



EUROPEAN SEMESTER THEMATIC FACTSHEET

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

1. INTRODUCTION

Early school leaving¹ is an obstacle to economic growth and employment. It hampers productivity and competitiveness, and fuels poverty and social exclusion. With its shrinking workforce, Europe has to make full use of its human resources. Young people who leave education and training prematurely are bound to lack skills and qualifications, and face a higher risk of unemployment, social exclusion and poverty.

This has been recognised in the Europe 2020 strategy, which has set the **goal of bringing the share of early leavers from education and training among those aged 18-24 to below 10%**. Still, in 2015 there were more than 4 million early school leavers across Europe, only 40% of whom are employed.

Young people with a migrant background are more at risk of early school leaving; the risk is especially high for disadvantaged minorities, including Roma. The recent steep rise in the inflow of refugees and migrants has heightened the challenge of integrating pupils with migrant background, helping them to acquire necessary skills and competences.

The 2011 **Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school**

leaving² proposes cross-sectorial policy approaches in Member States, focusing on prevention, intervention and compensation at all levels of education.

The 2013 **Youth Guarantee Council Recommendation** commits Member States to ensure that every young person under 25 years receives a good-quality offer of employment, training, traineeship or apprenticeship within four months of leaving education or becoming unemployed.³ It recommends them to offer education and training opportunities to young people with insufficient qualifications.

The **New Skills Agenda for Europe**, launched June 2016, proposed a "skills guarantee" to provide flexible pathways for adults aged 25 or more, to re-enter education and/or obtain qualifications equivalent to upper secondary education, also thanks to recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning, e.g. occurred on-the-job.

While the guarantee will not influence directly the early school leaving rate, it could help to reduce the harmful effects of early school leaving throughout life.

The Council is expected to modify this proposal and rename it "Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults".

¹ The terms early school leavers and early leavers from education and training are used interchangeably in this document.

² OJ C191, 1.7.2011, p. 1.

³ See thematic factsheet on Youth employment.

2. POLICY CHALLENGES: AN OVERVIEW OF PERFORMANCE IN EU COUNTRIES

The EU average rate of early leavers from education and training [Early school leavers are defined as persons aged 18 to 24 fulfilling the following two conditions:

(1) the highest level of education or training attained is ISCED 0, 1, or 2;

(2) no education or training has been received in the four weeks preceding the survey.

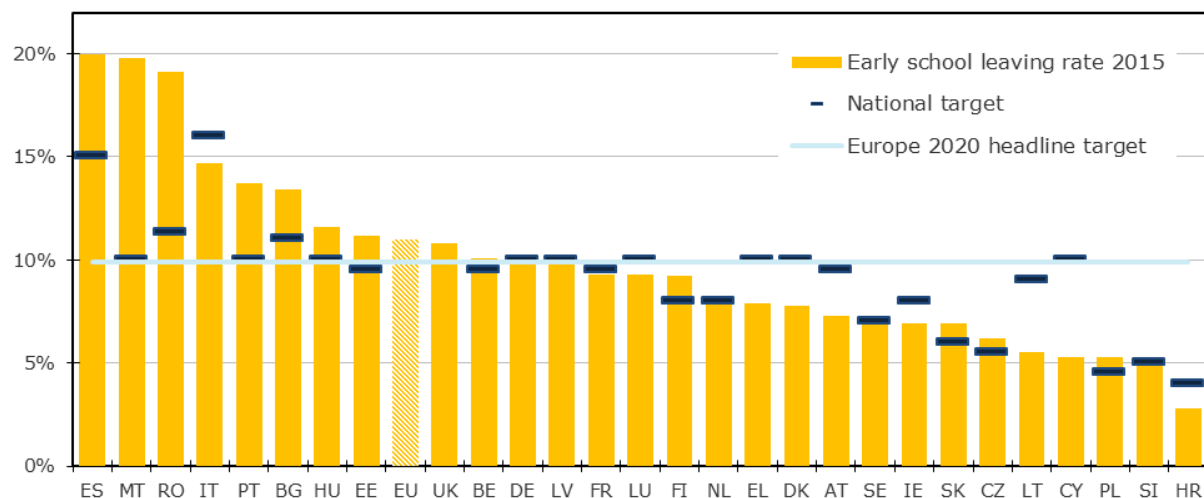
The reference group to calculate the early school leaving rate consists of the total population aged 18 to 24. All measurements come from the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS.) in 2015 was 11%, down 0.2 percentage points from 2014.

The rate fell by nearly 3 percentage points since 2010 and, if the trend

continues, the Europe 2020 headline target of below 10% is within reach. However, even reaching the 10% target by 2020 should not be a reason for complacency, as there would still be several million early school leavers in the EU. Moreover, sustaining the current progress rates could be more challenging the more a country approaches the target, as ever more targeted policies are likely to be needed to tackle the most difficult situations.

Seventeen Member States have already achieved the Europe 2020 headline target, i.e. two less than in 2014. Among the eleven countries still above the EU target, only Italy has reached its national target of 16%. Among the Member States below 10%, five have not yet reached their more ambitious national targets (Finland, The Netherlands, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland).

Figure 1 – Early school leaving, Europe 2020 headline target and national targets

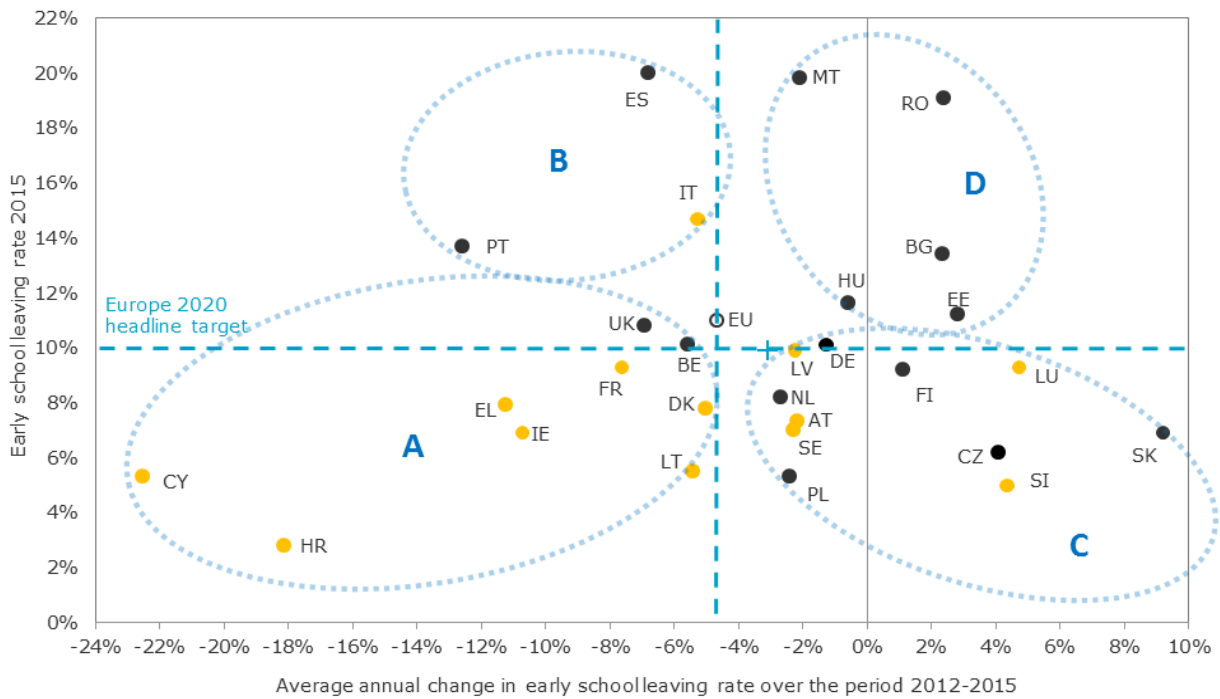


Source: Eurostat (LFS, table [t2020_40]). National targets follow different definitions of the indicator in some countries. Further information on national targets and their definitions: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4411192/4411431/Europe_2020_Targets.pdf

The snapshot of Figure 1 can be complemented by a look at progress made over the last three years. Figure 2 sets the 2015 early school leaving rates (on the vertical axis, same values as in Figure 1) against the average annual percentage change in early school leaving rates over the period 2012-2015.

The two dashed lines are the reference points for this assessment: firstly, the headline target of “below 10%” and, secondly, the annual progress made by the EU as a whole over the past three years (i.e., 4.7% between 2012 and 2015).

Figure 2 – Early school leaving: current performance and recent change



Source: DG EAC calculations based on Eurostat (LFS, data table [t2020_40]). Note: EU Member States having already reached their national targets are depicted in yellow.

From the scatterplot in Figure 2, four groups of countries can be distinguished.

- A. Countries that have early school leaving rates below or just above 10% and are nonetheless still making progress. These countries have also reached their national targets, with the exception of Belgium (the UK did not set a national target).
- B. Countries that have early school leaving rates above 10% but are nevertheless making significant progress. This is a diverse group of countries, with Spain standing out as the Member State with the highest early school leaving rate and Portugal among the fastest-progressing Member States in recent years.
- C. Countries that have early school leaving rates below 10% but are making little or no progress. Early school leaving rates have been *increasing* in Finland, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Luxembourg and most notably Slovakia, while they declined marginally in Germany, Latvia, The Netherlands, Austria,

Sweden and Poland.

- D. Finally, the situation is worst for the five countries in Group D, combining early school leaving rates above 10% with insufficient progress between 2012 and 2015.

As can be seen in Annex B, the rate of early leavers from education and training is **considerably higher amongst boys than amongst girls**, in the EU average (12.4% and 9.5% respectively) and in all Member States except Bulgaria. In fact, as a group girls had already attained the EU target in 2014, with a rate of 9.6%. The disadvantage of boys is most pronounced in Spain, Latvia and Malta (all more than 6 percentage points above girls'). Between 2014 and 2015, the gender gap has on average slightly decreased (notably in Cyprus and Estonia), but exceptions can be found (notably Malta, where it rose to 6.3 percentage points).

Secondly, amongst the **foreign-born population** in the EU, early school leaving rates are nearly twice as high as for the native population (Annex C). The

disparity between the foreign-born and the natives has decreased over time (from 13.4 percentage points in 2010 to 8.9 percentage points in 2015), but is still substantial in a number of Member States. Unfortunately, the early school leaving rates for foreign-born people are not available for 11 Member States. Nevertheless, calculations show that the EU as a whole would be 30% closer to reaching its Europe 2020 target of reducing the early school leaving to below 10% if the gap between foreign-born and native were closed.⁴ Identifying ways of tackling the problem, a study on newly arrived migrant children demonstrated that inclusive education systems are better equipped to integrate migrant children successfully and to support them effectively in school education.⁵

While the specific factors leading to early school leaving vary from country to country, the root causes of ineffective policies can be boiled down to three typical interlinked deficiencies:

1. Lack of a comprehensive strategy: strategic approaches to address early school leaving are not yet broadly implemented in Member States, although there is a growing tendency to develop more comprehensive strategies. In addition, relevant stakeholders such as local services (social, health, employment, etc.), youth and community organisations, guidance centres are often not involved in efforts to develop and implement measures. A peer review on policies to reduce early school leaving in March 2013 highlighted the need to e.g. involve business to allow for more work-based learning, improve guidance for young people at risk of early school leaving and ease their transition from school to work.⁶

- 2. Lack of evidence-based policy-making:** with some notable exceptions, Member States lack detailed information on the background of early school leavers and analyses of the causes and incidence of early school leaving. Only a few countries take a systematic approach to collecting, monitoring and analysing data on early school leaving.
- 3. Insufficient prevention and early intervention:** Member States start to devote more attention to prevention, but still stronger focus on preventive and early intervention measures is needed both at system level and at the level of individual education and training institutions. Prevention measures at system level need to address in particular problems of segregation by type of school, the negative effects of grade repetition, the lack of support of groups at risk of early school leaving and the need to improve the attractiveness of vocational education and training.

3. POLICY LEVERS TO ADDRESS THE POLICY CHALLENGES

The 2011 Council Recommendation gives guidance to Member States on how to tackle early school leaving and sets out the way forward. Member States should implement coherent, comprehensive and evidence-based strategies, comprising prevention, intervention and compensation measures.

- Prevention seeks to avoid the conditions from arising where processes leading to early school leaving can start. Successful prevention of early school leaving considers the pre-conditions for successful schooling and the design of education and training systems. This includes among others access to good quality early childhood education and care, flexible educational pathways and better integration of migrant children.
- Intervention addresses emerging difficulties at an early stage and seeks to prevent them from leading to early school leaving. They often apply to all pupils, but are especially

⁴ European Commission – OECD (2015).

⁵ PPMI (2013).

⁶ 'Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support', November 2013, final report of the Thematic Working Group on early school leaving:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf

beneficial and relevant to those at risk of early school leaving. They are student-focused and build on the early detection of support needed for learning and motivation.

- Compensation measures offer opportunities for education and training for those who have dropped out. They aim to re-engage people in education and training.

Increasing the provision of high-quality and work-based initial vocational education and training can help reduce early school leaving. In general education programmes, the combination of school education with work experience can also motivate disengaged learners and help to prepare them for further vocational education and training pathways.

A thematic working group on early school leaving, composed of policy-makers, practitioners and experts from 27 Member States and key European stakeholder organisations developed guidance on successful factors for developing comprehensive policies.⁷ It stressed the importance of prevention and the need to enhance cross-sectorial cooperation and create partnerships and synergies among different stakeholders at all levels.

A subsequent working group on schools policy identified key conditions for implementing a whole school approach to tackling early school leaving in its policy messages⁸ and the online 'European Toolkit for Schools'. They offer policy makers and practitioners guidance and resources to promote educational success and provide support for all learners.

The 2015 Council Conclusions on reducing early school leaving and

⁷ Op. cit.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf

⁸

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/strategic-framework/expert-groups/documents/early-leaving-policy_en.pdf

promoting success in school⁹ build on the work of the working groups and reiterate the importance of implementing the 2011 Council Recommendation.

In the framework of the Youth Guarantee Council Recommendation, Member States are encouraged to involve education and training providers in their Youth Guarantee schemes to ensure that early intervention is provided to students at risk of dropping out and becoming economically inactive.

As part of the New Skills Agenda adopted by the Commission in June 2016, the "Skills Guarantee" will help low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or progress towards an upper-secondary or equivalent qualification. Member States should put in place flexible pathways for upskilling in cooperation with social partners, education and training providers, and local and regional authorities. The Commission will support Member States in implementing and monitoring the Skills Guarantee. Financial support could be provided through the European Structural and Investment Funds and programmes like Erasmus+ and EaSI.

4. CROSS-EXAMINATION OF POLICY STATE OF PLAY

To ensure the **effectiveness** of the policies advocated by the 2011 Council Recommendation, it is important to identify the main factors leading to early school leaving and to monitor developments at national, regional and local level.¹⁰ First experiences in countries applying more advanced data collection systems show that high-quality monitoring is very useful in maximising the reduction in early school leaving.

According to the latest country-specific analysis, the majority of Member States have implemented the Council Recom-

⁹ [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52015XG1215\(03\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52015XG1215(03))

¹⁰ See the joint report Cedefop/Eurydice (2014).

mentation either through adopting explicit comprehensive strategies¹¹ or other national policies¹². Other countries have only partly or not yet implemented comprehensive strategies or national policies.

The latest issue of the annual Education and Training Monitor¹³ provides some examples of recently implemented national strategies to address early school leaving:

(i) France adopted an action plan to fight early school leaving, organised along three lines: the mobilisation of all actors inside and outside the schools, increased prevention, and acquisition of qualifications for early school leavers;

(ii) based on the November 2014 early school leaving strategy, Hungary has started developing an early warning system to signal potential drop-outs;

(iii) the June 2015 national strategy on early school leaving in Romania provides for prevention and inclusions measures, the setting up of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and a specific focus on children from groups at risk, in particular the Roma community. As a step towards implementation, the Romanian authorities have recently launched ESF calls providing support to poor children in pre-primary education, schools and second chance programmes, as well to teachers, headmasters and counsellors working with pupils at risk, particularly in disadvantaged schools.

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¹¹ Belgium, The Netherlands, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Malta, Austria, Romania.

¹² Cyprus, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Finland, Sweden and the UK.

¹³ More details on country-specific progress in tackling early school leaving are available in Volume 2 of the [Education and Training Monitor 2016](#).

5. REFERENCES

- Cedefop/Eurydice (2014), "Tackling early leaving from education and training in Europe"
<http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/tackling-early-leaving-from-education-and-training-in-europe-pbEC0414859/>
- European Commission - OECD (2015), EU Indicators of Immigrant Integration
<https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/indicators-of-immigrant-integration-2015-settling-in>
- Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) (2013), Study on educational support for newly arrived migrant children, Report on behalf of the European Commission
<https://bookshop.europa.eu/en/study-on-educational-support-for-newly-arrived-migrant-children-pbNC3112385/>

6. USEFUL RESOURCES

- European Commission: Education and Training policies on early school leaving
https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/early-school-leavers_en
- European Commission: Education and Training Monitor 2016
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor_en
- European Expert Network on Economics of Education <http://www.eenee.de>
- Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training
<http://nesetweb.eu/en/>

ANNEX

Table 1 – Early leavers from education and training (total)

	2000	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Target
EU 28	17.6 ^{EU 27}	13.9	13.4	12.7	11.9	11.2	11.0	10
Belgium	13.8	11.9	12.3	12.0	11.0	9.8	10.1	9.5
Bulgaria	:	12.6	11.8	12.5	12.5	12.9	13.4	11
Czech Republic	:	4.9	4.9	5.5	5.4	5.5	6.2	5.5
Denmark	11.7	11.0	9.6	9.1	8.0	7.8	7.8	10
Germany	14.6	11.8	11.6	10.5	9.8	9.5	10.1	10
Estonia	15.1	11.0	10.6	10.3	9.7	11.4	11.2	9.5
Ireland	:	11.5	10.8	9.7	8.4	6.9	6.9	8
Greece	18.2	13.5	12.9	11.3	10.1	9.0	7.9	10
Spain	29.1	28.2	26.3	24.7	23.6	21.9	20.0	15
France	13.3	12.7	12.3	11.8	9.7	9.0	9.3	9.5
Croatia	:	5.2	5.0	5.1	4.5	2.7	2.8	4
Italy	25.1	18.6	17.8	17.3	16.8	15.0	14.7	16
Cyprus	18.5	12.7	11.3	11.4	9.1	6.8	5.3	10
Latvia	:	12.9	11.6	10.6	9.8	8.5	9.9	10
Lithuania	16.5	7.9	7.4	6.5	6.3	5.9	5.5	9
Luxembourg	16.8	7.1	6.2	8.1	6.1	6.1	9.3	10
Hungary	13.9	10.8	11.4	11.8	11.9	11.4	11.6	10
Malta	54.2	23.8	22.7	21.1	20.5	20.3	19.8	10
Netherlands	15.4	10.0	9.2	8.9	9.3	8.7	8.2	8
Austria	10.2	8.3	8.5	7.8	7.5	7.0	7.3	9.5
Poland	:	5.4	5.6	5.7	5.6	5.4	5.3	4.5
Portugal	43.6	28.3	23.0	20.5	18.9	17.4	13.7	10
Romania	22.9	19.3	18.1	17.8	17.3	18.1	19.1	11.3
Slovenia	:	5.0	4.2	4.4	3.9	4.4	5.0	5
Slovakia	:	4.7	5.1	5.3	6.4	6.7	6.9	6
Finland	9.0	10.3	9.8	8.9	9.3	9.5	9.2	8
Sweden	7.3	6.5	6.6	7.5	7.1	6.7	7.0	7
United Kingdom	18.2	14.8	14.9	13.4	12.3	11.8	10.8	:

Source: Eurostat (LFS, data table [t2020_40]).

Table 2 – Early leavers from education and training by sex

	Males				Females				Gender gap 2015 (F-M)
	2010	2013	2014	2015	2010	2013	2014	2015	
EU 28	15.8	13.6	12.8	12.4	11.9	10.2	9.6	9.5	-2.9
Belgium	13.8	13.2	11.8	11.6	10.0	8.7	7.7	8.6	-3.0
Bulgaria	12.4	12.3	12.8	13.3	12.9	12.7	12.9	13.4	0.1
Czech Republic	4.9	5.4	5.8	6.4	4.8	5.5	5.2	6.0	-0.4
Denmark	14.1	9.9	9.5	9.7	7.7	6.2	6.1	5.7	-4.0
Germany	12.5	10.2	10.0	10.4	11.0	9.3	8.9	9.8	-0.6
Estonia	14.4	13.6	15.3	13.2	7.6	5.8	7.5	9.0	-4.2
Ireland	13.4	9.8	8.0	8.4	9.6	6.9	5.7	5.4	-3.0
Greece	16.4	12.7	11.5	9.4	10.6	7.5	6.6	6.4	-3.0
Spain	33.6	27.2	25.6	24.0	22.6	19.8	18.1	15.8	-8.2
France	15.3	10.7	10.2	10.1	10.2	8.6	7.9	8.5	-1.6
Croatia	6.5	5.5	3.1	3.6	3.8	3.4	2.3	2.1	-1.5
Italy	21.8	20.0	17.7	17.5	15.3	13.6	12.2	11.8	-5.7
Cyprus	16.2	14.8	11.2	7.7	9.8	4.2	2.9	3.2	-4.5
Latvia	16.7	13.6	11.7	13.4	9.0	5.8	5.1	6.2	-7.2
Lithuania	9.8	7.8	7.0	6.9	6.0	4.7	4.6	4.0	-2.9
Luxembourg	8.0	8.4	8.3	10.5	6.0	3.7	3.7	8.1	-2.4
Hungary	11.5	12.5	12.5	12.0	10.1	11.4	10.3	11.2	-0.8
Malta	29.9	23.2	22.2	22.9	17.4	17.7	18.3	16.6	-6.3
Netherlands	12.1	11.2	10.6	9.9	7.8	7.4	6.8	6.4	-3.5
Austria	8.4	7.9	7.6	7.8	8.3	7.1	6.5	6.8	-1.0
Poland	7.2	7.9	7.3	7.2	3.5	3.2	3.3	3.2	-4.0
Portugal	32.4	23.4	20.7	16.4	24.0	14.3	14.1	11.0	-5.4
Romania	19.5	18.7	19.5	19.5	19.0	15.9	16.7	18.5	-1.0
Slovenia	6.4	5.0	6.0	6.4	3.3	2.6	2.7	3.4	-3.0
Slovakia	4.6	6.7	6.9	6.9	4.9	6.1	6.6	6.8	-0.1
Finland	11.6	10.4	11.9	10.6	9.0	8.3	7.2	7.9	-2.7
Sweden	7.5	7.9	7.3	7.6	5.5	6.2	6.0	6.4	-1.2
United Kingdom	15.6	13.6	12.8	11.7	13.9	11.1	10.7	9.8	-1.9

Source: Eurostat (LFS, data table [edat_lfse_14]).

Table 3 – Early leavers from education and training by country of birth

	2010			2015			
	Total	Foreign-born	Native	Total	Foreign-born	Native	Native – Foreign Gap
EU 28	13.9	26.2	12.8	11.0	19.0	10.1	-8.9
Belgium	11.9	21.9	10.7	10.1	18.2	9.0	-9.2
Bulgaria	12.6	:	12.7	13.4	:	13.5	:
Czech Republic	4.9	13.2	4.7	6.2	10.7	6.1	-4.6
Denmark	11.0	16.7	10.6	7.8	8.7	7.7	-1
Germany	11.8	:	10.2	10.1	:	8.6	:
Estonia	11.0	:	11.1	11.2	:	11.3	:
Ireland	11.5	16.3	10.7	6.9	6.8	7.0	0.2
Greece	13.5	43.1	9.2	7.9	24.1	6.8	-17.3
Spain	28.2	43.0	25.1	20.0	33.3	17.5	-15.8
France	12.7	24.7	11.9	9.3	16.5	8.7	-7.8
Croatia	5.2	4.6	5.3	2.8	:	2.8	:
Italy	18.6	40.7	16.3	14.7	31.3	12.7	-18.6
Cyprus	12.7	26.3	7.5	5.3	16.7	3.1	-13.6
Latvia	12.9	:	13.0	9.9	:	10.0	:
Lithuania	7.9	:	8.0	5.5	:	5.5	:
Luxembourg	7.1	10.2	6.0	9.3	15.6	6.9	-8.7
Hungary	10.8	:	10.7	11.6	:	11.6	:
Malta	23.8	:	24.0	19.8	:	19.9	:
Netherlands	10.0	11.3	10.0	8.2	9.7	8.0	-1.7
Austria	8.3	21.2	5.9	7.3	19.0	5.5	-13.5
Poland	5.4	:	5.4	5.3	:	5.3	:
Portugal	28.3	27.4	28.3	13.7	16.2	13.5	-2.7
Romania	19.3	:	19.3	19.1	:	19.1	:
Slovenia	5.0	20.0	4.5	5.0	16.5	4.3	-12.2
Slovakia	4.7	:	4.7	6.9	:	6.9	:
Finland	10.3	21.1	9.7	9.2	18.1	8.7	-9.4
Sweden	6.5	10.8	5.9	7.0	13.9	5.9	-8
United Kingdom	14.8	10.2	15.4	10.8	7.6	11.2	3.6

Source: Eurostat (LFS, data table [edat_lfse_02]).