

# Educating young Europeans

## *Similarities and differences between the EU Member States and the PHARE countries*

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*Spyridon Pilos*

### Statistics in focus

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#### POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

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THEME 3 – 14/2000

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For the first time, in 1999, all EU Member States and countries taking part in the PHARE<sup>1</sup> programme have provided data on education to Eurostat using the same questionnaires and the same methodology. The data, covering the 1997/98 school year, allow a comparison to be made between the Member States of the European Union and the PHARE countries: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia. Ten of these countries are candidates for EU membership.

#### *Common features but also specific characteristics*

Certain features are similar in the PHARE countries and the EU Member States. Girls are less likely to enrol in the vocational stream at secondary level. In tertiary education, women are relatively more numerous than men, but they are much less likely to be studying mathematics, computer science and engineering.

English is becoming the most widespread language of communication in Europe as it is the most studied by young Europeans within the school system. In the PHARE countries, German and Russian are also studied by many.

On the other hand, in many PHARE countries, pre-primary education is less widespread, and compulsory schooling starts later than in the European Union. Fewer young people take part in post-compulsory education and enrolment is relatively lower at tertiary level.



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<sup>1</sup>The PHARE (**P**oland and **H**ungary: **A**ction for the **R**estructuring of the **E**conomy) programme, launched in 1989 for Poland and Hungary, was extended to other countries in 1991 and is part of the pre-accession strategy (cf. <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/pas/phare>).

## The populations of the PHARE countries are younger than those of the EU Member States

Considering demographic situation, in general, the young people – at which initial education/training is primarily targeted – in the PHARE countries make up a larger share of the population than their counterparts in the EU. In the European Union, the proportion of 3-24-year-olds is inferior to 30% in all countries apart Ireland, while percentages are higher in almost all PHARE countries but three.

In the EU, this percentage varies from 24% in Germany to 36% in Ireland. In the PHARE countries, it ranges from 29% in Bulgaria and Slovenia to 43% in Albania.

It should, however, be borne in mind that these percentages cover a fairly broad age group. For younger children, the differences are less marked. Although a decline in birth rate is also observed in the PHARE countries, the process began later than in Western Europe. In recent years, the total fertility rate in the majority of PHARE countries has actually fallen below that of most EU Member States.

Table 1: 3-24-year-olds as a percentage of the total population, 1.1.1998

EU		PHARE	
EU	27	AL	43
B	27	BA	:
DK	26	BG	29
D	24	CZ	31
EL	27	EE	31
E	28	MK	35
F	29	HU	30
IRL	36	LT	32
I	25	LV	32
L	26	PL	34
NL	27	RO	33
A	26	SI	29
P	29	SK	35
FIN	28		
S	27		
UK	28		

## The duration of studies reflects specific national characteristics, but it is often shorter in the PHARE countries

The curve for the educational participation rate from the age of 3 to 24 rises to 100% at the beginning of primary education, is more or less constant for 8-10 years of compulsory schooling, and then declines at rates which vary from one country to another.

This curve reflects, at least partly, the organisation of the educational system in individual countries, in particular the duration of compulsory schooling.

Of the EU Member States, it is only in the three nordic countries that compulsory schooling begins relatively late (at 7 years). Among the PHARE countries, this is the case for seven countries.

Apart from the differences in the duration of compulsory schooling, two characteristics are specific to the PHARE countries:

1. children start school at a later age (fewer very young children attend the pre-primary institutions) and
2. they end their studies earlier.

Table 2: Duration of compulsory education (starting and ending ages), 1997/1998

	EU		PHARE		
	Starting	Ending	Starting	Ending	
B <sup>1)</sup>	6	18	AL	6	14
DK	7	16	BA	7	15
D <sup>1)</sup>	6	18	BG	7	16
EL	6	15	CZ	6	15
E	6	16	EE	7	16
F	6	16	MK	7	15
IRL	6	15	HU	6	16
I	6	14	LT	7	16
L	4	15	LV	7	16
NL <sup>2)</sup>	5	17	PL	7	15
A	6	15	RO	7	15
P	6	15	SI	6	15
FIN	7	16	SK	6	15
S	7	16			
UK <sup>3)</sup>	5	16			

1) last 2-3 part-time years included

2) last year part-time included

3) North Ireland: 4-16 years

## A. Pre-primary education is less widespread in the PHARE countries

Pre-primary education is less developed in the PHARE countries than in the EU Member States. There are various reasons for this: cultural (the bigger role attributed to education by the family) and socio-economic (the availability of pre-school places, the length of parental leave, the value of child/educational allowances, etc.)

Considering the data on participation rates in pre-primary education, it can be seen, for example, that in six EU Member

States (the Benelux countries, Spain, France and Italy) almost all 4-year-olds attend school, which is not the case in any of the PHARE countries. Hungary has the highest rate, at 88%. It should be mentioned that, in Ireland and the United Kingdom, some primary classes start already at 4.

Generally speaking, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Poland and Finland have the fewest children in education-oriented pre-primary education.

Table 3: Participation rates for children aged 3 to 5 in education-oriented pre-primary education (ISCED 0), in %, 1997/98

		EU														
Age	EU *	B <sup>1)</sup>	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK
3 years	66	99	71	62	0	72	100	3	96	:	0	33	52	33	62	51
4 years	90	100	89	84	54	99	100	2	97	100	98	73	62	38	67	94
5 years	92	100	94	86	83	100	100	1	97	100	98	91	70	42	71	0

		PHARE											
Age	AL <sup>1)</sup>	BA	BG	CZ	EE	MK	HU	LT	LV	PL	RO	SI	SK
3 years	29	:	51	44	80	10	68	38	47	21	35	:	:
4 years	39	:	61	77	76	14	88	44	53	30	56	:	:
5 years	45	:	66	92	73	32	97	46	56	39	73	50 <sup>2)</sup>	:

1) 1996/97

\* estimate

2) 3-5 years

## B. At secondary level, the importance of the vocational stream varies from one country to another, but it is everywhere more popular among boys than among girls

Compulsory education in European countries is organised either in a system which separates primary and lower secondary education (this is the case in most EU Member States and in Bulgaria, Romania and Lithuania), or in a single structure (nordic, Portugal and most PHARE countries). Depending on the country, upper secondary education starts at between 14 and 16 years, which often coincides with the age at which pupils end their compulsory schooling.

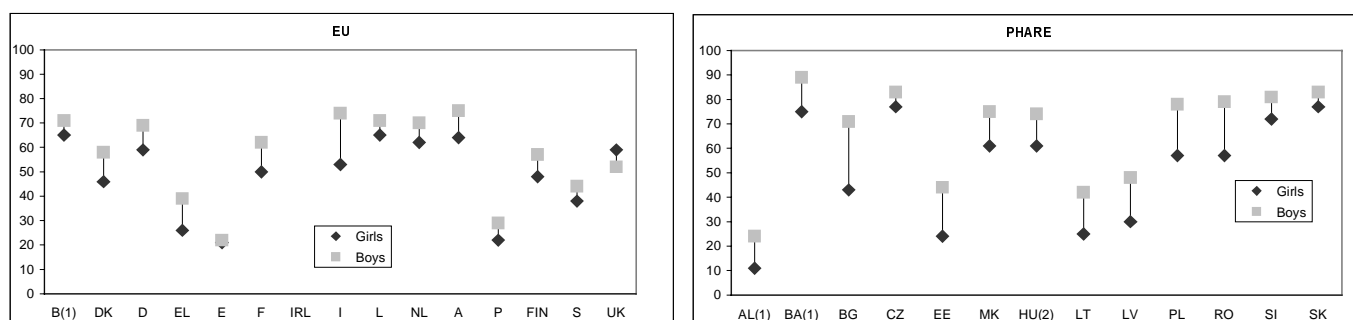
Primary and lower secondary education involves mainly general education; preparation for professional life does not, strictly speaking, begin until the upper secondary level.

Concerning enrolment of pupils in the vocational stream, the differences between the EU Member States are as great as those between the PHARE countries.

In Greece, Spain, Portugal, Albania and Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), most pupils of upper secondary pupils are enrolled in general education. In Ireland, all pupils at level ISCED 3 receive general or pre-vocational education. By contrast, approximately two-thirds of pupils attend a vocational school in Germany, Austria and the Benelux countries. Similarly, young people in the PHARE countries (except Albania and the Baltic States) are clearly more oriented towards vocational studies.

In almost all the countries (except for the UK), boys are relatively more numerous than girls in the vocational stream. However, the graphs show that these gaps are generally more pronounced in the PHARE countries. In Bulgaria, in particular, but also in Poland and Romania, the differences exceed 20%.

Figure 1: Enrolment in the vocational stream of upper secondary education (ISCED 3), by gender, in %, 1997/98



1) 1996/97 2) pre-vocational education included

### C. Fewer young people in the PHARE countries continue post-compulsory studies

Firstly, the rate of participation in post-compulsory education (all levels considered) is much lower in the PHARE countries than in the European Union.

At 16 years, a big majority of young Europeans are still at school, but their participation rate is starting to decline.

At 18, more than 80% of them are still in education in Sweden, Germany, Belgium, France and Finland. Among the PHARE countries, the highest percentage is 73% in Poland. On the other hand, the educational participation rate does not exceed 50% in the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Romania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania.

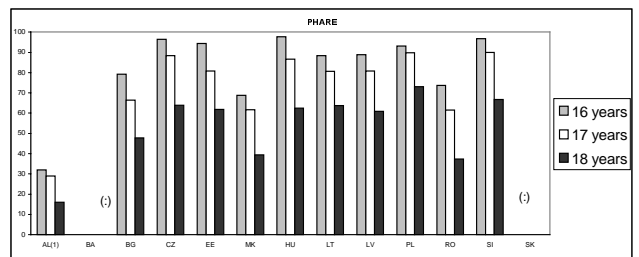
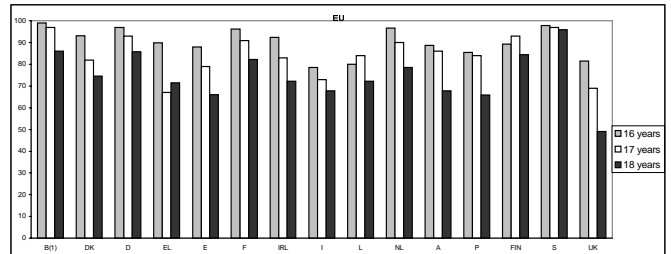
Almost half of 20-year-olds in the European Union are still studying. Participation rates vary from 29% in Austria to about 60% in Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece and France.

Among the PHARE countries, at this age, Poland has the highest participation rate: 48%. In five other countries (Baltic countries, Hungary and Slovenia) this proportion is higher than one-third of 20-year-olds.

Secondly, in the PHARE countries, young people in post-compulsory education are enrolled especially at tertiary level, whereas in the EU, many young people continue their studies at upper-secondary level or post-compulsory non-tertiary level. This is particularly true of Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden.

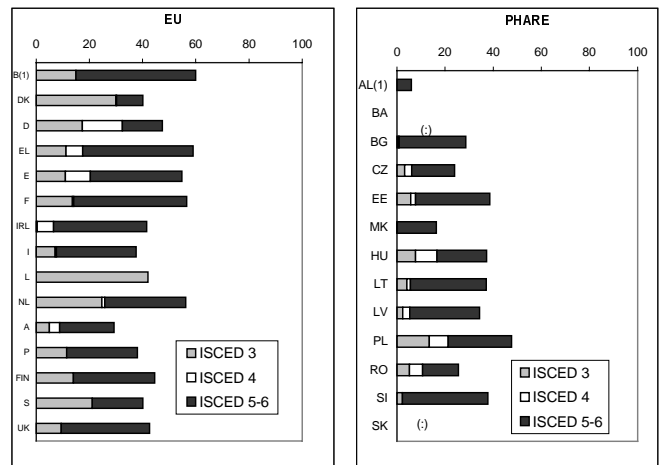
Participation rates in tertiary education are generally higher in the EU than in the PHARE countries. In the 18-24 age group, which is the most important at tertiary level, only Slovenia, the baltic countries and Bulgaria show values that are similar to the average rate for the European Union – 23 %.

Figure 2: Participation rates in education (ISCED 2-6) of young aged 16 to 18, in %, 1997/98



1) 1996/97

Figure 3: Participation rates of 20-year-olds in post-compulsory education, by ISCED level, in %, 1997/98



1) 1996/97

Table 4: Participation rates for 18-24-year-olds in tertiary education (ISCED 5-6), in %, 1997/98

EU															
EU	B <sup>1)</sup>	DK	D <sup>2)</sup>	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK
23	31	17	14	32	28	30	24	23	:	24	17	21	28	18	21
PHARE															
AL <sup>1) 2)</sup>	BA	BG	CZ	EE	MK <sup>2)</sup>	HU	LT	LV	PL	RO	SI <sup>2)</sup>	SK			
4	:	22	14	23	12	15	22	22	19	11	25	:			

1) 1996/97

2) without ISCED 6

## A predominance of females in tertiary education, particularly in certain fields, is common to all European countries

In almost all European countries, the participation of women in tertiary education is higher than that of men, although the effects of compulsory military service must be taken into account (especially in the PHARE countries, where military service is generally longer than in those EU Member States where there is such an obligation). On the other hand, it is more common for women to discontinue their studies for family reasons. Allowing for these factors, women seem to be more inclined to opt for tertiary education in most countries.

This preponderance of women is particularly apparent in some PHARE countries: Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia.

Another feature common to the EU Member States and the PHARE countries is that certain fields of tertiary studies are dominated by women: humanities and applied arts, education science and medical science. On the other hand, mathematics, computer science and, especially, engineering and architecture are chosen mostly by men. In the PHARE countries, the male-female differences seem to be less pronounced.

Bulgaria notes the highest percentages of women among students of mathematics, computer science and engineering.

Figure 4: Participation rates in tertiary education (ISCED 5-6) of young aged 18 to 24, by gender, in %, 1997/98

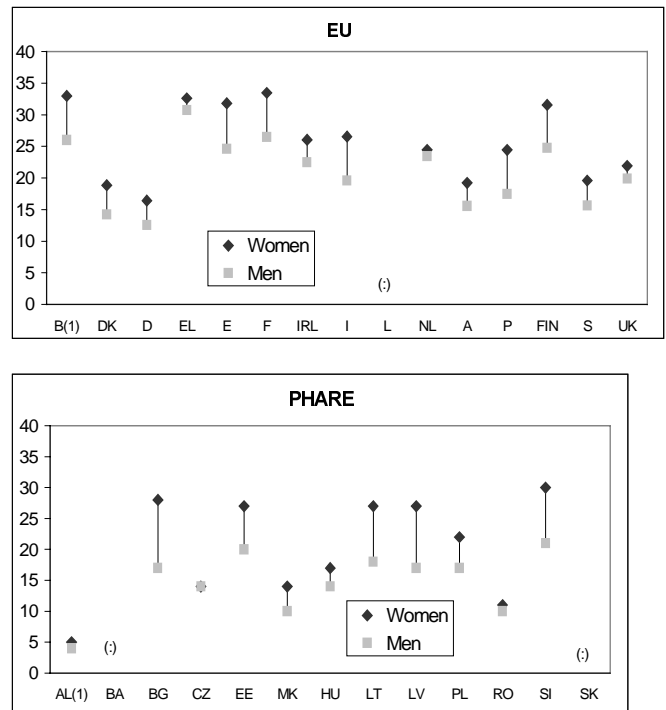


Table 5: Percentage of women among tertiary education students (ISCED 5-6), in some fields of study, 1997/98

	EU					PHARE					
	Humanities, applied arts	Education science	Medical science	Mathematics, computer	Engineering	Humanities, applied arts	Education science	Medical science	Mathematics, computer	Engineering	
B <sup>1)</sup>	56	70	67	18	20	AL <sup>1)</sup>	42	59	60	52	29
DK	66	69	80	22	35	BA	:	:	:	:	:
D	61	74	69	22	17	BG	71	80	72	53	40
EL	:	:	:	:	:	CZ	58	71	68	15	20
E	63	76	73	29	25	EE	71	82	84	25	27
F	:	:	:	:	:	MK	71	78	70	40	28
IRL	66	76	69	33	16	HU	63	78	71	29	21
I	77	81	57	45	25	LV	75	80	81	38	25
L	:	:	:	:	:	LT	75	82	79	36	33
NL	58	69	74	14	12	PL	74	83	64	47	24
A	64	75	61	20	17	RO	66	51	62	51	23
P	68	78	74	38	29	SI	71	81	77	14	24
FIN	71	79	84	30	17	SK	58	75	71	18	28
S	65	75	78	35	25						
UK <sup>1)</sup>	61	71	77	25	15						

1) 1996/97

## In Europe's schools, English is the most widely taught foreign language, followed by French, German and Russian

Young Europeans often begin studying a foreign language at primary school, but at different ages, depending on their country's education system.

At secondary level, a second language is often added to the first foreign language studied at primary school. In Luxembourg, the Flemish Community of Belgium, Denmark, Finland and Estonia, language learning seems to be more widespread.

Only data concerning the general stream are presented here as they are more complete and more reliable. In the countries for which data have been provided for both (general and vocational) streams, a tendency is clearly marked : in the vocational stream, more importance is given to the study of foreign languages in the general stream than in the vocational stream.

English is the most widely taught foreign language in Europe's schools. In the PHARE countries, the proportion of pupils learning English is often smaller, to the benefit of German or Russian.

German is the most widely taught language in several countries near to Germany and Austria: Luxembourg, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland.

Many pupils learn French in the Flemish Community of Belgium and in Luxembourg, but also in Ireland and Romania.

Russian is the most widely studied by pupils in the three Baltic countries, Bulgaria and Poland.

Table 6: Percentage of pupils in general secondary education (ISCED 2 and 3) studying the most widely taught modern foreign languages, 1997/98

EU	B fr <sup>1)</sup>	B fl <sup>1)</sup>	DK	D	EL <sup>1)</sup>	E	F	IRL	I	L <sup>1)</sup>	NL	A	P	FIN	S <sup>2)</sup>	UK
1st foreign language	nl 70	▲ 95	● 100	● 93	● 83	● 97	● 97	▲ 72	● 78	▲ 98	:	● 98	:	● 99	● 100	.
2nd foreign language	● 64	● 71	■ 69	▲ 24	▲ 63	▲ 32	◇ 34	■ 25	▲ 33	■ 98	:	▲ 13	:	sv 92	■ 45	:
3rd foreign language	■ 5	■ 24	▲ 15	◎ 2	■ 7	■ 1	■ 26	◇ 4	■ 4	● 77	:	it 6	:	■ 30	▲ 22	:
4th foreign language	◇ 3		◇ 6	◇ 2			it 4		▲ 1	◇ 11	:	◇ 2	:	▲ 13	◇ 8	:

PHARE	AL <sup>1)</sup>	BA	BG	CZ	EE	MK <sup>4)</sup>	HU	LT	LV	PL <sup>1)3)</sup>	RO	SI <sup>4)</sup>	SK
1st foreign language	● 50	:	● 59	■ 58	● 85	▲ 70	■ 58	● 68	● 75	● 73	▲ 59	● 81	■ 63
2nd foreign language	▲ 26	:	◎ 29	■ 53	◎ 55	▲ 37	■ 55	◎ 57	◎ 36	■ 53	● 30	■ 34	● 61
3rd foreign language	it 3	:	■ 20	▲ 3	■ 36	■ 6	▲ 4	■ 33	■ 32	◎ 26	◎ 4	▲ 5	◎ 8
4th foreign language	◎ 2	:	▲ 18		▲ 3	◎ 6	◎ 2	▲ 8	▲ 2	▲ 13	■ 4	it 5	▲ 4

● English    ▲ French    ■ German    ◇ Spanish    ◎ Russian

1) 1996/97

2) only ISCED 2

3) only ISCED 3

4) general and professional education

## ➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

### Abbreviations

: not available

**EU countries:** B Belgium, DK Denmark, D Germany, EL Greece, E Spain, F France, IRL Ireland, I Italy, L Luxembourg, NL Netherlands, A Austria, P Portugal, FIN Finland, S Sweden, UK United Kingdom

**PHARE countries:** AL Albania, BA Bosnia Herzegovina, BG Bulgaria, CZ Czech Republic, EE Estonia, MK Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, HU Hungary, LT Lithuania, LV Latvia, PL Poland, RO Romania, SI Slovenia, SK Slovakia

### Data sources

Most of the data presented here are obtained through the joint UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat UOE questionnaires. The data, which are collected annually, relate to enrolments, new entrants, graduates, teaching staff, educational institutions and educational expenditure.

A specific Eurostat questionnaire provided information on the study of foreign languages. Eurostat's demographic data were also used.

Information on the duration of compulsory schooling was obtained from the Information Network on Education in Europe (EURYDICE).

### ISCED - International Standard Classification of Education (1997 version)

#### A) EDUCATIONAL LEVELS:

ISCED 0: Pre-primary education

Preceding primary education, not compulsory in most countries. Data refer to the education-oriented institutions which obligatorily recruit staff with specialized qualifications in education.

ISCED 1: Primary education

Depending on countries, it begins between 4 and 7 years of age and generally lasts from 5 to 6 years. Programmes are designed to give pupils a sound basic education in reading, writing and mathematics along with an elementary understanding of other subjects.

ISCED 2: Lower secondary education

Is a part of compulsory schooling in all analysed countries. Programmes are typically more subject-focused. Usually the end of this level coincides with the end of full-time compulsory education.

ISCED 3: Upper secondary education

Typically starts at 15 or 16 years, at the end of full-time compulsory education. Instruction is even more subject-oriented and often teachers need to be more qualified than at ISCED 2 level. Education can be general or pre-vocational (two types of education often aggregated) or vocational. Many programmes enable access to ISCED 5.

ISCED 4: Post-secondary non-tertiary education

These programmes straddle the boundary between upper-secondary and tertiary education from an international point of view. They serve to broaden the knowledge of ISCED 3 graduates. Typical examples are programmes designed to prepare students for studies at level 5 while other programmes prepare students for direct labour market entry.

ISCED 5 and 6: Tertiary education

a) ISCED 5 (first stage): entry to these programmes normally requires the successful completion of ISCED 3 or 4. Level 5A includes programmes with academical orientation and longer duration, and level 5B those which occupational orientation.

b) ISCED 6 (second stage): leads to an advanced research qualification and typically includes the submission of a thesis or dissertation which is the product of original research and represents a significant contribution to knowledge.

B) FIELDS OF EDUCATION – a detailed classification serves as a basis for aggregation of fields at tertiary level

### Some definitions

The data cover full- and part-time students in public and private establishments. They cover school-based general education and vocational education/training. Programmes combining studies at school with work (e.g. apprenticeships) such as the dual system are also included.

The participation rate for a given age is the ratio of the number of pupils of this age enrolled in a given level of education and the total population of this age. In the vast majority of countries, pupils' reference age is their age as of 31 December /1 January of the school year.

Concerning the data on foreign language study, when one of the national languages is taught in schools where it is not the teaching language, it is not considered as a foreign language.

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"Key Data on Education in Europe, 1999/2000", European Commission, 2000

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