Participation of young people in education and the labour market

This article focuses on the complex interplay between participation in formal education and in the labour market in the European Union (EU) and its Member States, supplementing a companion article on youth unemployment.

In the case of young people, participation in formal education and in the labour market interact in complex ways going beyond a straightforward one-way transition from school to work. In some countries, young people start working much earlier than in others, e.g. in the form of summer jobs or jobs for students. It is also possible to be in formal education and on the labour market at the same time, leading to an overlap. It is important to be aware of these issues when interpreting and assessing youth unemployment rates.

Participation of young persons in formal education and in the labour market

At age 15, nearly 100% of the population in the European Union are still at school. As the young grow older, there is a gradual decrease in the proportion of young persons in education. Not all leave education at the same age, so there is a gradual change for the young population as a whole. The pace is determined by national systems of education and training, as well as other factors like national labour market characteristics and cultural determinants.

In parallel to a decrease in the proportion of young people in education, there is an increase of those on the labour market, employed or unemployed. The pace of exit from education is not identical to the pace of entry onto the labour market, as some people are in education and on the labour market at the same time, while others move out of education and stay outside the labour market. There are a range of situations in which education and labour market participation overlap, as will be seen below. This overlap can occur at any age, but it is far more frequent for the younger age group because of the transition from education to the labour market.

Figure 1 below shows a schematic presentation of the proportion of young people aged 15 to 34 years old in formal education and on the labour market at each age. All those who state they have been in formal education or training during the previous four weeks are considered as being a student or apprentice, and are represented by a light colour (light blue or light yellow) in the schematic representation. Nevertheless, persons who participated exclusively in non-formal training sessions, such as attending a course, a seminar or taking private lessons, are not included and can appear either in the category “Persons outside the labour force, not student or apprentice” (dark blue) or “Persons in the labour force, not student or apprentice” (orange) depending on whether or not they are participating in the labour market.

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1For the purpose of this article, the definition of people neither in education nor in employment is different from the one for NEETs (hyperlink to: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training) where people both in formal and/or in non-formal education and training are considered as being in education or training.
All those who are in employment or unemployed according to the ILO definitions, are classified as being in the labour force, and are represented by an orange colour. Finally, those who are both in formal education or training and in the labour force, as employed or unemployed, form the overlap between formal education and the labour force and are represented by a light yellow colour in the schematic representation.

Figure 1: Schematic presentation of the structure of the youth population in formal education and in the labour force by age (%)

The overlaps between education and labour market participation correspond to a range of different situations. For some young people, employment is subordinate to education, for example, in the case of a student who works for just a few hours a week. Others are employed and enrolled in a formal education programme at the same time (such as apprentices), or they study after work to qualify for a diploma. Education and work may take place at different times of the year (e.g. students alternating between their academic course and summer jobs) or in parallel (e.g. students working at weekends or in the evenings after classes). The same activity may count as both education and employment e.g. apprenticeships, paid traineeships (if part of a formal programme), or specific vocational training phases integrated in some study programmes in tertiary education. In line with ILO guidelines, paid trainees are classified as employed, but unpaid trainees are not.

The status of young people in the labour force can be further disaggregated to clearly distinguish those employed from those unemployed. This richer overview at EU level is presented in Figure 2, where employed are colour-coded in orange and unemployed in a more reddish orange. Please note that there cannot be overlaps between employment and unemployment, as a person cannot be both employed and unemployed at the same time. As with Figure 1, those in formal education are coded in a light shade and those not in formal education in a darker shade of the colour corresponding to the labour status (employed, unemployed or outside the labour force).
The number of young people, aged 15-24 and 15-34 respectively, in each of the six groups presented in Figure 2 (i.e. in education and not in the labour force, not in education and not in the labour force, in education and employed, in education and unemployed, not in education and unemployed, not in education and employed) is given at EU level for 2018 in Figure 3.

Most young unemployed people are not in formal education (2.6 million aged 15-24 and 6.5 million aged 15-34 in 2018) but still some of them are in formal education (0.9 million aged 15-24 and 1.2 million aged 15-34 in 2018). In addition, there are many young people employed while in formal education (7.1 million aged 15-24 and 10.3 million aged 15-34 in 2018). As can be seen, there are more young people (for both age groups) who are employed while in formal education than young people unemployed (whether in formal education or not).

The rest of this article will analyse country differences regarding those patterns.

**Country differences**

There are significant structural differences among European countries in young people’s participation in the labour market. The reason is a combination of institutional factors (e.g. formal apprenticeship schemes), cul-

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**Figure 2: Youth population in formal education and/or in the labour force by age, EU-28, 2018**

**Figure 3: Number of young people, aged 15-24 and 15-34 in formal education and/or in the labour force, EU-28, 2018 (in thousands)**
tural determinants, whether there is a job market for students, etc. Differences in the national systems of education and training also play a major role. For details see Eurydice - Description of national educational systems and policies.

Each country’s characteristics are unique, hence charts such as Figure 2 for each country are like a fingerprint. Nevertheless, it is possible to create some country groups with common features. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the country grouping where the first parameter is the degree to which those in education are simultaneously on the labour market (horizontal axis) and the second parameter is the level of youth unemployment, measured in terms of the youth unemployment ratio (for definition, see the Statistics Explained article on Youth unemployment). Figure 4 (resp. Figure 5) plots the situation of all countries participating in the EU-LFS according to these two dimensions and suggests possible country clusters for the age group 15-24 (resp. the age group 15-34). The five resulting country groups are analysed in more detail below.

Figure 4: Country groups by participation of persons simultaneously in formal education and in the labour market 15-24, 2018
Figure 5: Country groups by participation of persons simultaneously in formal education and in the labour market 15-34, 2018

**Group 1:** The first group of countries has very few students who are employed or unemployed. For countries in this group, the overlap between the labour market and education is very small. This could be the case e.g. if the young complete their studies before looking for a first job, and there are only few part-time or summer jobs for students. Countries in this group include: Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. Romania is shown in Figure 6 as an example. The defining feature of countries in this group are very thin bands of light orange, corresponding respectively to people who are in education and at the same time employed or unemployed.

Figure 6: Youth population in formal education and/or in the labour force by age, Romania, 2018

Note that for countries in this group, the youth unemployment rate may be high even if the absolute number of youth unemployment is low, the reason being a very small labour market for the young. See more details on
youth unemployment rates in the companion article on Youth unemployment.

**Group 2:** The second group of countries features a moderate overlap between education and the labour market and a higher level of youth unemployment than in group 1. Countries in this group include Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey. Spain is shown in Figure 7 as it highlights one of the highest levels of youth unemployment for both age groups 15-24 and 15-34.

![Figure 7: Youth population in formal education and/or in the labour force by age, Spain, 2018](image)

**Group 3:** A third group of countries has two features: a moderate overlap between education and the labour market and youth unemployment levels that are below the EU average. This group includes Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, and Poland. Poland is shown as an example in Figure 8. The defining feature of countries in this group is thicker bands of students or apprentices in the labour market than in the case of countries in the first group. Those in education while employed correspond to two broad types of situation: they are either apprentices or paid trainees (if the traineeship is part of a formal programme; and which are conventionally considered as employed and in education), or they are students who work at the same time. Note that the number of young people unemployed in education is marginal compared to the figure for young people unemployed and not in education (compare size of colour bands in intense orange and light pink).
Group 4: The fourth group of countries has high levels of employment among those in education but almost no unemployment among those in education. These countries include Estonia, Ireland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. Germany and Austria are also in this group and these two countries in particular are known to have established apprenticeship systems in secondary education. These factors help to explain further the high number of young people who are both in education and employment. Germany is shown in Figure 9.

Group 5: The final group of countries displays a high to very high involvement of students in the labour market, and an average level of unemployment. This group includes Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland. These countries have a long-standing tradition of students doing part-time or summer jobs (Nordic countries have strong seasonal unemployment among students as the season for summer jobs opens). Furthermore, some countries, e.g. the Netherlands, have dual study programmes in specific fields of
tertiary education that include practical work phases. In this group of countries, young people start looking for jobs at a very early age; as a result, there is sizeable unemployment among students 15 to 17 years of age. This declines steadily at higher ages, but is counterbalanced by a rise in unemployment among those in education. The example of the Netherlands is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Youth population in formal education and/or in the labour force by age, the Netherlands, 2018

A video with the country profile of all EU-LFS countries can be found here.

Data sources

Source: the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) is a large sample, quarterly survey providing results for the population in private households in the EU, EFTA and the candidate countries. Conscripts in military or community service are not included in the results.

Reference period: Yearly results are obtained as averages of the four quarters in the year.

Coverage: The data for France cover the metropolitan territory (excluding overseas regions). Country codes: Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Czechia (CZ), Denmark (DK), Germany (DE), Estonia (EE), Ireland (IE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), France (FR), Croatia (HR), Italy (IT), Cyprus (CY), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Hungary (HU), Malta (MT), the Netherlands (NL), Austria (AT), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Finland (FI), Sweden (SE), the United Kingdom (UK), Iceland (IS), Norway (NO), Switzerland (CH), Montenegro (ME), North Macedonia (MK), Serbia (RS) and Turkey (TR).

European aggregates: EU refers to the sum of EU-28 Member States and EA to the sum of the 19 euro area Member States. If data are unavailable for a country, the calculation of the corresponding aggregates takes into account the data for the same country for the most recent period available. Such cases are indicated.

Definitions: The concepts and definitions used in the survey follow the guidelines of the International Labour Organisation.

Employed persons are persons aged 15 years and over who, during the reference week performed work, even for just one hour a week, for pay, profit or family gain or who were not at work but had a job or business from which they were temporarily absent because of something like, illness, holiday, industrial dispute or education.
Unemployed persons are persons aged 15-74 who were without work during the reference week, but who are currently available for work and were either actively seeking work in the past four weeks or had already found a job to start within the next three months.

The labour force comprises employed and unemployed persons. People outside the labour force are those classified neither as employed nor as unemployed.

People in education in this article refers to people in formal education during the four weeks preceding to the interview. Formal education and training is defined by UNESCO as 'education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned through public organisations and recognised private bodies and — in their totality — constitute the formal education system of a country'.

Non-formal education and training, i.e. any organised and sustained learning activities outside the formal education system are excluded from the analyses of this article. For further information on participation in non-formal education and training see the article on adult learning statistics.

**Context**

Young people are a priority for European Union's social vision, and the financial crisis further reinforced the need to sustain the young human capital. In November 2009, the Council of Youth Ministers adopted the EU Youth Strategy for 2010-2018 which had two overall objectives: to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and in the labour market to promote the active citizenship, social inclusion for all young people. Recently, following the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018, the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 has been introduced with 11 European Youth Goals and among them quality employment is set as one of the objectives.

The Open Method of Coordination supports the implementation of the strategy which should create favourable conditions for youth to develop their skills, fulfil their potential, work, and actively participate in society. In this framework youth statistics are an essential tool to support evidence-based policy-making in the various domains covered by the strategy.

Focus on young people has been also highlighted with the adoption of the Europe 2020 strategy back in June 2010. Quality education and training, successful labour market integration and more mobility of young people are key to unleashing all young people’s potential and achieving the Europe 2020 objectives. Youth on the Move presents a framework of policy priorities for action at national and EU level to reduce youth unemployment by facilitating the transition from school to work and reducing labour market segmentation. Particular focus is put on the role of public employment services, promoting the Youth Guarantee scheme to ensure all young people are in a job, in education or in activation, creating a European Vacancy Monitor and supporting young entrepreneurs.

**See also**

- All articles on labour market
- Education and training statistics introduced
- EU labour force survey (online publication)
- Youth unemployment (background article)

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Dedicated section

- Education and training
- Employment and social policy indicators
- Employment and unemployment (LFS)
- Labour market (including Labour Force Survey)

Publications

- Youth in Europe

External links

- European Commission - European employment strategy
- European Commission - Strategic framework for education and training
- European Commission - Youth
- Youth on the Move