Education and Training
Monitor 2021

Overview on
EU-level targets

Education
and Training

1. Low achievement in basic skills

EU-LEVEL TARGET: The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%, by 2030.

BEST EU PERFORMERS:
Reading: Estonia, Ireland, Finland
Maths: Estonia, Poland, Denmark
Science: Estonia, Finland, Poland

	2018 Reading	Trend	2018 Maths	Trend	2018 Science	Trend
EU	22.5	2.8	22.9	0.2	22.3	4.5
Belgium	21.3	3.6	19.7	0.6	20.0	2.0
Bulgaria	47.1	6.1	44.4	-2.7	46.5	7.7
Czechia	20.7	-2.4	20.4	-2.0	18.8	1.5
Denmark	16.0	0.8	14.6	-2.5	18.7	2.1
Germany	20.7	2.2	21.1	2.4	19.6	4.8
Estonia	11.1	-2.2	10.2	-2.5	8.8	0.5
Ireland	11.8	-5.4	15.7	-5.2	17.0	1.8
Greece	30.5	9.2	35.8	5.4	31.7	6.4
Spain	23.2	3.6	24.7	0.9	21.3	3.1
France	20.9	1.1	21.3	-1.2	20.5	1.2
Croatia	21.6	-0.8	31.2	-2.0	25.4	6.9
Italy	23.3	2.3	23.8	-1.2	25.9	5.3
Cyprus	43.7	:	36.9	:	39.0	:
Latvia	22.4	4.8	17.3	-5.3	18.5	3.8
Lithuania	24.4	0.0	25.6	-0.8	22.2	5.2
Luxembourg	29.3	3.3	27.2	3.3	26.8	3.1
Hungary	25.3	7.7	25.6	3.3	24.1	10.0
Malta	35.9	-0.4	30.2	-3.5	33.5	1.0
Netherlands	24.1	9.8	15.8	2.4	20.0	6.8
Austria	23.6	:	21.1	:	21.9	:
Poland	14.7	-0.3	14.7	-5.8	13.8	0.7
Portugal	20.2	2.6	23.3	-0.5	19.6	3.1
Romania	40.8	0.4	46.6	-0.4	43.9	2.5
Slovenia	17.9	-3.3	16.4	-4.0	14.6	-0.2
Slovakia	31.4	9.2	25.1	4.1	29.3	10.0
Finland	13.5	5.4	15.0	7.1	12.9	6.9
Sweden	18.4	1.0	18.8	-2.3	19.0	-0.1
Iceland	26.4	9.6	20.7	3.7	25.0	7.1
Norway	19.3	4.3	18.9	0.7	20.8	5.0
Switzerland	23.6	6.8	16.8	3.3	20.2	6.2
Montenegro	44.4	-5.1	46.2	-12.3	48.2	-5.4
North Macedonia	55.1	:	61.0	:	49.5	:
Serbia	37.7	4.9	39.7	-0.9	38.3	3.9
Turkey	26.1	1.6	36.7	-5.5	25.2	-4.8

A CLOSER LOOK: Reducing the number of pupils who cannot complete basic maths, science and reading tasks remains a challenge. Between 2012 and 2015, the EU actually moved further away from its target on basic skills. In most countries, pupils with a migrant background tend to perform worse than pupils without, signalling that investing in equal opportunities for all pupils remains a top priority in the EU.

Source: OECD (PISA 2009, 2018).
Notes: underachievement means failing Level 2 on the PISA scale for reading, mathematics or science. The trend depicted refers to the 2009-2018 change in percentage points. The comparability of PISA 2018 data on reading for Spain with those from earlier PISA assessments cannot be fully ensured. See section 2.2.1 of the Education and Training Monitor 2021 for more information (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

2. Low achievement in digital skills

EU-LEVEL TARGET: The share of low-achieving eight-graders in computer and information literacy should be less than 15%, by 2030.

BEST EU PERFORMERS: Czechia, Denmark, Poland

	Year	Low achievers	Boys	Girls
Czechia	2013	15.0	17.3	12.8
Denmark	2018	16.2	21.6	10.7
Germany	2013	21.4	24.1	18.6
	2018	33.2	36.5	29.6
	2013	29.2	32.9	25.3
France	2018	43.5	49.2	37.8
Croatia	2013	35.9	40.0	31.6
Lithuania	2013	45.1	49.1	40.9
Luxembourg	2018	50.6	55.4	45.0
Netherlands	2013	26.4	29.9	22.5
Poland	2013	25.3	27.6	23.0
Portugal	2018	33.5	36.0	30.8
Slovenia	2013	35.8	44.1	27.2
Slovakia	2013	32.8	36.3	29.3
Finland	2018	27.3	33.7	20.7
Norway	2013	24.0	:	:

A CLOSER LOOK: Over the past two years, the COVID-19 crisis has emphasised the importance of both basic and advanced digital skills for sustaining our economies and societies. Notably, digital skills became a prerequisite for participation in learning, working and socialising during the many lockdowns. There is a need to develop these skills from an early age in support of the digital transformation. ICILS data from 2013 and 2018 indicate that there is still some way to go to reach the 2030 EU-level target, and that there are gaps that should be addressed.

Source: IEA (ICILS 2013, 2018).
Notes: Underachievement is defined as performance below the level 2 threshold (492 score points) on the ICILS computer and information literacy scale. Italy participated in ICILS 2018, but the testing took place at the beginning of the school year and results are not comparable with those of other countries and are not shown. For country notes, see Table 3.4 in the respective international reports for ICILS 2013 and ICILS 2018.

3. Early childhood education and care

EU-LEVEL TARGET: At least 96% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education and care, by 2030.

BEST EU PERFORMERS: France, Ireland, Belgium
MOST PROGRESS 2010–2020: Cyprus, Ireland, Poland

	2019 Total	Trend	2019 Age 3	Age 4+
EU	**92.8**	**1.0**	**87.8**	**95.1**
Belgium	98.3	0.0	97.9	98.5
Bulgaria	79.9	-3.9	71.6	82.7
Czechia	86.3	9.5	77.6	90.7
Denmark	97.7	0.1	96.5	98.3
Germany	94.0	-1.8	90.4	95.8
Estonia	91.5	1.9	87.3	92.9
Ireland	100.0e	17.6	99.2e	100.0e
Greece	68.8	-16.5	34.9	85.6
Spain	97.3	0.7	96.1	97.8
France	100.0p	0.0	100.0p	100.0p
Croatia	79.4	11.8	71.5	81.8
Italy	93.6	-3.7	91.1	94.8
Cyprus	90.1	20.7	76.0	97.0
Latvia	94.1	2.8	89.1	95.9
Lithuania	89.6	6.2	84.5	91.3
Luxembourg	88.4	-1.5	69.0	97.9
Hungary	92.9	4.6	87.2	95.8
Malta	91.9	-7.5	89.0	94.9
Netherlands	90.5	-3.6	76.9	97.2
Austria	89.9	3.4	77.8	96.0
Poland	90.3e	13.9	77.6e	94.5e
Portugal	92.2d	3.5	83.7d	96.6
Romania	78.6	-5.5	71.0	82.3
Slovenia	92.1	4.2	89.1	93.6
Slovakia	77.8	5.5	68.3	82.6
Finland	88.8	8.8	80.4	91.4
Sweden	95.6	0.6	93.4	96.3
Iceland	96.8	0.7	96.3	97.0
Norway	97.1	0.4	96.4	97.4
Switzerland	49.4	2.7	2.4	73.3
Montenegro	:	:	:	:
North Macedonia	42.3	12.6	34.8	45.9
Serbia	67.3	4.2	57.3	:
Turkey	43.2	:	10.7	59.6

A CLOSER LOOK: In 2019, 92.8% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education participated in ECEC. During the preceding five years, increases can be observed in most countries. The target should be seen in conjunction with policy guidance on the quality of ECEC provision. Member States are working both on increasing the accessibility of ECEC and improving quality of staff and curricula.

Source: Eurostat (UOE), online data code [educ_uoe_enra21]; educ_uoe_enra20 (age 3); educ_uoe_enra10 (age 4+)].
Notes: the age for starting compulsory primary education is different from country to country. See Section 2.3 of the Education and Training Monitor 2021 for more information (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor). The trend depicted refers to the 2013-2019 change in percentage points.

4. Early leavers from education and training

EU-LEVEL TARGET: The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9%, by 2030.

BEST EU PERFORMERS: Croatia, Greece, Slovenia
MOST PROGRESS 2010-2020: Portugal, Spain, Greece

	2020 Total	Trend	2020	
			Males	Females
EU	**9.9**	**-3.9**	**11.8**	**8.0**
Belgium	8.1	-3.8	10.2	5.9
Bulgaria	12.8	0.2	13.4	12.1
Czechia	7.6	2.7	7.5	7.6
Denmark	9.3	-2.2	11.7	6.8
Germany	10.1bp	-1.7	11.8bp	8.3bp
Estonia	7.5	-3.5	9.2	5.8
Ireland	5.0	-6.9	5.4	4.7
Greece	3.8	-9.7	4.4	3.1
Spain	16.0	-12.2	20.2	11.6
France	8.0	-4.7	9.7	6.3
Croatia	2.2u	-3.0	2.4u	2.0u
Italy	13.1	-5.5	15.6	10.4
Cyprus	11.5	-1.2	15.0	8.4
Latvia	7.2	-5.7	9.5	4.7
Lithuania	5.6	-2.3	7.7	3.4u
Luxembourg	8.2	1.1	10.7	5.7
Hungary	12.1	1.3	12.9	11.3
Malta	12.6	-8.8	14.7	10.2
Netherlands	7.0	-3.1	8.7	5.3
Austria	8.1	-0.2	10.0	6.3
Poland	5.4	0.0	7.0	3.7
Portugal	8.9	-19.4	12.6	5.1
Romania	15.6	-3.7	14.7	16.6
Slovenia	4.1	-0.9	4.6u	3.4u
Slovakia	7.6	2.9	7.7	7.4
Finland	8.2	-2.1	9.4	7.0
Sweden	7.7	1.2	9.0	6.3
Iceland	14.8b	-7.8	17.8b	11.6b
Norway	9.9	-7.5	11.6	8.0
Switzerland	4.0	-2.7	4.7	3.3
Montenegro	3.6	:	:	:
North Macedonia	5.7	-9.8	5.7	5.8
Serbia	5.6	-2.7	5.4	5.8
Turkey	26.7	-16.4	27.5	25.8

A CLOSER LOOK: Reducing the share of young people who leave education and training before they have completed upper secondary education remains a priority of the EU. Young men are more likely to be early leavers than young women and there are striking disadvantages for foreign-born young people. Regional discrepancies are wide in many Member States.

Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS), online data code [edat_lfse_14].
Notes: the indicator covers 18 to 24 year-olds with ISCED 2 at most and who are no longer in formal or non-formal education and training. The trend depicted refers to the 2010-2020 change in percentage points.

5. Tertiary level attainment

EU-LEVEL TARGET: The share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45%, by 2030.

BEST EU PERFORMERS: Luxembourg, Ireland, Cyprus
MOST PROGRESS 2010-2020: Austria, Luxembourg, Portugal

	2020 Total	Trend	2020	
			Males	Females
EU	**40.5**	**8.3**	**35.2**	**46.0**
Belgium	48.5	4.7	40.8	56.2
Bulgaria	33.0	5.5	27.2	39.1
Czechia	33.0	10.4	26.1	40.4
Denmark	47.1	9.5	39.0	55.5
Germany	35.1bp	9.1	33.9bp	36.4bp
Estonia	43.1	4.9	32.7	54.7
Ireland	58.4	8.8	54.5	62.2
Greece	43.7	13.1	36.7	51.0
Spain	47.4	7.1	41.3	53.5
France	49.4	6.7	45.9	52.8
Croatia	36.6	10.8	27.5	45.8
Italy	28.9	8.1	22.9	35.0
Cyprus	57.8	9.7	47.3	67.8
Latvia	44.2	9.5	33.8	55.3
Lithuania	56.2	9.9	45.6	68.1
Luxembourg	60.6	16.4	55.0	66.3
Hungary	30.7	4.6	25.3	36.4
Malta	40.1	15.8	36.3	44.7
Netherlands	52.3	12.0	47.5	57.1
Austria	41.4	20.7	37.3	45.7
Poland	42.4	5.3	32.7	52.6
Portugal	41.9	16.4	34.6	49.0
Romania	24.9	4.2	21.7	28.3
Slovenia	45.4	14.1	35.8	56.6
Slovakia	39.0	15.0	29.3	49.2
Finland	43.8	4.6	35.9	52.2
Sweden	49.2	6.9	40.6	58.3
Iceland	41.7b	5.5	34.0b	50.4b
Norway	50.9	5.9	41.7	60.6
Switzerland	53.0	15.6	50.8	55.3
Montenegro	40.4	:	35.9	45.0
North Macedonia	37.7	15.9	31.6	44.1
Serbia	32.6	13.7	26.1	39.3
Turkey	36.2	19.4	35.5	36.8

A CLOSER LOOK: The tertiary level attainment rate in the EU is high, but with substantial differences between and within countries. On average in the EU, there is a large gap between the tertiary level attainment rate of women and men, in favour of the former. The social dimension of higher education requires urgent attention, notably to support participation of disadvantaged groups.

6. VET graduates' work based learning

EU-LEVEL TARGET: The share of recent graduates from VET benefiting from exposure to work-based learning during their vocational education and training should be at least 60%, by 2025.

Work-based learning helps young people and adults make smoother transitions from school or from unemployment to the labour market. Nevertheless, data underpinning the EU-level target by 2030 will only be available as of 2022. In the field of VET, other important indicator domains concern the employability of recent graduates and the learning mobility during their formal education. The former reveals that 76.1% of recent VET graduates were employed in 2020, outperforming their peers from medium-level general education.

7. Participation of adults in learning

EU-LEVEL TARGET: At least 47% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months, by 2025.

The COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted the already slow progress in adult learning in the EU. The pandemic did, however, add momentum to adult learning as a policy objective. Member States have agreed on an EEA target of at least 47% adult learning by 2025. When endorsing the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan at the 2021 Porto Summit, a 2030 target of 60% was added to that. Both targets are based on a new approach to measuring adult learning, which will first be applied in 2022.

Participation in adult learning was a target in previous EU strategic frameworks for cooperation in education and training, but always focused on the narrow window of four weeks preceding the survey . The current EU-level target, on the other hand, refers to the twelve months preceding the survey.

The twelve-month reference period makes it possible to cover all learning experiences, providing an overview of adult participation in learning closer to today's reality. Indeed, it has become more and more common for adults to attend (very) short courses, seminars and other learning experiences, provided in-company, on the market or by authorities at several levels and a variety of providers, from specialised centres to social partners and civil society organisations. Such participation may not be accounted for when applying the four week window, but the shift to a twelve month window is likely to capture it.

General notes

The percentage point trends and progress shown in this leaflet are calculated with 1-decimal figures and do not exclude any intermediate breaks in series.

: = data either not available or not reliable
due to very small sample size
b = break in time series
d = definition differs
e = estimate
p = provisional
u = low reliability

EU-Level targets

Reference levels of European average performance in education and training defined in the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) adopted in February 2021.

ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education (2011)

0 Early childhood education

1 Primary education

2 Lower secondary education

3 Upper secondary education

4 Post-secondary non-tertiary education

5 Short-cycle tertiary education

6 Bachelor's or equivalent level

7 Master's or equivalent level

8 Doctoral or equivalent level

Member States that have reached the EU-level target for the given year

For further descriptions, analysis and notes see the Education and Training Monitor 2021

ec.europa.eu/education/monitor