This article presents statistics on tertiary education (ISCED levels 5-8) in the European Union (EU) and forms part of an online publication on education and training in the EU. Tertiary education — provided by universities and other higher education institutions — is the level of education following secondary schooling. It is seen to play an essential role in society, by fostering innovation, increasing economic development and growth, and improving more generally the well-being of citizens. Some European universities are among the most prestigious in the world.

In the coming years, many commentators predict that there will be increased demand for highly skilled people; indeed, skills gaps already exist in some EU Member States. Driven by digital technology, jobs are becoming more flexible and complex. This has resulted in a growing number of employers seeking staff with the necessary capacities to manage complex information, think autonomously, be creative, use resources in a smart and efficient manner, as well as communicate effectively.

A relatively large number of students in tertiary education are internationally mobile and study abroad: an analysis of this phenomenon is available in a separate article.

**Participation**

Table 1 presents data on the number of students in each of four levels of tertiary education. Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctoral levels of tertiary education are found in all EU Member States, while short-cycle tertiary education, which is typically practically-based and occupationally-specific to prepare students for the labour market, is not part of the education system in Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Lithuania, Romania and Finland, nor in Liechtenstein, North Macedonia or Serbia. It is also quite uncommon in several others, for example the Czech Republic, Germany, Croatia, Poland or Portugal.
In the EU-28 there were 19.6 million tertiary education students in 2016 (see Table 1), of which 7.3 % were following short-cycle tertiary courses, 61.3 % were studying for Bachelor's degrees, 27.6 % for Master's degrees and 3.9 % for Doctoral degrees.

In 2016, Germany, the most populous EU Member State, had 3.0 million tertiary education students, which was the highest number in the EU and equivalent to 15.5 % of the EU-28 total. France (12.7 % of the total), the United Kingdom (12.2 %), Spain (10.0 %), Italy (9.3 %) and Poland (8.2 %) had the next largest tertiary student populations, followed by the Netherlands where 4.3 % of the EU-28’s tertiary students studied.

More students were studying for Bachelor’s degrees than for any other level of tertiary education in each of the EU Member States in 2016. Indeed, France, Austria and Luxembourg were the only Member States where fewer than 50 % of all tertiary students were studying for Bachelor’s degrees. By contrast, in Ireland (75.2 %), the Netherlands (76.0 %) and Lithuania (76.6 %), more than three quarters of tertiary students were studying for Bachelor’s degrees and this share rose to almost nine tenths in Greece (87.2 %), while high shares were also recorded for Serbia (79.9 %) and North Macedonia (94.6 %).
studying for Master’s degrees in Portugal, the Czech Republic, France, Luxembourg, Croatia, Cyprus, Slovakia and Italy.

In 2016, the highest proportion of tertiary students studying for Doctoral degrees among the EU Member States was 8.8 % in Luxembourg, while a higher share was recorded for Liechtenstein (18.3 %) — see Table 1. Aside from these relatively small countries, the next highest shares (among the EU Member States) were recorded in Finland (6.6 %), the Czech Republic and Germany (both 6.5 %), while among the non-member countries shown in Table 1 a share of 8.3 % was recorded in Switzerland. Within the EU, the lowest share of doctoral students in the total number of tertiary education students was observed in Malta (0.9 %), where higher educational institutions have only quite recently been established and are in the process of being expanded; a slightly lower share was recorded in North Macedonia (0.7 %).

Participation of men and women in tertiary education

In 2016, women accounted for an estimated 54.1 % of all tertiary students in the EU-28. The share of women among tertiary students was slightly higher among those studying for Master’s degrees (57.1 %), somewhat lower for those studying for Bachelor’s degrees (53.2 %) and following short-cycle courses (52.1 %). For doctoral studies, however, the majority (52.2 %) of students were men.

In 2016, close to three fifths of all tertiary students in Sweden, Slovakia, the Baltic Member States and Poland were women. Women were also in a majority among tertiary students in all of the other EU Member States except for Greece (where they accounted for 48.5 % of tertiary students) and Germany (48.2 %). In Switzerland, Turkey and Liechtenstein, female tertiary students were also in a minority.

Focusing on students studying for Bachelor’s degrees, Greece (47.8 % share for women) and Germany (45.9 %) were the only EU Member States where there were more men than women studying in 2016; this was also the case in Switzerland, Turkey and Liechtenstein. The highest share of female students among those studying for Bachelor’s degrees was recorded in Sweden (63.2 %). Among students studying for Master’s degrees, women were in the majority in all of the EU Member States, but in a minority in Turkey and Liechtenstein. The highest female shares were recorded in the Baltic Member States, Poland, Cyprus, Slovenia, Croatia and Slovakia, where women accounted for more than 60 % of the total number of students studying for a Master’s degree.

For the two tertiary education levels with smaller student populations the situation was more mixed. For short-cycle courses, 8 out of 22 Member States for which data are available had more male than female students, while men were in a majority among Doctoral level students in half (14 out of 28) of the EU Member States and women in a majority in the other half.

Fields of study

Across the EU-28, almost one third (32.0 %) of all students in tertiary education were studying social sciences, journalism, information, business, administration or law in 2016 (note the information presented includes 2015 data for the Netherlands). Women accounted for 57.6 % of all students within this field of education — see Figure 1. The second most common field of education was engineering, manufacturing and construction-related studies which accounted for 15.7 % of all tertiary education students. In this field, almost three quarters (74.1 %) of all students were male. The third largest field of study was health and welfare, with a 13.4 % share of all tertiary education students. In this field, women accounted for close to three quarters (71.2 %) of the total number of tertiary students. Among the remaining fields of education shown in Figure 1, the highest share of female students was recorded for those studying education (where 78.0 % of all students were women), while women accounted for almost two thirds (64.5 %) of all students studying arts and humanities. By contrast, within natural sciences, mathematics, statistics, and information and communication technologies the share of men in the total number of tertiary students was 61.1 %.
Graduates

Approximately 4.7 million students graduated from tertiary education establishments in the EU-28 in 2016; note this figure is based on the latest available information for each of the EU Member States, including 2015 data for the Netherlands. France (773 thousand) had the largest number of tertiary graduates in 2016, followed by the United Kingdom (754 thousand), some way ahead of Germany (557 thousand; note the figures shown exclude graduates of vocational academies) and Poland (488 thousand). Note also that the relatively high number of graduates in the United Kingdom and France may, at least to some extent, reflect a shorter average course length; for example, France had the highest proportion of tertiary students following short-cycle courses of any EU Member State.
In 2016, an analysis of the number of graduates in the EU-28 by field of education (2015 data for the Netherlands) shows that more than one third (34.1%) of all tertiary students had graduated in social sciences, journalism, information, business, administration or law. This share was higher than the equivalent share (32.0%) of tertiary education students still in the process of studying within this field in 2016, suggesting that fewer students had started this type of study in recent years, or that either drop-out rates or average course lengths were higher in other fields. A similar situation was observed for health and welfare, which made up 13.7% of graduates from 13.4% of the tertiary education student population, as well as for education studies (9.0% of graduates compared with 7.4% of students) and services (3.7% of graduates compared with 3.5% of students). The reverse situation was observed for the other fields of education: engineering, manufacturing and construction-related studies (14.8% of graduates and 15.7% of students); natural sciences, mathematics, statistics; information and communication technologies (11.0% of graduates and 12.3% of students); arts and humanities (11.0% of graduates and 12.2% of students); agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary (1.7% of graduates and 1.9% of students).
Among the EU Member States a few fields can be identified from which — compared with the EU average — a particularly large or a particularly small share of tertiary students graduated in 2016. The share of graduates in social sciences, journalism, information, business, administration or law was relatively low in Finland and Spain, where they accounted for just over one quarter of all graduates in 2016, while much higher shares were registered in Luxembourg (51.7 % of all graduates) and Bulgaria (49.0 %). A similar analysis for engineering, manufacturing and construction studies reveals that there was a relatively low share of graduates within this field in Luxembourg, the Netherlands (2015 data), Malta and the United Kingdom, whereas relatively high shares were recorded in Austria (20.5 %), Portugal (21.3 %) and particularly Germany (22.0 %). The share of graduates in natural sciences, mathematics, statistics, and information and communication technologies was relatively low in Belgium, Cyprus, Lithuania and Bulgaria, while it was particularly high in Germany (14.0 %), Ireland (15.0 %) and the United Kingdom (17.2 %). The share of graduates in health and welfare was relatively low in Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Germany, Austria and Cyprus, while it was relatively high in Finland (19.7 %), Denmark (20.3 %), Sweden (22.2 %) and particularly Belgium (26.5 %). Finally, the proportion of graduates in education was relatively low in Italy, France and Romania, while it was particularly high in Spain (16.5 %), Hungary (16.6 %), Cyprus (17.0 %) and Malta (18.0 %).

Within the EU-28, close to three fifths (57.6 %) of all graduates in 2016 were women. An analysis by programme orientation in the EU-28 (including 2015 data for the Netherlands) reveals that this share was somewhat higher (60.7 %) for social sciences, journalism, information, business, administration and law, rose to more than two thirds for arts and humanities (66.9 %), was close to three quarters for health and welfare (73.9 %) and peaked at more than four fifths (80.4 %) for education (see Figure 2). Male graduates accounted for close to three fifths...
(57.5 %) of the total number of graduates for natural sciences, mathematics, statistics, and information and communication technologies, and close to three quarters (72.3 %) of the total for engineering, manufacturing and construction-related fields. In the two smaller fields — agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary fields, and services — the number of graduates was almost balanced between men and women.

Figure 2: Distribution of tertiary graduates by field and sex, EU-28, 2016 (%)

Relative to the size of the population aged 20-29, the number of tertiary graduates in natural sciences, mathematics, statistics, and information and communication technologies increased in recent years. Figure 3 shows the gap between the number of male and female graduates in these fields for 2016, with almost twice as many male as female graduates in the EU-28. The gender gap for natural sciences, mathematics, statistics, and information and communication technologies graduates (relative to the size of the population) was most marked in Austria, where the number of male graduates was 2.7 times as high as the number of female graduates; there were also relatively large differences in Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands (2015 data), Malta, Luxembourg, Ireland and Germany. By contrast, in Cyprus, Romania and Poland the number of male graduates in natural sciences, mathematics, statistics, and information and communication technologies (relative to the size of the population) was less than 40 % higher than the number of female graduates.
Figure 3: Number of students graduating from tertiary education in science, mathematics, computing, engineering, manufacturing and construction, 2016 (number per 1 000 inhabitants aged 20-29 years) Source: Eurostat (educ_grad04)

Teaching staff and student-academic staff ratios

There were 1.5 million people teaching in tertiary education in the EU-28 (including 2015 data for Denmark and Ireland) in 2016 (see Table 4) of which a small minority — about 100 thousand — provided short-cycle tertiary courses. More than one quarter (27.1 %) of the tertiary education teaching staff in the EU-28 were located in Germany, with just over one tenth each in Spain (11.1 %) and the United Kingdom (10.2 %).
Table 4: Teaching staff in tertiary education by level and sex, 2016 (thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>183.7</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>402.4</td>
<td>245.2</td>
<td>157.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>164.2</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>123.9</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>151.2</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>155.2</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(* Sum of available data for the EU Member States (including discrepancies noted in the other footnotes).  
(1) 2015.  
(2) Independent private institutions and academic staff in government dependent private institutions: excluded.  
Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ_uoe_perp01)

In contrast to the teaching staff in primary and secondary education, where women were in the majority, the majority of tertiary education teaching staff were men. Almost three fifths (57.4 %) of the EU-28’s teaching staff in tertiary education in 2016 were men, a share that neared two thirds in Greece (66.2 %) and was also above 60 % in Luxembourg, Malta, Italy, the Czech Republic and Germany. By contrast, women accounted for a majority of the tertiary education teaching staff in Finland (51.7 %), Latvia (55.3 %) and Lithuania (56.5 %).

In 2016, student-academic staff ratios in tertiary education averaged 15.0 in the EU-28. Among the EU Member States, the highest student-staff ratios were recorded in Greece (39.6), while ratios of more than 20 students per staff member were also recorded in Belgium and Italy. By contrast, student-staff ratios were in single figures in Luxembourg (7.6 students per staff member) and Malta (9.7) and were also relatively low in Sweden and Denmark (2015 data).
Table 5: Student-academic staff ratios in tertiary education, 2016 (number of students per member of academic staff)

Source: Eurostat (educ_uoe_perp04)

Finance

Data concerning public expenditure on tertiary education relative to gross domestic product (GDP) are available for 27 of the EU Member States — see Figure 4. This ratio ranged in 2015 from 0.5 % in Luxembourg and 0.7 % in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Greece to 1.8 % in Austria and 1.9 % in Sweden and Finland, peaking at 2.4 % in Denmark (2014 data). The average for the EU-28 was 1.2 %.
The standards for international statistics on education are set by three international organisations:

- the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) institute for statistics (UIS);
- the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD);
- Eurostat, the statistical office of the EU.

The source of data used in this article is a joint UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat (UOE) data collection on education statistics and this is the basis for the core components of Eurostat’s database on education statistics; in combination with the joint data collection Eurostat also collects data on regional enrolments and foreign language learning.

More information about the joint data collection is available in an article on the UOE methodology.

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 6); master’s or equivalent (level 7); doctoral or equivalent (level 8). The first results based on ISCED 2011 have been published in 2015 starting with data for the 2013 reference period for data on students and teaching staff and the 2012 reference period for data on expenditure. This classification forms the basis of all of the statistical information that is presented in this article.

Tertiary education builds on secondary education, providing learning activities in specialised fields of education. Tertiary education includes not only what is commonly understood as ‘academic’ education, but also includes advanced vocational or professional education. The content of programmes at tertiary level is more complex and advanced than at lower ISCED levels. One prerequisite of tertiary education is the successful completion of ISCED level 3 programmes that give direct access to first tertiary education programmes (access may also be possible from ISCED level 4 programmes). In addition to qualification requirements, entry into education programmes at these levels may depend on subject choice and/or grades achieved. Furthermore, it may be necessary to take and succeed in entrance examinations.

There is usually a clear hierarchy between qualifications granted by tertiary education programmes. The transition between programmes at tertiary level is, however, not always clearly distinguished and it may be possible to combine programmes and transfer credits from one programme to another. In certain cases, credits received from previously completed education programmes may also be counted towards the completion of a programme at a higher ISCED level. That said, the successful completion of ISCED level 7 is usually required for entry into ISCED level 8.

ISCED 1997 and ISCED 2011 also described fields of education and training, but these were subsequently replaced by the ISCED-F 2013 classification. Eurostat data by fields of education were classified according to ISCED 1997 (which is the same as ISCED 2011 in terms of the fields of education) until 2015. The data for 2016 onwards have and will be classified according to ISCED-F 2013. The broad groups of fields of education in ISCED 1997 are: general programmes; education; arts and humanities; social sciences, business and law; science, mathematics and computing; engineering, manufacturing and construction; agriculture and veterinary; health and welfare; and services.

Key concepts

Student–academic staff ratios for tertiary education are calculated by dividing the number of full-time equivalent students by the number of full-time equivalent members of academic staff; this ratio should not be confused with average class size, which refers to the number of students in a given course or classroom.

### Tables in this article use the following notation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value in italics</th>
<th>data value is forecasted, provisional or estimated and is therefore likely to change;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>:</td>
<td>not available, confidential or unreliable value;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>not applicable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Context

Bologna process

Since the introduction of the Bologna process (see the article on Education and training statistics introduced)
a major expansion in higher education systems has taken place, accompanied by significant reforms in degree structures and quality assurance systems. However, the financial and economic crisis affected higher education in different ways, with some EU Member States investing more and others making radical cutbacks in their tertiary education spending. In 2018, the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency published a review of the implementation of the Bologna process, titled The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report.

While the Bologna process put in motion a series of reforms to make European higher education more compatible, comparable, competitive and attractive for students, it is only one strand of a broader effort concerning higher education. To establish synergies between the Bologna process and the Copenhagen process (for enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training), the European Commission and EU Member States have established a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF).

Europe 2020 and ET 2020 benchmarks

Higher education institutions are crucial partners in delivering the EU’s strategy to drive forward and maintain growth: the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth has set a target that 40% of people aged 30-34 in the EU should have a higher education qualification by 2020. Improving the performance of education and training systems at all levels and increasing participation in tertiary education is also one of the integrated economic and employment guidelines that were revised as part of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (known as ET 2020), 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.

The strategy sets a number of benchmarks to be achieved by 2020, including the above-mentioned target that the share of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%. Two supplementary benchmarks on learning mobility were adopted by the Council in November 2011. The first of these sets a target for 2020 whereby an average of at least 20% of higher education graduates in the EU-28 should have had a period of higher education-related study or training (including work placements) abroad, representing a minimum of 15 European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) credits or lasting a minimum of three months. A second benchmark on employability was added in May 2012: namely, that by 2020, the EU-28 share of employed graduates aged 20-34 having left education and training no more than three years before the reference year should be at least 82%.

Erasmus+

The Erasmus programme was one of the most well-known European programmes and ran for just over a quarter of a century; in 2014 it was superseded by the EU’s programme for education, training, youth and sport, referred to as Erasmus+. In the field of higher education, Erasmus+ gives students and academic staff the opportunity to develop their skills and boost their employment prospects. Students can study abroad for up to 12 months (during each cycle of tertiary education). More than two million higher education students are expected to take part in Erasmus+ during the 2014-2020 period, including an estimated 25 thousand students in joint Masters’ programmes.

In May 2018, the European Commission adopted proposals for the Erasmus programme for 2021-2027, involving a doubling of the budget to EUR 30 billion which it is expected should enable 12 million people to participate in the programme.
Other articles

- 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 almost reached its target for share of persons aged 30 to 34 with tertiary education , News release April 2018
- Key data on education in Europe 2012
- The European higher education area in 2018: Bologna process Implementation report

Main tables

- Education and training (t EDUC)

Database

- Education and training (educ), see:
  - Participation in education and training (educ_part)
    - Education personnel (educ_uoe_per)
    - Education finance (educ_uoe_fin)
- Education and training
- Youth

Methodology

Metadata

- Education administrative data from 2013 onwards (ISCED 2011) (ESMS metadata file — educ_uoe_enr_esms)

Manuals and other methodological information

- Classification of learning activities — Manual
- Further methodological information on educational attainment
- ISCED 2011 operational manual — Guidelines for classifying national education programmes and related qualifications
- UOE data collection on formal education — Manual on concepts, definitions and classifications, 2014

Legislation

- UOE: Regulation (EC) No 452/2008 of 23 April 2008 concerning the production and development of statistics on education and lifelong learning
- From school year 2012/2013 onwards: Commission Regulation (EU) No 912/2013 of 23 September 2013 as regards statistics on education and training systems
External links

- European Commission — Education and training monitor, 2018
- European Commission — Education and training — Bologna process
- European Commission — Education and training — Higher education policy
- European Commission — Education and training — Strategic framework for education and training
- European Commission — Programmes — Erasmus+
- Eurydice — The information network on education in Europe
- OECD — Skills beyond school
- OECD — Thematic review of tertiary education
- UNESCO — Higher education

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