

Employment rates of recent graduates

Statistics Explained

*Data extracted in July 2025.
Planned article update: June 2026.*

Highlights

In 2024 the average employment rate for recent graduates aged 20-34 in the EU was 82.3%. The employment rate ranged from 69.6% in Italy to 91.6% in the Netherlands. In 2024 recent male graduates in the EU were more likely to find work than their female counterparts, with the difference between them amounting to 1.8 percentage points. The employment rate of recent graduates from medium vocational education in the EU was 80.0% in 2024.

This article presents statistics on the [employment rates](#) of young adults aged 20-34 who recently graduated from upper secondary or tertiary levels of education in the [European Union \(EU\)](#). 'Recent graduates' are defined here as people who, firstly, have attained at least upper secondary education ([ISCED 3](#)) as the highest level of education, secondly, have not received any (formal or non-formal) education or training in the 4 weeks preceding the survey, and thirdly, have successfully completed their highest educational attainment 1, 2 or 3 years before the survey. Data come from the [EU labour force survey](#). The article is included in a series of statistical articles forming part of the online publication [Education and training in the EU - facts and figures](#).

The article provides information on the transition from education to work and analyses recent graduates' access to the labour market. It is important to make sure that the transition from education to work is smooth so a person doesn't end up being [neither in employment nor in education or training \(NEET\)](#). The risk of becoming a NEET decreases with the level of education but it should still be borne in mind.

Each EU Member State is responsible for its own education and training system, though [EU policies](#) in this area are designed to address common challenges, while providing a forum for the exchange of best practices and sharing information about policy initiatives that worked well. [Vocational education and training \(VET\)](#) is a key part of [lifelong learning](#) systems, and there is an [EU-level objective](#) for the share of employed recent VET graduates to be at least 82% by 2025 for people aged 20-34. In 2024, this amounted to 80.0% in the EU.

Employment rates of recent graduates are highest for those with tertiary educational attainment

Figure 1 shows the employment rates for recent graduates by level of educational attainment in the EU. It shows that the highest employment rates in 2024 were recorded for people who had graduated from tertiary education, while lower employment rates were recorded for people with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (a medium level of education). Recent graduates with vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (medium vocational education) in most EU countries recorded higher employment rates than people with general upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (medium general education). It would therefore appear that apprenticeships and other kinds of education programmes that equip students with the knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required for a particular occupation, increase the likelihood that recent graduates will find a job.

Figure 1 shows that the EU employment rate for recent graduates in 2024 was 82.3%. However, there are differences between countries, with the highest employment rates in the Netherlands (91.6%) and Germany (90.5%). The lowest employment rates were in Italy (69.6%), Greece (73.2%) and Romania (75.0%).

As previously stated, the level of educational attainment plays a key role when recent graduates seek employment. Graduates with tertiary educational attainment recorded the highest employment rates and were generally better shielded from the risks of unemployment than their peers who entered the labour market with lower levels of educational attainment. In 2024, the employment rate of recent tertiary graduates was more than 90% in Malta, Lithuania, Slovakia, Poland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Estonia and Bulgaria. In the 2 EU countries of Greece and Italy, this indicator was less than 80%.

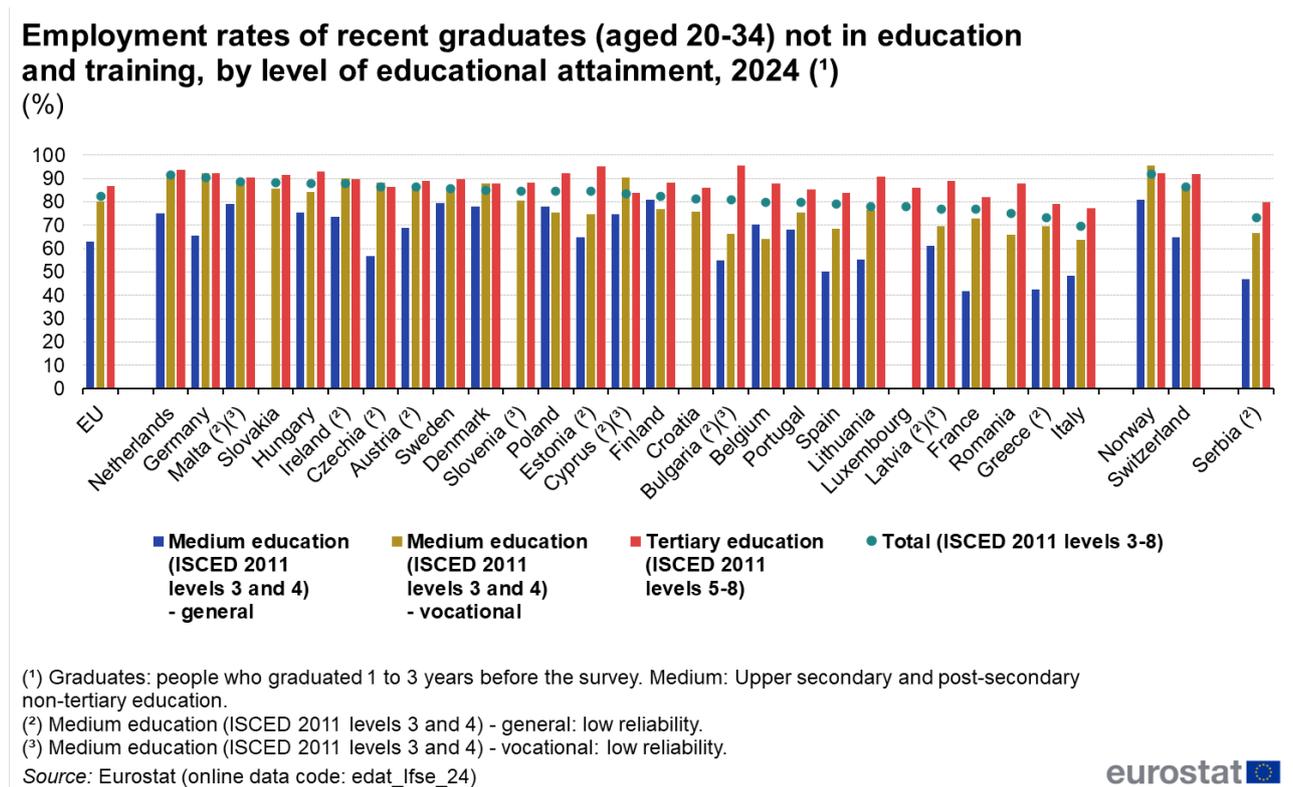


Figure 1: Employment rates of recent graduates (aged 20-34) not in education and training, by level of educational attainment, 2024 Source: Eurostat (edat_ifse_24)

Employment rates of recent graduates in the last 10 years

When looking into the different types of recent graduates and their employment rates over time, the general pattern is the same, but the levels differ, depending on educational attainment (Figure 2).

Recent tertiary graduates had their lowest employment rate in 2014 (79.5%). This rose to 85.1% in 2019, before going down in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. After that, the rate rose again, reaching 87.6% in 2023, before decreasing to 86.7% in 2024.

The EU employment rate for recent graduates from medium education was at its lowest in 2014 (69.8%). By contrast, the first peak for this subpopulation was recorded at 76.1% in 2018. In 2020 there was a considerable decrease due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the rate rose again from 2021 to its highest level of 78.0% in 2023, followed by a decrease to 76.2% in 2024.

For all educational attainment levels, rates recovered after the pandemic. However, it is too early to say whether the decline in 2024 already represents a reversal of the trend.

In 2024, the gap in employment rates between recent tertiary graduates and recent graduates from medium education was 10.5 percentage points (pp). This gap was narrowest in 2018 (8.9 pp).

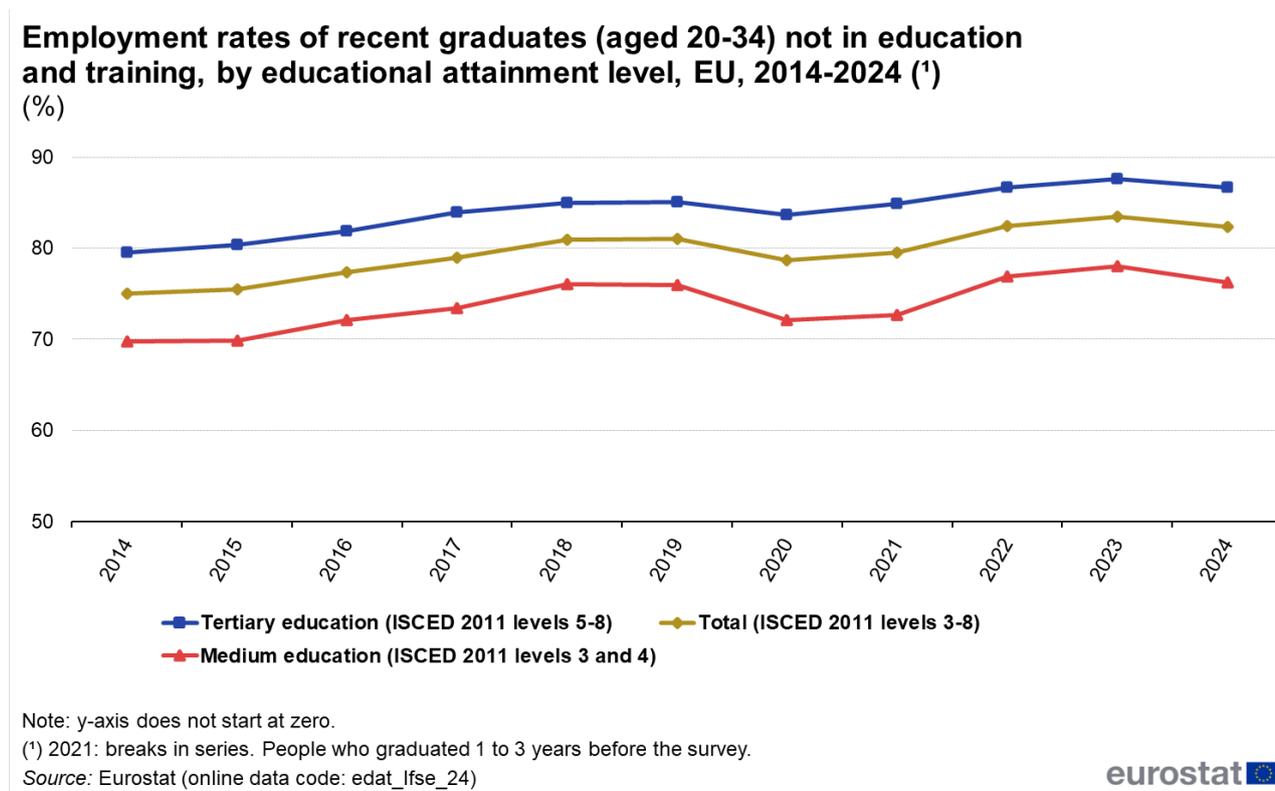


Figure 2: Employment rates of recent graduates (aged 20-34) not in education and training, by educational attainment level, EU, 2014-2024 Source: Eurostat (edat_ifse_24)

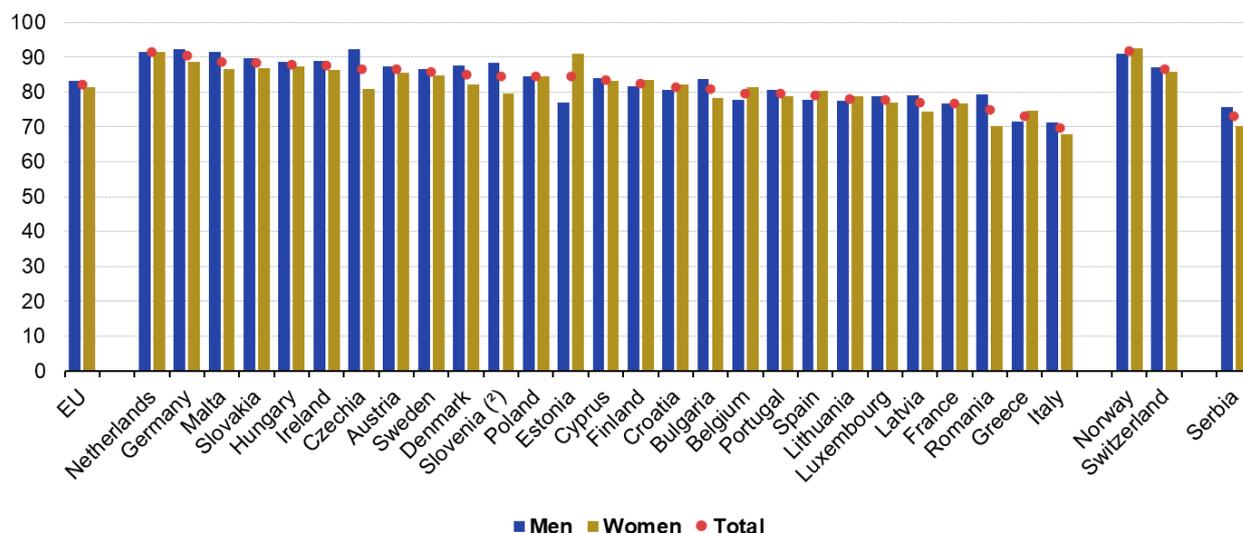
Recent male graduates in the EU were more likely to find work than their female counterparts

In 2024, the EU employment rate of recent male graduates was 83.2%, while the corresponding rate of recent female graduates was 81.4% (Figure 3), a difference of 1.8 pp. Some of these differences may be attributable to the nature of the area studied as there are differences in labour market demand. Women and men also tend to study different subjects, for example, a higher proportion of science and technology students tend to be male.

The differences between men and women vary from one EU country to another, both in magnitude and in terms of which sex has the higher employment rate. In 16 countries men had a higher employment rate than women (0.8 pp or more). The largest difference by far was in Czechia, where the employment rate of male graduates was 11.3 pp higher than that of women. 7 EU countries had a higher employment rate for women. The largest difference was in Estonia, where the employment rate of women was 14.1 pp higher than that of men.

Employment rates of recent graduates (aged 20-34) not in education and training, by sex, 2024 (1)

(%)



(1) Graduates: people with an upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education or a tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3-8) who graduated 1 to 3 years before the survey.

(2) Women: low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_ifse_24)

eurostat

Figure 3: Employment rates of recent graduates (aged 20-34) not in education and training, by sex, 2024
Source: Eurostat (edat_ifse_24)

Several EU countries have achieved the EU-level objective for medium vocational education for 2025, but differences between the sexes persist

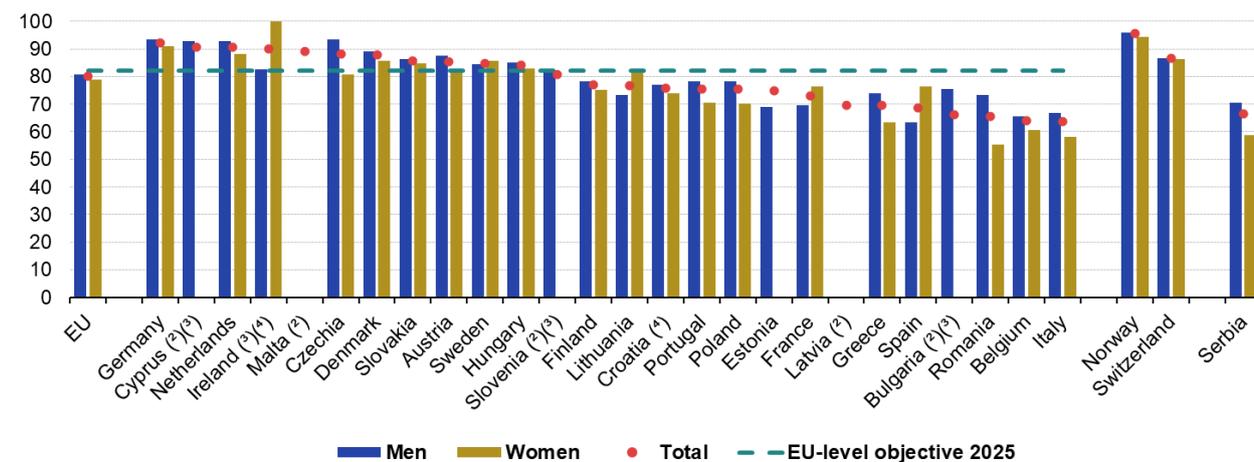
Bearing in mind that the EU wants to increase the employment rates of recent medium vocational education graduates to 82% by 2025, this section focuses on [this objective](#). Across EU countries there are wide variations both between countries but also within countries when the results are divided between women and men (Figure 4).

In the EU, the employment rate of recent medium vocational education graduates was 80.0% in 2024. The rate was higher for men (80.7%) than for women (79.0%), a difference between the sexes of 1.7 pp.

In terms of the employment rates of recent medium vocational education graduates, 9 EU countries had already reached the EU target of at least 82% by 2024: Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Czechia, Denmark, Slovakia, Austria, Sweden and Hungary. All these countries except Czechia also reached the target for men and women separately. The countries with the lowest employment rates were Italy (63.7%), Belgium (63.9%) and Romania (65.7%). This means that the employment rates of recent medium vocational education graduates in EU countries ranged from 63.7% in Italy to 92.2% in Germany in 2024.

The numbers show that in EU countries there are differences between the sexes, both in magnitude and in terms of which sex has the higher employment rate. Of the 18 EU countries for which data are available and reliable for both women and men, in 14 countries the employment rate of men was higher than that of women. The largest difference in favour of male medium vocational education graduates was in Romania (18.0 pp), followed by Czechia (12.7 pp) and Greece (10.5 pp). However, in 4 countries the employment rate of women was higher than that of men. Where this was the case, the largest difference between the sexes was in Spain (13.1 pp).

Employment rates of recent medium vocational education graduates (aged 20-34) not in education and training by sex, 2024 (1)



(1) Graduates: people with a vocational upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3-4) who graduated 1 to 3 years before the survey. Luxembourg is not available.

(2) Total: low reliability.

(3) Men: low reliability.

(4) Women: low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_ifse_24)

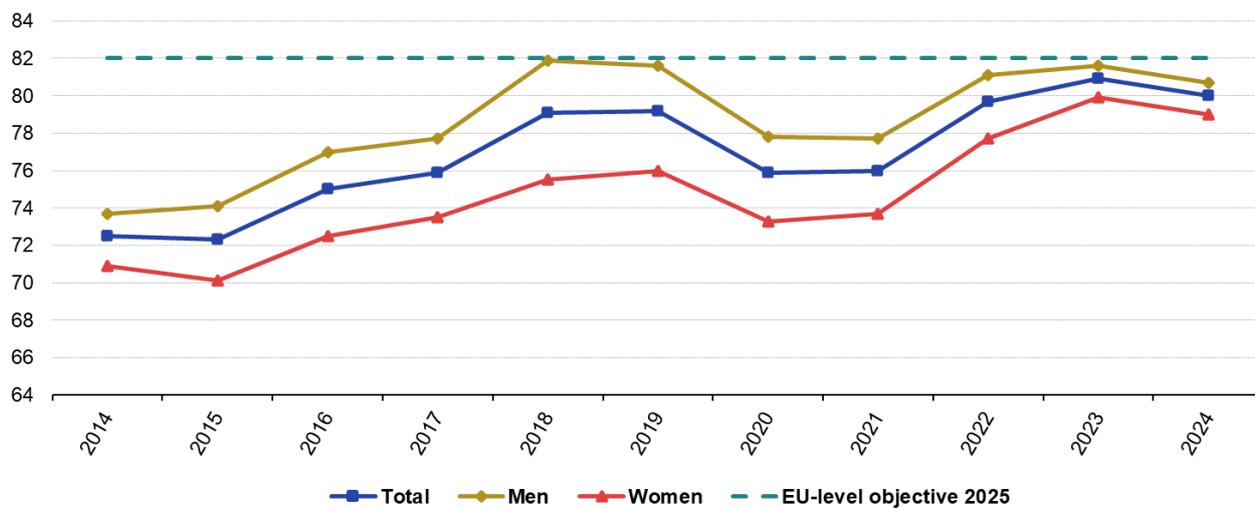
eurostat

Figure 4: Employment rates of recent medium vocational education graduates (aged 20-34) not in education and training by sex, 2024 Source: Eurostat (edat_ifse_24)

Recent male medium vocational education graduates had higher employment rates than women in the last 10 years

The results from 2024 show that in the EU men in general had a higher employment rate than women for recent medium vocational education graduates. This has also been the case historically. Men's employment rates have been higher over time, but the general trend is similar for both women and men. The gender gap, which has varied in magnitude, was at its lowest in 2023 and 2024, at 1.7 pp. The largest difference, observed in 2018, was 6.4 pp in favour of men. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the rates of both women and men fell sharply. In 2023, both sexes' rates increased significantly, to end up being higher than the pre-pandemic level of 2019, before decreasing by around 1 pp in 2024.

Employment rates of recent medium vocational education graduates (aged 20-34) not in education and training, by sex, EU, 2014-2024 (*) (%)



Note: y-axis does not start at zero.

(*) Graduates: people with a vocational upper secondary & post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3-4) who graduated 1 to 3 years before the survey. 2021: breaks in series.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_lfse_24)

eurostat

Figure 5: Employment rates of recent medium vocational education graduates (aged 20-34) not in education and training, by sex, EU, 2014-2024 Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_24)

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Employment rate of recent graduates](#)

Data sources

The EU [labour force survey \(EU-LFS\)](#) provides statistics on the employment rates of recent graduates. The EU-LFS is documented in this [background article](#) which provides information on the scope of the data, their legal basis, the methodology used, and related concepts and definitions.

The [employment rate](#) is obtained by dividing the number of people in employment (according to the ILO definition) in a particular age group by the total population of the same age group. The indicator for recent graduates is calculated for the 20-34 age group and concerns people who successfully completed their highest level of education 1 to 3 years before the EU-LFS interview. The term 'graduate' refers to anyone who has left education and training with at least an upper secondary or post-secondary, non-tertiary qualification or with a tertiary qualification (ISCED 2011 levels 3-8). This is based solely on people who were no longer in (formal or non-formal) education or training at the time of the EU-LFS. It therefore excludes both

- people who continue to study while working (for example, part-time jobs, seasonal work, holiday jobs)
- people who are primarily working but are at the same time engaged in some form of education or training, for example, apprentices.

For this article, graduates are considered people who entered and successfully completed an education programme. The information presented refers to students who graduated from ISCED 2011 levels 3-8. Graduates are only counted once, at the level of the highest programme successfully completed.

Common definitions for education systems have been agreed between the [UNESCO](#) Institute for Statistics (UIS), the [OECD](#) and [Eurostat](#). UNESCO developed the [International standard classification of education \(ISCED\)](#) to facilitate comparisons across countries on the basis of uniform and internationally agreed definitions. In 2011, an

ISCED revision was formally adopted, referred to as [ISCED 2011](#) . Before this, ISCED 1997 was used as the common standard for classifying education systems. Eurostat statistics on the employment rates of recent graduates have a break in series in 2014, when the first information collected using the ISCED 2011 classification became available; before this date, these statistics were collected using ISCED 1997. For more information, see [the article on the ISCED classification](#) .

The colon (':') is used to show where data are not available.

Context

Principle 1 of the [European pillar of social rights](#) states that 'everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market'. The [European Skills Agenda](#) is a 5-year plan to support skills development. Equipping people with the right skills helps them to adjust to changes that happen as a result of technological developments in the way we work, learn, take part in society and lead our everyday lives. The right skills help individuals to adjust to these changes and ensure their well-being while contributing to society, productivity and economic growth. The 'Youth guarantee' calls on EU countries to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within 4 months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. Its main aim is to help tackle youth unemployment and to ease the transition from education to work. The [reinforced youth guarantee](#) has extended the target population to all young people under the age of 30.

In line with [CEDEFOP's definition](#) , vocational education and training (VET) can be understood as education and training that aims to equip young people and adults with knowledge, skills and competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market. [Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training \(VET\) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#) calls for work towards achieving by 2025 3 EU-level objectives, including the objective that the employment rate of VET graduates should be at least 82%.

The overall state of an economy is an important determinant for both the availability and the quality of job opportunities. As a result of the economic downturn resulting from the global financial and economic crisis in the late 2000s and the COVID-19 pandemic, graduates in the EU have faced a range of difficulties when trying to enter labour markets, with persistently high unemployment rates and many graduates accepting work for which they were over-qualified or unqualified. Such a mismatch may arise from a discrepancy between occupations and qualifications (a vertical mismatch), or from discrepancies between occupations and areas of study (a horizontal mismatch); the former is generally more common within the EU (see also the [dedicated section on Skills](#)).

Explore further

Other articles

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

Database

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

Education and training outcomes (educ_outc)

Transition from education to work (edatt)

Thematic section

- [Education and training](#)
- [Employment and unemployment \(LFS\)](#)
- [Skills related statistics](#)

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 employment rates of recent graduates](#)

External links

- [European Commission — Education and training policies](#)
- [European Commission — Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights](#)
- [European Commission — Vocational education and training](#)

Legislation

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