

# Background Information: Higher Education System in Estonia



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# Higher Education System in Estonia

## 1. General Characteristics

<b>Population</b>	
Total population (1.1.2013) (million) <sup>1</sup>	1.32
Population density (2013) (persons per square kilometre) <sup>2</sup>	30.3
<b>Population Structure (2013) (share of total population %)<sup>3</sup></b>	
0-14 years	15.7
15-24 years	11.8
25-49 years	34.5
50-64 years	20.0
65 years and older	18.0
<b>GDP</b>	
GDP per capita in PPS (2013), EU 28 = 100 <sup>4</sup>	73
GDP year-on-year growth rate (2013) (%) <sup>5</sup>	1.6
<b>Education (2012) (All levels)<sup>6</sup></b>	
Enrolment	
Total (ISCED 0-6)	289,934
Tertiary Level of Education (ISCED 5-6)	67,607
<b>Tertiary Education</b>	
Population aged 25-64 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) <sup>7</sup>	37.0
Population aged 30 – 34 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) <sup>7</sup>	39.0
Public expenditure on tertiary education (percentage of GDP) (2011) <sup>8</sup>	1.4

## 2. Types of Higher Education Institutions

Higher education in Estonia is mainly offered by two types of higher education institutions – universities and institutions of professional higher education. Additionally, there are public vocational education institutions offering higher education in Estonia. Both state-run and private institutions of higher education exist in Estonia. Universities primarily focus on scientific research and academic education and offer degrees in first (professional and Bachelor), second (Master), and third (Doctoral) cycle qualifications. They are free to develop

<sup>1</sup> European Commission. (2013). *Eurostat Compact Guides: Basic Figures on the EU, Winter 2013/2014 Edition*. Eurostat: Luxembourg.

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat. (2013). *Population density*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00003&plugin=0>

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat (2013). *People by age group*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tps00010&language=en>

<sup>4</sup> Eurostat. (2013). *GDP per capita in PPS*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tec00114>

<sup>5</sup> Eurostat (2013). *Real GDP growth rate*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tec00115>

<sup>6</sup> Eurostat (2014). *Students by ISCED level, age and sex*. Retrieved from [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ\\_enr11tl&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_enr11tl&lang=en)

<sup>7</sup> OECD. (2014). *Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, pp. 44. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> OECD. (2014). *Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, pp. 232. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

new curricula, establish admission procedures and guidelines, approve budgets, and make administrative and financial decisions.

The institutions of professional higher education mainly focus on professional higher education and vocational training and offer Diploma of professional higher education (*Rakendus kõrghariduse diplom*), which is a first cycle (Bachelor) level degree and is equivalent to a *Bakalaureus* degree awarded by the universities. The graduates have the right to continue studies towards Master (*Magister*) level qualification<sup>9</sup>.

The curriculum at universities is grounded in theoretical principles and practical skills are created on the basis of theoretical assumptions. The focus of the institutions of professional education is on applied education and to provide students with skills and expertise for employment in a particular field and the students develop theoretical knowledge from practical experiences. The curriculum at the institutions of professional education includes a compulsory period of practical training in a work environment.

### 3. Study Structure

Estonia joined the Bologna Process in 1999 and the three-cycle structure based on Bologna guidelines was formally implemented in the academic year 2002/2003<sup>10</sup>. Higher education attainment and student's performance are measured in credit points compatible with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

#### First cycle qualification (Bachelor)

- The study duration of first cycle Bachelor programmes at a university or at an institute of professional higher education in Estonia is typically three to four years.
- The workload associated with Bachelor programmes at an Estonian institute of higher education is 180 ECTS credits (study duration three years).
- A professional higher education diploma generally requires 180 to 240 ECTS credits (study duration three to four years).

#### Second cycle qualification (Master)

- The second cycle qualification includes Master programmes with study duration of one to two years.
- The workload associated with a Master degree at an Estonian institute of higher education varies between 60 to 120 ECTS credits.
- Integrated Master and Bachelor programmes require at least five years of study and 300 ECTS credits. The length of integrated programmes in medicine and veterinary medicine is six years (360 ECTS credits).

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<sup>9</sup> Higher education cycles and qualifications. Retrieved from [http://www2.archimedes.ee/enic/File/Fact\\_sheet\\_7\\_Higher\\_%20Education\\_cycles\\_and\\_qualifications2015.pdf](http://www2.archimedes.ee/enic/File/Fact_sheet_7_Higher_%20Education_cycles_and_qualifications2015.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Implementation of Bologna declaration in Estonia in 1999-2003. Retrieved from [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/ESTONIA\\_2003.PDF](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/ESTONIA_2003.PDF)

Third cycle qualification (Doctoral)

- A Doctoral degree at an Estonian university is awarded after obtaining 180 to 240 ECTS credits and at least requires three to four years of studies.

#### **4. Admission Requirements<sup>11 12 13</sup>**

To study at an institution of higher education in Estonia, a general secondary school leaving certificate with the results of the national examination, the certificate of vocational secondary education, or a relevant foreign qualification is needed. Additionally, the board of the universities or of the institutions of higher education establishes conditions for the admittance of students. This may include results of entrance exams, professional aptitude interviews, or academic aptitude tests. The admission decision is made on the basis of the results of the national and the entrance examinations.

Admission to a Master programme in Estonia requires a relevant Bachelor degree, the completion of a professional higher education curriculum, or a corresponding qualification. Additionally, at an institution of higher education, at least one year work experience in the chosen field of study for the Master programme is required.

In order to be admitted to a programme leading to a Doctoral degree, a relevant Master degree or an equivalent qualification is needed. Furthermore, additional conditions such as the submission of a thesis research plan or an admission interview may be established by the university board.

#### **5. Enrolment Levels**

Figure 1 shows trends in enrolment levels (ISCED 5, 5B and 6, ISCED 97) in Estonia between 2003 and 2012. The enrolment levels in Tertiary Type 5A have increased by 16 % whereas enrolment levels in Tertiary Type 6 have doubled between 2003 and 2012. The enrolment levels in Tertiary Type 5B have decreased slightly (14 %) during the same time period.

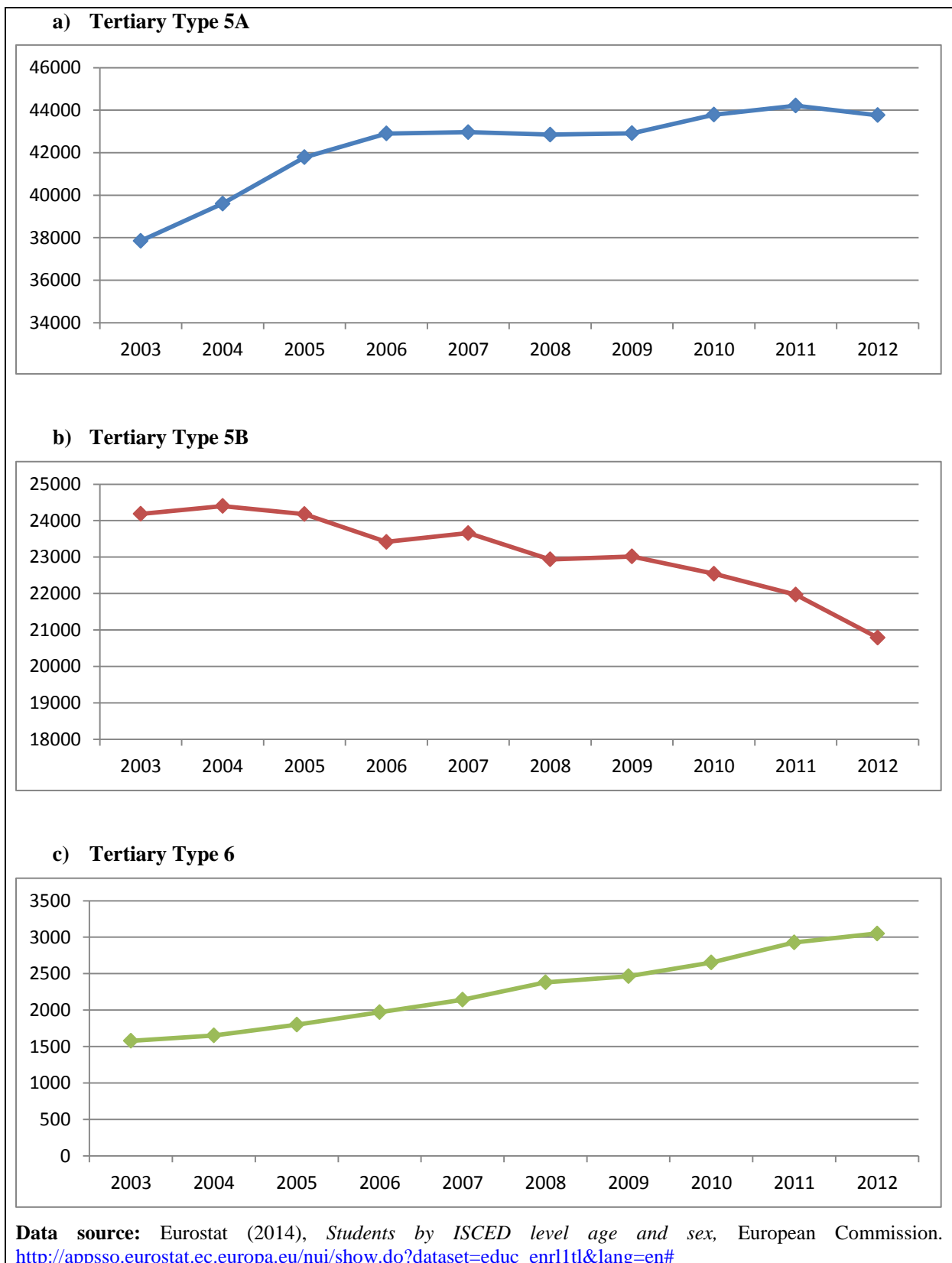
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<sup>11</sup> Eurydice. (2014). *Bachelor*. Retrieved from <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Bachelor>

<sup>12</sup> Eurydice. (2014). *Second cycle programmes*. Retrieved from [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Second\\_Cycle\\_Programmes](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Second_Cycle_Programmes)

<sup>13</sup> Eurydice. (2014). *Third cycle (PhD) programmes*. Retrieved from [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Third\\_Cycle\\_%28PhD%29\\_Programmes](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Third_Cycle_%28PhD%29_Programmes)

Figure 1: Trends in enrolment levels



## 6. Registration and/or Tuition Fees<sup>14</sup>

Tuition fee in Estonia is determined based on the language of study programme and students' enrolment status. Since the academic year 2013/2014, full-time students who are enrolled in courses taught in Estonian language, and who have by the beginning of the semester completed all of their required credits from the previous semesters do not have to pay any tuition fee. Part-time students on the other hand are still required to pay a tuition fee. Moreover, students who are enrolled in study programmes with English as the medium of instruction have to pay a tuition fee. The amount of tuition fee also varies with the type of higher education institution.

## 7. Financial Support for Students<sup>15</sup>

Students can apply for student loans, state education allowances, grants, or various scholarships. From 2013/14, a new study grant system has been implemented. The new system includes need- and merit-based support. The amount of need-based grants varies from 75 Euro to 220 Euro per month depending on the students and their families' income. All students who began their higher education before the academic year 2013/14 have the right to a merit-based grant up until 2015/16. From then on, the new system will be fully implemented. Doctoral students who meet the requirements for obtaining a Doctoral allowance have the right to receive 422 Euro per month.

Since 2014, talented students, who achieve excellent study results, may apply for a merit-based grant of 100 Euro per month. A new scholarship programme to support the development of smart specialisation areas has also been established.

A student loan in Estonia is paid long-term in order to cover tuition costs. Students eligible must be full-time or part-time (since 01.07.2015) students with an Estonian citizenship. Education allowances are paid from the Estonian state budget the amount of which depends on the programme chosen. Students eligible for education allowance must be Estonian citizens who are acquiring higher education and studying a programme with duration of more than nine months. Apart from the loans financed by the state, students may also receive bank loans. Moreover, Estonian government as well as various organisations and companies offer scholarships for Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral students.

This report is based on the following sources:

EESTI. (2013). *Financial Aid for Studies and Education Allowance*. Retrieved from <https://www.eesti.ee/eng/start>

Estonian Ministry of Education and Research et.al. (2010). *Implementation of Bologna declaration in Estonia in 1999-2003*. Retrieved from [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/ESTONIA\\_2003.PDF](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/ESTONIA_2003.PDF)

Eurydice. (2013). *Overview Estonia*. Retrieved from <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Redirect>

Study in Estonia. (2010). *Scholarships*. Retrieved from <http://www.studyinestonia.ee/>

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<sup>14</sup> Eurydice. (2014). *Fees within public higher education institutions*. Retrieved from [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Higher\\_Education\\_Funding](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Higher_Education_Funding)

<sup>15</sup> Eurydice. (2014). *Higher education funding*. Retrieved from [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Higher\\_Education\\_Funding](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Estonia:Higher_Education_Funding)