This article provides recent statistics on levels of education by country, age group and sex of the population of the European Union (EU), EFTA and candidate countries and forms part of an online publication on education and training. For information about the levels of education, see Data sources at the end of the article.

**Level of educational attainment by age**

The patterns of educational attainment levels of the population have changed significantly: on average, younger people attain higher levels of education than older ones. In 2020, 81.4% of people aged 25–54 in the EU had attained at least an upper secondary level of education, compared with 67.2% of those aged 55–74. Those with tertiary educational attainment amounted to 35.9% of those aged 25–54 and 21.8% of those aged 55–74 (see Table 1).
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 30-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40 %. In 2019, 40.3 % of the population aged 30–34 in the EU had completed tertiary education, reaching the target for the first time (see Figure 1). In 2020, this share rose to 41.0 %.

In February 2021, 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). This resolution sets a new EU-level target, i.e. a reference level for European average performance for an expanded age group: the share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45 %, by 2030.

In 11 EU Member States this proportion was already 45 % or more in 2020; this was also the case in Norway and Switzerland. By contrast, the lowest shares of those having completed tertiary education were observed in...
Romania and Italy, where the proportion of persons with tertiary educational attainment was below 30 %.

**Level of educational attainment by sex**

For the EU as a whole, women already reached the EU-level target for 2030 in 2019 (with a proportion of 45.0 % of women having completed tertiary education that year in the EU; this share was 46.0 % in 2020). Tertiary educational attainment for men in this age group stood at 35.2 % in 2020. The share of men with tertiary education has increased over the last ten years but at a slower pace than for women, leading to a broader gender gap (see Figure 2).

![Population aged 25-34 with tertiary educational attainment (ISCED 5-8), by sex, EU, 2010-2020 (%)](image)

*Note: Break in the series in 2014.*
*Source: Eurostat (code: edat_lfse_03)*

Many countries make efforts aiming for more young people to obtain an upper secondary education qualification. Data for 2020 show that more than four fifths (84.3 %) of the EU population aged 20–24 had completed at least an upper secondary level of education (i.e. ISCED level 3 and above), a figure that reached 87.1 % for women (see Table 2).
On the other hand, 9.9% of young people aged 18–24 (11.8% of men and 8.0% of women) had completed at most lower secondary education but were no longer in education and training in 2020. An EU-level target is set by the EU to decrease this rate to less than 9% by 2030 within the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond. This rate is commonly called ‘early leavers from education and training’.

In 2020, 18 countries already reported shares of early leavers below the EU-level target: Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, France, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden. However, the share of early leavers from education and training is still high in Malta (16.7%), Spain (16.0%) and Romania (15.6%) (see Figure 3).
Statistics on the level of the educational attainment of the population are based on the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS). The EU-LFS results cover the total population usually residing in Member States, except for persons living in collective or institutional households.

For data on educational attainment based on the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) the International Standard Classification of Education 2011 (ISCED 2011) is applied as from 2014. Up to 2013 ISCED 1997 is used.

Eurostat’s online database presents data on educational attainment for four aggregates:

- Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (ISCED levels 0-2)
- Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED levels 3 and 4)
- At least upper secondary education, i.e. upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary and tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3-8, ISCED 1997 levels 3-6)
- Tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 5-8, ISCED 1997 levels 5 and 6)

At this level of aggregation data are comparable over time for all available countries except Austria and Estonia.

**Context**

Educational attainment is the visible output of education systems and a measure of their success. For individuals, achievement levels have a major impact, both personally and professionally, on the quality of life and job opportunities. The level of educational attainment people reach is measured according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).

**Other articles**

- Early leavers from education and training
- Tertiary education statistics
Data visualisations

- Eurostat Statistical Atlas (Chapter 4)

Publications

- Key data on education in Europe - 2012 edition
- The European higher education area in 2015: Bologna process – Implementation report
- Trends in European education during the last decade - Statistics in focus 54/2011
- 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 EDUC), see:

Educational attainment and outcomes of education (t EDUC_OUTC)

Database

- Education and training (educ), see:

Educational and training outcomes (educ_OUTC)
Population by educational attainment level (edat1)

Dedicated section

- Education and training

Methodology

- Educational attainment level and transition from education to work (based on EU-LFS) (ESMS metadata file — edat1_esms)

External links

- Bologna process
- European Commission - Education and Training - Strategic framework: Education & Training 2020