

# Statistics in focus

## ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

THEME 8 – 2/2002

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# A statistical source-book on sustainability issues

Mario Ronconi

## TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE EUROPE

Eurostat applies the United Nations methodology at EU level.

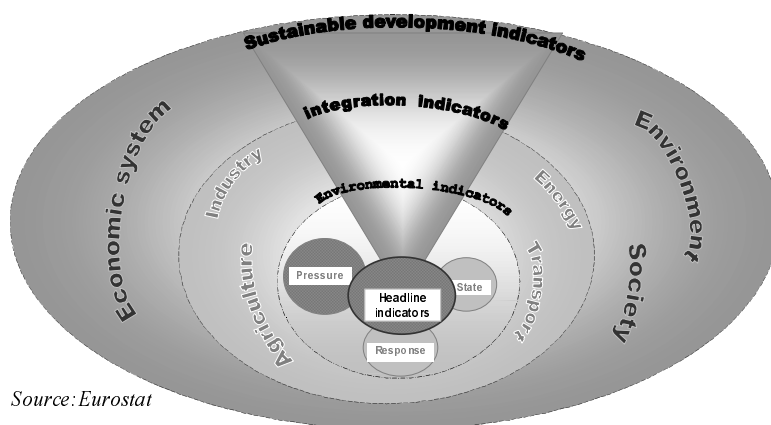
A wide-ranging report containing 63 Social, Economic, Environmental and Institutional Indicators

*The sustainability concept as laid down in the Amsterdam Treaty (Art.3) is a major objective of the European Union in order to assure the future development of European societies and economies and the maintenance of natural resources and environmental assets. Appropriate information on the 'three pillars' of sustainability - that is the social, economic and environmental dimensions - is one of the major challenges to improve our understanding of the interactions between our economies and societies and the environment. Adequate statistical information, the 'measurement side' of sustainability, is also an important support for reviewing and monitoring the implementation of sustainability policies.*

« Measuring Progress Towards a More Sustainable Europe » published by Eurostat provides the most up-to-date statistical information available at European level on the different social, economic and environmental sustainability issues and themes.

The variety of fields covered by the 63 indicators is considerable: from social (e.g., income distribution, unemployment, migration rate, health, education) to economic issues (GDP per capita, investments, energy use, transport, etc.), environmental (air pollutants, forests, water use, waste generation and disposal, use of nitrogen and pesticides, etc.) and institutional domains (internet access, communications, R&D).

### The indicator family



Source: Eurostat

The Eurostat's report can be considered a technical reference tool providing wide-ranging synthetic information on sustainability themes, as well as a preliminary statistical illustration of some of the themes and issues mentioned in the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup>, approved at the Göteborg European Council, held in June 2001. The following examples can provide an idea of the breadth of information covered in the publication.

<sup>1</sup> the EU-strategy for Sustainable Development has identified four priority sustainability areas - namely: climate change, public health, natural resource and transport- thus complementing the social and economic issues (poverty- social exclusion and demography), already identified in the European Council held in Stockholm (March 2001).

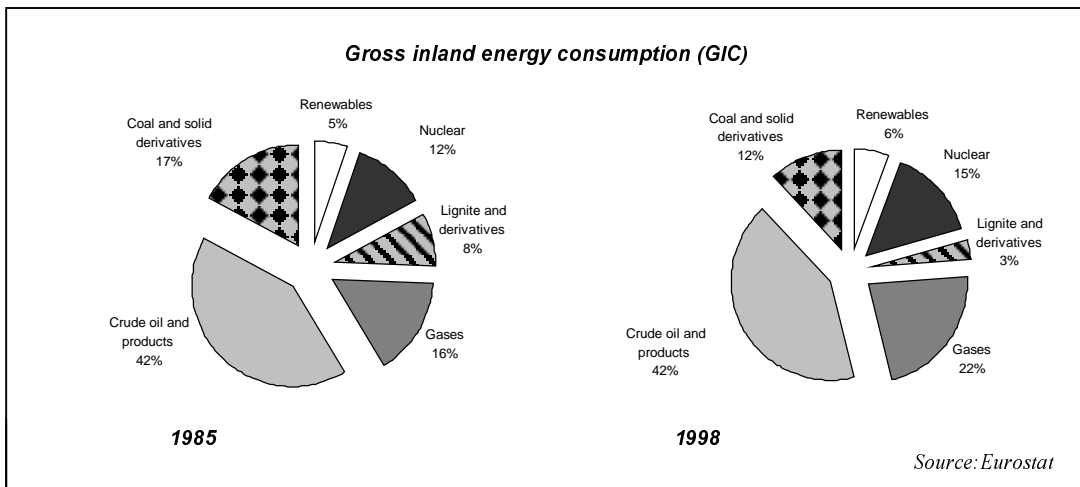
# 1. Environmental and Economic Indicators

## Sustainability implies a more efficient use of natural resources...

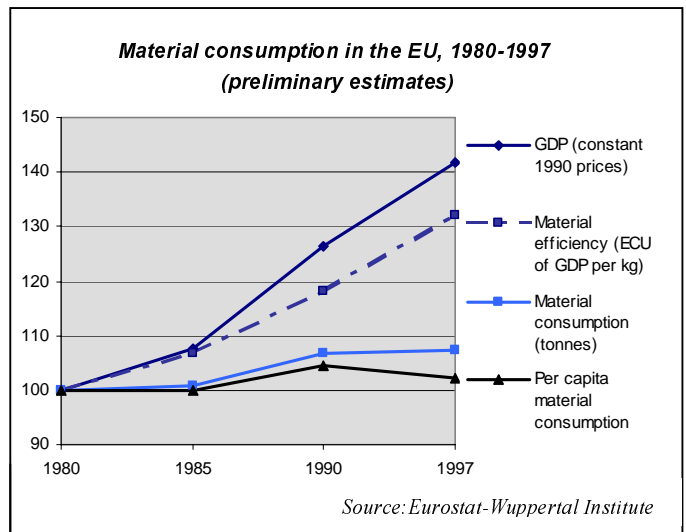
**1.1 Use of Energy.** The relative utilisation of different energy sources is an important factor in a move to a sustainable economy. At present, energy demand still requires the extensive use of non-renewable energy sources such as fossil fuels, also major source of greenhouse gas emissions, one of the main determinants of climate change. Besides a better energy efficiency, another contribution for a sustainable energy use can arrive from an increased proportion in the global energy consumption of renewable energy sources, which are associated with much

lower greenhouse gases emissions.

Between 1985 and 1998 the production of renewables has grown by 26%. However, this positive trend was outpaced by the overall rise in energy consumption - around three times the amount of energy supplied by renewables. Therefore, renewables still make up only 5.9% of all energy consumption and an increased effort is needed in order to achieve the EU target of doubling this share by 2010 (up to 12% of gross inland energy consumption).



**1.2 Overall resource use.** Natural assets are intensively exploited but they are not unlimited. Therefore, a key challenge for ensuring long-term sustainability is the decoupling of economic growth from total quantity of resources used. According to first available preliminary estimates of a synthetic economy-wide resource use indicator elaborated by Eurostat, EU-15 material consumption<sup>2</sup> has increased by about +7% between 1980 and 1997, and by about +2% per capita. This implies that a relative but not absolute decoupling of economic growth and material use has occurred. Nevertheless, the information available does not reveal to what extent this is the result of specific improvements in resource efficiency or simply the effect of changes in the structure of EU economies (i.e. less intensive resource- consumption industries).



**1.3 Use of Water.** The sustainable use of water is an essential pre-condition to assure future socio-economic development and to safeguard aquatic ecosystems. Water abstraction (in particular from groundwater) is a major pressure on fresh water resources. From 1980 to 1999, total water abstraction as a whole at EU level remained fairly

stable, although very significant variations - at sectoral and regional level - occurred. Industrial uses of water decreased everywhere across Europe and water use for agriculture increased in the Southern European countries where the demand from agriculture accounts for over 50% of water consumption.

<sup>2</sup>Material consumption is defined as all materials (fossil fuels, minerals and biomass) entering a country's economy (materials domestically extracted plus materials imported), less the materials that are exported. It includes Minerals (47%), Biomass-agriculture and forestry (33%) and Fossil fuels (20%).

In the Northern European countries, the water consumption from industry is comparatively larger. The water use expressed in per capita values vary a lot, from 1 037 000 litres for Spain to 142 000 litres for Denmark and Luxembourg. The intensity of use rate (abstractions related to water resources) is highest in some of the drier countries (37% in Spain, 32% in Italy) and in certain densely populated countries (Belgium 45%) and is lowest in sparsely populated countries (Sweden 2.2%, Austria 4%). These differences are primarily due to different overall

conditions throughout Europe (geological, climatic etc.) and to different water use patterns by users/sectors. This also explains why comparisons on a global (national) level of abstractions with water resources (the only possible given the present data availability) have objective limitations, considered that in Europe the real water supply problems are affecting a specific area or region. To analyse that, a more disaggregated information on water resources and uses at local/river basin level is needed and this is the main development area for water statistics in next years.

Water abstractions by sector (1000 Litres per capita/year)

Southern countries (EL,E,PT)					Northern countries (DK,F,NL,A,FIN,S,ENGL&WALES)				
	1980	1985	1990	1995		1980	1985	1990	1995
Total abstraction	815	817	738	852	Total abstraction	265	249	243	217
Agriculture	606	666	606	701	Agriculture	39	41	42	48
Manufacturing industry	105	38	38	52	Manufacturing industry	119	100	88	65
Public water supply	104	113	94	99	Public water supply	106	108	112	104

Source: Eurostat

Per capita water abstraction, 1999<sup>1</sup> (1000 Litres per capita/year)

	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK	IS	NO	CH	CZ	HU	PL	EE	SI
Total abstraction	729	142	532	826	1037	514	327	975	142	302	441	735	296	307	257	566	488	360	192	560	292	1056	166

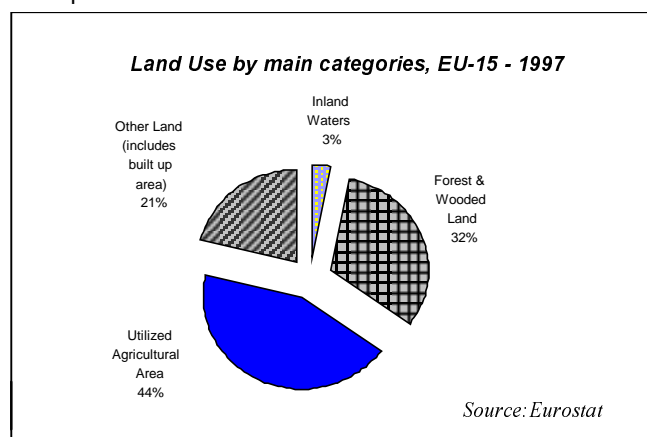
<sup>1</sup>: Data refers to 1999 or latest available year

Source: Eurostat

## Sustainability implies less pressures on the environment...

**1.4 Built-up land.** Land is another natural asset under pressure. Within Europe, agricultural areas and forests account for around 80% of the total area. However, building upon natural land (for houses, industries, roads, transport network, etc.) is almost an irreversible change in land use that affects the landscape and has several negative environmental impacts (increases water run-off and thus increases the risk of flooding, hinders replenishment of groundwater, destroys habitats, affecting biodiversity). Despite the considerable information gaps, first available statistics collected by Eurostat show that in the last two decades the area of built up land has increased significantly in EU countries. For example, during the nineties built-up area has risen by +28% in Austria, by around +16% in Portugal and France, by +12% in Spain

(over a period of four years time and exclusively for residential uses). Belgium, Portugal, UK and the Netherlands appear to have the highest proportion of their land surface built up.



Source: Eurostat

Built-up Area, 1999 (°)

	B	DK	D	E	F	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK	IS	CH	CZ	PL	SI
% of total land area	18	8*	12	:	7	9 <sup>2</sup>	15	5	18	3*	3 <sup>2</sup>	15	1	7*	10*	7	3*
%change 1990-99	8.8	15.2 <sup>3</sup>	4.3 <sup>3</sup>	12 <sup>3</sup>	16.5	:	6.6	27.6	15.7	1.8 <sup>3</sup>	7.6 <sup>3</sup>	:	:	13.4 <sup>3</sup>	0.7 <sup>3</sup>	3.1	:

Source: Eurostat and national authorities

(°) Built-up area includes land used for residential purposes, roads, technical infrastructure, industrial and commercial premises and recreational sites.

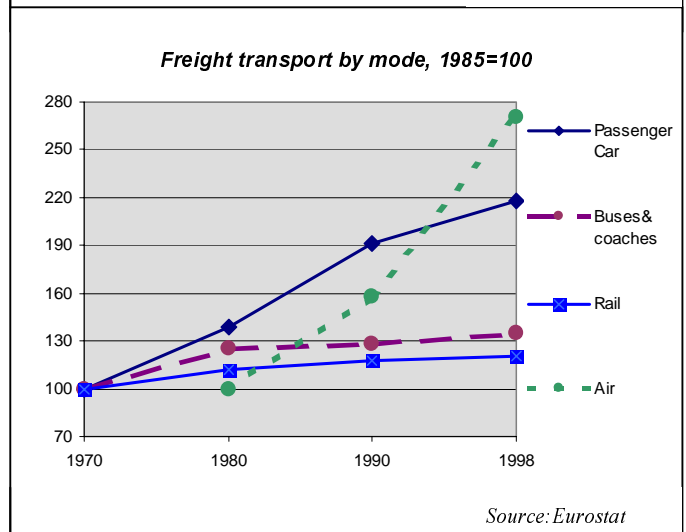
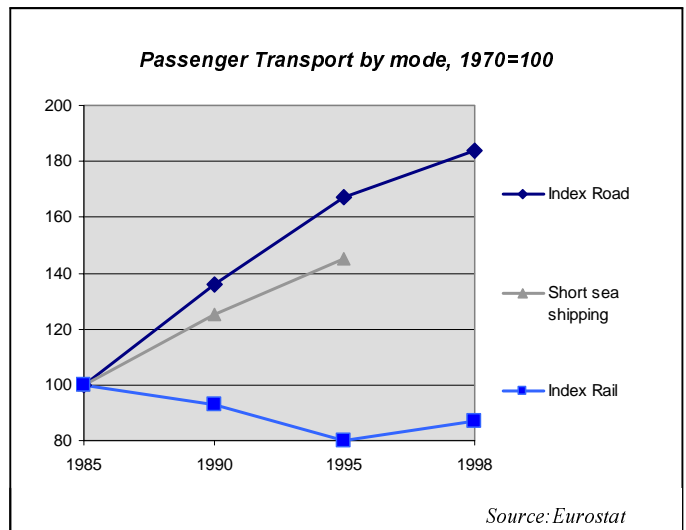
\* : Data refer to 1995

<sup>2</sup> : Data refers to 1990

<sup>3</sup> : Change over: 1995-99 for D and E (only residential land), 1980-95 for DK, 1980-90 for S, 1990-95 for F and CZ, 1985-95 for CH.

**1.5 Transport Demand.** Economic growth, increased personal mobility and markets integration explain the increased relevance of the transport system in last decades. At the same time, this development represents an overall threat to sustainability, in terms of traffic congestion problems and worsened environmental impacts. Between 1970 and 1998 passenger car use increased by +118%, bus use by +35% and rail use by +21%. Road transport accounts for about 30% of total emissions of greenhouse gases. In 1997, the highest car use was in Luxembourg, France, Portugal, Italy and Denmark. The lowest per capita usage was in Greece and Austria. There are many reasons for the difference in vehicle usage including wealth (and hence car ownership), sparsity of population, hence greater journey distances, availability of good public transport alternatives, etc. An impressive increase was observed for the use of air transport (+171%). A shift to more sustainable modes is required.

Freight transport heavily contributes to traffic congestion problems. The different modes have significantly different impacts: water transport and pipelines are more efficient in energy terms than rail, which is in turn more energy efficient than road. On the other hand, if one considers delivery time, road still remains the most efficient mode. Between 1985 and 1998, total freight transported within the EU has risen considerably: + 84% for road freight and +45% for short sea shipping (up to 1996). Over this period, the use of rail recorded an overall fall of 13%. However, at country level there have been some increases: for example, rail use in Italy has risen by 33%, by +10% in Sweden and by +8% in UK.



## ...and a healthier environment

**1.6 Organic farming.** The role of agriculture is central for the preservation of traditional landscapes and biodiversity. Some agriculture, particularly intensive systems, is a source of pressure on the environment. In the nineties, specific EU policies have promoted the organic production of agricultural products and established strict requirements to market a product as 'organic'. A less intensive use of land and better protection of the environment are the main advantages of organic farming, which relies a lot on self-

dependence on external inputs is reduced as far as possible). While the area of utilised agricultural land has changed little in most Member States in recent years, the area of organically farmed land is increasing rapidly. It is estimated that between 1990 and 1999 there was a ten-fold increase at EU level. There is a high degree of variation between countries: Austria has the highest percentage of organic land (8.4%) followed by Finland (5.4%), Sweden (4.1%) and Italy (4.0%).

### Organic farming (1000 hectares)

	Area Organically Farmed*				% of total utilized agricultural area
	1990	1993	1995	1997	1997
EU-15	312	835	1 406	2 302	1.79 <sup>2</sup>

\* Includes certified and policy-supported organic and in-conversion land  
<sup>2</sup> percentage of agricultural area that is organically farmed

Source: Martin and Lamb, Welsh Institute of Rural Studies

**1.7 Biodiversity protection.** The creation, outlined in the EU legislation, of specific biodiversity sites and protection zones at Member States level has been the first step to protect habitats and natural systems.

In 2000, 6% of the EU's total area was protected under the Birds Directive and 11.6% has been designated as protected under the Habitats Directive. The proportion of land so protected varies dramatically between EU countries

Denmark (22%), Austria (14%) and Belgium (14%) all significantly above the EU average. For an appropriate evaluation of biodiversity trends, this pure quantitative information needs to be complemented by an assessment on the quality of protection between different sites and in different countries. This is a major challenge for future development of biodiversity indicators.

Sites of Nature Conservation in EU-15, 2000

	Birds Directive			Habitats Directive		
	No. Sites	Total Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	% total area	No. Sites	Total Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	% total area
EU-15	2 613	184 477	5.8	10 819	369 569	11.6

Source: ENV DG, Natura 2000

## Sustainability has also an international dimension

**1.8 Development Aid.** There is also a global dimension of sustainability and the external EU policies can actively support other countries - particularly the developing ones- in their policies for a more sustainable development. The EU is a major player in the development sphere. It is the source of approximately half of the public aid effort worldwide and is the main trading partner for many developing countries. In 1998, the overall EU-15 countries rate of development assistance (0.41% of GDP) was higher than those of USA

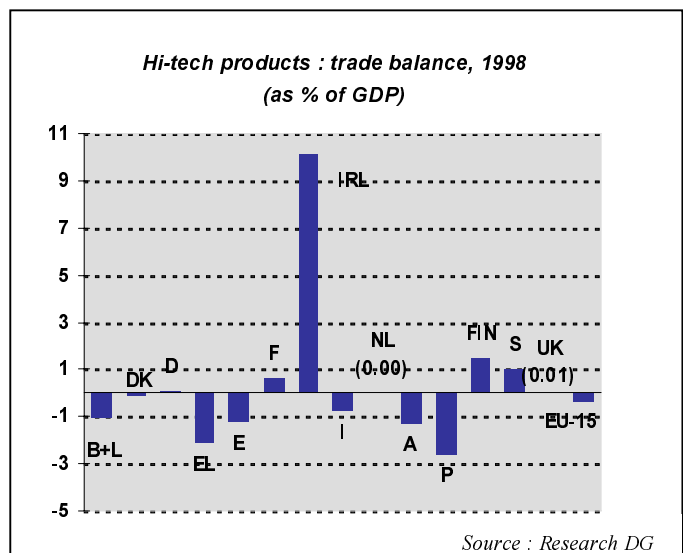
(0.10 %) and Japan (0.28%). However, during the nineties a falling trend of the development aid was observed, with Switzerland being the only exception. Within Europe, the Nordic countries led by Denmark (0.99%), Norway (0.91%) and Sweden (0.72%), give the highest proportion of their income in external co-operation. Over the period 1986 to 1998, the European Commission's development assistance has increased four fold (in nominal terms), from 1669 (1986) to 6710 Mio ECU (1998).

Official Development Assistance (% of GDP)

	1990	1995	1996	1997	1998
EU-15	0.51	0.45	0.45	0.41	0.41
NO	1.17	0.87	0.85	0.86	0.91
CH	0.32	0.34	0.34	0.34	0.32
JP	0.31	0.28	0.20	0.22	0.28
USA	0.21	0.10	0.12	0.09	0.10

Source: OECD

**1.9 Technological change.** Fostering technological progress and promoting innovation are also critical issues for assuring Europe's long-term prosperity. The figures on trade of high-tech products (including pharmaceuticals, IT, aerospace, electronic and telecommunications) provide some first indications in this direction. As a whole, in 1998 EU-15 recorded a trade deficit against the rest of the world (-28.4 Billion ECU), even though some countries - Ireland, France, Finland, Germany and Sweden - show positive balances and surpluses.



## 2. Social Indicators

### Social sustainability patterns are influenced by structural changes, the level of welfare...

**2.1 Households structure.** Changes in household composition have a direct impact on several aspects of the social, economic and environmental patterns and are linked to models of household consumption and private and public expenditure attitudes. Over the 1988-1998 period, the average EU household size decreased by around 10%, from 2.8 persons in 1988 to 2.5 in 1998. This trend was mirrored by a decline (-2% as a whole, but with peaks by -16% in the Netherlands, -9% Greece, -8% Italy) in the (still) most prevalent (36% of the EU population) household of '2

with dependent children'. Conversely, a rise occurred in 'single-parent families' and 'one-person households', 4% and 11.8%, respectively of EU population. The trend towards 'single-parent families' was pronounced in UK and Luxembourg (+100%) and then in Ireland, Spain, Germany and France (+40-50%). In 1999, 'one-person households' represented 17% of the population in Denmark, 16% in Germany and Finland, 14.2% in the Netherlands and 12.9% in France.

Average size of Households 1981-1998 (average number of persons/household and %change )

	EU-15	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK	IS	NO	CH
1998	2.5	2.4	2.2	2.2	2.7	3.1	2.4	3.0	2.7	2.6	2.3	2.5	3.0	2.1	2.3	2.3	2.7	2.2	2.3
% of change 1981-1998	-10.7	-11.1	-8.3	-12.0	-12.9	-13.9	-11.1	-16.7	-10.0	-7.1	-17.9	-7.4	-9.1	-19.2	0.0	-14.8		-18.5	-8.0

Source: Eurostat

**2.2 Signals of poverty.** In 1996, some 61 million people (17% of all EU citizens) were living under the poverty line. The same year, 21% of EU children aged less than 16<sup>3</sup> lived in low-income households<sup>4</sup>: this proportion ranges from 26% in the UK, 23% in Spain, Ireland and Portugal, 20% in Germany, to 4% in Denmark. The economic welfare of children living with one adult

(increased to 13% in 1998 from 8% in 1983), is likely to be lower than those living with two adults. For example, poverty seems more prevalent among 'single-parents with dependent children' than '2 adults with dependent children': 37% of the population living in single-parent households were below the poverty line in 1996.

Low income households, 1996

	EU	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	UK
% of children under 16 years of age living in low income households	21	19	4	20	18	23	18	23	22	16	14	16	23	26
% of total population below the poverty line	17	17	11	16	21	18	16	18	19	12	12	13	22	19

Source: Eurostat

**2.3 Social benefits.** The social benefits offered in each country to households or individuals gives some indication of the level of social protection, one main topic of the EU Social Policy Agenda. Between 1990 and 1998, real terms per capita expenditure on social protection grew by 22% in the EU-15, with significant country variations: by 2% in the Netherlands, 10% in Sweden, 20-24% in Denmark, Spain, France, Italy and Austria to 44% in Ireland, 51% in Luxembourg and 89% in Portugal. In most Member States,

'old-age and survivors' benefits make up the largest item of social protection expenditure: EU-wide, they amounted to 46% of total benefits (or 12.2% of GDP) in 1998. Unemployment benefits represent 7% of social benefits. Inter-country differences concerning the share of unemployment-related benefits in total social benefits (next to old age and survivors, sickness health care and disability, family and children) are significant and reflect national labour market characteristics and social policies.

Social benefits per capita, 1990=100 (at constant prices)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
EU-15	100	:	:	113	114	117	120	120	122

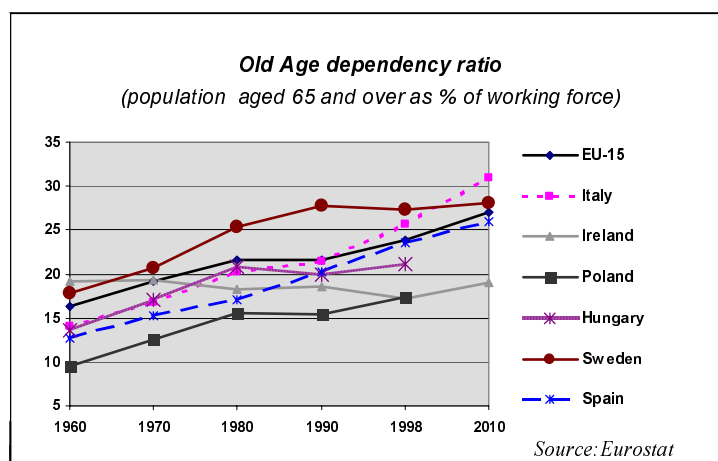
Source: Eurostat

<sup>3</sup>: 'Dependent children' include all children aged under 16 years plus all those persons aged 16-24 who are economically inactive (mainly in education) and who are living with at least one of their parents.

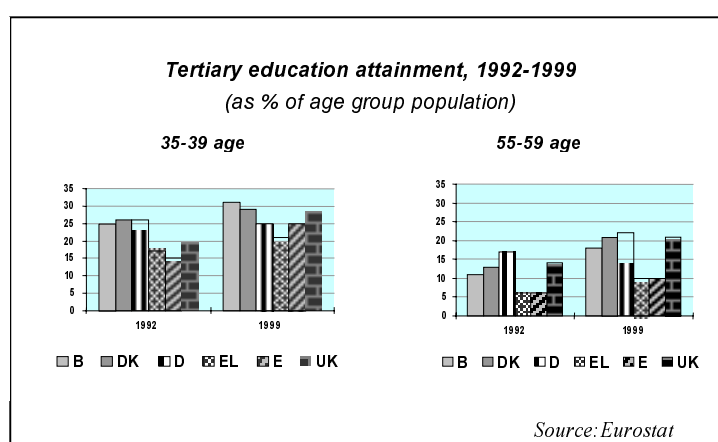
<sup>4</sup>: 'Low-income households' are households whose income is below the poverty line of their country, i.e. below 60% of the median national income.

## ...a sustainable growth and an increased educational attainment

**2.4 Population growth.** There has been a gradual slowing down of population growth in the EU over the last 35 years. Between 1995 and 1999, the population increased on average 2.5 per 1 000 population per year compared with an annual average of around 8 in the 1960s. The falls in fertility and mortality explain population ageing and related impacts in terms of social welfare and also labour market structure. The proportion of persons aged 65 and over in the working population increased from 19.2% in 1970 to 23.8% in 1998. Eurostat projected that the old age dependency ratio will rise to 27% in 2010. More jobs – including also a better employability of older workers – are required to offset the trend.



**2.5 Education attainment.** Over the last thirty years, the level of post compulsory educational attainment has increased significantly in the EU. In 1999, 51% of EU citizens aged 25-29 were qualified at upper secondary level compared with only 34% of the population aged 55-59. This overall trend is confirmed by a significant increase - experienced by most Member States- over the 1992-1999 period in tertiary education attainment levels. In 1999, 22% of EU citizens aged 35-39 had attained a tertiary qualification, compared with 16% of the 55-59 population.



## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION - METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

From 1996, Eurostat has co-operated with the United Nations Department for Economic Social Affairs (UNDESA), to support the indicator development work within the process of the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (UNCSD). Eurostat has also supported the UNCSD by contributing to the methodological improvement of the indicator list. For example, in 1999 and 2000 Eurostat, as the lead organisation, prepared the methodological sheets for four new indicators, selected in the context of the newly defined 'Consumption and Production Patterns' theme.

The 63 indicators compiled now by Eurostat follow one of the most important international initiatives on this topic, the Sustainable Development Indicators (SDI) methodology and list defined by United Nations Commission of Sustainable Development (UNCSD). In particular, the publication draws upon and extends the recently revised (2000) UN list of 59 core SDI, which is structured along a policy-oriented classification according to the relevant sustainability dimensions (4), themes (15) and sub-themes (38). As far as possible, the selected indicators have been organised along the same thematic lines and have used the same definitions as those proposed by UNCSD. In order to maintain consistency with the UNCSD SDI core list and to avoid omitting important themes, some indicators with limited time-series coverage have been included in the publication (mainly from the social sphere, for example: population below poverty line, crime, income inequality). These indicators demonstrate the need for more and better information on certain issues. Some specific complements have been added to the UNCSD core SDI list in order to include important EU issues that would otherwise be

neglected (mainly in the social and the macro-economic sphere) Eurostat has tested the UN methodology in order to verify the application of the selected indicators and their availability, in terms of adequate statistical information, at European level. About 50 per cent of the indicators selected by Eurostat (29 indicators) are similar to those in the UN core list and, the 20 per cent of the final Eurostat selection (13 modified) are comparable to their UN counterparts in terms of definitions. As a result, more than 66 per cent of the selected indicators (i.e. 42 indicators out of 63) are comparable to those in the UNCSD core list. The publication covers the EU-15 Member States and, whenever data are available, also the EEA and the first six Accession countries. Eurostat is the main data source of the indicators presented, complemented by other international sources. For each indicator a statistical presentation (table and graphs) and a synthetic descriptive analysis is provided. The aim has been to provide the reader, through the use of tables and graphs, with as much complementary information as possible. A brief evaluation of the data presented is also provided, alongside an overall assessment of the available statistical information for the issue. An inter-dimensional, integrated policy assessment of sustainable development indicators is not presented in this report for two main reasons: 1) it goes beyond the scope of a statistical analysis and 2) an exhaustive analytical framework establishing relationships/links among and between indicators has not yet been identified or agreed internationally. A separate part of the publication presents the experiences of the five Member States (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France and Germany), which took part in the UN testing phase on indicators (1996-99).

# Further information:

## ➤ Reference publications

Title Measuring progress towards a more sustainable Europe  
Available in EN, FR and DE in PDF format; EN also on paper  
Catalogue No KS-37-01-203-EN-C Price 35 EUR

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## For information on methodology

Mario Ronconi, Eurostat/F3, L-2920 Luxembourg, Tel. (352) 4301 35532, Fax (352) 4301 37316, E-mail: [mario.ronconi@cec.eu.int](mailto:mario.ronconi@cec.eu.int)

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