

Transmission of level of education between generations

Educational attainment: persistence or movement through the generations?

It is well known that there has been a general trend of improved educational attainment in the EU across generations. However, is this general trend visible for all levels of education and in all Member States? A recent report¹ on the **Intergenerational transmission of disadvantages** published by **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union** provides some statistical analyses of these questions.

In the **EU28** in 2011, adults aged 25-59 were asked about the level of education² of their parents³, and this was then compared with the respondent's level of education. Among respondents whose parents had a low level of education, 34% had a low level of education themselves, 48% had a medium level and 18% a high. Among respondents whose parents had a medium level of education, 8% had a low level of education, 59% a medium and 33% a high. For respondents with parents with a high level of education, only 3% had a low level of education themselves, 33% had a medium level and 63% a high.

The data show that in the **EU28**, persistence of educational attainment between generations differs according to the level of education of the parents. In line with the general trend, there is movement, mainly to a medium level of education, for those with parents with a low level of education. It should however be noted that, despite this movement, the share of respondents with a low level of education was much higher among those whose parents had a low level of education (34%) than among those whose parents had a high level of education (3%). Also in line with the trend, there is strong persistence of a high level of education between generations. However, it is notable that for those with parents with a medium level of education, movement to a high level is somewhat limited, and there is still significant persistence of a medium level.

These figures are based on data from the EU Statistics on Income and Living Condition (EU-SILC) survey⁴. The report looks at three different factors which have an impact on the risk of poverty or social exclusion: the transmission from parents to children of the level of education, of the ability to make ends meet and of economic situation.

Largest movement from low to high level of education in Finland and the United Kingdom

In 2011, for those with parents with a low level of education, there was a significant movement to a medium level of education in a majority of Member States, with the highest shares in the **Czech Republic** (83%), **Slovakia** (78%) and **Poland** (75%). In **Finland** and the **United Kingdom** around a third of respondents had even moved to a high level of education. However, a persistence of a low level of education was observed among half or more of the respondents only in **Malta** (73%), **Portugal** (68%), **Luxembourg** (52%), **Spain** and **Italy** (both 50%). The smallest proportions of low level of education were registered in **Lithuania** (10%), the **Czech Republic** and **Sweden** (both 11%).

Strongest persistence of high level of education in Romania, Ireland, Luxembourg and Cyprus

For adults with parents with a high level of education, there was a strong persistence of educational attainment between generations in almost all Member States. More than three quarters of respondents had a high level of education themselves in **Romania** (82%), **Ireland** and **Luxembourg** (both 79%), **Cyprus** (78%), **Belgium** (76%) and **Spain** (75%). Fewer than 10% had a low level in nearly all Member States.

Largest movement from medium to high level of education in France, Cyprus, Ireland, Spain and Greece

In 2011, for adults with parents with a medium level of education, there was a significant persistence of this level of education in a large majority of Member States, with the highest proportions in the **Czech Republic** and **Slovakia** (both 72%), **Croatia** (71%) and **Austria** (70%). However, there was a clear movement to a high level of education in **France** (56%), **Cyprus** (53%), **Ireland** and **Spain** (both 52%) and **Greece** (51%).

Level of education of adults aged 25-59 by parents' level of education, 2011

	Level of education of adults with:								
	low educated parents, %			medium educated parents, %			high educated parents, %		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
EU28	34	48	18	8	59	33	3	33	63
Belgium	33	43	24	11	42	47	4	20	76
Bulgaria	39	54	8	5	67	28	1	31	67
Czech Republic	11	83	7	1	72	27	1	45	55
Denmark	25	51	24	17	49	33	7	35	58
Germany	36	49	16	8	68	23	4	46	50
Estonia	13	64	23	9	58	33	4	34	62
Ireland	40	33	28	18	29	52	4	17	79
Greece	31	47	21	5	44	51	2	29	69
Spain	50	24	27	16	32	52	6	19	75
France	22	55	23	8	36	56	4	24	71
Croatia	30	63	7	7	71	22	1	47	52
Italy	50	41	9	12	56	32	3	33	64
Cyprus	34	44	22	8	40	53	4	18	78
Latvia	20	66	14	12	58	30	4	39	57
Lithuania	10	73	17	8	50	42	1	27	72
Luxembourg	52	37	11	17	49	34	4	17	79
Hungary	25	66	8	5	67	28	2	35	63
Malta	73	17	10	43	29	28	26	25	50
Netherlands	29	48	23	13	50	37	5	30	65
Austria	30	59	11	9	70	21	5	49	46
Poland	18	75	7	4	66	30	2	32	66
Portugal	68	19	13	20	39	41	8	23	70
Romania	23	67	9	2	54	44	0	18	82
Slovenia	21	63	16	6	59	35	2	42	56
Slovakia	15	78	7	3	72	25	1	35	64
Finland	15	52	33	10	46	44	4	32	64
Sweden	11	66	23	5	57	38	2	34	64
United Kingdom	16	51	32	5	49	47	1	27	72
Iceland	31	46	22	19	47	34	8	31	61
Norway	32	48	21	18	49	33	11	30	59
Switzerland	34	54	12	5	67	27	2	32	65

0: less than 0.5%

Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

1. **Eurostat, Statistics in Focus, 27/2013, "Intergenerational transmission of disadvantage statistics"**, available free of charge in pdf format in Statistics explained on the Eurostat web site:
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Intergenerational_transmission_of_disadvantage_statistics
2. Levels of education (educational attainment - meaning highest level of education successfully completed) are classified according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 1997):
Low level of education (ISCED 1 and 2): at most lower secondary education.
Medium level of education (ISCED 3 and 4): upper secondary education and post-secondary non-tertiary education
High level of education (ISCED 5 and 6): first and second stage of tertiary education.
3. The highest level of education attained by either the father or the mother, when the respondent was aged 14, is taken into consideration.
4. The EU-SILC survey is the EU reference source for comparative statistics on income distribution, poverty and living conditions. More information can be found on the Eurostat website:
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions/introduction.
It should be noted that for a limited number of sub groups, the size of the sample may partly affect the reliability of the data.

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