

# Educational attainment statistics

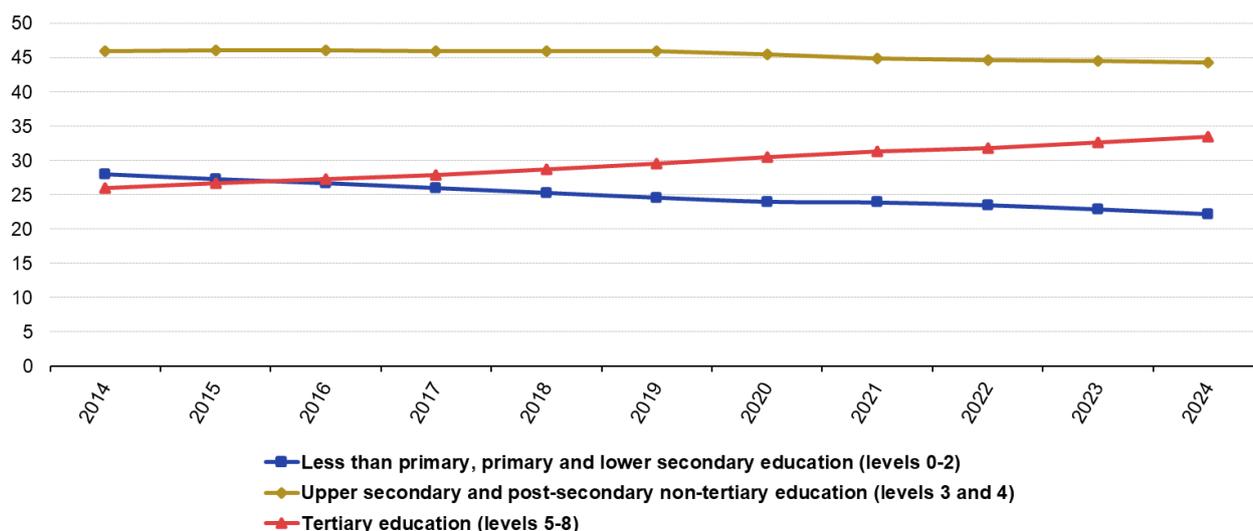
Statistics Explained

Data extracted in May 2025.  
Planned article update: May 2026.

## Highlights

In 2024, 44% of 25–34-year-olds in the EU had completed tertiary education. In 2024, 84% of 20–24-year-olds in the EU had completed at least an upper secondary education.

### Population aged 25-74 by educational attainment level, EU, 2014-2024 (% of the population aged 25-74)



Note: Break in the series in 2021.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_ifs\_9903)

eurostat

Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifs\_9903)

This article provides recent statistics on [education](#) levels by country, age group and sex of the population in the [European Union \(EU\)](#), [EFTA](#) and [candidate](#) countries. The article forms part of the online publication [Education and training in the EU - facts and figures](#).

Educational attainment plays a major role in the labour market, in the lives of individuals and in society in general. Higher levels of education usually lead to higher rates of employment, higher productivity and higher lifetime earnings for individuals and greater life satisfaction. More generally, having at least an upper secondary education is often considered as the minimum level needed to fully participate in society and lead a fulfilling life.

This article looks at 3 main levels of educational attainment

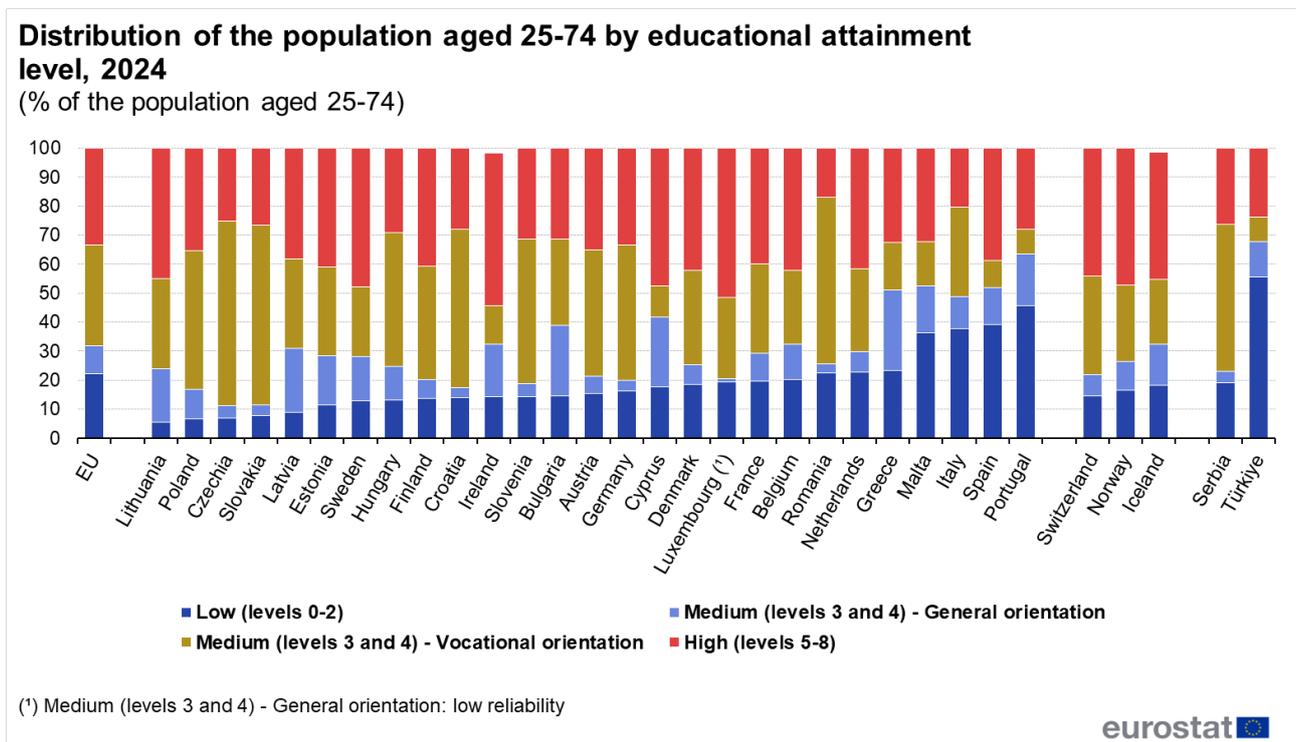
1. low (lower than primary, primary and lower secondary education)

2. medium (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education)
3. high (tertiary education, i.e. education provided by universities and other higher education institutions)

Relevant [EU level targets](#) related to educational attainment are also presented.

## Distribution of the EU population by educational attainment in 2024

- 22.2% of people aged 25-74 in the EU had a low educational attainment level
- 44.3% had a medium educational attainment level (9.6% had a general qualification and 34.7% a vocational qualification)
- 33.5% had a high educational attainment level, i.e. tertiary education



**Figure 1: Distribution of the population aged 25-74 years by educational attainment level, 2024** Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifs\_9903)

### Educational attainment levels

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the population aged 25-74 years by educational attainment level and how it varies among Member States. The 3 different levels of educational attainment are

- less than primary, primary or lower secondary level of education (International Standard Classification of Education ( [ISCED](#) ) 2011 levels 0–2) – referred to as a low educational attainment level or low level of education
- upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3 and 4) – referred to as a medium educational attainment level or medium level of education; this level has information on whether the programme had a general or vocational orientation
- tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 5–8) – referred to as a high educational attainment level or high level of education

The share of people with a low level of education ranged from 5.5% in Lithuania to 45.5% in Portugal. Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and Latvia had the lowest shares of people with a low level of education (all less than 10%), while Malta, Italy, Spain and Portugal had the highest (all above 35%).

Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden and Cyprus reported the highest shares of people with tertiary education (over 45%), while Romania and Italy reported the lowest shares (below 25%). Overall, the share of people with a high level of education ranged from 17.1% in Romania to 52.8% in Ireland.

For the medium level of education, Spain, Portugal and Luxembourg had the lowest shares (below 30%), while Slovakia and Czechia had the highest (above 65%). For this educational level, a distinction between general and vocational qualifications is made, with vocational qualifications considered to be more relevant for the labour market because they are more job oriented.

Looking at this distinction, the share of people that had a vocational qualification was higher than the one with a general qualification in almost all countries. The only exceptions were Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Malta. The extent to which these qualifications prevail in a country reflects both national education systems and labour markets.

## Development of educational attainment levels over the last 10 years

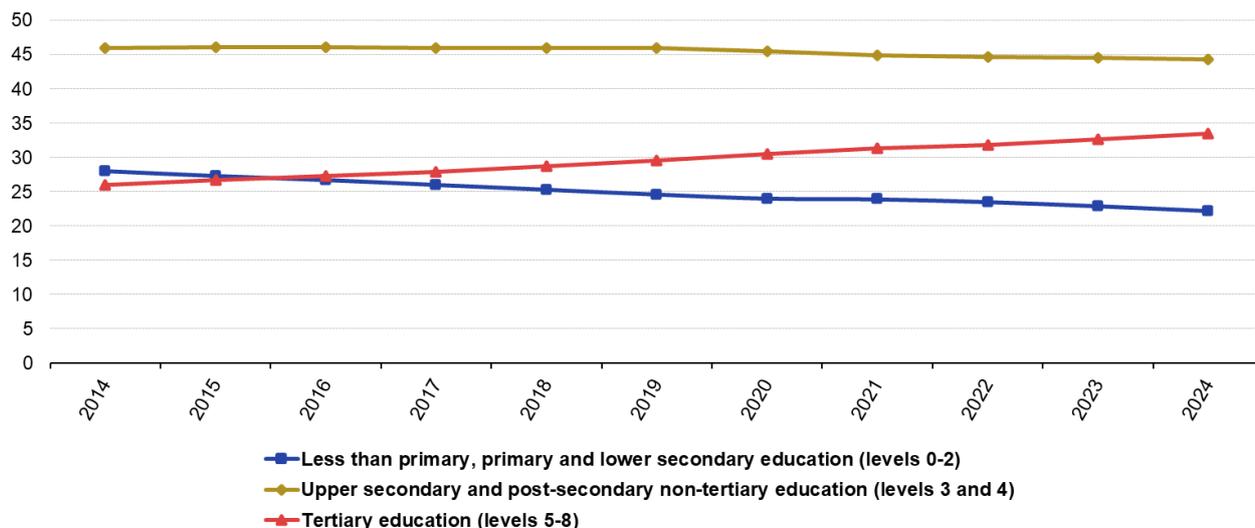
Trends in educational attainment levels from 2014 to 2024 are illustrated in Figure 2

- the share of people aged 25-74 with tertiary education increased from 26.0% in 2014 to 33.5% in 2024
- the share of the population with a low level of education decreased from 28.0% in 2014 to 22.2% in 2024
- the share of people with a medium level of education has been relatively stable over the years, at around 45%

The proportion of people with a low level of education was surpassed by those with tertiary education in 2016. Since then, the gap between these two groups has increased, with 11.3 **percentage points** (pp) more people having tertiary education than a low level of education in 2024.

## Population aged 25-74 by educational attainment level, EU, 2014-2024

(% of the population aged 25-74)



Note: Break in the series in 2021.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_lfs\_9903)

eurostat

**Figure 2: Population aged 25-74 years by educational attainment level, EU, 2014-2024** Source: Eurostat (edat\_lfs\_9903)

## Educational attainment levels vary between age groups

Just like the overall development of educational attainment levels over time, the patterns of educational attainment levels across the EU population have also changed significantly.

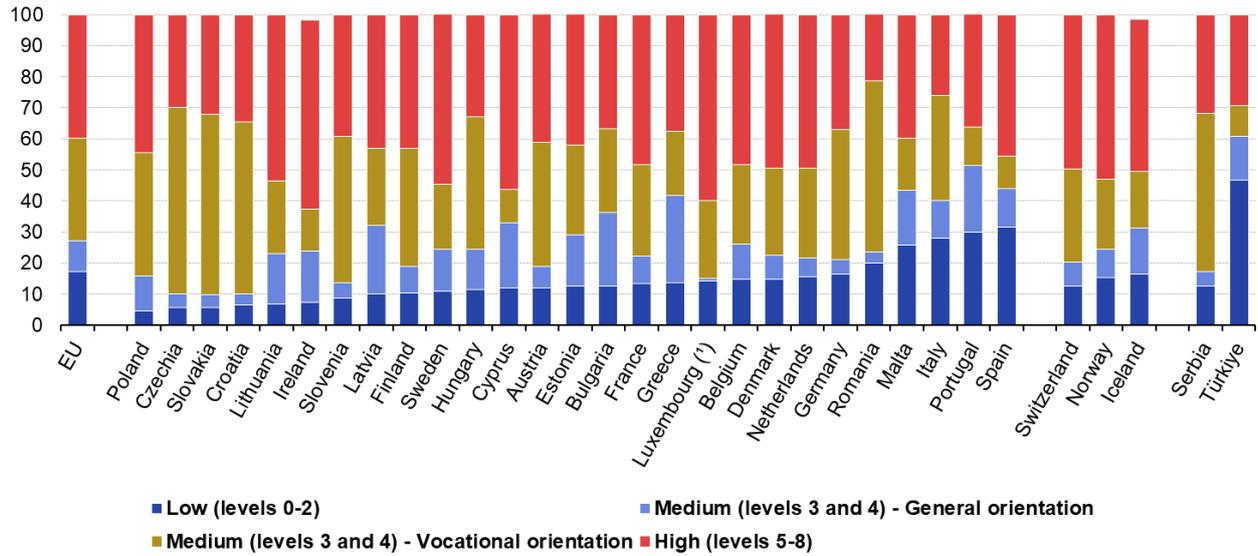
- On average, younger people attain higher levels of education than older people. In 2024, 82.7% of people aged 25-54 in the EU had attained at least an upper secondary level of education, compared with 70.4% of those aged 55-74
- Younger people (25-54 years) are less likely to have a low educational attainment level: 17.3% compared with 29.6% for the older age group (55-74 years). Those with a tertiary level of education amounted to 39.8% of the group aged 25-54 and 23.9% of the group aged 55-74
- The share of those with a medium level of education was about the same in both age groups (42.9% and 46.5% respectively, see Figures 3 and 4)

Among the people in the EU with a medium level of educational attainment, the share of those with a vocational qualification was about the same for the two age groups: 76.7% for those aged 25-54 years and 80.6% for those aged 55-74 years. However, these shares varied a lot between countries. In Luxembourg, vocational qualifications were common in both age groups: 96.5% for the younger age group and 97.8% for the older. By contrast, the lowest shares were in Cyprus (33.3% for those aged 25-54) and Portugal (13.5% for those aged 55-74).

Moreover, significant differences between the age groups can be observed in countries with low shares of vocational qualifications. In Portugal, the share of vocational qualifications was more than double for the younger age group (37.2% vs 13.5%). In Greece the share of the younger group outnumbered that of the older one by a factor of 1.6 (42.5% vs 26.7%). Similar but less pronounced patterns can be observed in Ireland, Cyprus and Spain. Reforms in the national education systems in favour of vocational training as well as labour market demand could explain these trends.

### Distribution of the population aged 25-54 by educational attainment level, 2024

(% of the population aged 25-54)



(\*) Medium general orientation: low reliability.

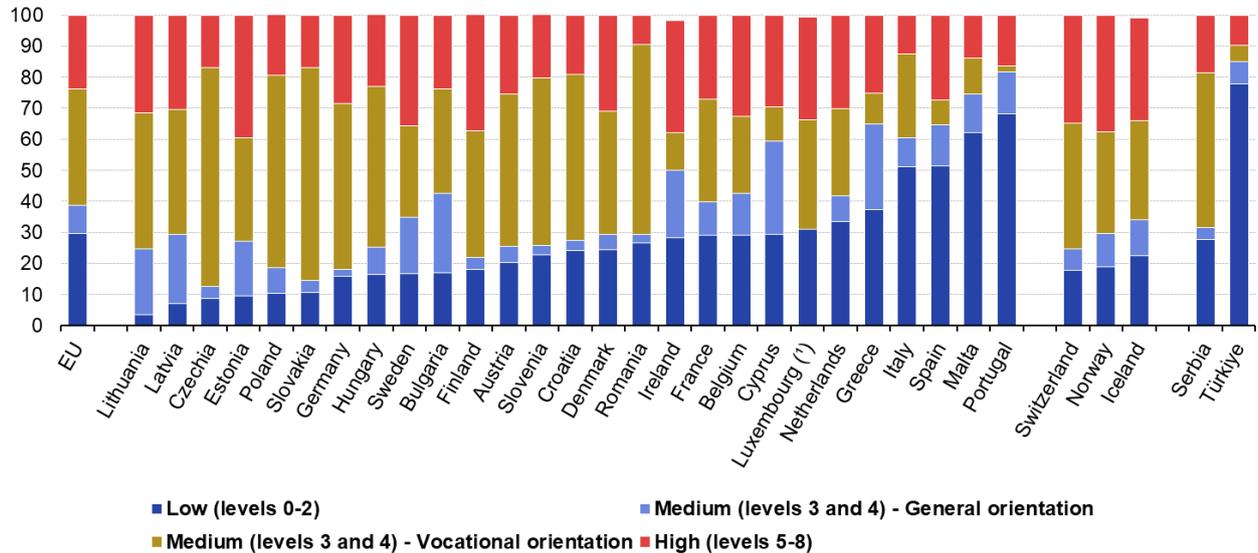
Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_ifs\_9903)

eurostat

Figure 3: Distribution of the population aged 25-54 by educational attainment level, 2024 Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifs\_9903)

### Distribution of the population aged 55-74 by educational attainment level, 2024

(% of the population aged 55-74)



(\*) Medium general orientation: not available due to very small sample size.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_ifs\_9903)

eurostat

Figure 4: Distribution of the population aged 55-74 by educational attainment level, 2024 (% of the population aged 55-74) Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifs\_9903)

## Policy indicators for educational attainment

As part of the [strategic framework for the European Education Area](#) several strategic priorities for 2021-2030 have been set and [7 EU level targets](#) have been agreed upon. Two indicators for educational attainment are used for policy monitoring

- an EU-level target indicator for tertiary attainment
- a complementary indicator for the share of people with at least an upper secondary education

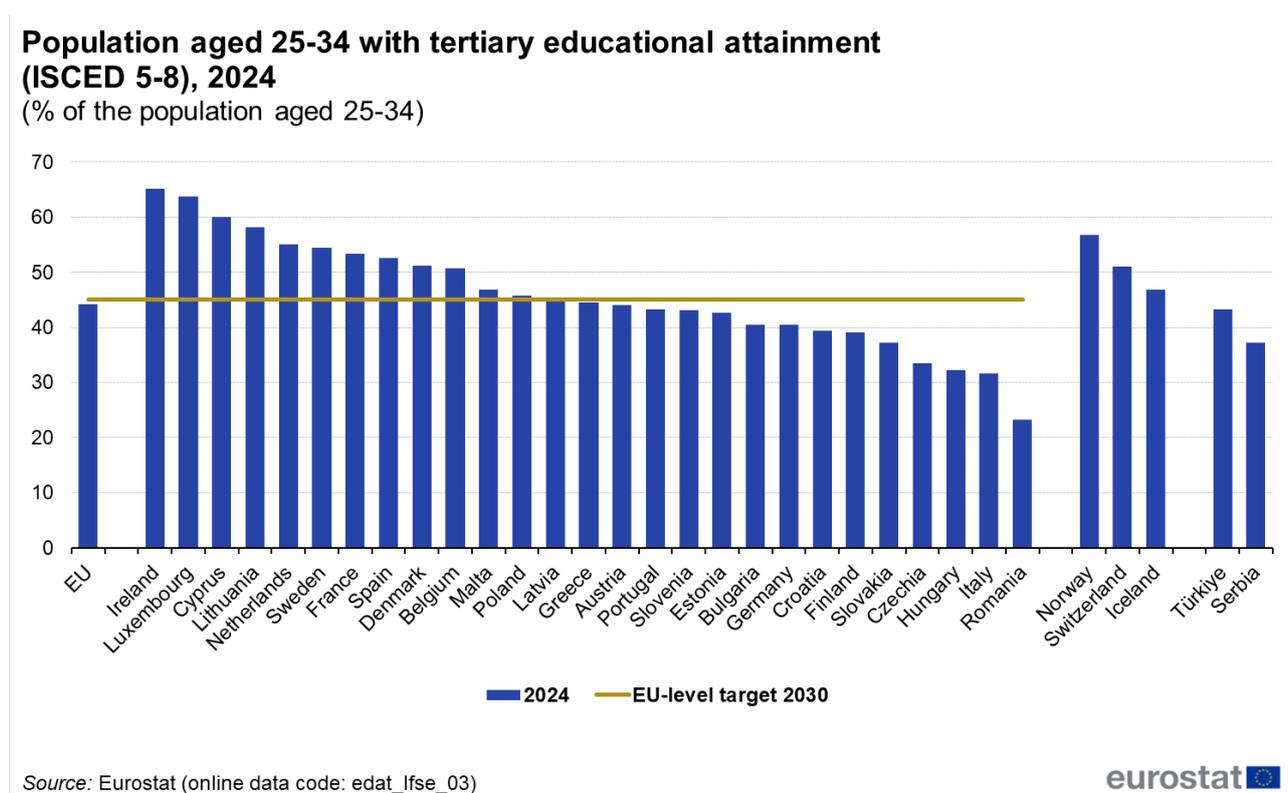
### Tertiary education is becoming increasingly important

Successfully completing tertiary education is becoming more important due to the increased demand for highly skilled individuals in the EU's labour market. Higher education plays an essential role in society by fostering innovation, increasing economic development and growth, and improving more generally the population's well-being. For more detailed information see the [statistics explained article on tertiary education](#).

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 an EU-level target that the share of people aged 25-34 with a tertiary level of education should be at least 45% by 2030.

Figure 5 shows the share of the population aged 25-34 with tertiary education in 2024. In the EU, this share amounted to 44.2%. Almost half the Member States have already reached the target for 2030. The highest shares were in Ireland, Luxembourg and Cyprus, at over 60%.

By contrast, the lowest share of people with tertiary educational attainment was in Romania, where it was below 30%.



**Figure 5: Population aged 25-34 years with tertiary educational attainment (ISCED 5-8), 2024** Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifse\_03)

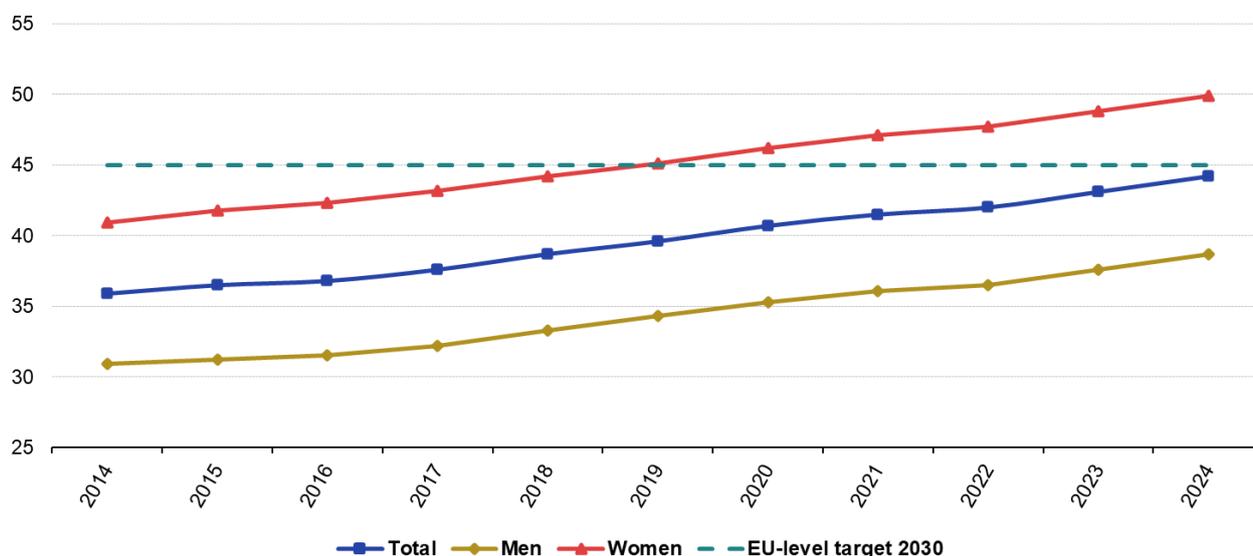
### More women than men have a tertiary level of education

Across the EU, women had already reached the 2030 EU-level target in 2019: 45.1% of women aged 25-34 had completed tertiary education. In 2024, this share rose to 49.9%. The share of tertiary educational attainment for

men in the same age group stood at 38.7% in 2024. The proportion of men with tertiary education has increased over the last 10 years but at a slower pace than for women. This has led to a slightly wider gender gap over time: 11.2 pp in 2024 vs 10.0 pp in 2014 (see Figure 6).

### Population aged 25-34 with tertiary educational attainment (ISCED 5-8), by sex, EU, 2014-2024

(% of the population aged 25-34)



Note: Break in the series in 2021.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_ifse\_03)

eurostat

**Figure 6: Population aged 25-34 years with tertiary educational attainment (ISCED 5-8), by sex, EU, 2014-2024**  
Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifse\_03)

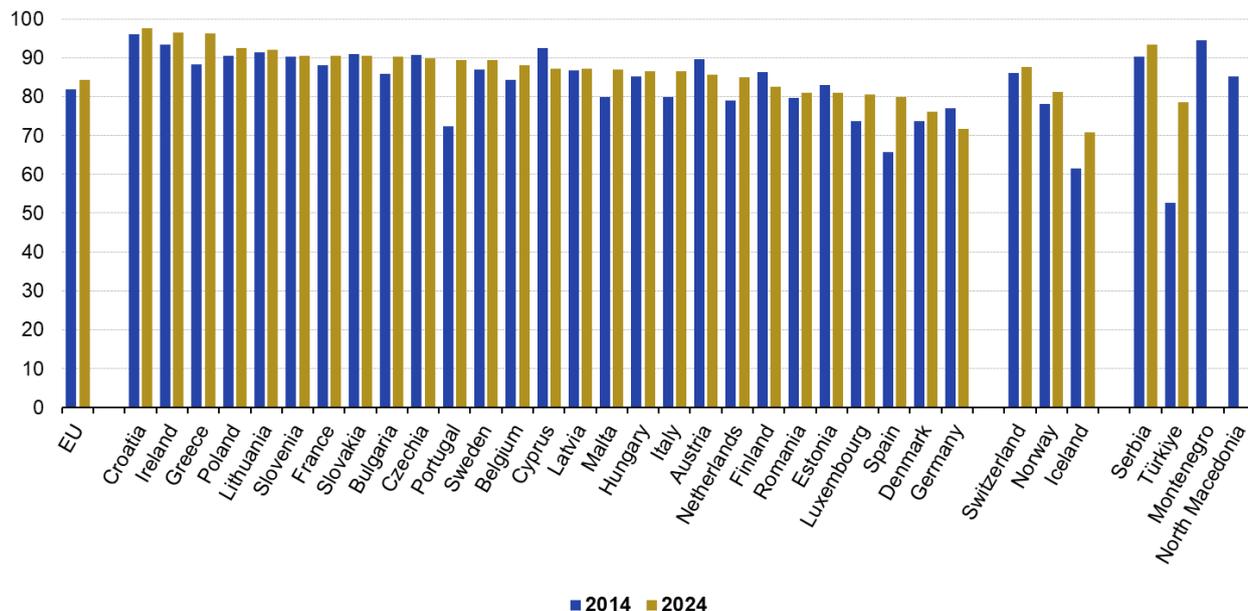
### Completion of upper secondary education is also of interest for policymakers

The share of people aged 20-24 with at least an upper secondary qualification has been agreed as a supplementary indicator to the [EU level target for early leavers from education and training](#).

The skills and competences gained through upper secondary education are increasingly seen as the minimum requirements for a successful move into the labour market and the foundation for further learning and a fulfilling life.

Figure 7 shows that, in 2024, the average share of people aged 20-24 in the EU with at least an upper secondary education was 84.3%. The EU countries with the lowest shares were in Spain, Denmark and Germany, all below 80%. The highest shares were in Croatia, Ireland and Greece where it stood above 96%. Compared with 2014, this share increased in all countries except Germany, Cyprus, Austria, Finland, Estonia, Czechia and Slovakia. Spain and Portugal reported the largest increases, up 14.1 pp and 17.0 pp, respectively.

**Population aged 20-24 with at least an upper secondary education (ISCED 3-8), 2014 and 2024**  
(% of the population aged 20-24)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_ifse\_03)

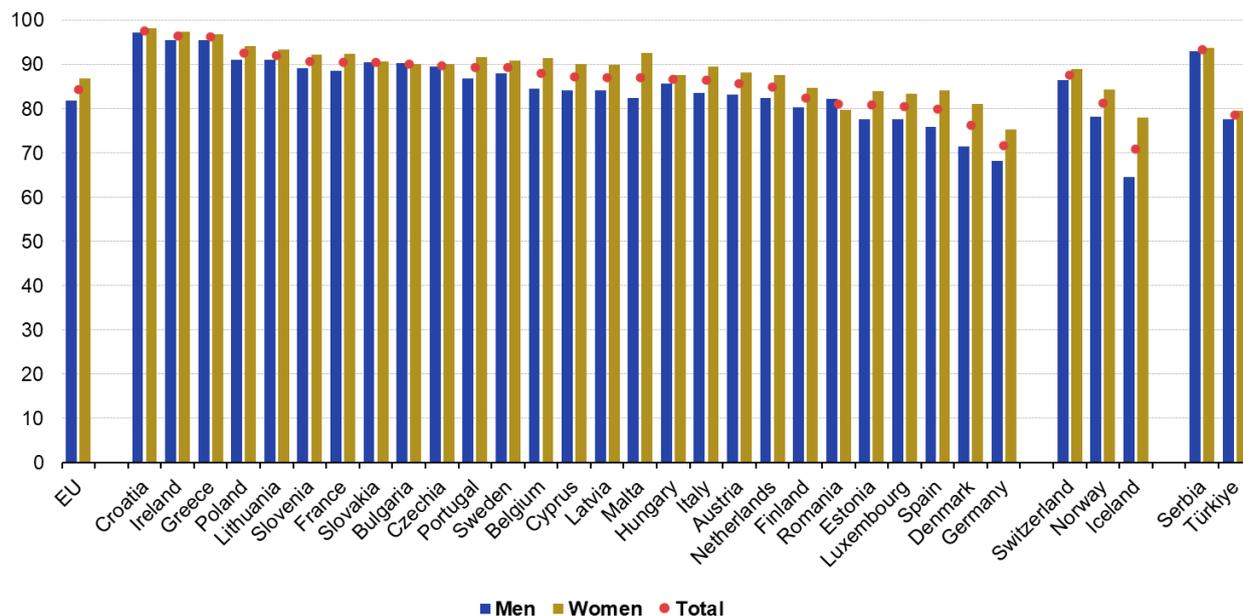


**Figure 7: Population aged 20-24 years with at least an upper secondary education (ISCED 3-8), 2014 and 2024** Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifse\_03)

**More women than men have completed at least an upper secondary level of education**

A higher proportion of women reached this level of education compared with men: 86.8% for women aged 20-24 and 81.8% for men in the same age group (see Figure 8). The share for women was higher than for men in all Member States except in Romania. In Bulgaria and Slovakia, the shares were about the same for women and men. In Spain, Denmark and Malta, the differences between men and women were the largest, with 8 pp or more in favour of women.

## Population aged 20-24 with at least an upper secondary education (ISCED 3-8) by sex, 2024 (% of the population aged 20-24)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat\_ifse\_03)

eurostat

**Figure 8: Population aged 20-24 years with at least an upper secondary education (ISCED 3-8) by sex, 2024 (% of the population aged 20-24 years) Source: Eurostat (edat\_ifse\_03)**

## Source data for tables and graphs

- [Educational attainment: tables and figures](#)

## Data sources

The EU [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#) provides statistics on educational attainment. The EU-LFS is documented in this [background article](#), which provides information on the scope of the data, its legal basis, the methodology employed, and related concepts and definitions. Data on educational attainment are calculated as annual averages of quarterly data.

For data on educational attainment based on the EU-LFS, the International Standard Classification of Education 2011 ( [ISCED 2011](#) ) has been applied since 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 (see the reference metadata [Educational attainment level and transition from education to work \(based on EU-LFS\)](#) ).

As from 2021, for ISCED levels 3 and 4, a breakdown by general and vocational qualifications is available for all age

groups. Up to 2020, this breakdown is only available for those aged 15-34.

## Context

Educational attainment is the visible output of education systems and forms a measure of their success. For individuals, attainment levels have a major impact 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 \(ISCED\)](#) .

The February 2021 [Council resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European education area and beyond \(2021-2030\)](#) builds on the previous frameworks for European cooperation in education and training (ET), namely the ET2010 and ET2020 frameworks. It fixes 5 strategic priorities: (i) improving quality, equity, inclusion and success for all; (ii) making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all; (iii) enhancing competences and motivation among teaching professionals; (iv) reinforcing European higher education; and (v) supporting the green and digital transitions. The document also sets out [7 EU level targets](#) , the first 5 of which are to be achieved by 2030. The EU-level target for tertiary level attainment is that the share of persons aged 25-34 with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45%. One supplementary indicator complementing the EU-level target on [early leavers from education and training](#) is the share of people aged 20-24 with at least an upper secondary qualification. For more information, see the [statistical explain article on the subject](#) .

Indicators for educational attainment – among others – are also used to reflect the principles of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) and to monitor the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) .

## Explore further

### Other articles

- [EU labour force survey statistics — online publication](#)
- [Education and training in the EU — facts and figures](#)

### Database

- [Education and training \(educ\)](#) , see:

Education and training outcomes (educ\_outc)

Educational attainment level (edat)

Population by educational attainment level (edat1)

### Thematic section

- [Education and training](#)

### Selected datasets

- [Education and training \(t\\_educ\)](#) , see:

Education and training outcomes (t\_educ\_outc)

## Methodology

### Metadata

- [Educational attainment level and transition from education to work](#) (reference metadata — edat1\_esms)

### Manuals and other methodological information

- [Further methodological information on educational attainment](#)

### External links

- [European Commission — Education and training policies](#)

### Legislation

- [EU labour force survey – main features and legal basis](#)