

Background Information: Higher Education System in Germany



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Higher Education System in Germany

I. General Characteristics

Population	
Total population (I.I.2013) (million) ¹	82.02
Population density (2013) (persons per square kilometre) ²	230
Population Structure (2013) (share of total population in %)³	
0-14 years	13.1
15-24 years	10.9
25-49 years	34.1
50-64 years	21.1
65 years and older	20.7
GDP	
GDP per capita in PPS (2013), EU 28 = 100 ⁴	122
GDP year-on-year growth rate (2013) ⁵	0.1
Education (2012) (All levels)⁶	
Enrolment	
Total (ISCED 0-6)	16,271,720
Tertiary Level of Education (ISCED 5-6)	2,939,463
Tertiary Education	
Population aged 25-64 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) ⁷	28.0
Population aged 30 – 34 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) ⁷	32.0
Public expenditure on tertiary education (percentage of GDP) (2011) ⁸	1.1

2. Types of Higher Education Institutions

Germany has 415 institutions of higher education which include 106 universities, six colleges of education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*), 16 colleges of theology (*Theologische Hochschulen*), 51 colleges of art (*Kunsthochschulen*), 207 universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*), and 29 colleges of public administration (*Verwaltungsfachhochschulen*)⁹. Additionally, universities of cooperative education

¹ European Commission. (2013). *Eurostat Compact Guides: Basic Figures on the EU, Winter 2013/2014 Edition*. Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union.

² 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>

³ 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>

⁴ 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=teco0114>

⁵ 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=teco0115>

⁶ Eurostat (2014). *Students by ISCED level, age and sex*. Retrieved from http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_enr1rtl&lang=en

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

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

⁹ Federal Ministry of Education and Research. (2015). *Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.bmbf.de/en/655.php>

(*Berufsakademien*) and *Fachschulen* are included in the higher education sector in some German states.

In general, universities focus on scientific research and academic education and offer degrees in first (Bachelor), second (Master), and third cycle (Doctoral) qualifications. As a specific subgroup, technical universities (*Technische Hochschulen*) have a special emphasis on courses in natural and engineering sciences while also offering degrees across the overall range of study fields offered at universities in general. Higher education institutions with similar status as universities include colleges of theology, colleges of art and music, and – in Baden-Württemberg – also colleges of education. Colleges of education are centres for educational sciences offering a wide range of teacher training programmes. The theological colleges focus on theology, philosophy, welfare work, and education. Colleges of art and music offer courses in visual arts, design, performing arts, films and media, and in various music disciplines. Approximately two thirds of all higher education students are registered at universities or similar institutions⁷.

Universities of applied sciences have a strong emphasis on practical training and applied research. They primarily offer courses in engineering, natural sciences, social sciences, and economics and offer degrees only in first and second cycle qualifications. In Germany, there are also colleges of public administration which offer training for senior level civil services positions. These courses can only be attended by officials working in the public services¹⁰. Approximately one third of all higher education students are registered at universities of applied sciences and colleges of public administration⁷.

Universities of cooperative education are regarded as higher education institutions only in the German state of Baden-Württemberg – now called “*Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg*” – and offer degrees only at the first cycle qualifications. In the other German states it is possible to complete a Bachelor degree in a dual study programme at the university of cooperative education although the institution itself is not considered a part of the tertiary education sector.

3. Study Structure

In the winter term 2011/12, 85% of all German courses of studies were converted to a two-cycle Bachelor/Master structure¹¹. Higher education attainment and students’ performances are measured in credit points compatible with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Many German universities also offer integrated long programmes (*Staatsexamen*) outside of the Bologna framework.

First cycle qualification (Bachelor)

- The study duration of a Bachelor degree is typically six to eight semesters.

¹⁰ German Rectors’ Conference. (2015). Higher education institutions in Germany – universities, colleges of art and music, universities of applied sciences. Retrieved from <https://www.hochschulkompass.de/en/higher-education-institutions.html>

¹¹ Federal Ministry of Education and Research. (2012). *The implementation of the Bologna Reforms in Germany*. Retrieved from <http://www.bmbf.de/en/7222.php>

- The credit requirement for a Bachelor degree in the arts, sciences, social sciences, and artistic fields is at least 180 ECTS credits.

Second cycle qualification (Master)

- The second cycle Master degree generally requires four semesters of studies.
- The credit requirement for a Master degree in the arts, sciences, social sciences, and artistic fields is usually 240-300 ECTS credits which includes the preceding degree.

Third cycle qualification (Doctoral)

- A Doctoral degree is conferred on the evaluation and successful defence of a Doctoral thesis which must be based on independent research.

Integrated long programmes (*Staatsexamen*)

- Higher education studies in the fields of medicine, law, or pharmaceuticals typically require three to six years of studies and are concluded with the *Staatsexamen*.
- In some German states this may also apply for certain teaching professions.

4. Admission Requirements^{12 13 14}

The entry requirements for study programmes at Bachelor-level at universities include the high school leaving certificate (*Allgemeine Hochschulreife*) or the subject-linked university entrance qualification (*Fachgebundene Hochschulreife*). These two school leaving certificates are awarded upon completing the advanced level of high school (*Oberstufe*) or courses in vocational education at an upper secondary level. The *Allgemeine Hochschulreife* can also be acquired at evening schools (*Abendgymnasien*) or schools for people who have completed vocational education (*Kollegs*). The *Allgemeine Hochschulreife* qualifies school-graduates to study at all higher education institutions in all fields of studies, whereas holders of the *Fachgebundene Hochschulreife* are eligible for higher education studies only in certain subject areas. In some subject areas (e.g. sports and arts) applicants may have to pass additional examinations to enter higher education. In addition to the traditional entry requirements (*Hochschulreife*), students may also enter higher education based on their prior work experience or through special entrance examinations.

The entry requirements to study at universities of applied sciences include the *Fachhochschulreife*. Additionally a *Fachgebundene Fachhochschulreife* also qualifies its holders to study at universities of applied sciences, however, only in certain fields of study.

In order to be admitted to a Master study course, a higher education degree is usually required. However, in some cases this may be waived off based on applicant's relevant job experience. A Master degree acquired at a university or an equivalent higher education institution qualifies for a Doctoral programme.

¹² Eurydice. (2014). *Bachelor*. Retrieved from <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Germany:Bachelor>

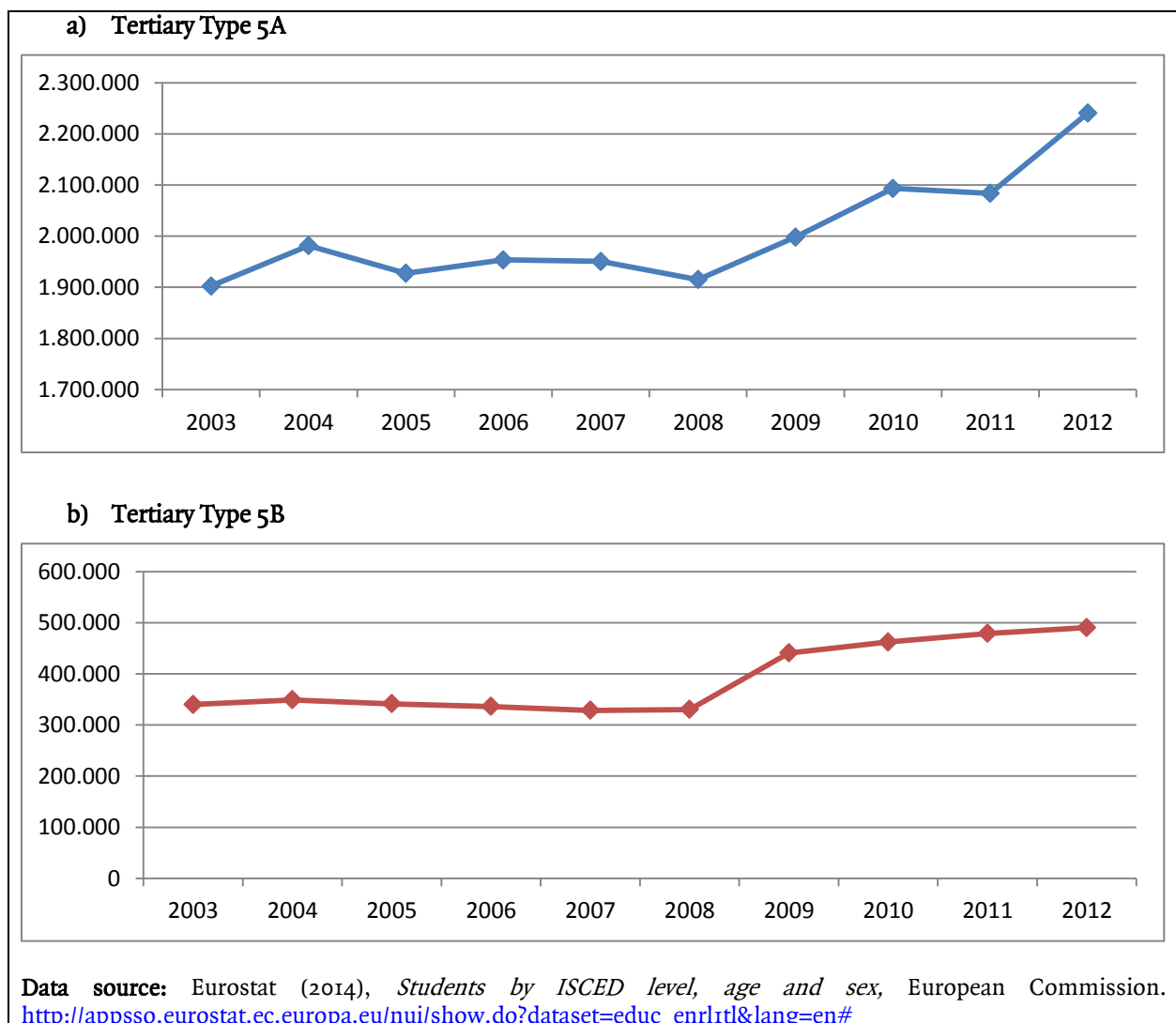
¹³ Eurydice. (2014). *Second cycle programmes*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Germany:Second_Cycle_Programmes

¹⁴ Eurydice. (2014). *Third cycle (PhD) programmes*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Germany:Third_Cycle_%28PhD%29_Programmes

5. Enrolment Levels

Figure 1 shows trends in enrolment levels (ISCED 5A and 5B, ISCED-97) in Germany between 2003 and 2012. Enrolment levels in both Tertiary Type 5A and 5B were relatively stable between 2003 and 2008, with an increase since 2008 and thereafter. The latter was mainly caused by the federal states' successive implementation of the G8 fast track curriculum at secondary educational (starting around 2007), leading to an increasing number of high school graduates entering tertiary education at the same time (*"doppelte Abiturjahrgänge"*). In addition, since 2011 compulsory military service in Germany has been put on hold, leading to a significant increase in enrolment of students at ISCED 5A level.

Figure 1: Trends in Enrolment



6. Registration and/or Tuition Fees¹⁵

In general, higher education in Germany is free for students at public higher education institutions¹⁶. However, students are required to pay a semester contribution to their university. These contributions cover administrative costs, social contributions, as well as a

¹⁵ Eurydice. (2014). *Higher education funding*. Retrieved from

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Germany:Higher_Education_Funding

¹⁶ <http://www.hochschulkompass.de/studium/studienbeitraege-finanzierung/semesterbeitrag-studienbeitrag.html>

ticket for public transportation. In 2012, Lower Saxony and Bavaria were the only two states that charged tuition fee.¹⁷ Since then, both states have abolished these fees. There are, however, some states which charge long-term study fees if students exceed the prescribed length of study by a certain number of semesters. Tuition fees are usually charged by private higher education institutions.

7. Financial Support for Students

Students who do not have sufficient means to finance their studies can receive financial support under the terms of the Federal Training Assistance Act (*Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz – BAföG*). The duration of this support depends on the standard length of the study programme in which the student is enrolled. The amount of support depends on the student’s financial means as well as on those of his or her parents or spouse. This support is offered as grants as well as loans which need to be paid back after the completion of studies. In addition, there are other sources of funding available for students such as stipend and loan programmes. Although rare, in some federal states, loans of varying amounts are provided by student associations or institutions of higher education as well as by small regional foundations to support students in extreme social need. More common are the KfW student loan (“*Studienkredit*”) and the “*Bildungskredit*” which are funded by the German government.

8. Note on the German data provided for EUROSTUDENT V

The German sample includes only German students and foreign students who obtained their higher education entrance qualification in Germany. Students with foreign citizenship and a higher education entrance qualification obtained abroad (referred to as “*Bildungsausländer*” in German) were addressed through a different survey and data on these students were not included in the data which were delivered to EUROSTUDENT. There are therefore deviations from the EUROSTUDENT standard target groups and no adequate data to generate the focus group “International students”. Students enrolled in programmes at ISCED 2011 level 5 (Short-cycle tertiary education) are also not included in the German sample as these programmes are typically not considered to be a part of the higher education system in Germany.

According to the “*Sozialerhebung*”-definition – and in line with the national understanding of higher education – the focus group “social background” is defined in the following way: students with higher education background are defined as having at least one parent with a degree attained at university or university of applied sciences (“*Universität*” or “*Fachhochschule*”), typically at ISCED 2011 level 6, 7, or 8. Students with parents who attained a degree at a non-academic institution (*Fach-, Meister-, Technikerschule, Berufs- or Fachakademie*) are considered “without higher education background”. However, in the chapter ‘Social background of national student population’ in the EUROSTUDENT V: Synopsis of Indicators, German data are analysed according to the EUROSTUDENT conventions, i.e. according to ISCED 2011 levels. Therefore, students whose parents acquired

¹⁷ Middendorff et al. (2012). Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Studierenden in Deutschland 2012. Retrieved from http://www.studentenwerke.de/sites/default/files/or_20-SE-Hauptbericht.pdf

an educational degree of level 5 or 6 at a non-academic institution are defined as having a higher education background in this chapter. In all of the other chapters, the focus groups “with higher education background” and “without higher education background” are calculated according to the definition used for the German national report “*Sozialerhebung*”.

This report is based on the following sources:

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