

Prevalence of diabetes and asthma

Chronic conditions are not only the leading causes of death in EU countries, but they also reduce the quality of life among people living with such chronic conditions, especially if the conditions are not properly managed. Many chronic conditions such as diabetes are preventable by reducing behavioural and environmental risk factors.

Diabetes is a chronic condition that occurs when the body is unable to regulate excessive glucose levels. If left undiagnosed or poorly controlled, it can result in serious complications, including blindness, kidney failure and lower limb amputation. Diabetes increases the risks of cardiovascular diseases. People with diabetes also have a greater risk of becoming severely ill if infected by COVID-19. Delays or postponement of regular care during the pandemic may have increased severe complications (see Chapter 2).

Over 7% of adults on average reported having diabetes in EU countries in 2019 (Figure 3.15). Rates varied from 9% or more in Croatia, Portugal and Finland to less than 5% in Ireland, Luxembourg and Romania. The prevalence of diabetes has increased at least slightly between 2009 and 2019 in all the 17 EU countries with data available from the three waves of the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS).

Adults with lower education level (who have not completed secondary education) are more than twice as likely to report having diabetes than those with higher education level on average across EU countries. This is partly due the fact that a higher proportion of lower-educated people is in older population groups. The prevalence of important risk factors for diabetes such as overweight and obesity is also much higher among the least-educated people (see indicator “Overweight and obesity among adults” in Chapter 4).

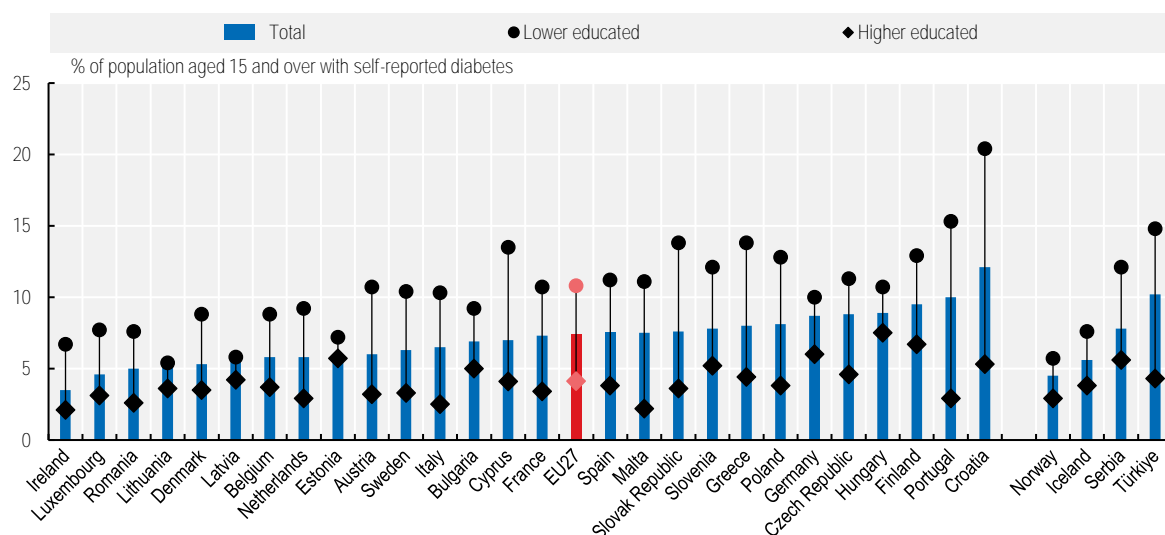
Asthma is a long-term condition that occurs when the air passages in the lungs become narrow due to inflammation and tightening of the muscles around the small airways. This causes cough, wheeze, shortness of breath and chest tightness, among other symptoms. Risk factors for asthma include air pollution, smoke, dust, viral infections (e.g. colds), and grass and tree pollen. While asthma cannot be cured, good management with inhaled medications can enable people to enjoy a normal life.

About 6% of people in the EU reported having asthma in 2019 (Figure 3.16). Rates varied from about 8% or more in Finland, Germany and France to about 2% or less in Romania and Bulgaria. In most countries, the prevalence of asthma is higher among lower-educated people than higher-educated people. The prevalence of asthma has remained relatively stable between 2009 and 2019 in the majority of the 17 EU countries with data available from EHIS, although it has increased in a few countries (such as Germany, Estonia and Latvia).

Definition and comparability

The European Health Interview Survey (EHIS) asks people aged 15 and over to report whether they had some chronic conditions in the past 12 months. Diabetes (excluding gestational diabetes) and asthma are included in a list of 15 chronic conditions. The rates are not aged-standardised. Lower and higher education levels are based on ISCED-2011 and refer to less than primary and lower secondary education, and tertiary education, respectively.

Figure 3.15. Prevalence of diabetes, by education level, 2019

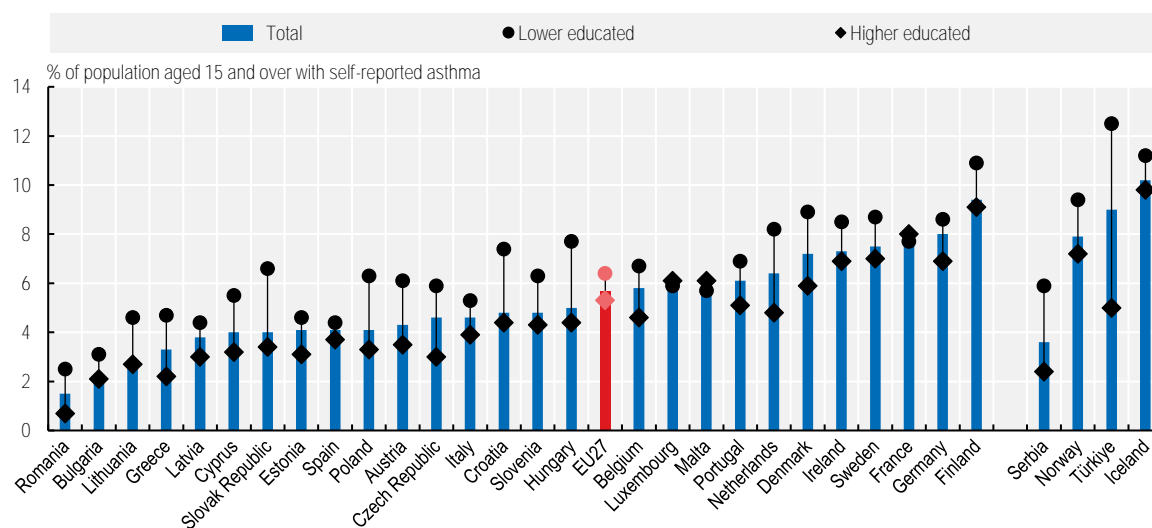


Note: The EU average is weighted. Lower educated is defined as people with no more than lower secondary education, while higher educated is defined as those with a tertiary education degree.

Source: Eurostat Database, based on the European Health Interview Survey (wave 3).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/unfz18>

Figure 3.16. Prevalence of asthma, by education level, 2019



Note: The EU average is weighted. Lower educated is defined as people with no more than lower secondary education, while higher educated is defined as those with a tertiary education degree.

Source: Eurostat Database, based on the European Health Interview Survey (wave 3).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/u59kl4>



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