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%.

Overview

In 2019, an average of 10.2% 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 2019 ranged from 3.0% in Croatia to 17.3% in Spain (see Figure 1).

The overall share of early leavers from education and training fell in the EU by 0.9 percentage points between 2014 and 2019. Among the EU Member States, the largest reductions (in percentage point terms) between 2014 and 2019 in the proportion of early leavers were in Portugal, Greece, Spain and Malta, each reporting a fall in excess of 4.0 points; this was also the case for Turkey and North Macedonia among the non-member countries. There was an increase between 2014 and 2019 in the proportion of early leavers in 12 Member States. The largest increases were recorded for Cyprus (2.4 percentage points), Denmark (1.8 points), Slovakia (1.6 points), Czechia (1.2 points), Luxembourg (1.1 points) and Bulgaria (1.0 point). The other six Member States (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Croatia, Latvia and Slovenia) reported increases of less than 1.0 points.

As part of the Europe 2020 strategy, all EU Member States have adopted national targets for this indicator, and these are also shown in Figure 1. By 2019, the proportion of early leavers was already below the national target in 16 of the Member States, but remained above the national target for 11 of the Member States.

The gap between the latest rate for early leavers from education and training and the national target for 2020 was particularly pronounced in Romania (where the latest rate for 2019 was 4.0 percentage points higher than the target), and peaked in Malta where the difference was 6.7 percentage points; note that these two Member States together with Spain also recorded the highest rates of early leavers in 2019.

Analysis by sex

The proportion of early leavers from education and training in 2019 in the EU was 3.5 percentage points higher for young men (11.9%) than for young women (8.4%). 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 Estonia, 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 (0.9 percentage points difference) and Czechia (0.2 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 2009 and 2019: the overall proportion fell by 3.8 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 3.5 points in 2019. This gender gap was 4.0 points in 2009 but as low as 3.0 points in 2016.

Between 2009 and 2019, nearly all EU Member States reported a fall in the proportion of early leavers among young men. Yet, seven countries reported increases: 0.1 percentage points in Poland, 0.3 points in Germany, 0.5 points in Hungary, 0.8 points in Bulgaria, 0.9 points in Austria, 1.1 points in Czechia and 3.1 points in Slovakia. Elsewhere the proportion fell: in 2019 the share of young men who were early leavers was at least 10.0 percentage points lower than in 2009 in Malta, Greece and Spain. Among non-member countries, this was also the case in Norway, while in Portugal the proportion fell by 22.1 points between these two years.

Among young women, a broadly similar situation was observed. Four EU Member States — Slovakia, Czechia, Slovenia and Hungary — reported a higher proportion of young women who were early leavers in 2019 than they had in 2009. Portugal again recorded the largest fall in the proportion of early school leavers, down 18.4 percentage points between 2009 and 2019 for young women. Except for Spain (down 11.1 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, 2009 and 2019**

(% of young men aged 18-24)

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

(*) 2019: low reliability.

(2) 2019: young men: low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_lfse_14)

**Figure 2:** Early leavers from education and training, young men, 2009 and 2019 (% of young men aged 18-24) Source: Eurostat (edat_lfse_14)
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 2019, the 10.2% of early leavers from education and training were composed as such: a 4.6% share of the EU’s population aged 18-24 were early leavers in employment, while 3.4% 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 2019, five EU Member States reported more early leavers not employed but wanting to work than early leavers that were employed. The biggest gap — 1.7 percentage points — was recorded in Italy, where the share of early leavers who were employed stood at 4.8%, compared with a 6.5% share of early leavers who were not employed but wanted to work; Ireland, Greece, France and Slovakia recorded a gap between these two shares that was between 0.3 and 1.2 percentage points. The same was true for Serbia. In 21 Member States the reverse was true, namely that there were more early leavers that were employed than early leavers not employed but wanting to work, the most notable cases being Malta, Romania, Latvia and Estonia; this was also the case for six of the non-member countries shown in Figure 4, most notably for Iceland, Turkey and Norway. Croatia 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 2019, but this proportion was 1.6 % among young men and nearly twice as high among young women at 2.8 % (see Table 1). In all but four of the 21 EU Member States for which data are available (in six 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 Belgium, Denmark and Lithuania while Ireland 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 (6.9 percentage points higher for young women than young men), Bulgaria (4.1 points) and Hungary (3.3 points); very high gender differences were also recorded in North Macedonia (4.3 points) and in particular in Turkey (where the share of female early leavers not wanting to work was 14.8 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 four other Member States — Ireland, Greece, France and Italy — the reverse was true. 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 six 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, 2019 (% 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 2019, the lowest proportion of early leavers in the EU was reported in cities (9.1%); this share is in line with the benchmark set in the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (which foresees lowering the share of early leavers to not more than 10% by 2020). 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 10.7%.

Among the 24 EU Member States with a complete set of data for all three degrees of urbanisation (incomplete data for Luxembourg, Malta and Slovakia), nine 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, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania and Sweden, the highest proportion of early leavers was reported in rural areas, as was also the case in Iceland, Norway and Serbia; while Germany had lowest proportion of early leavers in rural areas; among the non-member countries this pattern was repeated in the United Kingdom and Switzerland. Belgium, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus and Austria reported the opposite pattern, with rural areas recording the lowest proportion of early leavers and the cities reporting highest proportion of early leavers for Belgium, Cyprus and Austria while rural areas had the highest shares in Croatia and Italy. France has its lowest share in both cities and rural areas.
Figure 5: Early leavers from education and training by degree of urbanisation, 2019 (% 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 enrol 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](#).

More recently CEDEFOP launched 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 %. This benchmark is also one of the Europe 2020 strategy targets and previously formed part of the European employment strategy (subsequently incorporated into the Europe 2020 strategy), which specifies that the share should be below 10 %.

**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 — Early school leaving
- European Commission — Education and training — Strategic framework — Education & Training 2020
- CEDEFOP — VET toolkit for tackling early leaving
- Eurydice — Better knowledge for better policies
- OECD — Early childhood and schools
- UNESCO — Education for the 21st century

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