



STATISTICS IN FOCUS

Population and social conditions

1997 □ 4

ISSN 1024-4352

Education in the European Union: Opportunities and choices

In 1993/94, education in the European Union means 72 million pupils in pre-primary, primary and secondary education and 12 million in higher education. The average participation rate of 15-19 year olds in the Union is 79%.

Females have caught up regarding participation in upper secondary and higher education although gender differences in the types of study undertaken remain. For instance, there are four times as many males than females studying Engineering and Architecture.

The most common foreign language being learnt by pupils in general secondary education in the European Union is English: 88% of those enrolled at this level are learning it. French followed with 32%.

Participating in higher education after your 30th birthday varies between Member States: 1% of total new entrants in Greece, France and Ireland to more than 16% in Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

These are a few highlights from the recently published "Education across the European Union - Statistics and indicators 1996".

Towards equal opportunities in education...

In the 1990s, more females are continuing in education than ever before. In the European Union in 1993/94, there were 101 females per 100 males in upper secondary education compared with 96 ten years earlier. In higher education the increase over time was even greater rising from 85 females per 100 males in 1983/84 to 99 in 1993/94 (Figure 1).

While on the European level the gender gap has disappeared, inequality still persists in some Member States. The lowest female participation was seen in higher education in Germany where there were 73 females per 100 males. However, in other Member States and particularly in Portugal, the situation has reversed so that females now outnumber males in higher education (Table 1).

Figure 1
Trend in the number of females per 100 males, 1983/84-1993/94, EUR 15

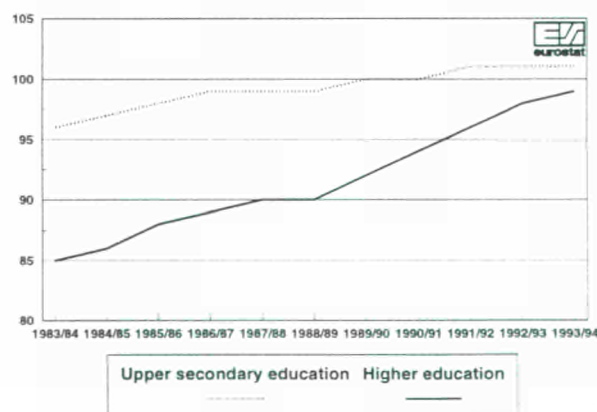


Table 1
Females per 100 males in upper secondary and higher education, 1993/94

	EUR15	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK
Upper secondary	101	97	101	85	93	111	96	103	99	:	84	84	111	125	114	115
Higher education	99	97	105	73	88	104	120	93	106	:	86	89	132	113	120	100

Manuscript completed on = 28.2.1997

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Price (excl. VAT) in Luxembourg: Subscription 'Statistics in focus' of all themes: ECU 310
Subscription 'Statistics in focus' of Theme 2 'Population and social conditions': ECU 85
Single copy: ECU 6

Catalogue number: CA-NK-97-004-EN-C

...but not in both types of upper secondary education...

When looking at the breakdown of general and vocational education at the upper secondary level, females tend to be concentrated in general education with far fewer opting for vocational education. In the European Union in 1993/94, there were 114 females per 100 males in general education whereas in vocational education the figure was down to 93 (Table 2).

Table 2
Females per 100 males in upper secondary by type of education, 1993/94

	General	Vocational
EUR 15	114	93
Belgium	115	90
Denmark	134	79
Germany	115	78
Greece	124	52
Spain	115	107
France	123	77
Ireland	105	97
Italy	130	89
Luxembourg	:	:
Netherlands	115	73
Austria	100	80
Portugal	121	83
Finland	140	113
Sweden	144	100
United Kingdom	97	131

On a country level, however, the situation was more diverse as in four Member States, namely Spain, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom there were in fact more females than males in vocational education. This situation was particularly evident in the United Kingdom where there were more females proportionately in vocational than in general education. Conversely, in Greece the gender proportion was just 52 females per 100 males which was low compared with other Member States.

...nor in all fields of study in higher education

Traditional boundaries between males and females concerning the subjects they study in higher education were still evident in 1993/94. In the European Union as a whole, females were more likely to choose Humanities, Applied arts and Medical science (including Nursing) than males. While Social science, Business studies and Law were favoured more or less equally by both sexes, Natural science, Mathematics and Computer science were more popular with males. However, the most marked difference in subject choice between the sexes

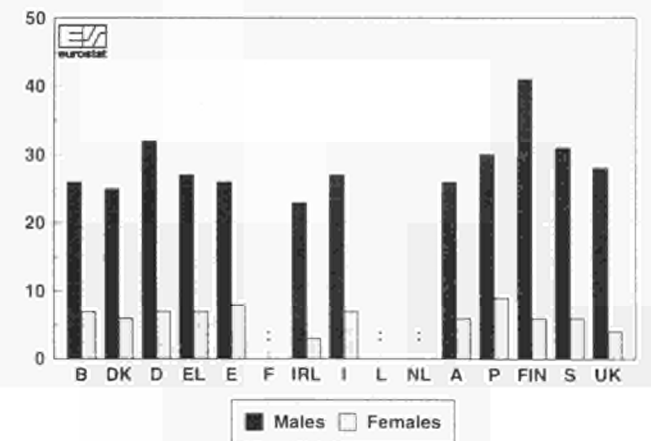
was found in Engineering and Architecture with four times as many males opting for this subject group than females (Table 3).

Table 3
Field of study choices of students enrolled in higher education, EUR 15, 1993/94

	Males	Females
Total	100	100
Humanities, Applied arts, Religion	9	18
Social science, Business studies	26	26
Law	9	10
Natural science	7	5
Mathematics, Computer science	7	3
Medical science	7	14
Engineering, Architecture	28	7
Others	7	16

All Member States were fairly equally united in the phenomenon of having a drastically low amount of females enrolled in Engineering and Architecture compared to males. The difference between the percentage of each sex enrolled in Engineering and Architecture was greatest in Finland where it reached 35 percentage points (41% of males compared with 6% of females). The other Member States had differences ranging from 18 percentage points in Spain to 25 in Germany and Sweden (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Males and females enrolled in Engineering and Architecture as a percentage of total enrollment, 1993/94



Foreign language learning

Interest in foreign language proficiency is great within the European Commission and according to an objective in the White Paper on education⁽¹⁾, every citizen of the European Union should be able to communicate in three Community languages.

Figures show that in the European Union in 1993/94, pupils enrolled in general secondary education (both compulsory and post-compulsory) were learning, on average 1.2 modern foreign languages⁽²⁾. Over half of the Member States were near this European average figure of around one language (ranging from 1.0 in Spain and Ireland to 1.4 in the French speaking Community of Belgium) while the other countries revealed figures of pupils learning closer to around two foreign languages (ranging from 1.6 in France to 2.4 in Finland) (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Average number of foreign languages taught per pupil in general secondary education, 1993/94

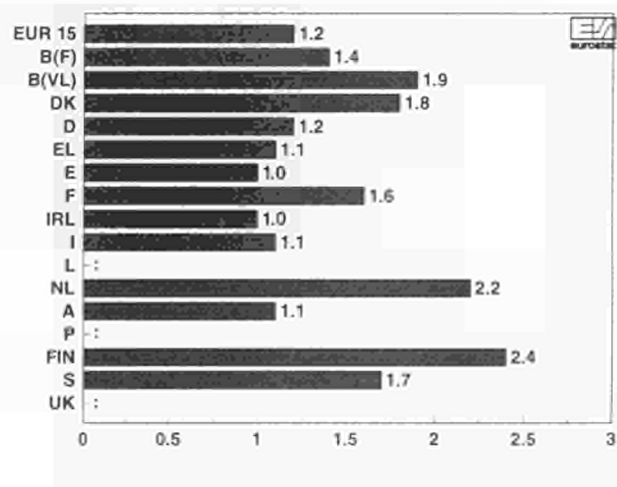


Table 4
Most widely taught foreign languages in general secondary education, 1993/94

	EUR 15	B(F)	B(VL)	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK
English	88	60	70	94	93	64	94	95	.	71	:	93	96	:	99	99	:
French	32	.	98	18	23	45	8	.	70	34	:	57	9	:	11	17	:
German	18	5	23	61	.	2	0	28	27	4	:	69	.	:	33	45	:

Note: Data refer to the percentage of pupils learning selected foreign languages.

The most common modern foreign language being learnt by pupils in general secondary education in the Union was English. Of those enrolled at this level, 88% were being taught English, French followed as the second most widely taught with 32% and then German with 18% (Table 4). Spanish and Italian also featured as foreign language choices but to a far lesser degree at 8% and 1% respectively.

For most countries the proportion of pupils learning English as a foreign language was more than 90%. For Greece (64%) and Italy (71%) the percentages were significantly lower although there were still more pupils learning English than other foreign languages. Belgium as a multilingual country was the only exception. In the French speaking Community, more pupils were learning Dutch (70%) than English (60%) and in the Flemish Community French was by far the most widely taught (98%) foreign language.

Although in general the second most popular language was French, closer examination of individual Member States shows that German was far more popular in the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Finland and Sweden. However, French was still the main choice after English in the Southern Member States of Spain, Italy and Greece where there was very little learning of German. The Netherlands stood out as an exception as both French and German were being learnt to a considerable degree.

In primary education, where interest in the teaching of foreign languages is growing, figures for 1993/94 showed that if foreign languages were being taught at all it was again English that was being taught the most. Greece, Germany, France, Austria and Finland also reported pupils, although very few, learning foreign languages other than English at this level. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, however, the only foreign language being learnt was French.

(1) Teaching and learning - Towards the Learning Society, 1995

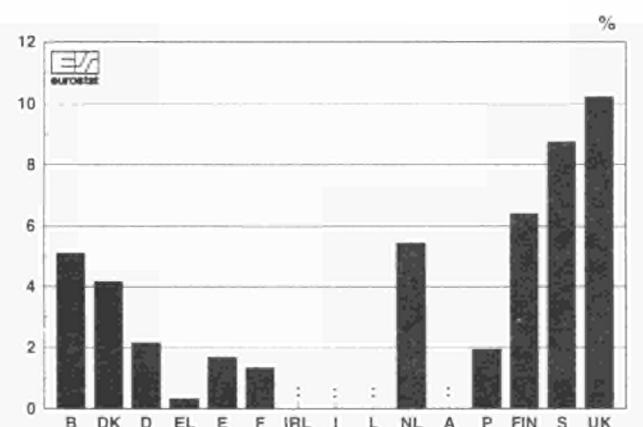
(2) The average number of foreign languages being studied by each pupil at one point in time (as opposed to those studied throughout their secondary schooling)

Education as a lifelong process

The European Commission's increasing political and economic focus on the importance of education as a continuing process through life rather than as something confined to childhood and early adulthood, was highlighted to all by 1996 being dedicated the European Year of Lifelong Learning.

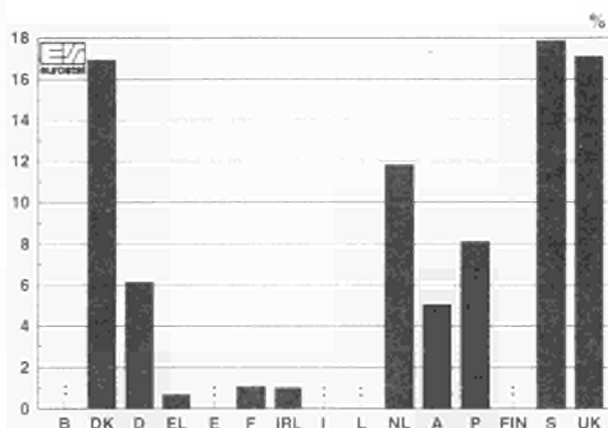
In 1993/94, most Member States of the European Union had people aged 30 and over enrolled in education. Focusing on this age group gives some indication of the extent of those still participating in education when the majority following traditional routes through education would normally have finished. Differences between Member States in the amount of those aged 30 and over enrolled in some form of education were clearly evident. In Greece, Spain, France, Germany and Portugal the proportion of this age group out of total enrollment was 2% or less, whereas in Sweden and the United Kingdom the proportion reached 9 and 10% respectively. Or, in other words, as many as 1 in 10 people in education in the United Kingdom were aged 30 and over (about 1 in 11 in Sweden) (Figure 4).

Figure 4
Participants in education aged 30 and over as a proportion of total enrollment, 1993/94



When interpreting these enrollment figures, it has to be taken into account that the situation is influenced by the existence of varying programme lengths in higher education and also the age at which people start the programmes. Information on new entrants to higher education, on the other hand, provide a clearer indication of participation in education being taken up at later stages in life (Figure 5).

Figure 5
New entrants to higher education aged 30 and over as a proportion of total new entrants, 1993/94



Here, the variations between countries became greater ranging from 1% in Greece, France and Ireland to 18% in Sweden. Moreover, Sweden and the United Kingdom remained as those Member States having the highest proportion of those aged 30 and over although they were also joined at the top by Denmark (17%) for the figures on new entrants to higher education. In these countries it would appear that the education systems are open to those wishing to take up higher education later in life which is one element of education as a lifelong process.

See also the following Eurostat publications:

Education across the European Union - Statistics and Indicators 1996. A 350 page document with information on enrollment, new entrants, graduates and teaching staff for the school year 1993/94; a time series for certain variables 1975/76-1993/94; levels of educational attainment of the population in 1995; and demographic data.

Continuing Vocational Training in enterprises - an essential part of lifelong learning. Statistics in Focus 1996 No.7.

Education and job prospects: what can we expect today? Statistics in Focus 1995 No.12.

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Symbols used

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ORIGINAL : ENGLISH