The European Reference Budgets Network is a project financed by the European Commission that aims to develop cross-national, comparable reference budgets in all EU Member States. Reference budgets are baskets of goods and services considered necessary for an individual household to achieve an acceptable standard of living within a given country, region or city. Preparing reference budgets with a common methodology can help EU Member States to design effective and adequate income support measures and to encourage mutual learning and the exchange of best practices. More information about the project as well as the full country reports can be found on the European Commission website: http://europa.eu/!CC79TD

The Estonian food basket indicates the monthly budget required for an adequate food intake by three reference households (consisting of children and people of working age, in good health, without disabilities and living in the capital city). The basket includes a budget for food and for the kitchen equipment required to prepare, serve, consume and preserve this food. Furthermore, it takes into account the necessary budget for physical activity and for other functions of food, such as its social function for example. The food basket has been developed in accordance with nutritionist recommendations and national dietary guidelines, and takes into account the cultural specificities of Estonian eating habits. The feasibility and acceptability of the basket have been verified through focus group discussions involving citizens with different socio-economic backgrounds.

1. Key findings

The Estonian Food Budget: monthly amounts in euros, Tallinn, March 2015

The monthly budget required for a healthy diet in Estonia is EUR 138 for a single person and EUR 454 for a family of two adults and two children. If the budget needed for physical activity and for the other functions of food (eating out, holidays, etc.) is also taken into consideration, the total monthly food budget amounts to EUR 144 for a single person and EUR 476 for a family of two adults and two children.

2. National specificities

Developing cross-national, comparable European reference budgets requires the differences between the respective budgets of the Member States to be explained according to the institutional, cultural, climatological and economic context of the country concerned. The Estonian food basket takes the following factors into account:

- **Dietary habits**

Between 2013 and 2014, the National Institute for Health Development conducted a new food consumption survey to study the differences between actual food consumption and the official nutrition recommendations. However, since the results of this survey are not yet available at the time of...
In this publication, the most recent detailed findings on food consumption patterns date from 1997. They revealed that Estonians tend to have a lower intake of fruit, fish and dairy products than recommended in the guidelines and that, while middle-aged women consume too much coffee, middle-aged men have a too high an alcohol intake. The diet of the Estonian population also varies according to the level of income. People with higher incomes tend to eat more meat and fruit, whereas people with lower incomes consume more grain products, in particular bread.

### National food guidelines

The exact composition of the food basket has been developed in accordance with the national food guidelines. In 2006, the National Institute for Health Development and the Estonian Society of Nutritional Science developed dietary guidelines based on the Nordic Nutrition Recommendations 2004. In 2012, a working group was established to update the dietary guidelines, with the results published in 2015, taking into account the updated version of the Nordic Nutrition Recommendations 2012. The guidelines emphasise four general principles, namely that the choice of food should be balanced, moderate, based on needs and diverse. They are presented using a simplified model of the food pyramid divided into four main layers: grains and potatoes; vegetables, fruit and berries; dairy products, meat, fish and eggs; and fat, nuts and seeds.

### The pricing of the basket

The pricing of the food basket was conducted in the first week of May 2015. The choice of shop was based on a review of the market share of the biggest Estonian retail chains. The selected store has the largest market share in the capital city Tallinn. The lowest prices of good-quality products were chosen in terms of price per kilo and package size.

### Institutional context

The pricing of the basket for households with children also takes into account the fact that all school students receive a free lunch at school financed by the state and local municipalities. The provision of free school lunches reduces the price of the food basket to EUR 40 per month. This represents a reduction in cost of the healthy food basket of 8% for a couple with two children and with 11% for a single woman with two children.

### Physical activity

Besides the budget required for a healthy diet, the food basket also includes a minimum budget for physical activity, as this is presented in the national guidelines as a general requirement for a healthy lifestyle. The Estonian nutrition and physical activity guidelines recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity or 75 minutes of intensive physical activity per week for adults. Children should perform physical activity at least 60 minutes a day.

### Other functions of food

The food basket also incorporates social, cultural and emotional functions of food that have been identified by focus group participants as necessary for adequate participation in Estonian society. Cooking festive dishes for holidays and celebrations (e.g. Independence Day, Easter or Christmas), eating out once in a while and inviting friends and family over are seen as constitutive functions of food.