

# Statistics in focus

## POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THEME 3 – 6/2003

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# Young people's social origin, educational attainment and labour market outcomes in Europe

## *Youth transitions from education to working life in Europe Part III*

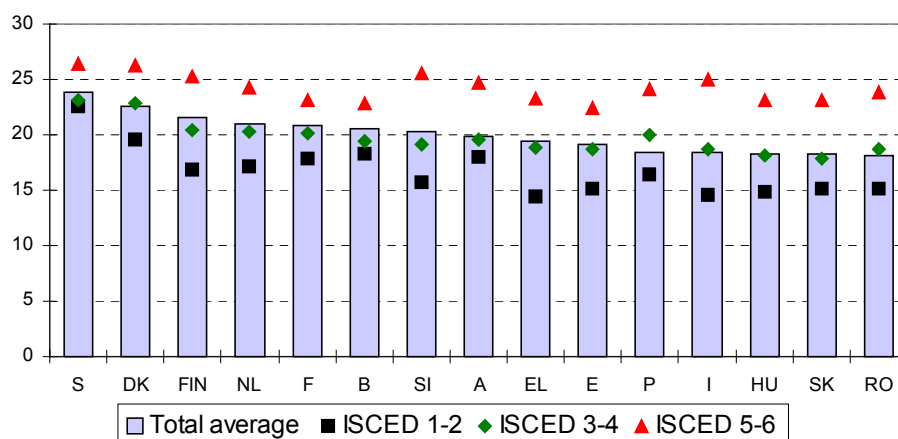
Within the 2000 EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) new data were collected in order to analyse the transition from school to working life (ad hoc module data). 14 EU Member States and 6 Eastern European countries agreed with Eurostat to include an additional set of questions their national LFS to investigate this transition.

This publication presents some key information, drawn from these new data, on two important issues in school-to-work transitions: (1) young people's average age of leaving continuous education or training and their educational attainment at the time of leaving and (2) the relationship between parents' education and their children's educational and occupational attainment. The indicators presented include data for the countries in which a sufficient degree of comparability has been established and information on social background was collected.

This publication has been produced by Cristina Iannelli. It is an extract of a larger indicators report prepared by the researchers involved in the "Evaluation and Analyses of the LFS 2000 Ad Hoc Module Data on School-to-Work Transitions" project.

### The average age of leaving continuous education or training ranges between 18 and 24

Figure 1: Average age of leaving continuous education



The age at which young people leave continuous education is an important indicator of the point in life in which their transition from school-to-work begins. In the Nordic countries for which data are available - that is, Sweden, Denmark and Finland - and in the Netherlands young people tend on average to leave education or training particularly late (between 21 and 24 years old, figure 1). On the contrary in Portugal, Italy, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania young people make the transition from education to working life at a



younger age (on average at around 18 years of age). The remaining countries are in an intermediate position with young people leaving education between the ages of 19 and 21 years.

Given the great diversity in the structure of European education systems, the average age of leaving different educational stages inevitably varies across countries. Country differences in the average age of leaving continuous education are particularly marked at the lower levels of education (ISCED 1-2). The average age of young people leaving with only primary or lower-secondary education ranges between 14.5 (Greece) to 19.6 (in Denmark). In Sweden the average age of leaving education from lower-secondary education (as well as the other levels of education) is particularly high (22 years old). This may be explained by the fact that in

this country young people who have attended various short-term training courses after leaving the school system are likely to have been considered as continuing education. In contrast, in Greece, Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Spain young people tend to leave primary and lower-secondary education earlier than in the other countries (at around 15 years old). There is less variation between countries at ISCED levels 3 and 4: the oldest school leavers are in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, France and Portugal (on average they leave at around 20 years old) while the youngest ones are in Slovakia and Hungary (around 18 years old). At the tertiary level, young people leave education at an older age in Sweden, Denmark, Slovenia, Finland, Italy and Austria than in the other countries.

### Young people's educational attainment varies widely across European countries

Country variations in the average age of leaving continuous education depend upon another factor, that is differences across countries in the proportions of young people leaving at various stages of their educational careers.

There are large country variations in the educational

attainment achieved by young people when leaving continuous education (table 1). Thus, the countries in which young people leave education at a particularly early age (i.e. Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia, with the addition of Austria), are those characterised by low rates of tertiary graduates, between 10 and 17 per cent. Furthermore, compared to the other countries, Italy, Romania and Portugal (but also Spain and Denmark) show the highest percentages of young people leaving continuous education having completed only primary or lower secondary (ISCED 1-

*Table 1: Young people's highest educational attainment at the time of leaving continuous education (as percentages)*

	ISCED 1-2	ISCED 3-4	ISCED 5-6
A	15	74	11
B	17	42	41
DK	30	51	19
E	35	22	43
FIN	12	56	32
F	21	42	37
EL	15	58	27
HU	15	70	15
I	29	57	14
NL	20	46	34
P	60	23	17
RO	27	63	10
S	14	62	24
SI	8	70	22
SK	4	86	10

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2). Portugal, especially, shows an exceptionally high percentage of young people with only compulsory education (60 per cent). In Denmark many people (around 25 per cent) who left continuous education early were found to have subsequently upgraded their education. In most countries more than half of the young population has left continuous education with a diploma from upper-secondary or post upper-secondary (non tertiary) education (ISCED 3-4). At tertiary level, the highest percentages of graduates are found in Belgium, Finland, France, the Netherlands and Spain. With the exception of the Netherlands, these countries have also the highest percentages (between 14 and 23 per cent) of young people who have attended tertiary degree courses which are usually shorter and more technically oriented, corresponding to ISCED 5b (data not shown).

## Younger generations achieve higher educational qualifications than their parents

The distribution of parents' highest educational attainment (the highest between the two parents) shows very large country differences (table 2). The most striking difference is in the percentages of parents with low levels of education (ISCED 1-2). These percentages are particularly high in the countries of Southern Europe (80 per cent in

attainment, comparing the educational levels (ISCED 1-2, ISCED 3-4 and ISCED 5-6) achieved by parents with those achieved by their children at the time of leaving continuous education. In 5 countries (Belgium, France, Greece, Italy and Spain) upward mobility, that is children having increased their educational level

Table 2: Parents' highest educational attainment (in per cent)

	Parents' highest educational attainment		
	ISCED 1-2	ISCED 3-4	ISCED 5-6
A	27	54	19
B	45	29	26
E	80	10	10
FIN	21	42	36
F	51	34	15
EL	66	25	9
HU	26	61	13
I	68	26	6
RO	44	50	6
S	26	38	36
SI	33	51	16
SK	16	76	8

Note: some rows do not exactly sum to 100% because the percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole figure.

Spain, 68 per cent in Italy and 66 per cent in Greece; information for Portugal is not available) and comparatively low in Slovakia, Finland, Hungary, Sweden and Austria (below 30 per cent). If compared with the data on children's educational attainment (see table 1) these data point out the remarkable improvement that younger generations in Southern European countries have made in their educational attainment. Overall, in all examined countries the percentages of young people with at least upper-secondary education is higher than the percentages of parents with the same level of education.

Table 3 presents the absolute rates of mobility or stability between parents' and children's educational

attainment, comparing the educational levels (ISCED 1-2, ISCED 3-4 and ISCED 5-6) achieved by parents with those achieved by their children at the time of leaving continuous education. In 5 countries (Belgium, France, Greece, Italy and Spain) upward mobility, that is children having increased their educational level compared to their parents, is more prevalent (or equally possible in the case of Italy) than stability (i.e. children having reached the same level of education of their parents). In all the other countries young people have mainly achieved the same levels of education as their parents. Everywhere downward mobility is restricted to a limited proportion of young people. Gender differences in the rates of mobility between parents' and children's educational attainment are quite remarkable: in most countries the chances of upward inter-generational educational mobility are significantly higher for women than for men (with the exception of Austria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia).

Table 3: Absolute rates of stability, upward and downward mobility between young people's educational attainment and their parents' educational attainment (in per cent)

	Stability			Upward mobility			Downward mobility		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
A	52	52	52	25	26	26	22	22	22
B	46	40	43	41	51	46	13	9	11
E	47	37	42	46	59	53	7	4	5
FIN	40	40	40	27	34	31	33	26	29
F	43	38	40	45	53	49	13	9	10
EL	36	30	33	57	63	60	7	6	6
HU	62	63	63	24	26	25	14	11	12
I	47	43	46	42	49	46	10	8	8
RO	63	62	62	28	30	29	9	8	9
S	42	42	43	24	32	29	34	26	28
SI	51	43	48	32	46	39	17	10	13
SK	74	75	75	19	19	19	7	6	6

Note: some rows do not exactly sum to 100% because the percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole figure.

## There is a strong relationship between parents' and children's educational attainment

There is much empirical evidence which shows that social origin is an important factor affecting young people's chances of continuing education or dropping out early. Table 4 supports this finding: in all countries, with the exception of Finland, the percentages of young

among young people with low levels of parental education (ISCED 1-2) women are significantly less likely than men to leave education at lower secondary level. In the remaining countries women's chances of leaving education early do not significantly differ from

Table 4: Early school leavers (ISCED 1-2) by parents' highest educational attainment (in per cent)

	Parents' highest educational attainment								
	ISCED 1-2			ISCED 3-4			ISCED 5-6		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
A	22	26	24	12	14	13	12	8	10
B	32	20	26	14	10	12	3	3	3
E	47	33	40	27	14	21	14	8	11
FIN	16	10	13	17	13	15	8	7	8
F	29	24	26	19	15	17	7	5	6
EL	24	16	20	10	5	8	(9)	.	6
HU	32	35	33	10	9	9	(4)	.	3
I	42	34	38	22	15	19	12	10	11
RO	47	47	47	14	14	14	.	.	.
S	19	18	18	13	11	12	13	.	10
SI	14	(7)	10	9	(6)	8	.	.	.
SK	15	14	14	2	2	2	.	.	.

Note: percentages in brackets in the table have to be read with caution due to the small number of cases and the full stops in the table are percentages which are unreliable and therefore not reported.

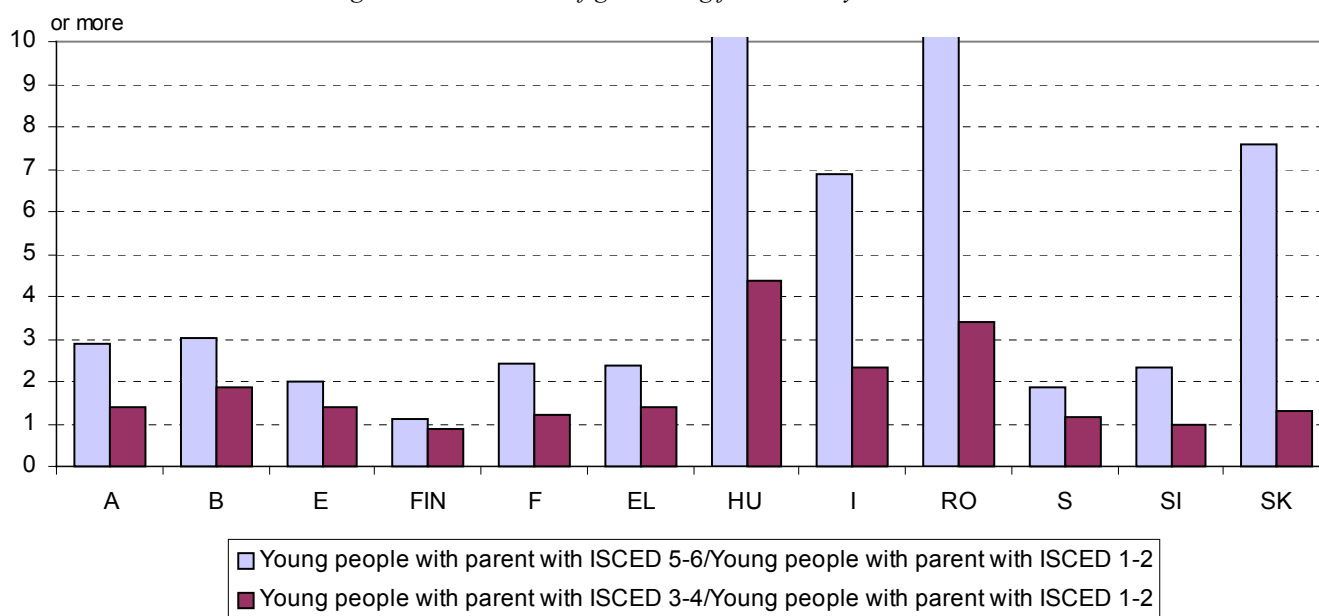
people leaving education at an earlier stage are much higher among those whose parents have low levels of education than among those who have more educated parents (outflow percentages) and these differences are also significant.

In 7 of the 12 countries under examination (i.e. Belgium, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Italy and Slovenia)

those of men.

In all countries there are also differences among young people from various social backgrounds in the likelihood of leaving from tertiary education. The odds ratios presented in figure 2 measure the chances of graduating from tertiary education. A value higher than 1 means that young people with parents with high (or medium) education are more likely to graduate at

Figure 2: Odds ratios of graduating from tertiary education



tertiary level than young people with parents with low levels of education. The results reveal that young people with highly educated parents always have higher chances of graduation than children with less educated parents. Moreover, the countries which show

comparably low levels of tertiary leavers (i.e. Hungary, Italy, Romania and Slovakia) are also those where the gap between young people with different social backgrounds is higher.

### Parents' education also affects young people's occupational outcomes

Two main indicators are here presented to analyse the relationship between social origin and young people's occupational outcomes: the length of time before starting the first significant job (as a proxy for the degree

of difficulty that young people may encounter in entering the labour market) and the occupational status of the first significant job, measured by the International Social and Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI).

Figure 3: Average number of months between leaving education and starting the first significant job by parents' education

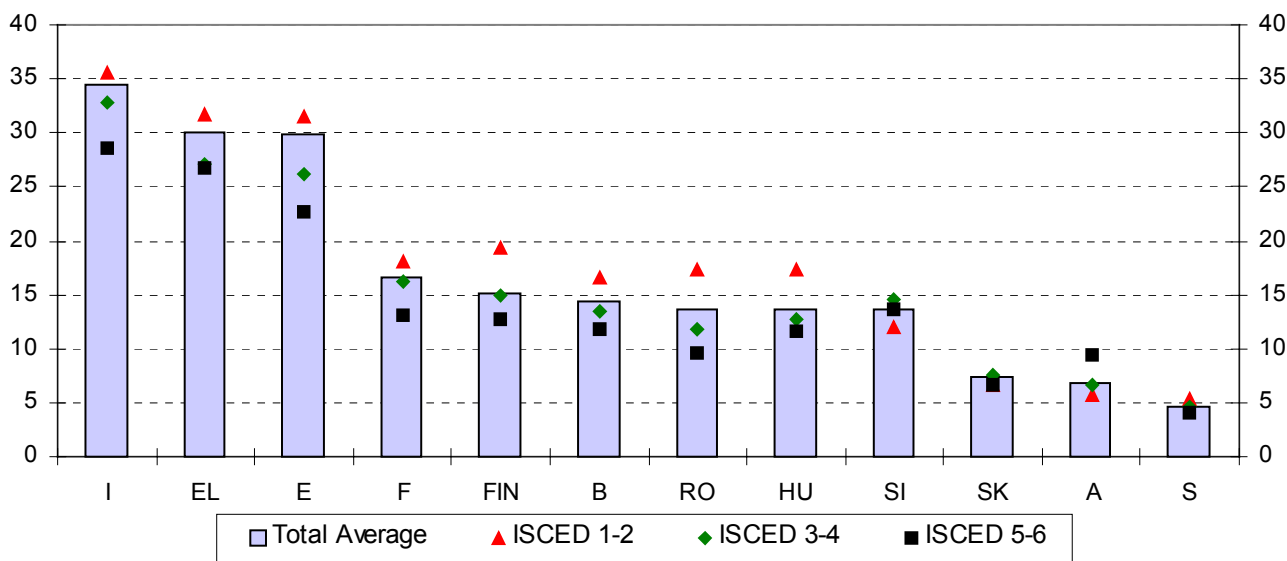
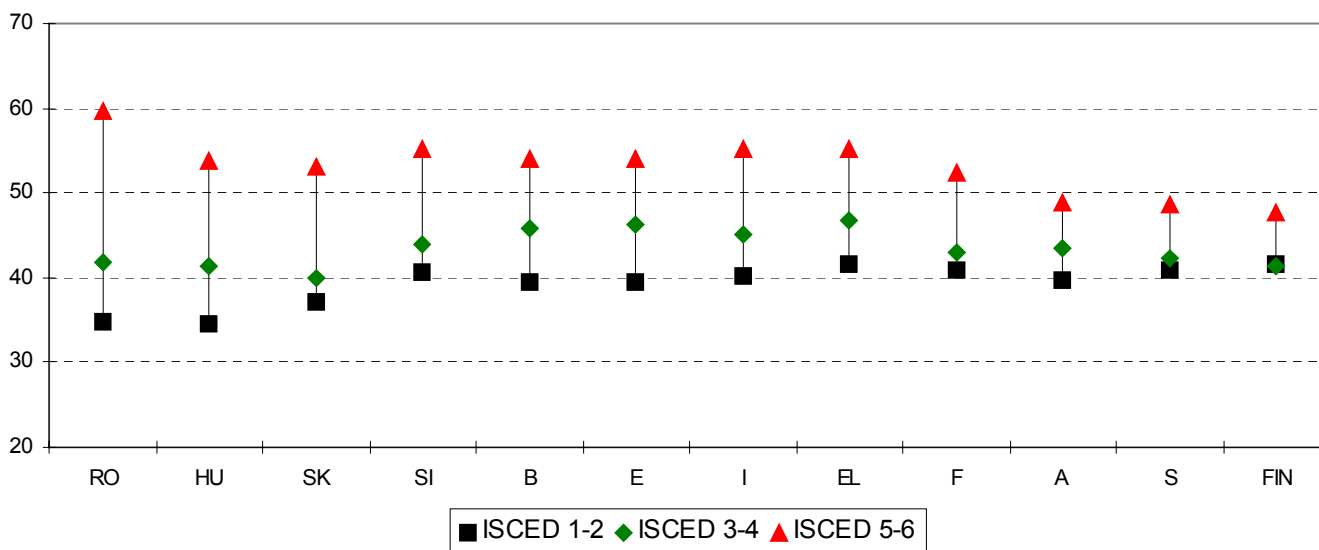


Figure 4: Average occupational status of young people with parents with different educational attainment



In all countries, with the exception of Slovenia, Slovakia Austria and Sweden, the speed with which young people enter the labour market significantly differs among young people with different social backgrounds (figure 3). Young people with parents with low levels of education tend to wait longer before acquiring the first significant job. On the contrary young people with parents who graduated from tertiary education experience significantly shorter waiting times. These results hold even after having taken into account differences related to gender and young people's educational attainment (with the exception of Italy and Belgium).

achieve different occupational statuses: the higher the parents' educational attainment, the higher the children's occupational status. Moreover, the gap between young people with different social backgrounds appears to be larger in the Eastern European countries (Hungary, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia) and smaller in Austria, Sweden and Finland. Social differences in young people's occupational outcomes remain significant (though they reduce) even taking into account differences between the two sexes and among young people with various educational attainments. Table 5 synthesises this finding for the pooled sample of countries. Young people with the same level of

*Table 5: Average occupational attainment (ISEI classification) of young people with different levels of educational attainment by their parents' highest educational attainment*

Young people's educational attainment when left continuous education	Parents' highest educational attainment		
	ISCED 1-2	ISCED 3-4	ISCED 5-6
ISCED 1-2	31.8	33.9	35.8
ISCED 3-4	38.2	39.5	42.3
ISCED 5-6	52.1	55.5	59.7

The relationship between parental education and the occupational position acquired by young people in their first significant job is analysed using the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI). The ISEI is a scale which ranges from 16 to 90, with the highest value attributed to the highest occupational status.

Figure 4 shows that, in all countries under examination, young people with different social backgrounds tend to

education but more highly educated parents tend to occupy higher occupational positions than young people with parents with low levels of education. Thus, among tertiary graduates, the average occupational status is 52.1, in the case of graduates who have parents with only primary or lower secondary education, and 59.7, in the case of graduates who have parents with tertiary education (an increase of 7.6 in the ISEI scale).

## ➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

### Abbreviations:

A Austria, B Belgium, DK Denmark, E Spain, FIN Finland, F France, EL Greece, HU Hungary, I Italy, NL the Netherlands, P Portugal, RO Romania, S Sweden, SI Slovenia, SK Slovakia.

### Data sources:

The data used in this publication were drawn from the EU LFS 2000 ad hoc module data on Transition from school to working life. The target population of the ad hoc module was composed of young people aged between 15 and 35 years who left continuous education or training (that is, left education or training for the first time) in the last 5 or 10 years.

### Educational levels

ISCED 1-2: primary and lower secondary education.

ISCED 3-4: upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education.

ISCED 5-6: tertiary education.

### Occupational status of first significant job

The International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) refers to the hierarchical position of one's occupation. It considers occupation as the intervening activity linking education and income. Using the 3-digit ISCO-88 occupational codes each person was assigned a score on the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI), an interval scale with the range between 16 and 90, developed by Ganzeboom and Treiman (1996) (See Ganzeboom, Harry B.G. and Donald J. Treiman, 1996, "Internationally Comparable Measures of Occupational Status for the 1988 International Standard Classification of Occupations" in *Social Science Research* 25, pp. 201-239).

### Some definitions

"Leaving continuous education or training" includes (1) completion of education - successful (e.g. graduation or acquisition of the final school leaving diploma) or not successful - and (2) interruption of studies for more than one year, with the exclusion of interruptions due to special reasons (e.g. maternity leaves, illness, national service, etc.). Moreover, "leaving continuous education" refers to both education and training (with at least 10% of the total training in the educational/training institution), full-time or part-time, and vocational and general courses.

Young people's educational attainment refers to the highest level of education which they have successfully completed at the time of leaving continuous education. In France the highest level of education refers to both successful and unsuccessful completion at the time of leaving continuous education. However, the data presented here have been corrected in the cases in which young people have declared that they have a lower educational attainment at present than at the time of leaving continuous education.

First significant job is defined as a job started after leaving continuous education, with a duration of minimum 6 months, involving a minimum of 20 hrs per week and being no casual work or training scheme.

There are some country differences in the implementation of the definitions above described. For further details see the report on data quality and cross-country comparability produced within the "Evaluation and Analyses of the LFS 2000 Ad Hoc Module Data on School-to-Work Transitions" project., now available in the Eurostat Education, Training and Culture Statistics (ETCS) webpages at the address <http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/dsis/edtcslibrary>.

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