

ESTONIA

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms chosen in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are: **ECEC centre** (*koolieelne lasteasutus*, 1½–6), also called **kindergartens**, and **pre-primary group** (*koolieelikute ettevalmistusrühm*, 6–7)¹. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Estonia

1839	First kindergarten established based on Froebel’s principles of pedagogy
1840	Baroness Uexküll founds the first childcare institution in Tallinn for 2 and 3 year-olds from families living in poverty.
1862	The Estonian Welfare Society founds its first ‘kindergarten’.
1905	First kindergarten with Estonian as the language of instruction opens (previously mostly German and Russian)
1919 -1940	Estonia becomes an independent state for the first time.
1921	First curricular programme developed by C.H. Niggol based on Froebel’s principles.
Up to 1940	Kindergartens the responsibility either of municipalities or private founders – no state legislation
1944	Statutory age for beginning school is lowered from 8 to 7 years.
1950s to 1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Care and supervision are the main aspects in the institutions, cognitive stimulation comes later. – Working mothers have only 2 months of paid maternity leave, but there is a well-functioning state system of ECEC.
1968	First state curricular framework based on Communist principles, with an emphasis on moral education.
Early 1980s	Statutory age for beginning school is lowered from 7 to 6 years.
1987	Second state curricular framework based on Soviet programmes for same-age groups
1989	747 ECEC institutions exist, with approximately 83.000 children enrolled.
1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Estonia once again becomes an autonomous state. – Reform of the education system following independence – State-maintained provision comes under the responsibility of the municipalities. – Compulsory schooling age raised from 6 to 7 years
Post-1991	Economic crises and sinking birth rates lead to the closing of many kindergartens (100 between 1990 and 1994).
1999	<i>Preschool Child Care Institutions Act</i> comes into force.
Up to 2004	Continuing expansion of ECEC facilities, also because parental leave pay is not sufficient to care for a child at home.
2004	‘21st Century Education Programme’ emphasises the creation of high quality education related to children’s needs.
2008	Introduction of a National ECEC Curriculum

¹ **Editors’ note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the case of Estonia, the relevant format is **1½–6** years, since children usually start school when they are 7 years old.



2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Political strategy of lifelong learning launched – Introduction of legal entitlement to a place in ECEC provision for children aged 1½ to 7 years
2015/2016	634 ECEC institutions exist, with 68.331 children enrolled.
2017/2018	Amendments to the <i>Preschool Child Care Institutions Act</i> with focus on better support for children with special educational needs
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A “Development Plan for Education 2035” is launched. – A Parliamentary Bill sets out the integration of the education and care sectors for children under and over 3 years of age.
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Responsibility for all ECEC settings for children ages 1½ to 7 years now lies with the Ministry of Education and Research. – A draft Early Childhood Education and Care Act is issued and will be submitted to Parliament in March 2024.

Sources: Ugaste and Õun 2008; Veisson 2018

ECEC system type and auspices²

Age-integrated ECEC centres/kindergartens (*koolieelne lasteasutus* – ‘preschool child care institutions’) for children aged 1½ years to school entry at 7 are the main form of provision, coming under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Research (*Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium*). Moreover, the draft *Early Childhood Education and Care Act* states that not only the ECEC centres/kindergartens, but also former childcare services such as playgroups or other facilities housed in institutional spaces as well as home-based ECEC provision will all come under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research.

Consequently, the system of ECEC in Estonia is to be fully integrated under Education.

The education system is the responsibility of Parliament (*Riigikogu*) and the Estonian government. Parliament decides on the design and development of the system and the government ensures the implementation of educational programmes. The Ministry of Education is responsible for research and management in the field of education as well as for quality assurance, financial planning, the development of national curricula, and the professional education of the teaching staff. At the local level, the district government is responsible for the technical supervision of teaching and educational activities, and the municipalities for providing and organising ECEC.

General objectives and legislative framework

Overarching goals of early childhood education and care include the right of all children to education, the development of their individual potential and the reduction of social inequalities. Of particular importance is an integrated view of education and care. This includes, on the one hand, the support of parents in reconciling family and working life, and on the other hand, the promotion of children's skills that prepare them for school and life in general.

In 2014, the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (*Eesti elukestva õppe strateegia 2020*) was introduced, which serves as the government's cornerstone for all changes in the education system. Important goals are (1) respecting the individuality of the learner; (2) improving the competences and motivation of professionals and teachers; (3) linking lifelong learning to the needs

² The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Estonia provided orientation for data on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

of the labour market; (4) using modern digital technologies and creating a good infrastructure for this; (5) ensuring equal opportunities for all. The Ministry of Education is responsible for coordinating the implementation. In addition, the Ministry of Education has initiated a ‘Development Plan for Education 2035’ which is to contribute to the further optimisation of equal opportunities in education (European Commission 2020, 27).

Tending towards decentralisation, the organisation and principles of the education system are guided by the Estonian Education Act (*Eesti Vabariigi haridusseadus*, 1992 with amendments until 2004), the Preschool Child Care Institution Act (*Koolieelse lasteasutuse seadus*, 1999 with amendments until 2023), the Child Protection Act (*Eesti Vabariigi lastekaitse seadus*, 1993 with amendments from 2016), and the Estonian Constitution (*Eesti Vabariigi põhiseadus*, 1992).

In 2015, the Estonian Minister of Education and Research approved an integrated early childhood education concept (Decision No. 1.1-2/15/455). This aims to provide high quality education and care, ensure access for all children between 1½ years of age and school entry, create a safe and supportive learning environment and improve preparation for school. A new *Early Childhood Education and Care Act* is therefore under preparation which aims to provide high quality early childhood education and care for all children and to support pre-primary education by making the system of ECEC more coherent. The new law harmonises the requirements for ECEC centres/kindergartens and childcare facilities as well as for municipal and private kindergartens. Both rural municipalities and city governments shall, at the parents’ request, provide children from 18 months to 7 years of age residing in their territory and whose residence coincides with that of at least one parent the opportunity to attend an early childhood centre (‘preschool’). According to the action plan of the Estonian Government, a new draft of the Early Childhood Education and Care Act will be submitted to Parliament in March 2024.

Based on amendments made to the Preschool Child Care Institution Act (2022), the transition to Estonian-medium teaching and education in early childhood education must be completed by 1 September 2024. Instruction and educational activities in kindergartens will be conducted only in Estonian. The aim is to ensure that children whose home language is not Estonian have the opportunity to acquire primary education in Estonian and to reach a level of language proficiency sufficient for them to cope in an Estonian-speaking environment, to continue their education in Estonian and to integrate themselves into the Estonian cultural and value system. Estonian-medium learning in kindergartens is carried out by integrating language learning with other activities or by additional language activities. The transition will be supported by a training and motivation programme for teachers, while the overall increase in teachers’ salaries will also be a key objective.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Since 2014, all children between the ages of 1½ and 7 years have been entitled to a free place in an ECEC setting (see *chapter Financing and costs for parents*). If in some cases the municipalities cannot guarantee this, they may provide a place for under 3 year-olds in a centre-based childcare service in lieu.

There is no obligation to attend an ECEC setting. However, local authorities have a duty to provide a place at the request of parents for all children between 1½ and 7 years of age, irrespective of special educational needs.

Compulsory education begins at age 7.



Main types of provision

According to national Statistics in 2022, there were a total of 586 ECEC centres/kindergartens ('preschool institutions' – *koolieelne lasteasutus*) in Estonia in which 68,623 children were enrolled (Statistics Estonia 2023a).

ECEC centres (still called 'preschool child care institutions') for children aged 1½ to under 7 years are the most common form of provision and local authorities are responsible for their management. 'Integrated' in this sense means both age-integrated across the early childhood period (1–6 years) as well as in terms of providing a combination of nursery and kindergarten facilities and also pre-primary education for 6 to 7 year-olds under one roof. Integrative groups comprising children with and without disabilities can be set up in the centres, as can mixed-age groups. The ECEC centres are open all the year round. The municipalities decide on the specific opening times in consultation with parents. If the demand for places exceeds the number available, the municipalities offer half-day places. The opening hours of most centres are from 07:00/08:00 to 18:00/19:00.

In 2022, 447 kindergartens served 62,589 children, and 5,962 children attended one of 132 preschool groups (Statistics Estonia 2023a).

Childcare services (*lapsehoiuteenus*), including centre-based and home-based provision, come under the auspices of the Ministry for Social Affairs. Based to the Social Welfare Act, the objective of childcare services is to support the ability of a person raising a child to cope or work or to reduce the care burden arising from the special needs of the child. 10% of under 3 year-old children are enrolled in childcare services (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 172). According to the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act, a rural municipality or city government may, with the parents' consent, substitute the guaranteed place of a child from 18 months to 3 years of age in a public ECEC centre with a place in a childcare service or a private kindergarten, the financing of which shall be based on the provisions of the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act.

In 2022, there were five childcare services attended by 253 children (Statistics Estonia 2023a).

Provider structures

The majority of ECEC settings are public and run by the municipalities. In 2022/23, only 60 (10,4%) settings from a total of 589 were owned by private providers (Estonian Education Information System 2022). According to Eurostat data, only 4.4% of children over 3 years attended private ECEC settings in 2021; no data are available on children under 3 years of age (Eurostat 2023j).

Participation rates in regulated provision

In 2022, 92.5% of children aged 3–6 years, 34.1% of children aged 1 year and 76.4% of children aged 2 years attended an ECEC institution (Statistics Estonia 2023d).

The share of children under 3 years of age who are cared for in ECEC settings has increased since 2005 from 12% to 33.7% in 2022. The proportion of children between the ages of 3 and 6 also increased significantly - 93.9% of these children attended a facility in 2022 (see *Table 1*).

Table 1

Estonia: Participation rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years in %**	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	3	9
	Over 30 hours	9	69
	No enrolment in ECEC	89	22
2010	1 to 29 hours	2	6
	Over 30 hours	19	86
	No enrolment in ECEC	79	8
2015	1 to 29 hours	3.6	6.8
	Over 30 hours	17.8	86.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	78.5	7.1
2022	1 to 29 hours	12.3	11.9
	Over 30 hours	21.4	82.0
	No enrolment in ECEC	66.3	6.2

Source: Eurostat 2023b, deviations in the sums due to rounding

Table 2

Estonia: Number of children in ECEC settings by age-group and enrolment rate, 2022 (excluding child-care services)

Age	Number of children enrolled in ECEC	Number of children in the total population	Enrolment rate
Under 1 year	34	13,312	0.3*
1 year-olds	4,654	13,343	34.1
2 year-olds	10,708	14,255	76.4
Under 3 year-olds	15,396	40,910	37.6*
3 year-olds	13,407	14,607	90.7
4 year-olds	14,179	14,017	95.6
5 year-olds	13,484	14,439	92.3
6 year-olds	12,157	14,460	81.4
3 to under 7 year-olds	53,227	57,523	92.5*
Under 7 year-olds	68,623	98,433	69.7*

Source: Statistics Estonia 2023b, c, d; * own calculations

Since the late 1980s, due to demographic changes and lower birth rates, there have been significant changes in the number of ECEC settings and enrolment rates. Moreover, over time, these have always been significantly lower in rural areas than in urban areas. In general, enrolment rates increased again after the turn of the millennium (Veisson 2018). From 2000 to 2015, the number of children in settings increased up to 2021, when they fell, as did the number of settings. While the number of settings continued to decline in 2022, the number of children increased. Overall, however, enrolment rates for under 7 year-olds increased steadily between 2000 and 2022 increased steadily (see Table 3).

Table 3

Estonia: ECEC settings, children and enrolment rates between 2000 and 2022

Year	Number of settings	Number of children	Enrolment rates, 1 to 7 year-olds, in %*
2000	646	50,247	56.7
2005	609	54,560	61.7
2010	638	64,259	62.3
2015	634	68,331	65.2
2020	612	66,375	66.7
2021	601	66,626	67.5
2022	586	68,623	69.7

*Calculated on the basis of the rates for each age group, see *Table 2*

Source: Statistics Estonia 2023a

Demand and supply of ECEC places are balanced (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 63). Municipalities are cooperating with private providers to provide places for under 3 year-olds (European Commission 2020, 39).

Financing and costs for parents

According to the Estonian Educational Information System (2022), the total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 1,3% of GDP in 2020.

Public/municipal ECEC centres, which comprise the majority of settings, are financed through municipal budgets. Staff salaries, teaching/learning materials and the professional development activities of ECEC staff, as well as language courses for children with Estonian as an additional language, are subsidised by the government. Privately-run settings also receive these subsidies. The four special ECEC centres for children with multiple disabilities are fully state-funded. Financing from the European Social Fund is also available.

Parents always have to pay for meals. Sometimes, however, their fees may contribute both towards staff salaries and materials/equipment. This varies from municipality to municipality. What is regulated by law is the maximum fee, which may not exceed more than 20% of the minimum wage. The fees vary depending on the region and are also partly income-dependent: The average amount paid is €37 (Estonian Education Information System 2022).

In the case of privately-run ECEC settings, it is mostly the provider who is responsible for the running costs. However, in certain circumstances they may be supported through state and municipal budgets, particularly regarding salaries and staff professional development. Parental fees are determined by the service provider.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 2% of net household income on childcare costs³ (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

Groups in both the ECEC centres as well as the childcare centres may be organised in same-age or mixed-age groups.

³ The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.



In centre-based settings the maximum group size is 14 children, in a pre-primary group 20 and in a mixed-age group 18. Integrative groups which include children with disabilities have a maximum size of 12 children per group.

One qualified member of staff *or* an assistant is responsible for up to 7 under 3 year-olds, up to 9 children in a mixed-age group, up to 10 children in a pre-school group, and up to 8 children in an integrative group or 2 to 6 children with special educational needs, depending on their specific support needs.

The staff to child ratio is set by law: 1:7 for under 3 year-olds, 1:10 for children aged 3 and above.

Curricular framework

The educational programmes of the **ECEC centres** are obliged to comply with the National ECEC Curriculum (*Koolieelse lasteasutuse riiklik õppekava, 2008, most recently amended in 2011*). Based on this framework, each setting develops its own educational programme which is essentially play-based and takes into account the individual needs of children. Curricular guidelines are available to support staff. Particular emphasis is placed on the co-operation between families and the ECEC setting. The national curricular framework also sets out learning goals appropriate for the 6 and 7 year-olds in pre-school groups and includes principles for the evaluation of children's progress. A smooth transition to school is also foregrounded.

Early childhood education is understood as supporting the children's emotional, moral, social, intellectual and physical development as well as respecting their individual needs. The aim is to support the acquisition of playing, learning, social and personal, reflective skills. The curricular framework is organised around the following learning areas: Self and environment; language and speech; Estonian as an additional language; mathematics; the arts; music; and movement. Between the ages of 3 and 7 children also start learning a foreign language. Materials are currently being developed to support the acquisition of a foreign language.

Staff are free to choose the methods and materials they consider appropriate. Group activities relating to the national curricular framework do not have to be followed in detail. Some ECEC centres may prefer to work according to alternative pedagogical approaches such as Step-by-Step, Reggio Emilia or Waldorf.

Childcare services are still regulated by the Social Welfare Act and obliged to guarantee the care, development and safety of the child. There are no specific curricular guidelines for these services. This is likely to change when the new Early Childhood Education and Care Act comes into force.

Digital education

As early as 2000, the Estonian government declared access to the internet a human right. The Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 emphasises digital literacy as a key competence. All levels of education are expected to develop a digital culture. However, the National ECEC Curriculum (current version 2011) does not include the terms 'digital literacy' or 'computers'.

The "ProgeTiger" programme, a public-private partnership with the Ministry of Education, has been aiming since 2012 to integrate digital technologies in ECEC centres and to equip them with programmable devices. Over five years, 44% of ECEC settings in Estonia participated and received over €830,000 worth of equipment, for example for programming or multimedia devices (NESTA 2019). Staff in ECEC settings use different types of robots such as Qobo, mTiny, Blue-Bot, Matata Lab, LEGO WeDo set and tablets with coding games or animation apps. Children are

expected to acquire basic knowledge about coding and digital media at an early age through playful activities and learning through trial and error (education estonia 2021).

However, studies suggest that staff in ECEC settings still need more knowledge about how children can use digital technologies and how to teach them these skills (Õun et al. 2018).

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

Assessing child development is one of the daily tasks of an early childhood educator and is seen as cooperation between staff and parents. Children are observed during various activities according to a specific plan. Notes are made in accordance with data protection regulations and at least once a year there is a discussion with the parents. The ongoing assessments of the children are only known to the respective institution and the parents and are not passed on to others. They are mainly used for the optimal support of the children. Parental satisfaction with the setting is also surveyed. While children under 3 are primarily observed by the professionals, standardised tests are also used for children over 3 years of age. Special assessment instruments have been developed to determine the developmental level of children between the ages of 1 and 7.

Before the transfer to compulsory school, parents receive a ‘school readiness confirmation’, which they hand over to the corresponding primary school. This confirmation is usually made at the ECEC centre, but sometimes also externally. The exact procedure is regulated by criteria from the Ministry of Education. This confirmation documents the child's cognitive, physical and social abilities with regard to the areas of the National Curriculum, and also his or her particular strengths and areas in which further support is needed.

Centre-level self-evaluation

ECEC centres/kindergartens are obliged to carry out internal evaluations. The aim is to establish a quality assurance system and to improve the management of the settings. The centre leader can choose the preferred method. Centres can also ask for advice from the Ministry of Education. A final report lists the strengths and weaknesses of the ECEC centre. Such a development plan must be drawn up at least every three years. Children and parents are also encouraged to share their own experiences and views and thus play an active role (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 104, 127, 130).

The focus of such internal evaluations should be on leadership and management, cooperation with stake-holders and educational processes (Õun et al. 2018).

External evaluation

The review of the efficiency of a municipal institution is carried out by the local authority. In the case of a state institution, this is conducted by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education compiles an annual overview of external evaluations in the education system, which also includes data from self-evaluations (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 134) and publishes it on its website. Criteria include the spatial conditions, equipment and compliance with safety and health regulations, as well as compliance with regulations, the curriculum, leadership qualities and management, and finances. The results are made available to all stakeholders (facilities, providers, parents, authorities) and form the basis for further planning.

External evaluations are carried out annually in about 10% of early learning institutions based on thematic priorities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126).



Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and with disabilities

The 2017/18 amendments to the Early Childhood Education and Care Act focused on better support for children with special educational needs and their access to specialist support workers. In 2019/20, 19% of children attending ECEC centres could benefit from this (European Commission 2020, 27).

Children with a migration background

In 2023, 12.6% of the total population held a non-Estonian citizenship, 8.1% in the group of 0 to 4 year-olds and 9.6% in the group of the 5-9 year-olds. Of the persons of non-Estonian origin, 13.3% came from other EU countries, 86.7% from non-EU countries. Of the under 4 year-olds, 10.8% had another European citizenship as well as 8.2% of the 5 to 9 year-olds; 89.2% of the children under 4 years and 91.8% of the 5 to 9 year-olds one of non-EU countries. In the total population as well as in the groups of under 4 year-olds and 5 to 9 year-olds, most persons of non-Estonian origin came from Latvia and from Finland (EU countries). In terms of non-EU countries, most people in the total population came from Russia, followed by people from Ukraine, and the younger age groups there were more persons with Ukrainian citizenship followed by those with a Russian one (Statistics Estonia 2023e, own calculations).

Language training is provided for children with a first language other than Estonian in groups for 3 to 7 year-olds. In addition, the Ministry of Education also provides funds to teach children in one of the languages of the 17 different ethnic minorities in 'Sunday schools' (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 115).

Since 2000, the language immersion programme has been used in ECEC settings, in particular for Russian-speaking children. During the two years before starting school, children are thus given the opportunity to develop good skills in both their family language and Estonian (Õun et al. 2018).

Five specialist centres across the country provide support for professionals working with children with a non-Estonian family language.

By August 2022, 50,347 war refugees from Ukraine had arrived in Estonia, of whom 27% were minors (ERR 2022a). In 2023, additional funding was allocated from the national budget for the temporary protection of Ukrainian refugee children in nurseries and kindergartens. The per child contribution per calendar month was €465. The data for children in private childcare centres were calculated on the basis of data provided and verified by the municipality. The subsidy for children attending private childcare and nursery settings was allocated to municipalities. Ukrainian children are supported on the basis of principles developed by the municipality. These include ensuring that the subsidy allocated to the municipality is used for the intended purpose of providing Ukrainian children with childcare and kindergarten places within the municipality or in cooperation with the private sector. An additional subsidy was paid for the period January-February 2023. State support for Ukrainian children continued until the end of the school year 2022/23.

Looking at all school-age children, 70% were enrolled in Estonian-language institutions, 20% in Russian-language institutions and 10% in institutions with language immersion programmes (ERR 2022b).

Parental leave arrangements⁴

Maternity leave (*emapuhkus*) is granted for 100 calendar days; 70 of which may be taken before the expected birth date and 30 after the birth. The latter are obligatory. During this time mothers receive 100% of their average earnings based on the previous calendar year. Mothers who have not worked receive the basic minimum wage of €654 per month.

Paternity leave (*isapuhkus*) is granted for 30 working days which can be taken during 30 days before the expected birth up to the time the child reaches 3 years of age. Fathers receive a fully paid benefit calculated in the same way as the Parental leave allowance. This option is not available for same-sex couples.

Parental leave (*vanemapuhkus*) is a family entitlement and can be taken up to the child's 3rd birthday and can also be taken in several parts, up to 60 days can be taken by both parents at the same time. The shared Parental benefit (*vanemahüvitis*) is a full payment of average earnings during the previous 12 months (up to €4,291.29 per month, minimum €725) for 475 days after the end of Maternity leave. Parents who are not working receive a lump sum of €654 per month. The allowances are only reduced if the income of simultaneous employment exceeds 50% of the upper limit of the benefit (€2,154.65).

In 2021, 74.7% of fathers took Paternity leave; data regarding Maternity leave or the take-up of Parental leave does not exist. 16.2% of the recipients of Parental leave allowances in 2021 were men. Of these, 72% were also at least partially employed at the same time.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Estonia

Marika Veisson and Tiina Peterson

The foremost challenge for the ECEC system in Estonia is the imminent integration of all ECEC institutions under the Ministry of Education and Research. Related staffing challenges include ensuring that all teachers in ECEC institutions have a higher education qualification, as stipulated by law, and raising the salaries and status of ECEC Teachers.

To continue improving the quality of ECEC both at the structural and process level, providing the framework for collaborations with researchers in Europe and beyond is essential, and at the same time a challenge. In order to participate actively in a knowledge based society, Estonian researchers need partners in other countries to conduct cross-cultural research studies. Tallinn University, for example, already cooperates with a number of universities in Finland, Norway, Denmark, Malta, the UK, and the USA on ECEC issues. Such international collaborations need to be extended and supported.

⁴ The brief summary in this section is based on the country note for Germany by Katre Pall in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see References).



Demographic data

Please note: For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.

Total population

In 2022, the population in Estonia totalled 1,331,796. Up until 2015, the population gradually sank, but has been increasing slightly since then (2000: 1,401,250, 2005: 1,358,850, 2010: 1,333,290, 2015: 1,314,870, 2020: 1,328,976) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total birth rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), and the lowest in Malta (1.13). With a total fertility rate of 1.61, Estonia is above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)⁵.

Children under age 6

Table 4

Estonia: Distribution of children under age 6 by age in the total population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	13,312
1 year-olds	13,343
2 year-olds	14,255
3 year-olds	14,607
4 year-olds	14,017
5 year-olds	14,439
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	83,973

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 3.1% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 6.3% were children up to 6 years of age. Since 2015, these shares are well above the respective EU averages.

Table 5

Estonia: Relative share of children under 6 in total population compared with respective EU average, 2000 to 2022, in %*

		Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Estonia	2.6	2.8	5.5
	Ø EU15 ⁶	3.2	3.2	6.4

⁵ Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/> and <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU>).

⁶ The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

		Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2005	Estonia	3.0	2.8	5.7
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Estonia	3.2	3.5	6.7
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022/3	Estonia	3.1	3.2	6.3
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a; *own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, the majority of all households (73.2%) with children under age 6 were couple households. Single households in Estonia comprise 16.7% - most of them single mothers (10.1%). However, in European comparison, the proportion of single father households is relatively high at 6.7%.

Table 6

Estonia: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %
All households	133,800	
Couple households	97,900	73.2
Other household type	13,500	10.1
Single households, total	22,400	16.7
Single households, women	13,500	10.1
Single households, men	8,900	6.7

Source: Eurostat 2023j; * own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Estonia, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 82.7% and for women 79.6% (Eurostat 2023h).

In 2022, 72.1% of women and 90.7% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), both shares were thus above the average (87.2% and 63.6% respectively) (Eurostat 2023e).

Table 7a

Estonia: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Estonia	51.4	80.8
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries ⁷	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7

⁷ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

	2022	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Estonia	72.1	90.7
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries ⁸	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 7b*:

Table 7b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023)
⁺ Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
+++United Kingdom (2021/2023)				
with dependent children	75.6	92.1	⁺⁺ 72.3	⁺⁺ 79.2
with children under 2 years	72.4	93.1	⁺⁺ 72.1 (2023)	⁺⁺ 79.4 (2023)
with children 3–4 years	70.7	95.0		

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023h

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03>

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⁺[SSSU] State Statistics Service of Ukraine. 2022. *Employed population in 2021, by age group, sex and place of residence*. <https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2017/rp/eans/eanse/Archznmve.htm>

⁺⁺Statista. 2023. *Employment rate in the United Kingdom from June 1971 to January 2023, by gender*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/280120/employment-rate-in-the-uk-by-gender/>

⁺⁺⁺Office for National Statistics. 2023. *Families and the labour market, UK: 2021*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2021>

⁸ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion⁹

In 2022, 13.8% of children under 6 years were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was well below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 25.2% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 1,8% of children under 6 years and 2,1% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6,1% and 4,3% respectively) (Eurostat 2021f, g).

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⁹ 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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