

Overweight and obesity among adults

Being overweight is a major risk factor for various non-communicable diseases including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and certain cancers. High consumption of calorie-dense food, trans-fats and saturated fats, and increasingly sedentary lifestyles have contributed to growing obesity rates in Europe and more globally, further challenged by new obesogenic digital food environments (WHO Europe, 2022^[1]). Overweight might cause more than 320 000 premature deaths annually in EU countries over the next 30 years if no counter-measures are taken (OECD, 2019^[2]).

In most EU countries, more than half of adults are overweight or obese. Between 2014 and 2019, overweight rates increased in virtually all countries, except France and Luxembourg where they remained stable. Austria, Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Slovak Republic saw the largest increases Figure 4.19.

Men are more likely than women to be overweight or obese in all EU countries. The gender gap is particularly large in Luxembourg and the Czech Republic (Figure 4.20).

People with a lower education level are also more likely to be overweight or obese than those with a higher education level in all EU countries (Figure 4.21). This difference was greatest in Portugal and Luxembourg. Differences in overweight prevalence across high and low educated people result in further inequality in health and employment outcomes. Individuals with at least one chronic disease associated with overweight are less likely to be employed; and when employed, they are more likely to be absent or less productive than healthy individuals (OECD, 2019^[2]).

During the pandemic, overweight was associated with an increased risk of developing severe symptoms and dying from COVID-19 (Katz, 2021^[3]). The mobility restrictions during the pandemic have also led to unfavourable shifts in eating behaviours and physical activity patterns. Indeed, this context offset gains made by policies promoting healthier lifestyles, accentuating the prevalence of obesity in European countries (WHO Europe, 2022^[1]).

Countries have at their disposal comprehensive policy options to tackle overweight and obesity, ranging from health promotion and education to regulation. The EU Farm to Fork strategy and the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan call for revising EU rules on information provided to consumers. In particular, the EC will propose a harmonised mandatory front-of-pack nutrition label for food products, and establish nutrient profiles to restrict the promotion of food high in fat, salt or sugar (Laaninen, 2022^[4]). Some food business operators have already reformulated products in preparation of the establishment of nutrient profiles.

Definition and comparability

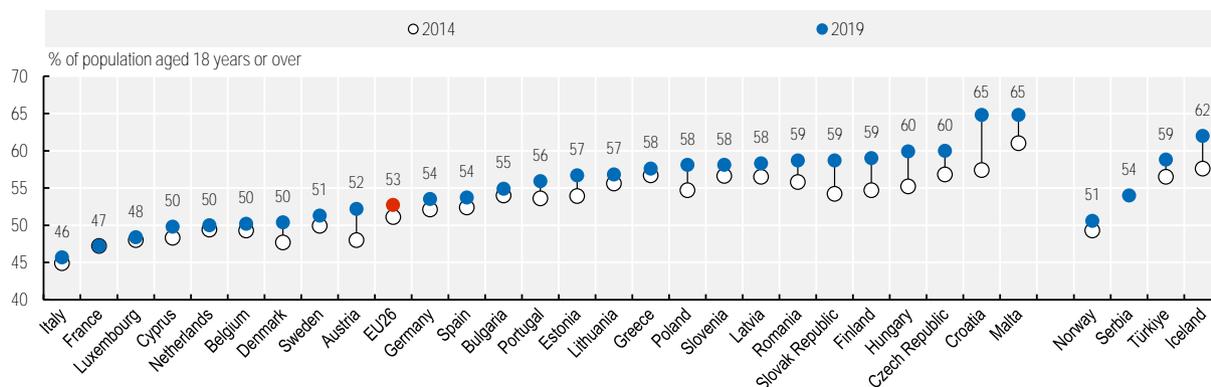
The data is based on the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS 2019), compiled by Eurostat. Height and weight were self-reported by individuals. The body mass index (BMI) is obtained by dividing weight in kilograms by height in metres squared. Overweight corresponds to a BMI equal or greater than 25, and obesity BMI equal or greater than 30.

Data are stratified by education level. As per the International Standard Classification for Education 2011, tertiary education refers to Levels 5-8 (short-cycle tertiary education, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctoral degrees). The non-tertiary education group corresponds to the average of "less than upper secondary" and "upper secondary and less than tertiary" education.

References

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- WHO Europe (2022), *WHO European Regional Obesity Report 2022*, World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/353747>. [1]

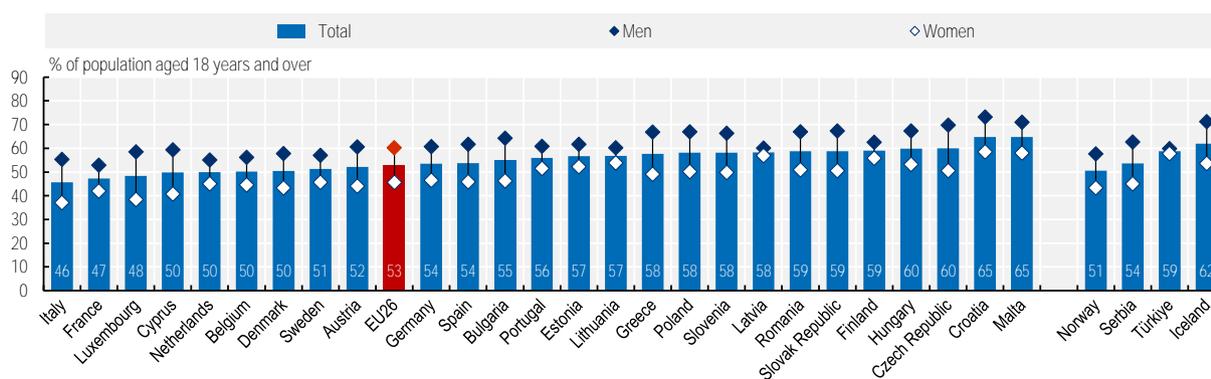
Figure 4.19. Overweight (including obesity) rates among adults, 2014 and 2019



Note: The EU average is weighted. No data is available for Ireland.
Source: Eurostat, 2022 (EHIS 2019).

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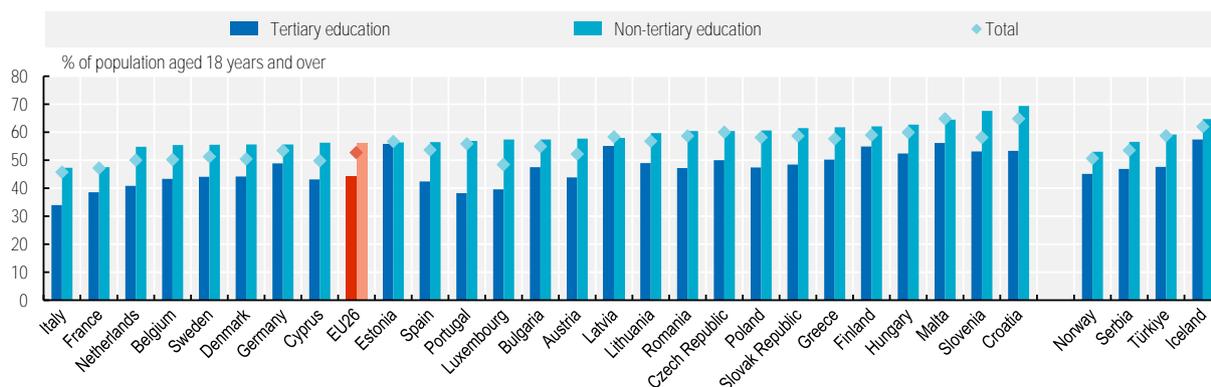
Figure 4.20. Overweight (including obesity) rates among adults, by gender, 2019



Note: The EU average is weighted. No data is available for Ireland.
Source: Eurostat, 2022 (EHIS 2019).

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Figure 4.21. Overweight (including obesity) rates among adults, by educational level, 2019



Note: The EU average is weighted. No data is available for Ireland.
Source: Eurostat, 2022 (EHIS 2019).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/s81iwz>



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