This article presents statistics on early leavers from education and training in the European Union (EU) and forms part of an online publication on education and training in the EU. Early leavers from education and training may face considerable difficulties in the labour market: for example, they can find it difficult to obtain a secure foothold as employers may be more reluctant to take them on with their limited education.

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (known as ET 2020) adopted a benchmark to be achieved by 2020, namely, that the share of early leavers from education and training in the EU should be not more than 10 %. With 9.9 %, this target was just met in 2020.

As the successor, the Council approved the Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) in February 2021. This resolution sets a new EU-level target, i.e. a reference level for European average performance: the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9 % by 2030.

Overview

In 2020, an average of 9.9 % of young people (aged 18-24) in the EU were early leavers from education and training, in other words, they had completed at most a lower secondary education and were not in further education or training.
during the four weeks preceding the survey. In this article, the terms ‘early leavers’ and ‘early leavers from education and training’ are used interchangeably.

Among the EU Member States, the proportion of early leavers in 2020 ranged from 2.2 % in Croatia to 16.7 % in Malta (see Figure 1).

The overall share of early leavers from education and training fell in the EU by 3.9 percentage points between 2010 and 2020. Among the EU Member States, the largest reductions (in percentage point terms) between 2010 and 2020 in the proportion of early leavers were in Portugal, Spain and Greece, each reporting a fall in excess of 9.0 points; this was also the case for Turkey and North Macedonia among the non-member countries. There was an increase between 2010 and 2020 in the proportion of early leavers in 6 Member States: Slovakia (2.9 percentage points), Czechia (2.7 points), Hungary (1.3 points), Sweden (1.2 points), Luxembourg (1.1 points) and Bulgaria (0.2 points).

Looking at the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, the benchmark set for 2020 – to have less than 10 % of early leavers – was just met in 2020 with 9.9 %. A new EU-level target for 2030 is fixed to less than 9 %, 2020 data being 0.9 percentage points away from it.

**Early leavers from education and training, 2010 and 2020**

(\% of population aged 18-24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>EU-level target 2030</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: break in time series.
(*) 2020: Low reliability.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_lfse_14)

Figure 1: Early leavers from education and training, 2010 and 2020 (% of population aged 18-24) Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_14)

**Analysis by sex**

The proportion of early leavers from education and training in 2020 in the EU was 3.8 percentage points higher for young men (11.8 %) than for young women (8.0 %). Nearly all EU Member States reported a higher proportion of early leavers for young men than for young women, with particularly large differences — of at least 5.0 percentage points — in Italy, Malta, Cyprus, Portugal and Spain; this was also the case in Iceland among the non-member countries. There were two exceptions among the Member States, as the proportion of early leavers was lower for young men than for young women in Romania (1.9 percentage points difference) and Czechia (0.1 points). Among the non-member countries shown in Figures 2 and 3, North Macedonia and Serbia reported lower proportions of early leavers among young men than among young women.

In the EU, the proportion of early leavers fell between 2010 and 2020: the overall proportion fell by 3.9 percentage points, while the proportions for young men and for young women fell by 4.1 and 3.6 points respectively. Although
the proportion of early leavers fell more for young men than for young women in percentage point terms, there is still a gender gap of 3.8 points in 2020. This gender gap was 4.3 points in 2010 but as low as 3.0 points in 2016.

Between 2010 and 2020, nearly all EU Member States reported a fall in the proportion of early leavers among young men. Yet, seven countries reported increases: 1.0 percentage points in Bulgaria, 1.4 points in Hungary, 1.5 points in Sweden, 1.6 points in Austria, 2.6 points in Czechia, 2.7 points in Luxembourg and 3.1 points in Slovakia. Elsewhere the proportion fell: in 2020 the share of young men who were early leavers fell by 19.8 points in Portugal, the largest drop, while it was at least 10.0 percentage points lower than in 2010 in Malta, Greece and Spain. Among non-member countries, this was also the case in Turkey.

Among young women, a broadly similar situation was observed. Six EU Member States — Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Sweden, Poland and Slovenia — reported a higher proportion of young women who were early leavers in 2020 than they had in 2010. Portugal again recorded the largest fall in the proportion of early school leavers, down 18.9 percentage points between 2010 and 2020 for young women. Except for Spain (down 11.0 percentage points), none of the other Member States recorded a fall in excess of 10.0 points; double-digit reductions were also recorded in North Macedonia and Turkey.

---

**Figure 2: Early leavers from education and training, young men, 2010 and 2020 (% of young men aged 18-24)**

Note: ranked on overall share of early leavers (young men and women); breaks in series.

(*) 2020: low reliability.

(**) 2020 young men: no data available due to very low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_lfse_14)

---

**Figure 2: Early leavers from education and training, young men, 2010 and 2020 (% of young men aged 18-24)**

Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_14)
Early leavers from education and training, young women, 2010 and 2020 (% of young women aged 18-24)

Analysis by labour status

Early leavers from education and training may face heightened difficulties in the labour market. Figure 4 ranks the EU Member States according to the share of early leavers in the population aged 18-24 and presents an analysis of whether these early leavers are employed or not: those not in employment may or may not want to work. In 2020, the 9.9% of early leavers from education and training were composed as such: a 4.2% share of the EU’s population aged 18-24 were early leavers in employment, while 3.5% were early leavers not employed but wanting to work, and the remaining early leavers (2.2% of the population aged 18-24) were not employed and did not want to work.

In 2020, six EU Member States reported more early leavers not employed but wanting to work than early leavers who were employed. The biggest gap — 2.1 percentage points — was recorded in Italy, where the share of early leavers who were employed stood at 4.3%, compared with a 6.4% share of early leavers who were not employed but wanted to work; Croatia, Ireland, France, Spain and Slovakia recorded a gap between these two shares that was between 0.1 and 0.9 percentage points. The same was true for Serbia and North Macedonia. In 19 Member States the reverse was true, namely that there were more early leavers who were employed than early leavers not employed but wanting to work, the most notable cases being Malta, Romania and Cyprus; this was also the case for four of the non-member countries shown in Figure 4, most notably for Iceland, Turkey and Norway. Greece was the only Member State where both shares were the same.
As noted above, early leavers not employed and not wanting to work accounted for 2.2% of the population aged 18-24 in the EU in 2020. This proportion was 1.7% among young men but 1 percentage point higher among young women at 2.7% (see Table 1). In all but five of the 20 EU Member States for which data are available (in seven of the Member States the data are of low reliability and therefore not published for one or both sexes), the proportion of young women who were early leavers and not wanting to work was higher than the equivalent proportion of young men. The exceptions where this proportion was higher among young men were Denmark, Spain and Lithuania while Belgium and Croatia had the same proportion for young men and young women. The largest gender differences among the proportion of young people who were early leavers and not wanting to work was higher than the equivalent proportion of young men. The exceptions where this proportion was higher among young men were Denmark, Spain and Lithuania while Belgium and Croatia had the same proportion for young men and young women. The largest gender differences among the proportion of young people who were early leavers and not wanting to work were recorded in Romania (6.6 percentage points higher for young women than young men), Hungary (4.0 points) and Bulgaria (3.5 points); a particularly high gender difference was also recorded in Turkey (where the share of female early leavers not wanting to work was 13.0 percentage points higher than among young male early leavers).

In 13 EU Member States, both for young men and young women, more early leavers were employed than were not employed but wanted to work. In two other Member States — France and Italy — the reverse was true. Greece, Spain, Hungary and Slovenia were special cases insofar as for each of these the proportion of early leavers among young women who were employed was lower than the share of early leavers who were not employed but wanted to work, while the opposite was true for young men (where the proportion of those who were employed was higher than those who were not employed but wanted to work). In Poland, there were more employed men than not employed but wanted to work while the two shares were identical for women. In the remaining seven Member States there were no data available for this comparison.
Table 1: Distribution of early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 by labour status, 2020 (% of population aged 18-24) Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_14)

Analysis by degree of urbanisation

Figure 5 presents an analysis of the proportion of early leavers from education and training according to the degree of urbanisation, with regions classified as cities, towns and suburbs, or rural areas. In 2020, the lowest proportion of early leavers in the EU was reported in cities (8.7%); this share is already in line with the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (which foresees lowering the share of early leavers to not more than 9% by 2030). In the towns and suburbs of the EU the proportion of early leavers rose to 11.2%, while it was lower in rural areas, at 10.5%.

Among the 23 EU Member States with a complete set of data for all three degrees of urbanisation (incomplete data for Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovakia), four, Czechia, France, Portugal and Sweden, reported a similar pattern to that observed for the EU as a whole, in other words a higher proportion of early leavers in towns and suburbs and a lower proportion in cities (see Figure 5). In Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Finland, the highest proportion of early leavers was reported in rural areas, as was also the case in Iceland, Norway and North Macedonia. Germany, Ireland and Slovenia reported the opposite pattern, with rural areas recording the lowest proportion of early leavers and towns and suburbs reporting the highest proportion of early leavers. Similarly, Austria reported the lowest proportion for rural areas but the highest proportion for cities. Among the non-member countries, this pattern was almost repeated in Switzerland, with lowest share of early leavers in rural areas while equally high shares in both cities and towns and suburbs.
Early leavers from education and training by degree of urbanisation, 2020 (% of population aged 18-24)

Note: ranked on overall share of early leavers. Montenegro and Turkey not available.

(*) Low reliability.
(*) Rural areas: low reliability.
(*) Towns and suburbs: low reliability.
(*) Cities: low reliability.
(*) Rural areas: not available due to a very low reliability.
(*) Towns and suburbs: not available due to a very low reliability.
(*) Cities: not available due to a very low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_lfse_30)

Figure 5: Early leavers from education and training by degree of urbanisation, 2020 (% of population aged 18-24) Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_30)

Source data for tables and graphs
- Early leavers from education and training statistics: tables and figures

Data sources
Data on early leavers are derived from the EU’s labour force survey (LFS); the data shown are calculated as annual averages of quarterly data.

Classification The International standard classification of education (ISCED) is the basis for international education statistics, describing different levels of education; it was first developed in 1976 by UNESCO and revised in 1997 and again in 2011. ISCED 2011 distinguishes nine levels of education: early childhood education (level 0); primary education (level 1); lower secondary education (level 2); upper secondary education (level 3); post-secondary non-tertiary education (level 4); short-cycle tertiary education (level 5); bachelor’s or equivalent level (level 6); master’s or equivalent level (level 7); doctoral or equivalent level (level 8).

The first results based on ISCED 2011 were published in 2015 starting with data for the 2014 reference period; data up to 2013 are based on ISCED 1997.
Key concepts Early leavers from education and training denotes the percentage of the population aged 18-24 having attained at most lower secondary education and not being involved in further education or training.

- The numerator of the indicator refers to persons aged 18-24 who meet the following two conditions: (a) the highest level of education or training they have completed is ISCED 2011 levels 0, 1 or 2 (ISCED 1997 levels 0, 1, 2 or 3C short) and (b) they have not received any education or training (in other words neither formal nor non-formal) in the four weeks preceding the survey.

- The denominator is the total population of the same age group, excluding respondents who did not answer the questions 'highest level of education or training successfully completed' and 'participation in education and training'.

Tables in this article use the following notation: ‘.’ not available, confidential or unreliable value.

Context

Tackling early leaving Most Europeans spend significantly more time in education than the legal minimum requirement. This reflects the choice to enroll in higher education, as well as increased enrolment in pre-primary education and wider participation in lifelong learning initiatives, such as adults returning to education (see the adult education survey) — often in order to retrain or equip themselves for a career change. Nevertheless, around one in ten young adults leave school or training early and this has an impact on individuals, society and economies.

In January 2011, the European Commission adopted a Communication titled ‘Tackling early school leaving: a key contribution to the Europe 2020 agenda’ (COM(2011) 18 final). This outlined the reasons why pupils decide to leave school early — including for example, learning difficulties, social factors, or a lack of motivation, guidance or support — and gave an overview of existing and planned measures to tackle this issue across the EU.

In 2014, the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) jointly released a report on Tackling early leaving from education and training in Europe: strategies, policies and measures.

CEDEFOP also provides an online VET toolkit for tackling early leaving which offers support to policy makers and practitioners in order to design and implement policies to prevent and remedy early leaving from education and training.

ET 2020 strategic framework The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training was adopted by the Council in May 2009. It sets out four strategic objectives for education and training in the EU: making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting equality, social cohesion and active citizenship; and enhancing creativity and innovation (including entrepreneurship) at all levels of education and training. This strategy set a number of benchmarks to be achieved by 2020, including that the EU share of early leavers from education and training should be not more than 10 %.

EEA 2030 strategic framework As a successor to ET 2020, a Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond was agreed by the Council in February 2021. It outlines five strategic priorities for the period 2021-2030: improving quality, equity, inclusion and success for all in education and training; making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all; enhancing competences and motivation in the education profession; reinforcing European higher education; and supporting the green and digital transitions in and through education and training. For monitoring progress, seven EU-level targets — i.e. reference levels of European average performance — have been defined, including that the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9 %, by 2030.
Other articles
- EU labour force survey statistics — online publication
- Education and training in the EU — facts and figures
- Being young in Europe today — education
- The EU in the world — education and training

Publications
- The EU has reached its target for share of persons aged 30 to 34 with tertiary education, News release April 2019

Main tables
- Education and training (t_edtr)

Database
- Education and training (edtr), see:
  - Education and training outcomes (educ_outc)
    - Transition from education to work (edatt)
      - Early leavers from education and training (edatt1)

Dedicated section
- Education and training
- Employment and social inclusion indicators
- Youth

Methodology
Metadata
- Educational attainment level and transition from education to work (ESMS metadata file — edat1_esms)

Manuals and other methodological information
- Further methodological information on early leavers

Legislation
- EU labour force survey — main features and legal basis

External links
- European Commission — Education and training policies
- CEDEFOP — VET toolkit for tackling early leaving
- Eurydice — Better knowledge for better policies
- OECD — Early childhood and schools
- UNESCO — Education for the 21st century

View this article online at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early_leavers_from_education_and_training