Moreover, drawing on the lessons from implementing policies in the last decade[179], the Commission announced two new initiatives to promote the inclusive dimension of school education: the *Pathways to School Success* initiative and the establishment of an expert group to develop proposals for creating supportive learning environments for groups of students at risk of low achievement and for supporting well-being at school[180].

The "Pathways to School Success" initiative is expected to focus on (1) helping all learners reach a baseline level of proficiency in basic skills; (2) promoting educational success strategies at national level, including language sensitive teaching; and (3) stimulating a safe and supportive school environment. In the context of early leavers from education and training, this will create new momentum for the triple objective of prevention, intervention and compensation.

2.5 Tertiary level attainment

In a nutshell

Member States have agreed on an EU-level target stating that the share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45% by 2030[181]. This supersedes the ET2020 40% benchmark, which was achieved in 2019[182]. In 2020, this share stood at 40.5% in the EU, but with substantial differences between and within countries. Eleven countries have tertiary educational attainment rates above the EU-level target. The average share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment is 10.8 pps higher among women (46.0%) than it is among men (35.2%). Moreover, there are clear discrepancies between urban and rural areas; the average rate in cities (50.9%) being substantially higher than it is in rural areas (28.9%).

2.5.1 Progress towards the EU-level target

On average, the share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment was 40.5% in the EU in 2020 (Figure 59). The share has increased steadily across the EU since 2010, with an overall increase of 8.3 pps. The difference between countries is pronounced, spanning from 24.9% in Romania to 60.6% in Luxembourg. Eleven countries have tertiary educational attainment rates above the EU-level target and a further nine are within five pps of the target value. In contrast, only three countries had attainment rates higher than the present target in 2010, underlining the development over the past decade.

Box 22: Expanding the tertiary vocational system in Italy

The Italian government is taking steps to expand the existing network of Istituti Tecnici Superiori (ITS), tertiary-level vocational institutions that offer graduates excellent employment prospects, but have so far remained limited in scope. A reform is under way with the aim of strengthening the ITS organisational and educational model. It provides for a stronger role for business within the ITS foundations and simplifies the recruitment of trainers from the business world. The

179 Since 2011, the Commission and Member States developed a policy framework to reduce early school leaving, with the adoption and implementation of a Council Recommendation on Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving. The policy framework is based on a combination of prevention measures to reduce the overall risk for young people to leave education and training before they have completed upper secondary education, intervention measures at the level of the educational institutions, and compensation measures to support young early leavers and offer them routes to re-enter education and training and gain qualifications.

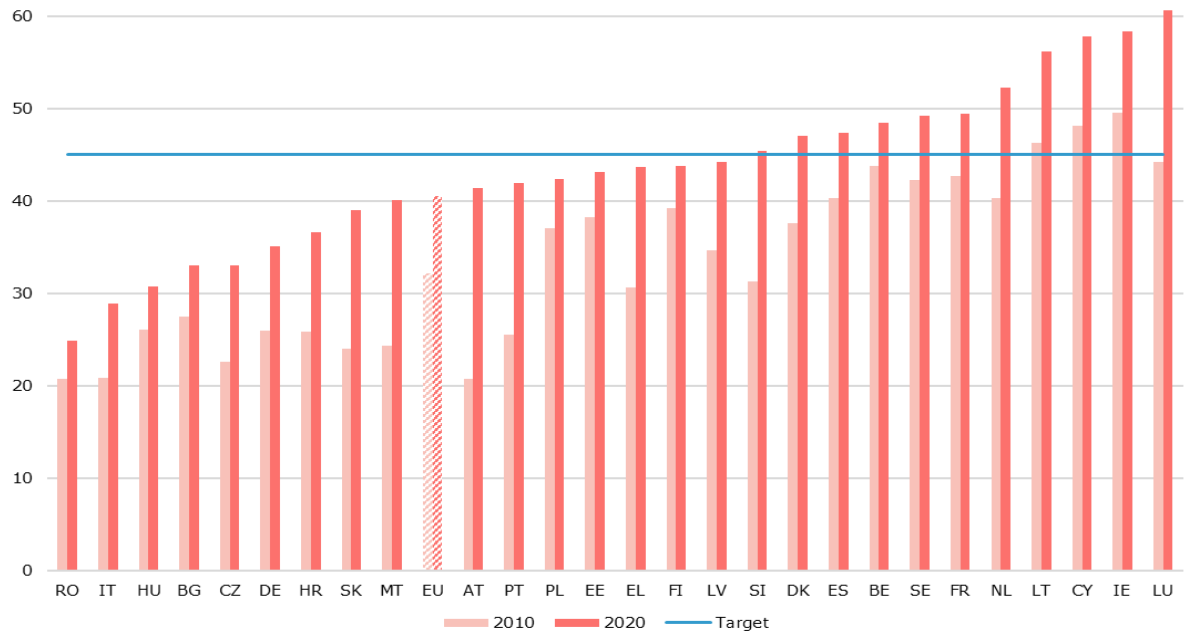
180 Cf. European Commission Communication on achieving a European Education Area by 2025.

181 The share of 25-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment refers to the share of this age bracket who have successfully completed tertiary education (ISCED levels 5-8).

182 The reference population for the ET2020 benchmark was the age cohort 30-34 years. In comparison, the tertiary educational attainment rate for the 25-34 years cohort stood at 39.5% in 2019.

reform also provides for a better integration of the ITS in the system of vocational tertiary education, and stronger coordination with the recently introduced tertiary professional degrees. Coordination between vocational schools, ITS and businesses will be ensured by involving schools, universities and businesses. The objective is to double the number of ITS students (currently 18 750) and graduates (currently 5 250) by 2026. The reform is backed by funding of €48 m for 2021 and €68 m from 2022, in addition to €1.5 bn from the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Figure 59: Tertiary educational attainment 25-34 year-olds by country, 2010 and 2020 [%]



Source: Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey. Online data code: [EDAT_LFSE_03].

Note: Break in time series: 2011 (BG, CZ, MT, NL, PT, SK), 2013 (FR, NL), 2014 (all countries), 2015 (LU), 2016 (DK), 2017 (BG, DK, IE), 2018 (SE), 2019 (NL), 2020 (DE). Provisional data: DE (2020).

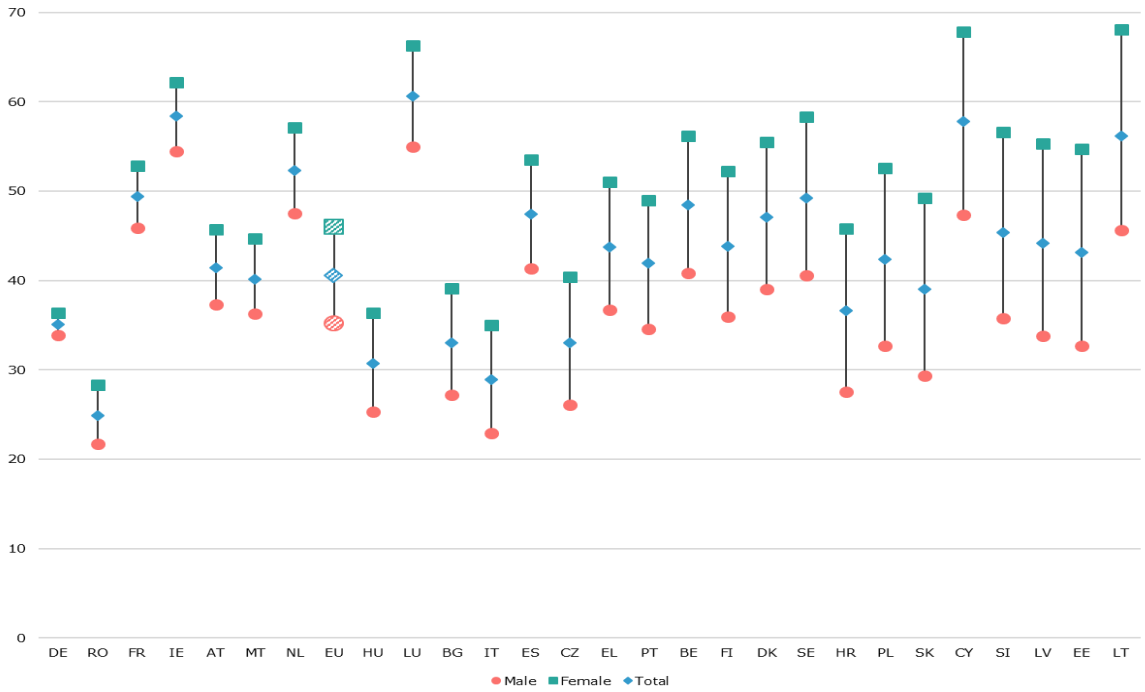
Austria, Luxembourg, Portugal, Malta and Slovakia are amongst the countries having made most progress since 2010, seeing increases in the tertiary educational attainment rate in excess of 15 pps. Looking at the relative increase in the attainment rate, Austria made most progress by doubling the rate[183]. At the other end of the spectrum, we find Estonia, Belgium, Hungary, Finland and Romania, where the increase since 2010 has been less than five pps. This only presents part of the picture, however. Estonia, Belgium and Finland already had high attainment rates in 2010, and by 2020 had attainment rates of 43.1%, 48.5% and 43.8%, respectively. In contrast, Hungary (30.7%) and Romania (24.9%) are amongst the Member States with the lowest attainment rates, having made very little progress since 2010.

[183] The increase in AT is in part due to the reclassification of programmes spanning levels in the transition from ISCED 1997 to ISCED 2011 in 2014.

Figure 60 compares the attainment rates of men and women. The average share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment is 10.8 pps higher among women (46%) than it is among men (35.2%). In all countries, women are more likely to have completed tertiary education than men are. The most striking differences are present in Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia and Cyprus, where the difference in the attainment rate exceeds 20 pps. Germany has the lowest discrepancy between men and women, with 2.5 pps, and is the only country where the difference is less than five pps.

Interestingly, the size of the gap between men and women does not appear to be associated with high or low levels of educational attainment at the country level. The educational attainment rate in the five countries with the widest gaps were all in excess of 40%. Comparably, three out of five countries with the smallest gaps also had attainment rates above 40%, the exceptions being Germany and Romania.

Figure 60: Tertiary educational attainment 25-34 year-olds by sex, 2020 [%]



Source: Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey. Online data code: [EDAT_LFSE_03].

Note: Sorted in ascending order according to the gap between women and men. Provisional data for DE.

In all but seven countries, the 45% EU-level target has been surpassed in the female population. Looking at the male population, this is only the case in six countries. Moreover, 18 countries have yet to reach a tertiary educational attainment rate above 40% for men. The average gap between men and women in the EU has increased by 1.7 pps between 2010 (9.1 pps) and 2020 (10.8). Only five countries (Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Latvia and Finland[184]) have seen a reduction in the gap in this period. Going forward, reducing the gender gap in tertiary educational attainment will have to be addressed if the 2030 target is to be reached.

[184] The largest reductions are present in IE (-4.9 pp), BG (-4.3) and FR (-2.0) where there has been a reduction of more than 2 percentage points between 2010 and 2020. Only a minor reduction took place in Finland (-0.4 percentage points) and Latvia (-0.2).

2.5.2 Spotlight on vulnerable groups

In 2020, the average rate of tertiary educational attainment in the EU was highest in cities (50.9%), while the lowest was reported in rural areas (28.9%). This is consistent across all countries[185].

The average gap in the EU between rural areas and cities is more than 20 pps. Moreover, the difference exceeds 30 pps in six countries (Luxembourg, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Denmark and Poland). In only five countries is the gap smaller than 15 pps (Cyprus, Slovenia, Spain, Italy and Belgium).

Considering the urban-rural divide in more detail, there is a marked increase in the gender gap with reduced degrees of urbanisation. In cities, the average gap between the attainment rates of women (55.5%) and men (46.3%) stood at 9.2 pps in the EU in 2020. This gap widens when looking at towns and suburbs, where the average gap between women (40.0%) and men (29.2%) was 10.8 pps. The lowest attainment rates, and the largest gap, is found in rural areas, where the gap between women (35.6%) and men (22.6%) was 13.0 pps.

Figure 61: Tertiary educational attainment of 25-34 year-olds by degree of urbanisation and country of birth, 2020 [%]

	Total	Degree of urbanisation			Country of birth			
		Cities	Towns and suburbs	Rural areas	Native-born	Born in another EU country	Born outside the EU	Total foreign-born
EU	**40.5**	**50.9**	**34.5**	**28.9**	**41.3**	**40.4**	**34.4**	**36**
BE	48.5	51.8	46.4	46.5	51.1	48.2	34.0	39.6
BG	33.0	46.6	25.6	13.0	32.9	:	:	:
CZ	33.0	47.0	27.8	24.1	32.3	50.8	41.3	46.3
DK	47.1	61.7	39.2	30.1	47.1	61.9	40.7	47.3
DE	35.1	43.2	29.5	25.4	35.1	38.9	33.3	35.0
EE	43.1	53.1	32.2	31.9	41.7	84.2	60.5	65.6
IE	58.4	68.4	52.1	49.5	56.0	47.7	73.6	63.2
EL	43.7	50.0	46.1	29.1	46.2	25.1	14.8	16.2
ES	47.4	52.8	40.5	40.8	52.4	35.0	31.1	31.9
FR	49.4	58.2	45.1	36.0	49.5	55.2	48.0	49.1
HR	36.6	51.3	36.9	24.8	36.2	45.2	42.0	42.5
IT	28.9	34.6	26.6	23.3	32.2	12.3	14.0	13.6
CY	57.8	63.1	50.5	49.2	68.7	34.4	39.9	37.9
LV	44.2	54.7	40.9	31.6	44.0	:	49.9	51.6
LT	56.2	68.3	47.0	41.5	56.1	:	62.6	62.0
LU	60.6	87.3	51.3	48.8	48.6	70.5	65.9	69.0
HU	30.7	47.7	27.8	15.2	30.2	46.2	48.6	47.4
MT	40.1	37.7	42.8	38.5	37.7	51.3	46.3	48.1
NL	52.3	57.9	43.2	38.5	52.8	55.6	45.0	47.9
AT	41.4	50.8	35.8	34.9	42.1	49.2	31.6	39.7
PL	42.4	60.3	36.9	29.8	42.2	65.4	62.6	63.1
PT	41.9	49.9	39.0	29.6	42.5	47.9	34.0	36.7
RO	24.9	45.9	19.3	8.0	24.8	:	:	:
SI	45.4	54.9	43.8	41.9	48.2	25.2	22.9	23.0
SK	39.0	58.2	36.8	31.0	39.1	:	:	:
FI	43.8	51.9	38.3	29.1	45.2	31.7	32.2	32.1
SE	49.2	60.9	42.8	33.4	49.9	69.0	42.2	47.2

Source: Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey. Online data codes: [edat_lfs_9913] and [edat_lfs_9912].

Note: Provisional data: DE. Low reliability: MT (rural areas). Confidential: BG, LT, RO (born outside the EU). Unreliable: EE, EL, HR, LV, PL, SI, SK (born in another EU country); BG, LT, RO, SK (born outside the EU); BG, LT, RO, SK (total foreign born).

[185] In BE, EE and ES there is a negligible difference between "towns and suburbs" and "rural areas". Data on rural areas in Malta have low reliability due to the sample size, and is thus not referenced in the text.

The educational attainment rate is generally lower for people born outside the EU compared to people born in the EU. In 2020, the EU average tertiary educational attainment rate for 25-34 year-olds stood at 41.3% for native-born people and 40.4% for people born in another EU country than the reporting country. The EU average tertiary educational attainment rate for people born outside the EU, in contrast, was 34.4%.

While there is some variability at the country level, the general trend is that the rate of tertiary educational attainment for people born outside the EU is lower than it is for native-born people and people born in another EU country[186]. The widest gaps between native-born people and people born outside the EU are present in Greece (31.4 pps), Cyprus (28.8 pps), Slovenia (25.3 pps), Spain (21.3 pps), Italy (18.2 pps) and Belgium (17.1 pps), where more than 15 pps separate the two groups. Italy (14.0%), Greece (14.8%) and Slovenia (22.9%) have the lowest overall tertiary attainment rates for people born outside the EU, the only countries where the rate for this group is below 30%.

Notable exceptions to the general trend of people born outside the EU having lower attainment rates include Poland, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland and Luxembourg, where the gap is in the opposite direction. In these countries, the tertiary attainment rate is in excess of 15 pps higher for people born outside the EU compared to native-born people.

2.5.3 Spotlight on learning mobility

The opportunity for learners to move abroad to study ('mobility') is a key element of EU cooperation and a tool to enhance quality and inclusion in education and training. It is associated with a greater likelihood to work abroad in the future, higher earnings and lower unemployment. Efforts to remove existing obstacles and barriers to all types of learning mobility will be central in moving towards the establishment of a European Education Area by 2025. Moreover, generating more opportunities for student mobility and young researchers by encouraging closer and deeper cooperation between higher education institutions will be a priority over the next decade under the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and under the European Research Area.

While the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have significantly affected the process of internationalising higher education, it will take time before the full effect of the pandemic is reflected in data on learning mobility – especially for graduates[187]. In 2019, the academic year before COVID-19, 14.4% of higher education graduates in the EU were mobile, had completed part or all of their studies abroad (Figure 62)[188]. The highest shares of such graduates were present in

[186] Data for 2020 on the tertiary education attainment rate for people born in another EU country is not available for all countries due to confidential data (BG, LT and RO) or low reliability (LV and SK). Low reliability of the data limits the analysis for a selection of countries (EE, EL, HR, PL and SI). Similarly, data is not available for some countries on people born outside the EU due to low reliability (BG, RO and SK) or limits the analysis (LT).

[187] The explanation for this is twofold: firstly, data is published 1.5 years after the end of the reference period, meaning that data for the academic year 2019/20 is not available before 2022. Second, the nature of graduate mobility, in contrast to student mobility, results in data only being generated when a degree is completed. In other words, longer term effects will take time to manifest themselves in the graduate data.

[188] Statistics on learning mobility have been calculated according to the procedure outlined in the methodological manual on learning mobility in tertiary education. We can distinguish between two types of mobile graduates. Credit-mobile graduates are those who have had a temporary study period and/or work placement abroad and return to their 'home institution' to complete their degree. Degree-mobile graduates are those whose country of origin (i.e. the country where their upper secondary qualification was obtained) is different from the country in which they graduate. While data on credit mobility is collected in the countries to which students returned after their credit mobility stay, data on degree-mobile graduates is collected at the level of the destination country. Consequently, the calculation of outwardly mobile EU graduates relies on figures provided by all EU and non-EU destination countries. For an estimation of the effect of missing data on the calculations, see Flisi, S. and Sanchez-Barrioluengo, M. (2018). Learning Mobility II: An estimation of the benchmark. A JRC Science for Policy Report.

Luxembourg (88.1%), Cyprus (35.9%), the Netherlands (26.4%) and Slovakia (21.1%), with more than 20% of the graduates having spent time abroad.

In a further 17 EU Member States, between 10 and 20% of the graduates participated in cross-border mobility. Only five countries had a total mobility rate below 10% (Poland, Slovenia, Romania, Croatia and Hungary), a common denominator being a low share of graduates with temporary experience abroad at the bachelor's level[189].

Figure 62: Outward degree and credit mobility of graduates by ISCED level, 2019 [%]

	Total mobility (credit+degree)					Credit mobility					Degree mobility				
	5-8	5	6	7	8	5-8	5	6	7	8	5-8	5	6	7	8
EU	14.4	5.1	11.8	18.6	33.9	9.8	2.6	8.3	12.7	18.9	4.6	2.5	3.5	5.9	15.0
BE	10.8	:	10.4	11.8	:	6.6	:	7.7	5.8	:	4.2	6.6	2.7	6.0	11.5
BG	10.7	:	11.6	8.0	16.5	1.5	:	1.5	1.3	3.8	9.2	:	10.0	6.7	12.7
CZ	12.6	55.6	9.5	14.5	20.6	7.4	0.0	5.0	10.1	13.3	5.1	55.6	4.5	4.4	7.3
DK	11.3	3.4	11.3	14.1	27.2	9.5	2.8	10.0	10.9	20.5	1.8	0.7	1.3	3.3	6.7
DE	8.6	:	13.6	22.5	:	11.6	:	10.6	15.2	:	4.7	10.6	2.9	7.3	9.6
EE	16.3	:	14.5	15.3	:	5.4	:	5.6	5.6	:	10.9	:	8.8	9.7	23.7
IE	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	6.0	3.8	3.6	11.0	21.4
EL	12.7	:	5.7	22.9	:	0.0	:	0.0	0.0	:	12.7	:	5.7	22.9	32.9
ES	10.9	1.7	17.3	9.4	40.0	8.6	1.3	15.4	5.2	30.0	2.2	0.4	1.9	4.1	10.1
FR	18.3	5.7	14.5	31.6	20.9	14.8	4.4	10.0	27.8	8.5	3.4	1.2	4.5	3.8	12.4
HR	7.7	72.8	5.1	9.2	26.3	3.6	0.0	2.1	5.2	7.6	4.0	72.8	3.0	4.0	18.8
IT	16.6	:	9.7	18.6	145.2	11.7	:	6.9	12.6	118.0	4.9	28.0	2.8	5.9	27.2
CY	35.9	17.0	56.3	20.8	63.1	2.1	0.5	4.5	0.3	2.9	33.8	16.4	51.9	20.4	60.2
LV	13.6	6.0	15.8	15.3	40.7	5.5	2.2	7.0	5.3	10.7	8.2	3.8	8.8	10.0	29.9
LT	16.9	:	15.3	15.8	35.6	6.6	:	7.3	5.0	10.4	10.3	:	8.1	10.9	25.2
LU	88.1	:	96.5	88.1	84.3	12.2	:	21.5	0.3	3.4	75.9	14.3	75.0	87.8	80.9
HU	8.7	7.9	6.8	12.0	14.9	4.0	0.3	3.1	6.3	1.5	4.7	7.5	3.7	5.7	13.4
MT	14.6	3.5	12.2	19.6	62.1	5.3	0.0	9.6	0.1	0.0	9.3	3.5	2.6	19.6	62.1
NL	26.4	11.7	26.4	26.3	:	23.0	4.7	25.0	19.8	:	3.3	7.0	1.4	6.5	:
AT	15.0	:	20.5	23.7	35.9	8.9	:	13.3	13.5	12.6	6.2	0.3	7.2	10.2	23.3
PL	2.9	89.1	1.9	4.2	13.7	1.5	0.0	1.0	2.5	1.9	1.4	89.1	0.9	1.6	11.8
PT	12.5	12.9	11.7	13.7	20.0	6.6	0.1	7.2	7.0	0.4	6.0	12.8	4.5	6.7	19.6
RO	7.3	:	6.6	6.7	19.2	1.6	:	1.8	1.4	1.3	5.6	:	4.9	5.3	17.9
SI	5.6	2.2	3.6	8.1	23.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.6	2.2	3.6	8.1	23.0
SK	21.1	:	21.5	20.1	20.2	4.0	:	3.3	4.9	4.2	17.0	34.4	18.2	15.2	16.0
FI	19.1	:	16.6	24.4	8.7	14.7	:	13.2	18.7	2.5	4.4	:	3.3	5.7	6.2
SE	15.6	3.6	15.4	20.9	15.7	10.8	0.3	11.3	14.8	5.6	4.9	3.3	4.1	6.1	10.2

Source: Eurostat, UOE, and OECD. Online data codes: [educ_uoe_grad01], [educ_uoe_mobc01] and [educ_uoe_mobg02]. Special extraction from the OECD of international graduate data for degree-mobile graduates of EU origin who graduated in non-European countries (Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Israel, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Brazil and Russia).

Note: The total outward mobility rate for country X is calculated as ((outward degree-mobile graduates from country X + outward credit-mobile graduates who were not degree-mobile from country X) / graduates originating in country X). The number of graduates originating in country X is calculated as (total graduates in country X – inward mobile graduates from any other country to country X + outwardly mobile graduates from country X to any other country). Credit and degree mobility are calculated considering only one component as the numerator. Outward mobility rates for the EU are calculated as ((outward degree-mobile graduates from the EU + outward credit-mobile graduates who were not degree mobile from the EU) / graduates originating in the EU). The number of graduates originating in the EU is calculated as (number of graduates in the EU – inward mobile graduates from non-EU countries to the EU + outwardly mobile graduates from the EU to non-EU countries. Inward degree mobility data are not available for SI disaggregated by country of origin, and no inward degree mobility data are available for NL (ISCED 8). This implies a potential underestimation of outward degree-mobile graduates from other Member States. Furthermore, limited availability of information on the number of outwardly mobile graduates of EU origin from destination countries outside of Europe affects the reliability of the estimates. (n.a.) not applicable, (:) not available.

189 Data on credit mobility is not available for IE, so total mobility cannot be reported.

At EU-level, 9.8% of the higher education graduates were credit mobile, having a temporary experience abroad (Figure 62)[190]. In contrast, only 4.6% of graduates were degree mobile, graduating in a country that was not the one where they received their upper secondary qualification. The share of credit mobile graduates tended to be higher than the share of degree mobile graduates in most countries. Notable exceptions include Luxembourg and Cyprus, where the share of degree mobile graduates were respectively 63.7 pps and 31.7 pps higher than the share of credit mobile graduates.

Box 23: COVID-19 and online international student experiences

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of universities around the world have chosen to deliver online education to international students to avoid travel, visa and health issues. But it remains unclear if this alternative is effective.

On the one hand, studying like this has several advantages. The most relevant is the opportunity to reach more students. Many students willing to study abroad cannot afford travel and other costs associated with living in a foreign country. And some would typically not consider such an option due to personal or employment reasons. In the recent past, international education has counted on a growing demand driven by more and more students entering higher education, increasingly interested in gaining a greater understanding of the world. Additionally, although online learning cannot replace the campus experience, a virtual learning environment still enables students to engage in cross-border collaborations, thus developing and improving intercultural understanding and global mindedness.

On the other hand, however, this mode of study abroad may not confer the same benefits doing so physically. First, there is evidence showing that students often feel less motivated when learning online rather than learning in person[191]. Second, some types of learning (e.g. doing experiments in laboratories for natural science students or visiting patients in hospitals for medical students) cannot take place virtually. Third, international students following online education miss out important social and cultural elements of a study abroad experience including living in a foreign country, enjoying the social life on campus and becoming familiar with other cultures. The results of a study[192] based on survey among EU students studying in the United Kingdom would seem to support this argument. Respondents report that one of the main reasons behind their decision to study abroad was to broaden their horizons or experience other cultures. Fourth, studying abroad online does not enable international students to gain access to foreign job markets.

Credit mobility through EU-funded programmes, such as Erasmus+, was the dominant form of outbound credit mobility amongst credit mobile graduates in the majority of Member States in 2019 (Figure 63)[193]. These programmes accounted for more than half of the graduate credit mobility in 21 countries. In 17 of these, mobility through EU programmes exceeded 75% of the total graduate credit mobility. The highest shares were present in Cyprus (100%), Malta (99.2%), Latvia (99.1%), Slovenia (94.7%), Romania (97.6%) and Bulgaria (96.6%), where more than 95% of the credit mobile graduates participated in EU-funded programmes.

---

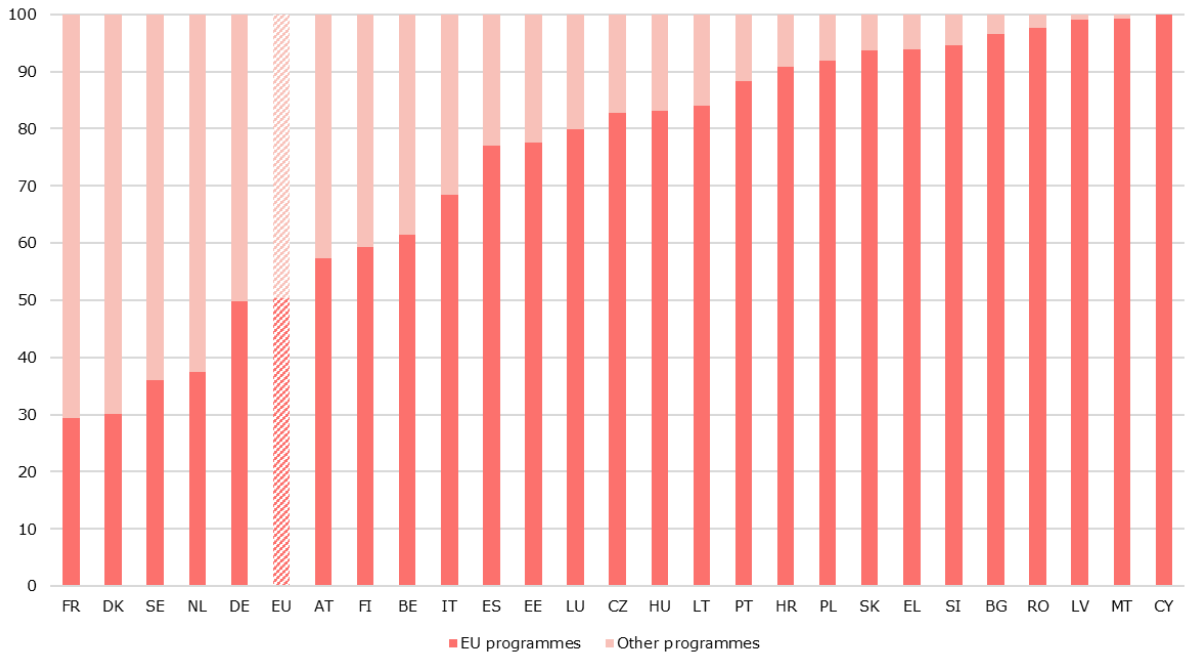
190 Credit mobile graduates refers to graduates with a credit mobility stay abroad who were not degree mobile. For countries where this disaggregation is not available, credit mobile graduates are used in the calculations.

191 Cf., Summers, J.J., Waigandt, A. and Whittaker, T.A. (2005). A comparison of student achievement and satisfaction in an online versus a traditional face-to-face statistics class, Innovative Higher Education 29: 233-250. Additionally, a recent survey among undergraduates in the UK during the lockdown finds that an increasing proportion of students dissatisfied with online compared to in-person learning.

192 West, A, Dimitropoulos, A., Hind, A. and Wilkes, J. (2000). Reasons for Studying Abroad: A Survey of EU Students Studying in the UK, Education-line, Edinburgh.

193 Not excluding credit mobile graduates who were also degree mobile.

Figure 63: Credit mobility by type of programme, 2019 [%]



Source: Eurostat, UOE. Online data code: [EDUC_UOE_MOBC01].

Note: "Other programmes" includes the categories "international/national programmes" and "other programmes", as reported by Eurostat. Values are the sum of the ISCED levels available for each country. The value for the EU is the sum of available data from EU Member States. Data is not available for IE. Data by type of mobility refer to all credit mobile graduates, not only those who were not degree mobile. Therefore they do not correspond to the credit mobility data used to calculate the credit mobility component of the learning mobility indicator as defined under ET 2020.

Only five EU Member States recorded a higher percentage of graduates with periods of foreign study supported by non-EU programmes than through EU programmes (France, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany). Combined, graduates from these five countries constituted 63% of the credit mobile graduates in the EU in 2019. The main contributors to the outward credit mobility through non-EU programmes were France (45.7% of the total credit mobility through non-EU programmes), Germany (17.8%) and the Netherlands (11.7%).

The rate of inward degree-mobile graduates ranged from 1.7% in Greece to 24.1% in Luxembourg in 2019 (

Figure 64)[194]. At EU level, the rate stood at 8.3%. In 16 Member States, the inward degree mobility rates were below 10%. Luxembourg (24.1%), the Netherlands (19.6%) and Austria (16.5%) recorded the highest rates, and were the only countries with inward graduate degree mobility rates above 15%. France was the most popular destination country in terms of absolute numbers (89 492 inwardly degree-mobile graduates), followed by Germany (53 835), the Netherlands (26 338) and Spain (22 205).

[194] ISCED levels 5-8.

Figure 64: Inward degree mobility by ISCED level, 2019 [%]

	Inward degree mobility rate					Inward mobile graduates	
	ISCED 5-8 %	ISCED 5 %	ISCED 6 %	ISCED 7 %	ISCED 8 %	ISCED 5-8 N	From EU %
EU	**8.3**	**2.1**	**4.9**	**13.5**	**24.3**	**312 273**	**29.7**
BE	10.7	:	6.6	16.6	46.3	11 472	52.2
BG	3.8	:	2.5	5.2	8.4	2 044	38.0
CZ	13.5	2.3	12.0	15.2	19.3	9 046	63.6
DK	14.7	16.1	7.7	25.5	58.0	10 766	65.5
DE	8.6	0.0	4.2	15.5	22.7	53 835	24.5
EE	13.1	:	7.3	23.4	19.6	1 153	40.4
IE	12.1	3.2	7.5	25.7	30.8	9 778	16.0
EL	1.7	:	2.3	0.7	1.7	1 364	71.8
ES	5.0	1.2	1.5	13.1	16.8	22 205	26.5
FR	11.2	2.5	8.8	18.8	52.8	83 492	13.2
HR	2.5	0.0	2.1	2.6	9.2	881	13.5
IT	4.2	:	3.3	5.2	12.1	17 704	17.1
CY	8.5	18.9	8.8	7.0	6.1	1 185	61.1
LV	6.6	0.5	4.8	15.6	5.6	990	32.1
LT	4.5	:	2.8	9.5	3.9	1 207	20.1
LU	24.1	30.5	7.0	44.4	102.2	864	68.2
HU	8.9	1.1	5.4	16.9	10.9	5 354	30.9
MT	13.3	8.0	5.7	27.5	8.0	622	18.2
NL	19.6	0.0	12.7	38.5	:	26 338	55.9
AT	16.5	0.3	19.9	28.9	46.1	12 663	74.3
PL	2.5	:	2.0	3.6	2.2	11 279	10.8
PT	7.1	1.9	3.2	14.0	35.4	5 673	22.6
RO	4.5	:	2.7	7.3	6.5	5 687	21.8
SI	3.8	1.5	2.9	5.8	6.9	616	49.0
SK	5.5	0.5	5.6	5.5	8.0	2 522	58.1
FI	9.3	:	6.1	13.6	40.1	5 236	17.5
SE	11.4	0.2	2.3	25.0	58.1	8 297	31.3

Source: Eurostat, UOE, and OECD. Online data codes: [educ_uoe_grad01], [educ_uoe_mobg02] and [educ_uoe_mobc01] for graduates, degree-mobile graduates and credit-mobile graduates in the EU, EFTA, EEA and candidate countries. Special extraction from the OECD of international graduate data for degree-mobile graduates of EU origin who graduated in non-European countries (Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Israel, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Brazil and Russia).

Note: The inward degree mobility rate in country X is calculated as (inward degree-mobile graduates in country X / graduates originating in country X). Graduates originating in country X is calculated as (total graduates in country X – inward mobile graduates from any other country to country X + outward mobile graduates from country X to any other country). The inward mobility rate for the EU is calculated as (inward degree-mobile graduates in the EU / graduates originating in the EU). The number of graduates originating in the EU is calculated as (number of graduates in the EU – inward degree-mobile graduates from non-EU countries to the EU + outward degree-mobile graduates from the EU to non-EU countries). Country of origin is defined as country of prior education or upper secondary diploma. Data on ISCED 8 are not available for NL. Inward-degree mobility data are not available for SI disaggregated by country of origin.

Close to one in three inward degree mobile graduates across the EU originated in the EU in 2019 (29.7%), followed by graduates originating in Asia (22.7%), Africa (16.6%) and European countries outside the EU (13.3%)[195]. There were substantial variations among Member States when it comes to the share of intra-EU inward graduate degree mobility, ranging from 10.8% to Poland to 74.3% to Austria. These differences can be explained by factors such as geographical proximity, common language and historical ties.

[195] Calculations based on Eurostat, UOE data. Online data code: [educ_uoe_mobg02].

2.5.4 Policy takeaways

Higher education has a unique role to play in building successful, inclusive societies. Moreover, higher levels of education attainment are associated with benefits at the individual, social and economic levels. Demand for highly skilled, socially engaged people is both increasing and changing, as labour markets are transforming rapidly, due to technological development, digital and green transitions. The higher education sector must respond to these needs to adequately skill the talents of tomorrow. The COVID-19 pandemic is another factor that has highlighted existing challenges, and presented new ones, while at the same time created opportunities for further synergies between higher education, research and innovation to provide solutions within the planned higher education transformation agenda[196]. One avenue for approaching these challenges is the European Universities Initiative[197], which encourages deeper cooperation between higher education institutions across borders.

The attainment rates in higher education have been increasing steadily over the past decade, but there is still considerable variation between countries and sub-groups within countries (e.g. gender gap, urban-rural divide). Notably, there is a persisting under-representation of students with disadvantaged background in higher education. Moreover, evidence suggests that disadvantaged communities in both inner city and isolated rural regions were among the most severely affected during the pandemic[198]. Those with high-level qualifications face better labour market perspectives, and insights from the European skills forecast suggests that people employed in highly skilled occupations are less likely to be replaced by technology in the future[199].

2.6 Work-based learning

In a nutshell

Work-based learning helps young people and adults make smoother transitions from school or from unemployment to the labour market. Member States agreed on an EU-level target to ensure that, by 2025, at least 60% of recent graduates from vocational education and training (VET) will have been exposed to work-based learning during their formal education. Data underpinning the EU-level target will be available as of 2022. In the field of VET, other important indicator domains concern the employability of recent graduates and number studying abroad during their formal education. 76.1% of recent VET graduates were employed in 2020, outperforming their peers from medium-level general education. Statistics on numbers studying abroad are also awaiting underlying data, to be sourced from a combination of administrative Erasmus+ and the UNESCO, OECD and Eurostat (UOE) data.

The 2020 Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience[200] further developed the European policy framework for VET in light of the social, economic, technological and environmental developments, but also the COVID-19 crisis[201].

---

196 Commission Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 COM/2020/625 final; Commission Communication on a new ERA for research and innovation COM/2020/628 final; Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) 2021/C 66/01; Council conclusions on the New European Research Area.

197 Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education. 2021/C 221/03

198 European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2020). The European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report.

199 Cedefop (2021). Digital, greener and more resilient. Insights from Cedefop's European skills forecast.

200 Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience 2020/C 417/01.