

Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages - statistics

Statistics Explained

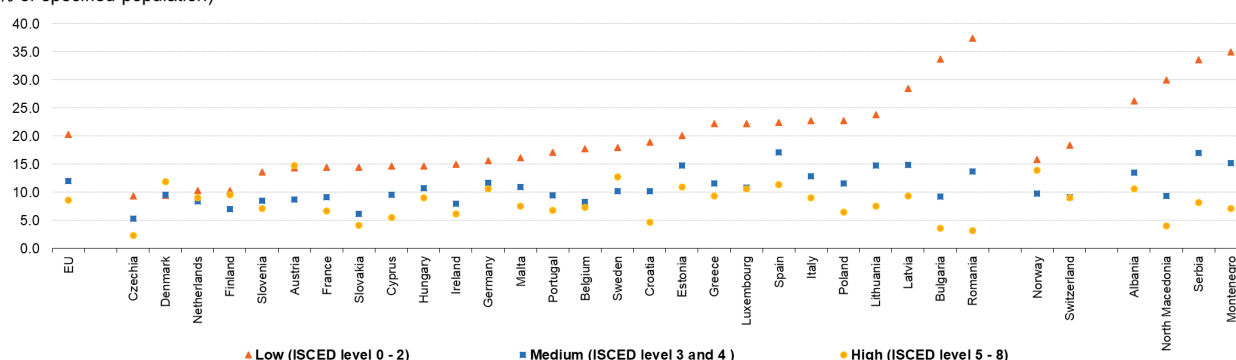
Data extracted in November 2021

Planned article update: June 2024

" In 2019, the EU average at-risk-of poverty rate of people whose parents had a low level of education was 20.3% while it was 12.0% for those whose parents had a medium level and 8.6% with highly educated parents. "

" In 2019, 76.4% of the EU population considered that the financial situation of the household in which they lived as teenagers was very good, good or moderately good. "

At-risk-of poverty rate for current adults by educational attainment level of their parents, 2019
(% of specified population)



Note: ranked by low level of education

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2019 ad-hoc module

'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages'

eurostat

At-risk-of poverty rate for current adults by educational attainment level of their parents, 2019 (% of specified population) Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2019 ad-hoc module 'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages'

People's lives as adults can be significantly affected by their life in childhood. More specifically, the socio-economic and financial situation of today's adults during their teenage years can lead to a low standard of living in adulthood.

This Statistics Explained article focuses on intergenerational transmission of advantages and disadvantages from parents to today's adults and shows how this affects the current standard of living of the population. The results are based on [EU statistics on income and living conditions \(EU-SILC\) - 2019 module 'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages, household composition and evolution of income'](#) and the 2011 module 'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages' in which each current household member aged 25 to 59 was asked questions about their family circumstances when they were aged 14.

Key statistical findings

- Persons having a low or a medium educational level are most likely to have low and medium educated parents but persons having a high educational level are most likely to have medium or high educated parents.
- People having a low level of education are around three and a half times more likely to be at-risk-of-poverty than people with a high level of education.
- The [at-risk-of poverty rate](#) was more than two times higher among people whose parents had a low level of education than among people whose parents had a high level of education.

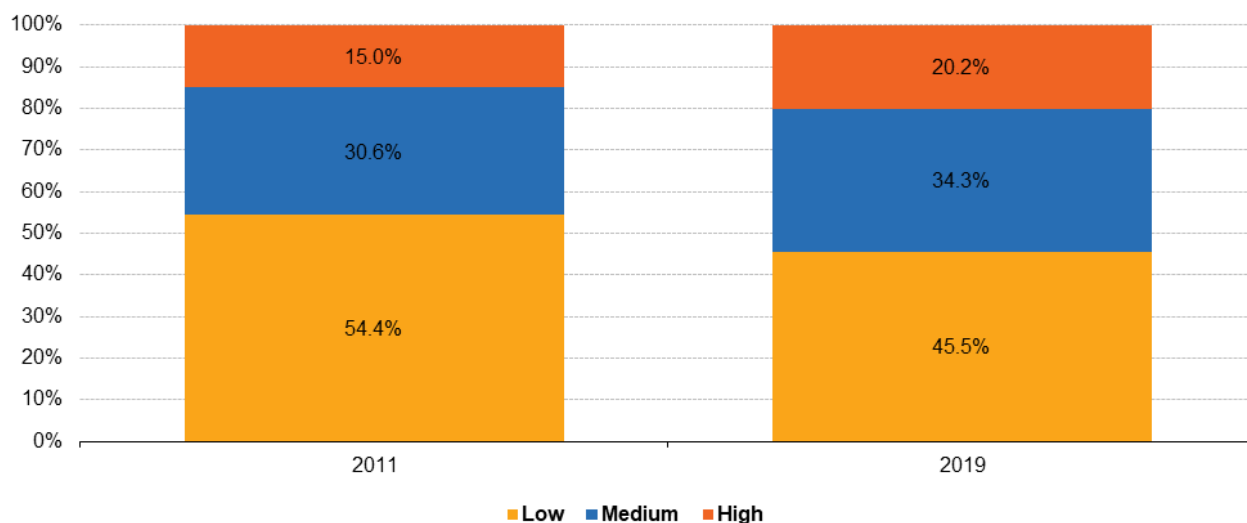
Educational attainment level: transition from parents to current adults

The educational level of parents has a significant impact on the educational level of their children. This can be explained by the fact that parents with a high level of educational attainment have more financial resources to invest in the education of their children, in comparison with parents with a low educational attainment level. Moreover, highly educated persons may have clearer views of the benefits of education and can encourage and support their descendants to receive a high level of education.

The distribution of the EU population by educational attainment level¹ of parents is shown in Figure 1. The educational level of the parents is measured as the highest educational attainment level of both parents (or educational level of a single parent).

¹It should be noted that in 2011, the data regarding education attainment level is collected and recorded according to ISCED 97 - high (first stage of tertiary education and second stage of tertiary education), medium (upper secondary education and post-secondary non-tertiary education), low (pre-primary, primary or lower secondary education) and very low (could not read nor write in any language) and in 2019, according to ISCED 11 – high (short-cycle tertiary education, bachelor's or equivalent level, master's or equivalent level, doctoral or equivalent level), medium (upper secondary education and post-secondary non-tertiary education) and low (less than primary, primary education or lower secondary education).

The highest education attainment level of parents (% of specified population)



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2011 and 2019 ad-hoc module
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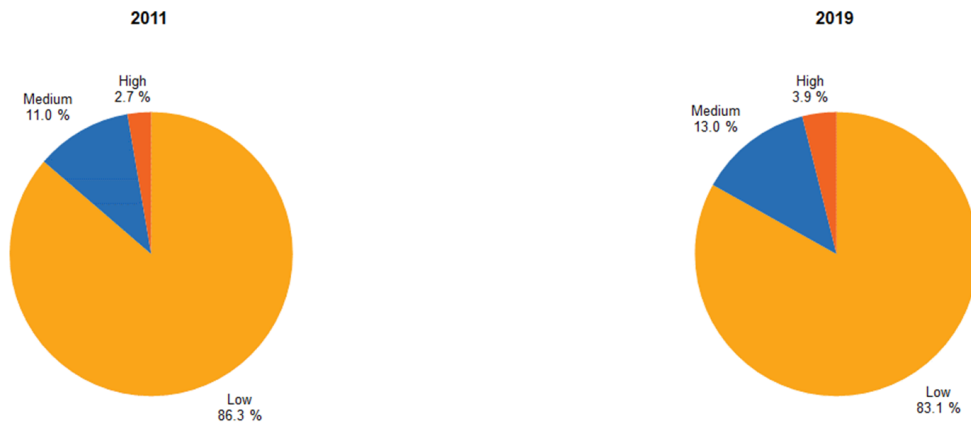
Figure 1: The highest education attainment level of parents (% of specified population) Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2011 and 2019 ad-hoc module 'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages'

The percentage of persons having parents with a low level of education decreased by 8.9 [percentage points \(pp.\)](#) from 54.4 % in 2011 to reach 45.5 % in 2019. Between 2011 and 2019, the share of the population having parents with a medium or high level of education increased by 3.7 pp. and 5.2 pp. respectively.

Majority of low-educated adults had low-educated parents

In 2019, 83.1 % of today's adults (aged 25-59) in the EU who had a low level of education indicated that their parents also had a low level of education, 13.0 % had parents with a medium level of education and 3.9 % had parents with a high level of education (Figure 2). Significant variations across countries are observed. In Portugal, the percentage of the population having a low educational level whose parents also had a low-education is 97.1 %; in contrast this share is 30.5 % in Estonia.

Today's low-educated adults by their parents' highest level of education
(% of specified population)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_igtp01)

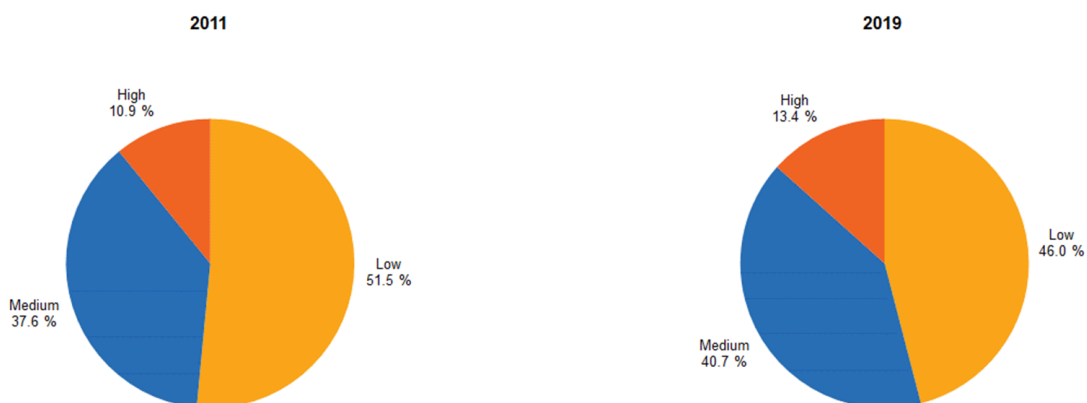
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Figure 2: Today's low-educated adults by their parents' highest level of education (% of specified population)
Source: Eurostat (ilc_igtp01)

Almost half of the adults with a medium level of education had low-educated parents

In 2019, the distribution of adults with a medium level of education by parents' education level in the EU, showed that 46.0 % (ranging from 82.7 % in Portugal to 16.1 % in Germany) had parents with a low level of education, 40.7 % (ranging from 73.0 % in Romania to 10.9 % in Portugal) had parents with a medium level of education and 13.4 % (ranging from 38.6 % in Estonia to 1.5 % in Romania) had parents with a high level of education (Figure 3).

Today's medium-educated adults by their parents' highest level of education
(% of specified population)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_igtp01)

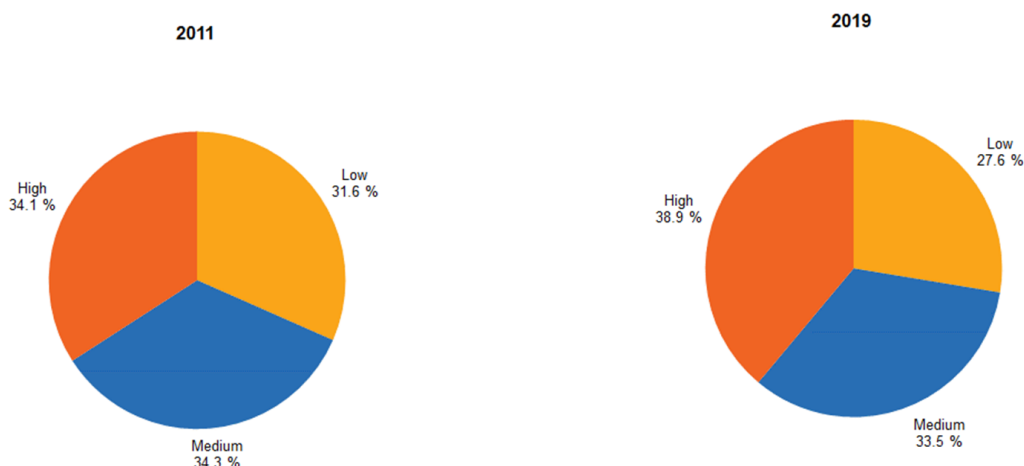
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Figure 3: Today's medium-educated adults by their parents' highest level of education (% of specified population) Source: Eurostat (ilc_igtp01)

A larger share of highly educated adults had highly educated parents

In 2019, almost two-fifths of highly educated adults (Figure 4) had parents with a high educational level (38.9 % in the EU). One-third (33.5 %) on average in the EU had parents with a medium level of education, and 27.6 % had parents with a low educational level.

Today's high-educated adults by their parents' highest level of education (% of specified population)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_igtp01)

eurostat

Figure 4: Today's high-educated adults by their parents' highest level of education (% of specified population) Source: Eurostat (ilc_igtp01)

It can be concluded that persons having a low or medium educational level are most likely to have low or medium educated parents but persons having a high educational level are most likely to have medium or high educated parents.

Low-educated parents expose their descendants to a higher risk of poverty

The education level has a significant impact on the poverty situation. In 2019, in the EU (population aged 18 or more), the share of people at-risk-of poverty was 29.4 % among persons with a low level of education. The at-risk-of poverty level among people having a medium level of education was 14.4 pp. lower (15.0 %) and 21.8 pp. lower for those with a high level of education (7.6 %). People having a low level of education are around three and a half times more often at-risk-of poverty than people with a high level of education.

Looking at the educational level of the parents also reveals a strong influence on the at-risk-of poverty levels of today's adults. In 2019, on average in the EU, the at-risk-of poverty rate of people whose parents had a low level of education was 20.3 %; it was 12.0 % when the parents had a medium level of education and 8.6 % among people with highly educated parents. In 2011, the situation was similar - 19.8 % at-risk-of poverty rate among people whose parents had a low level of education, 11.2 % for people with medium educated parents and 9.4 % for people with high educated parents. In both years, the at-risk-of poverty rate was more than twice as high amongst those having parents with a low level of education than amongst those having parents with a high level of education.

Differences between European countries are shown in Table 1. Overall, in 2019 the share of people at-risk-of poverty among people having parents with a low level of education was more than 20 % for 10 EU Member states (Estonia, Greece, Luxembourg, Spain, Italy, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria and Romania) with the highest rate in Romania (37.4 %). The lowest rate was observed in Czechia (9.3 %). The at-risk-of poverty rate among people having highly educated parents was highest in Sweden (12.7 %) and Austria (14.8 %) and lowest in Romania (3.2 %) and Czechia (2.3 %).

At-risk-of poverty rate for current adults by educational attainment level of their parents

(% of specified population)

	2011			2019		
	Low (ISCED level 0 - 2) or very low (could neither read nor write)	Medium (ISCED level 3 and 4)	High (ISCED level 5 and 6)	Low (ISCED level 0 - 2) or very low (could neither read nor write)	Medium (ISCED level 3 and 4)	High (ISCED level 5 - 8)
EU	19.8	11.2	9.4	20.3	12.0	8.6
Belgium	15.7	9.0	6.9	17.7	8.3	7.3
Bulgaria	28.4	8.3	2.8	33.7	9.2	3.6
Czechia	12.3	6.9	4.2	9.3	5.3	2.3
Denmark	8.6	6.3	14.1	9.4	9.6	11.9
Germany	22.1	12.7	12.1	15.6	11.7	10.6
Estonia	25.4	16.9	11.1	20.1	14.8	10.9
Ireland	16.2	12.1	10.9	15.0	7.9	6.1
Greece	21.8	11.6	7.1	22.2	11.6	9.3
Spain	20.1	15.8	11.6	22.4	17.1	11.4
France	13.0	8.4	8.5	14.4	9.1	6.7
Croatia	24.0	12.5	8.0	18.9	10.2	4.7
Italy	21.3	11.0	11.4	22.7	12.8	9.0
Cyprus	12.4	8.2	6.6	14.7	9.6	5.5
Latvia	28.6	16.9	12.1	28.5	14.9	9.3
Lithuania	23.9	16.6	10.1	23.8	14.8	7.5
Luxembourg	18.9	8.2	3.5	22.2	10.8	10.6
Hungary	17.9	7.8	4.2	14.7	10.7	9.0
Malta	14.6	7.6	4.5	16.1	10.9	7.5
Netherlands	10.0	6.9	9.4	10.3	8.4	9.0
Austria	15.2	10.5	10.9	14.3	8.7	14.8
Poland	22.6	13.2	7.9	22.7	11.6	6.5
Portugal	15.9	6.2	6.7	17.1	9.4	6.8
Romania	:	:	:	37.4	13.7	3.2
Slovenia	15.2	10.0	6.6	13.6	8.5	7.1
Slovakia	19.0	9.8	5.2	14.4	6.1	4.1
Sweden	8.7	9.7	11.3	18.0	10.2	12.7
Finland	11.5	9.2	9.2	10.3	7.0	9.6
Iceland	9.5	9.0	9.3	:	:	:
Norway	8.2	6.1	8.2	15.8	9.8	13.9
Switzerland	16.0	7.7	7.5	18.4	9.1	9.0
United Kingdom	15.0	9.3	9.2	:	:	:
North Macedonia	:	:	:	30.0	9.3	4.0
Montenegro	:	:	:	35.0	15.2	7.1
Turkey	19.9	3.2	1.7	:	:	:
Serbia	:	:	:	33.6	17.0	8.2
Albania	:	:	:	26.3	13.5	10.6

: not available

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2011 and 2019 ad-hoc module
'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages'

eurostat 

Table 1: At-risk-of poverty rate for current adults by educational attainment level of their parents (% of specified population) Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2011 and 2019 ad-hoc module 'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages'

The financial situation of the households was good rather than bad

Another factor influencing young people's future life is the financial situation of the household. Table 2 shows the household financial situation of today's adults when they were around 14 years old. In 2019, 76.4 % of the EU population considered that the financial situation of the household in which they lived as teenagers was very good, good or moderately good, while 23.6 % felt that it was very bad, bad, or moderately bad. The percentage of the population assessing the financial situation of their household at the age of 14 as very bad, bad, or moderately bad was slightly higher than the percentage for those with a positive assessment only in Estonia as well as in the candidate country Albania.

Financial situation of the household when respondent was around 14 years old

(% of specified population)

	2011						2019					
	Very bad	Bad	Moderately bad	Moderately good	Good	Very good	Very bad	Bad	Moderately bad	Moderately good	Good	Very good
EU	4.0	9.0	17.1	39.6	25.7	4.6	2.8	6.8	14.0	39.1	31.1	6.2
Belgium	3.2	7.7	10.4	30.7	38.8	9.2	3.0	6.9	10.9	29.1	40.5	9.6
Bulgaria	1.5	5.7	11.6	48.5	25.8	6.9	1.2	4.2	9.4	46.0	31.6	7.6
Czechia	2.5	6.2	19.1	39.4	29.8	2.9	1.4	4.2	16.0	40.9	33.1	4.5
Denmark	2.7	5.4	7.8	37.8	33.7	12.7	2.0	5.4	9.3	27.6	39.7	15.9
Germany	4.4	8.7	15.2	35.8	28.6	7.3	4.0	6.6	12.5	32.3	33.1	11.5
Estonia	1.1	5.1	19.0	51.0	21.8	2.0	4.2	11.6	36.0	34.7	11.5	1.9
Ireland	4.8	8.4	15.9	40.0	24.6	6.3	3.6	5.7	12.9	40.9	29.3	7.6
Greece	5.2	10.9	17.8	40.4	20.3	5.4	2.3	6.2	14.6	41.7	26.4	8.8
Spain	3.6	9.8	18.4	38.4	27.7	2.1	2.3	8.1	16.1	40.1	30.7	2.7
France	3.4	8.4	17.1	42.4	24.1	4.6	3.8	8.5	14.5	40.2	27.7	5.3
Croatia	8.1	16.5	16.6	28.7	24.0	6.0	3.3	10.3	16.3	34.3	29.2	6.7
Italy	4.3	8.1	19.6	48.1	18.2	1.8	1.3	6.4	14.0	43.9	32.0	2.3
Cyprus	10.8	12.4	15.0	31.1	25.2	5.5	3.1	8.0	12.2	32.6	36.5	7.6
Latvia	2.8	7.1	17.3	45.1	22.9	4.8	2.5	7.7	18.2	44.3	23.5	3.8
Lithuania	3.1	9.8	15.4	42.5	26.6	2.5	1.4	5.6	16.5	47.0	26.6	2.9
Luxembourg	3.8	8.4	13.6	37.0	31.8	5.3	2.4	7.1	10.9	34.0	37.1	8.3
Hungary	3.6	9.4	23.3	42.6	19.1	2.1	2.4	8.3	17.4	42.5	27.3	2.1
Malta	4.1	9.9	15.5	34.0	34.7	1.8	1.3	4.5	13.1	31.9	46.5	2.7
Netherlands	1.6	5.8	8.6	28.3	46.8	8.9	1.2	3.3	7.7	35.1	43.8	8.8
Austria	8.1	10.9	23.2	29.3	21.7	6.7	5.0	8.1	18.9	33.1	26.1	8.9
Poland	2.7	8.4	16.3	40.9	29.1	2.7	2.1	6.5	13.9	41.5	32.2	3.9
Portugal	10.6	17.1	20.3	36.5	14.3	1.3	5.0	9.4	17.3	43.3	22.2	2.8
Romania	5.6	14.8	22.5	42.5	13.1	1.6	2.7	5.1	16.3	53.9	19.6	2.4
Slovenia	8.8	12.5	33.5	28.1	12.6	4.4	6.1	12.6	11.9	35.7	29.3	4.5
Slovakia	2.7	7.3	21.0	35.8	29.1	4.0	1.5	4.6	14.8	33.7	39.6	5.8
Sweden	3.5	6.8	8.8	28.0	38.2	14.7	2.4	5.0	11.3	33.8	33.7	13.8
Finland	1.9	6.5	16.3	45.9	25.1	4.3	1.9	3.8	13.8	37.8	35.5	7.2
Iceland	3.5	6.6	13.8	47.0	20.5	8.6	:	:	:	:	:	:
Norway	1.3	4.3	9.2	36.9	40.3	7.9	1.9	5.6	10.3	34.5	37.5	10.2
Switzerland	3.1	7.2	9.6	30.4	39.3	10.4	2.4	6.5	7.9	30.0	41.0	12.1
United Kingdom	3.4	6.4	15.3	41.4	26.8	6.7	:	:	:	:	:	:
North Macedonia	:	:	:	:	:	:	5.2	12.4	18.2	33.9	26.3	3.9
Montenegro	:	:	:	:	:	:	3.4	11.9	16.9	41.4	22.3	4.1
Turkey	5.9	21.5	19.0	31.8	19.7	2.1	:	:	:	:	:	:
Serbia	:	:	:	:	:	:	3.3	11.4	20.8	39.1	21.5	3.9
Albania	:	:	:	:	:	:	9.5	24.4	24.3	25.5	14.3	2.0

: not available

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2011 and 2019 ad-hoc module 'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages'

eurostat 

Table 2: Financial situation of the household when respondent was around 14 years old, 2019 (% of specified population) Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2011 and 2019 ad-hoc module 'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages'

Financial situation of the parents' household as a cause of poverty of today's adults

Analyzing the financial situation of today's adults when they were teenagers shows a correspondence between past and current living conditions. For sake of simplicity, the answer categories very bad, bad and moderately bad are aggregated into one category entitled "Bad" financial situation and the categories very good, good and moderately good into one category entitled "Good" financial situation. In 2019, on average in the EU, the at-risk-of poverty rate was 23.0 % among people with a bad financial situation in their household in the past. This percentage is 9.6 pp. higher than the at-risk-of poverty rate among those with a good financial situation in their household when 14 years old. More than one in five persons having a bad financial situation in the past was below the at-risk-of poverty level in Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal, Lithuania, Greece, Spain, Italy, Romania and Bulgaria. The percentage did not fall under 10 % in any EU country. The lowest percentages were observed in Czechia (10.2 %) and Denmark (10.3 %) and the highest in Romania (32.7 %) and Bulgaria (40.1 %). The at-risk-of poverty rate among persons having a good financial situation as teenagers ranged from 5.9 % in Czechia and 7.9 % in Slovakia to 16.0 % in Latvia and 16.6 % in Spain. Outside of the EU, this percentage ranged from 11.2 % in Norway to 19.2 % in Albania.

**At-risk-of poverty rate for current adults by financial situation
of their households when respondent was around 14 years old**
(% of specified population)

	2011		2019	
	Bad	Good	Bad	Good
EU	21.1	13.7	23.0	13.4
Belgium	22.2	9.7	20.6	10.2
Bulgaria	34.1	12.8	40.1	12.5
Czechia	11.5	8.9	10.2	5.9
Denmark	9.3	9.2	10.3	11.1
Germany	15.9	14.0	16.9	12.0
Estonia	23.1	15.6	15.1	13.3
Ireland	16.5	11.9	14.8	8.7
Greece	25.2	15.9	28.3	14.8
Spain	25.9	15.4	30.0	16.6
France	13.3	11.1	13.8	11.6
Croatia	21.7	14.9	19.4	10.9
Italy	26.5	15.2	30.7	15.9
Cyprus	16.4	7.3	17.4	9.6
Latvia	25.1	18.3	16.6	16.0
Lithuania	26.5	16.4	24.6	12.8
Luxembourg	20.7	9.8	22.1	14.6
Hungary	18.2	10.3	16.2	10.3
Malta	14.9	11.3	16.0	11.2
Netherlands	14.4	7.9	16.2	9.6
Austria	12.6	12.0	12.4	11.7
Poland	21.1	14.8	19.2	12.3
Portugal	20.5	10.3	23.2	12.1
Romania	28.4	15.5	32.7	15.6
Slovenia	12.0	11.2	11.4	9.1
Slovakia	14.8	11.4	19.1	7.9
Sweden	12.2	11.0	15.9	13.0
Finland	10.1	10.1	10.5	8.5
Iceland	10.5	8.7	:	:
Norway	7.5	7.0	18.2	11.2
Switzerland	11.7	9.9	9.6	11.5
United Kingdom	14.7	11.7		:
North Macedonia	:	:	32.9	13.0
Montenegro	:	:	35.5	14.6
Turkey	23.6	14.3	:	:
Serbia	:	:	29.3	17.3
Albania	:	:	25.3	19.2

: not available

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2011 and 2019 ad-hoc module
'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages'

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages - tables and graphs](#)

Data sources

Data in this article are extracted from a special module on 'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages' of the EU statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) survey, which was carried out in 2019 and 2011. The data are available as Excel files downloadable from the Eurostat website.

Context

The objective of the 2019 module on 'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages, household composition and evolution of income' is to analyse the evolution of the results on this topic and a repetition of the former (2005) ad-hoc module on the 'intergenerational transmission of poverty' as well as the 2011 module on 'Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages'. The extent to which inequalities persist across generations is considered to play a major role in explaining adult social exclusion. In particular, the parental educational background and or their socio-economic status can influence the poverty risk during adulthood.

Main tables

- [Income and living conditions - selected datasets \(t_ilc\)](#)

Database

- [Income and living conditions - detailed datasets \(ilc\)](#) , see:

EU-SILC ad-hoc modules

2019 and 2011 Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages

Dedicated section

- [Income and living conditions](#)

Publications

- [Living conditions in Europe — 2018 edition](#)

Methodology

- [Income and living conditions](#) (ESMS metadata file — ilc_esms)
- [Income and living conditions — information on data](#)
- [Income and living conditions — methodology](#)

Legislation

- [Detailed list of legislative information on EU-SILC](#)
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1177/2003](#) of 16 June 2003 concerning Community statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC)
- [Regulation \(EU\) No 2018/174](#) of 2 February 2018 implementing Regulation (EC) No 1177/2003 concerning Community statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) as regards the list of target secondary variables on intergenerational transmission of disadvantages, household composition and evolution of income for 2019.
- [Regulation \(EU\) No 2010/481](#) of 1 June 2010 implementing Regulation (EC) No 1177/2003 concerning Community statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) as regards the 2011 list of target secondary variables on intergenerational transmission of disadvantages.

Notes