy workforce. We hope this resource may be of value to your Ministry for occupational therapy workforce development.

In closing, we wish to reiterate our support for the position of EAOT regarding the specific and irreplaceable role of occupational therapy and the critical need to recognise the profession as a priority health profession in Estonia.

Yours sincerely,



Samantha Shann
President
World Federation of Occupational Therapists

² Cieza, A., Causey, K., Kamenov, K., Hanson, S. W., Chatterji, S., & Vos, T. (2021). Global Estimates of the Need for Rehabilitation Based on the Global Burden of Disease study 2019: A Systematic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019. *Lancet*, 396(10267), 2006-2017. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(20\)32340-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(20)32340-0)

³ World Federation of Occupational Therapists, Jesus TS, ,von Zweck C, et al.(2024). Retrieved from <https://wfot.org/resources/wfot-global-strategy-for-the-occupational-therapy-workforce>