



# The European Union has set new education and training targets for 2030

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# NOTE D'INFORMATION

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## The European Union has set new education and training targets for 2030

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► In early 2021, as the Education and Training 2020 strategic framework ceased to be in effect, the European Union set new targets for 2030. At this stage, the average performance of the 27 EU Member States is lagging behind on each of the targets and, in view of the available results, the targets on students' skills seem particularly ambitious. Compared with the results of EU countries, France has more young children in education, fewer early school leavers and higher access to tertiary qualifications. It has also already exceeded collective targets in these areas. However, in terms of literacy, France, like almost all European countries, is far behind the common target for 2030.

► According to the Council of the European Union, the new objectives on education and training set for 2030 should be considered as "reference levels of the European average performance" (Council Resolution, No. 2021/C 66/01: "Find out more"). They will be monitored at the European level, using comparable data and taking into account the diversity of situations in the Member States, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and training systems. The Council also invites countries to set their own national targets.

Of the seven objectives and indicators defined by the Council, the first five are already suitable for statistical monitoring. The last two objectives, on work-based learning and adult training, will be monitored via the European Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) using a methodology that is currently being redesigned and that will deliver the first results mainly from 2022 onwards [↘ see box](#).

At this stage, the average performance of the 27 EU Member States is behind on each of the five targets presented [↘ see box](#), **Figure 1**. In France in particular, the results exceed the common targets for participation in education and training and for levels of educational attainment. For example:

- In 2019, 100% of children between the age of 3 and the starting age for compulsory primary education participate in formal education in France, while the European target is 96% or more (the EU average is 93%).
- In 2020, 8% of 18-24 year olds in France have at most a lower secondary education qualification and are neither in education nor

in training (the European target is less than 9% and the EU average is 10%).

- In 2020, 49% of individuals aged 25-34 have a higher education degree in France, the European target being 45% or more (40% on average in the EU).

On the other hand, the results in France, as in many other countries, lag behind the collective targets for students' skills:

- In 2018, about 21% of 15-year-old students in France do not have a sufficient level of reading, mathematics and science literacy (the European target is less than 15% and the EU averages are above 22% for all skills).
- In 2018, 44% of students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade (*classe de 4<sup>e</sup>*) do not have the expected digital literacy skills in France, while the European target is less than 15% (the EU average is not yet calculated at this stage due to a low number of countries having data).

### More young children in education in France than elsewhere in Europe

In 2021, the European Union decided to make its target for the participation of young children in education more demanding than in the Education and Training 2020 framework. As considerable progress has been made in this area by most countries over the past decade, it was decided that the target would now be set at 96% instead of 95%, and that a younger population (from the age of 3, instead of 4) would be monitored.

In 2019, the year of the last observation, 93.3% of children between the age of 3 and

the starting age for compulsory primary education participate in formal education in the 27 EU Member States on average. Only a few Member States exceeded the 96% target, namely Belgium, Denmark and Spain, while France and Ireland are the only ones with a 100% participation rate [↘ Figure 2](#).

Some countries are still far from the collective target at this stage: Greece (68.8%), the Slovak Republic (77.8%) and Romania (78.6%). However, the idea of the importance of early schooling is gaining ground in Europe. For example, Greece has introduced a reform from 2018 to 2021 that aims to lower the starting age for compulsory education from 5 to 4.

### A limited share of early school leavers in France and an equally favourable trend for the EU as a whole

The objective of reducing early leaving from education and training has been central to the "Education and Training 2020" framework as a key target. Moreover, it may have contributed to a significant improvement in the situation in many countries. For example, the share of school leavers decreased from 28.3% to 8.9% between 2010 and 2020 in Portugal, and from 12.7% to 8% in France. The EU average rate has fallen from 13.8% to 10.1% over the same period, i.e. it is now within 1 percentage point of the 2030 target, and 18 countries are now above this benchmark (i.e. less than 9% of early leavers). It should be pointed out that this does not only refer to school leavers in 2020, a year marked by the Covid-19 crisis which put European education systems to the test,

## Box: EU 2030 targets and results

**(1) Participation in early childhood education and care:** By 2030, at least 96% of children between the age of 3 and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education and care.

**(2) Early leavers from education and training:** by 2030, the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9%.

**(3.a., b., c.) Low achieving 15-year-olds in basic skills:** by 2030, the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science is expected to be less than 15%.

**(4) Low achieving eight-graders in digital literacy:** by 2030, the share of students in grade 8 with low digital literacy scores should be less than 15%.

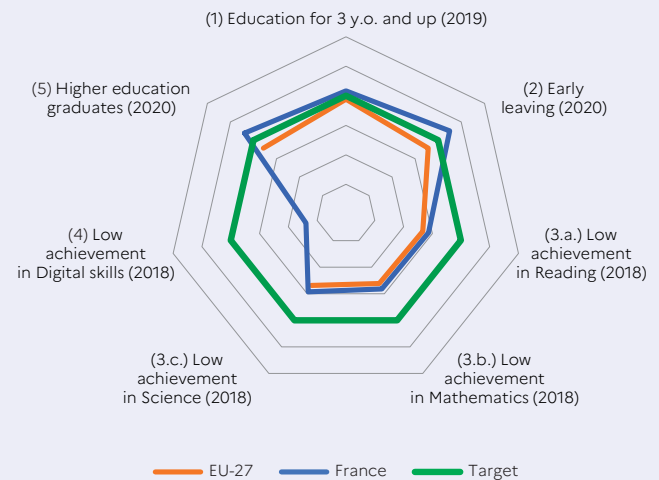
**(5) Tertiary graduates:** by 2030, the share of 25-34 year olds with tertiary education should be at least 45%.

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**Exposure of VET graduates to work-based learning:** by 2025, the share of young VET graduates from upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education who have benefited from work-based learning during their training should be at least 60% (monitored from the end of 2021 and in 2022).

**Participation of adult in learning:** By 2025, at least 47% of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning (formal or non-formal) in the last 12 months (monitored from 2022).

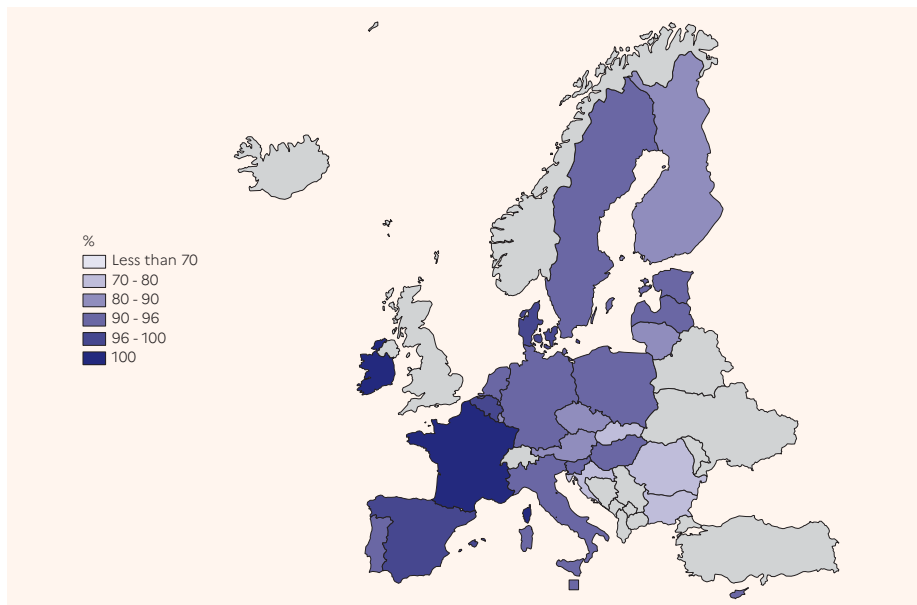
### 1 Targets and results for EU-27 and France



**Source:** Eurostat: UOE data collection (education for 3 y.o. and up) and labour force survey EU-LFS (early leaving and tertiary education attainment) ; OCDE: PISA (low achievement in reading, mathematics and science); IEA: Icils (low achievement in digital skills).

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### 2 Education participation rate of children between the age of 3 and the starting age for compulsory primary education, 2019<sup>1</sup>



1. 2018 data for Portugal. See "For more information".

**Source:** Eurostat, UOE data collection; [educ\_uoe\_enra21].

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but to all individuals aged between 18 and 24 who, in 2020, were in the situation described above (being without qualifications and not in training), regardless of the year in which this situation of leaving without a qualification occurred [Figure 3](#).

In Europe, young women are less likely than young men to leave education and training too early: 8.1% of women aged 18-24 have low educational attainment and are not participating in education and training in 2020 in the 27 EU countries on average, compared

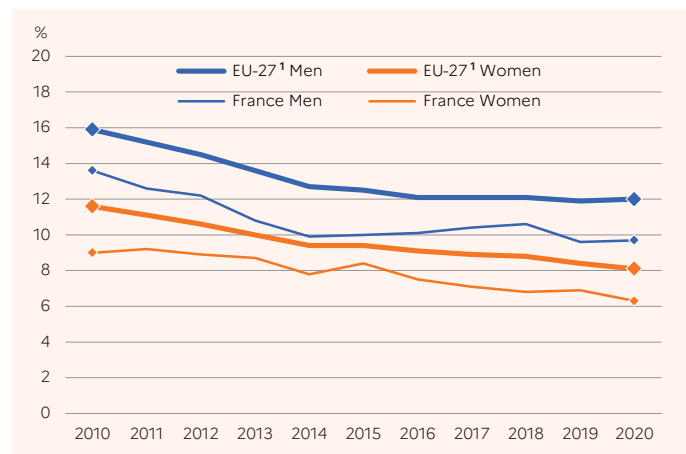
to 12% of men. However, during the 2010 decade, the gender gap has narrowed significantly in many countries. In France, for example, 9% of women were early leavers in 2010 compared to 13.6% of men (a gap of 5 percentage points); there are 6.3% of women compared to 9.7% of men in the same situation in 2020 (a gap of 3 points). Denmark and Spain followed a similar trend. In a few other countries, the gender gap has increased. In Germany, for example, it has increased from 1.5 percentage points in 2010 to 4 percentage points in 2020 in favour of women.

The new European early leaving target (less than 9% by 2030) and its monitoring indicator are complemented by another indicator: the share of 20-24 year olds with at least upper secondary education. Related to the previous one, this indicator counts all graduates year after year (and not only graduates in a given year), but refers to a slightly different age group and does not take into account participation in training. Again, the change between 2010 and 2020 in the European Union is positive overall: the EU-27 average has risen from 79.1% graduates to 84%, and the advantage remains with women [Figure 4](#). France contributes to this favourable overall trend, as its 'stock' of graduates has risen from 83% in 2010 to 89.7% in 2020. In five countries, including Croatia, Greece and Ireland, the rate exceeds 90% in 2020. On the other hand, in a few countries, including the Netherlands and Denmark, where some secondary education programmes are long, young people are enrolled beyond the age of 20, which brings down the graduation rates in the age group selected (20-24 years).

### Still large proportions of pupils with low skills in Europe

The target on basic skills for 15-year-olds (in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy) remains in the 2030 European agenda as it was in the 2020 agenda, since it had not been achieved by the EU. A new target on digital skills has also been set for 2030.

### 3 Change in the proportion of 18-24-year old early leavers from education and training by gender between 2010 and 2020

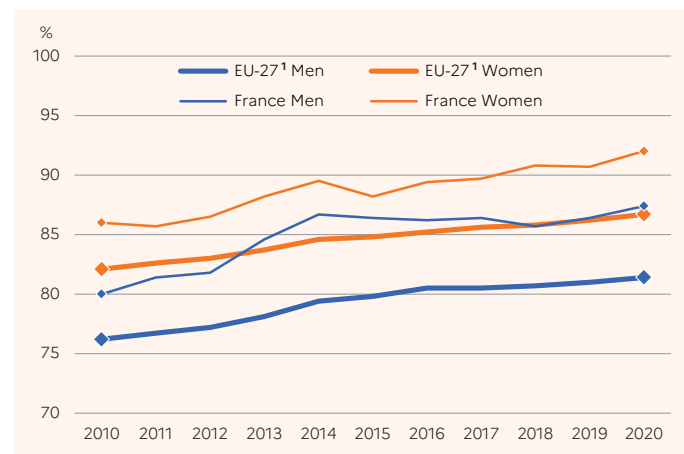


1. Provisional data for the EU-27 average in 2020.

Source: Eurostat, EU-LFS survey, [edat\_lfse\_14]; MENJS-DEPP, *Repères et références statistiques 2020*.

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### 4 Change in the proportion of 20-24 year olds with at least upper secondary education by gender between 2010 and 2020



1. Provisional data for the EU-27 average in 2020.

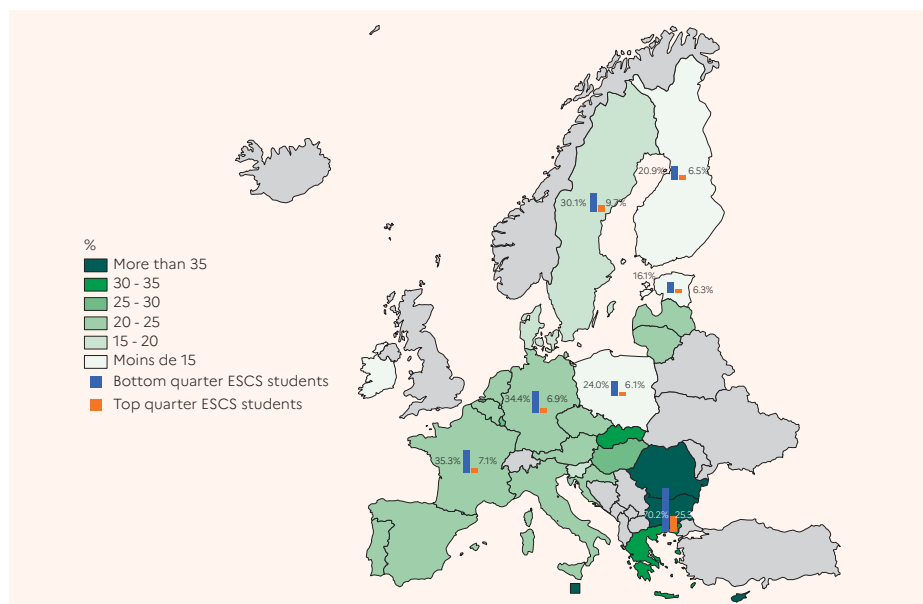
Source: Eurostat, EU-LFS survey, [edat\_lfse\_03].

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In the 27 Member States, on average, 22.5% of 15-year-old students do not reach the minimum competency threshold in the 'major' domain of the PISA 2018 assessment, namely reading literacy ('Find out more'). The situation is similar in the other two domains assessed (mathematical and scientific literacy), which are 'minor' domains in 2018, where the European average is 22.9% and 22.3% respectively **Figure 5**. The EU would like each of these proportions to be below 15%.

In France, the situation is similar to that of the 27 EU countries on average, although slightly better: there are about 21% of pupils with low proficiency in each of the three areas assessed in France. Germany is close to France, but Spain and Italy are in more difficult situations. Only Estonia, Finland and Poland had less than 15% of students with low proficiency in all three domains in PISA 2018, followed closely by Ireland, Denmark and Slovenia.

### 5 15-year-olds with insufficient proficiency in reading literacy: overall averages and averages by family economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) quartile (PISA 2018)



In 2018, in the OECD PISA survey, 20.9% of 15-year-old students in France had low reading literacy skills. In France, 35.3% of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have low skills, while the rate is 7.1% for very advantaged young people. See "For more information".

Source: OECD: PISA 2018, Tables I.B1.1, I.B4.2, I.B4.3, II.B1.2.6; Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, *PISA 2018. Resultados de lectura en España, 2020*.

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In all EU countries, even those with the highest averages, pupils' skills vary according to their background as identified by the index of social, economic and cultural status ("Find out more"). Indeed, among pupils from very disadvantaged backgrounds, the proportion of those who demonstrate low skills is systematically higher than among very advantaged pupils. Extreme cases can be found in Bulgaria, where 70.2% of very disadvantaged pupils have low reading literacy skills (25.3% among the advantaged). In contrast, in Estonia, only 16.1% of disadvantaged pupils do not reach the threshold of competence in this subject (6.3% among advantaged

pupils). In France, 35.3% of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are low proficient (34.4% in Germany), compared to 7.1% among pupils from advantaged backgrounds (6.9% in Germany).

Finally, the EU has set a new specific target for 2030 for young people's digital skills ("Find out more"). The Icils survey, carried out in 2018 by the association IEA among pupils in grade 8 (*classe de 4<sup>e</sup>* in France), delivered the results for six EU countries that had participated<sup>1</sup>. Although it is impossible to calculate a European average for such a small number of countries, it is important

to note that each of these six countries exceeds the maximum proportion of pupils with low digital literacy skills set by the European Union, i.e. 15%: the averages range from 16.2% in Denmark to 43.5% in France to 50.6% in Luxembourg **Figure 6**.

In the same year, 2018, the OECD Talis survey identified the need for skills in information and communication technology (ICT) for teaching among lower secondary school teachers ("Find out more").

1. Italy also participated in Icils 2018, but students were tested at the beginning of the school year. The Italian results are therefore not comparable to those of other countries.

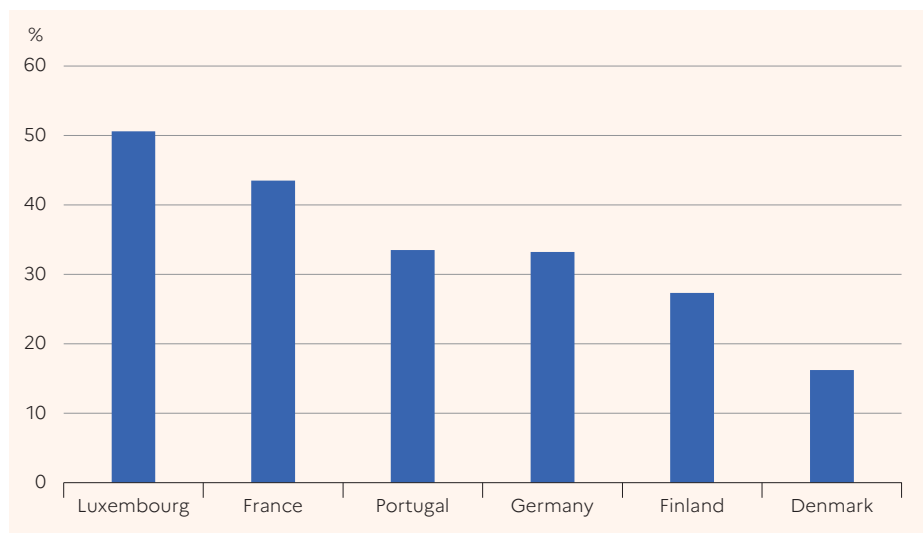
In Denmark, where few students lack digital literacy skills according to Icils, a significant proportion of teachers (39.5%) say they are ready to use ICT, compared with 28.7% in France and 21.5% in Finland according to Talis. At the same time, only 11.2% of teachers in Denmark declared a significant need for training in the use of ICT in Talis 2018, compared to 22.9% in France. These links should be taken with caution, however, since in Finland, despite low proportions of students with insufficient proficiency, many teachers report training needs in ICT for teaching (19%).

### Varying proportions of young people with tertiary qualifications in Europe, but equally diverse education systems

At the end of its Education and Training 2020 agenda, the European Union came in slightly above the target of 40% of tertiary graduates among 30-34 year olds. It was then decided to tighten up this target for 2030. In order to make the indicator more sensitive to the transition from secondary to tertiary education and to the acquisition of degrees within the theoretical duration of the programmes, the age range was lowered (now 25-34 years). In addition, the target has been raised to 45% of graduates. In 2020, the average country score is 39% and is therefore behind the 2030 target.

France (49.4% of graduates among 25-34 year-olds), like nine other countries including Ireland (58.4%), the Netherlands (52.3%), Sweden (49.2%) and Spain (47.4%), presents a result in 2020 that is particularly in line with the European strategy. Among these countries, which already have more than 45% of graduates, France is the country with the smallest gender gap (52.8% women and 45.9% men, i.e. a gap of 7 percentage points). Thus, in the 27 Member States as a whole, women are more likely than men to be higher education graduates, with an average gap of 11 percentage points. In some other countries, higher education graduates are notably rare among men: in Italy, 22.9% of men are graduates compared to 35% of women.

### 6 Proportion of students in grade 8 with insufficient digital literacy skills (Icils 2018)



Source: IEA, Icils survey 2018.

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However, important specificities of education systems remain outside the scope of this indicator. While the proportion of tertiary graduates is relatively low in Germany (33%), the proportion of pupils enrolled in post-secondary non-tertiary programmes, i.e. ISCED 4, is significantly higher than in any other European country ('Find out more'). Indeed, in Germany, ISCED 4 students represent 5.3% of all students from primary to tertiary level, compared to 3.5% in Poland, 2.4% in Belgium and 0.2% in France (Eurostat). Many young people in this country thus have an educational level beyond secondary education, even if they do not go on to higher education.

Also, some countries with high proportions of graduates rely more than others on short cycle tertiary programmes, which in France lead to qualifications such as BTS, DUT, DMA or professional paramedical and social diplomas. Indeed, among students in all tertiary education in 2019 (ISCED 5 to 8), 21% are enrolled in ISCED 5 in Spain, 20% in France and 17% in Austria, compared with only 0.3% in Germany, for example (Eurostat: 'Find out more').

Finally, in a number of European countries, gap years after secondary education are common, with early employment followed by a return to education. In these cases, young people go on to higher education later. The lowering of the age group - 25-34 years for the 2030 target, instead of 30-34 years for the 2020 target - then brings the proportions down, i.e. a mechanical loss in 2020 of 6 percentage points in Finland and 3 points in Sweden. ■

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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