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Foreword

The EU annual inflation rate in December remained at the low of 2.2% achieved in November.

An estimated 18.1 million people were unemployed in the EU in December. Seasonally-adjusted unemployment fell to 10.8%, unemployment for women was 12.6%, the rate for men was a quarter lower at 9.5%.

The yearly growth rates of extra-EU exports and imports for the first eight months of 1996 were 8.4% and 5.5% respectively. The EU balance with its Central and Eastern European partners showed the largest surplus, trade with Japan and China registered the highest deficits.

The first estimate of intra-EU trade in the periode January-August 1996 showed an increase of 4.7% compared to a year earlier.

There was little change in the position of currencies in the exchange rate mechanism (ERM), as measured by their bilateral fluctuations. By the end of January, the band within which ERM currencies fluctuated was 7.97%.

EU yields continue to fall in January, moving close to their historical lows.

Foreign official reserve levels (excluding gold) generally rose in September 1996 among the EUR 15.

EU industrial production was up by only 0.3% last year. This is much less than 1995's rise of 3.8%.

The "Dossier of the month" of this edition is devoted to *Continuing vocational training in enterprises*, to *The economic activity of women in the European Union* and *Accidents at work in the European Union*.

European economy at a glance



	Dates	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK	EUR 15
GDP, seasonally adjusted volume trends, T/T-1 %	III/96	:	0.99	1.14	:	0.61	0.9	:	0.59	:	0.71	:	:	2.07	0.67	0.75	0.43
GFCF, seasonally adjusted volume trends, T/T-1 %	III/96	:	2.94	1.66	:	-0.56	1.04	:	0.62	:	6.71	:	:	6.12	1.27	-2.18	2.1
Private final national consumption volume trends, T/T-1 %	III/96	:	0.26	0.77	:	0.58	1.02	:	:	:	1.2	:	:	0.73	1.81	1.13	:
Production index 1990=100 total, seasonally adjusted (1)	10/96	106.4	118.7	96.1	98.4	104.7	99.1	:	105.3	:	109.9	:	102.7	120.7	117.8	107.3	104.1
Consumer price index T/T-12 %	12/96	2.5	2.3	1.4	7.5	3.2	1.7	:	2.7p	1.8	2.5p	2.3p	3.3	0.8	-0.2	2.5	2.2p
Conversion rate 1 ECU=... monthly average	01/97	40.2	7.44	1.95	305.5	163.7	6.58	0.74	1905	40.2	2.19	13.72	194.9	5.80	8.58	0.73	:
Exchange rate 1 USD=... monthly average	01/97	33.1	6.12	1.60	251.3	134.7	5.41	0.61	1567	33.1	1.80	11.28	160.3	4.77	7.06	0.60	:
Money supply, M1 T/T-12 %	10/96	2.9	:	11.5	13.8	6.7	5.6	13.7	3.2	:	13.8	12.7	5.2	19.8	:	:	:
Yield on public sector long-term bonds %	12/96	5.9	6.6	5.8	:	7.0	5.7	6.6	7.6	5.8	5.7	5.9	7.0	6.3	6.9	7.7	:
Unemployment rate seasonally adjusted %	12/96	9.5	5.5	9.3	:	22.2	12.4	11.8	:	3.5	6.5	4.0	7.1	15.0	10.6	7.5	10.8
Extra-EU trade balance BN ECU	I/96(2)	-23(3)	1.9	19.3	-2.0	-2.5	10.4	1.1	16.1	-23(3)	-14.8	1.5	-2.0	3.7	7.8	-14.9	23.4
Intra-EU trade balance BN ECU	I/96(2)	8.3(3)	1.2	15.1	-5.3	-4.5	-3.5	5.8	8.1	8.3(3)	26.2	-7.2	-2.7	1.3	2.5	-5.6	39.6

Data in italics are not necessarily for the indicated period but are the latest available (usually the previous month or quarter)

(1) Excluding construction
(2) : January to August 1996
(3) : BLEU



**Stability of European Union
inflation rates : 2.2%**

Inflation rate

EU annual inflation in December remained at the record low of 2.2% achieved in November. This is the lowest inflation rate since these figures were first compiled in 1983 for what are now the 15 Member States. In December 1995 the rate was 3.0%. Within the EU, six Member States

recorded rates below the average: all under 2.0%. Lowest was Sweden which again had a fall, of -0.2%. Next lowest was Finland's 0.8%. Highest was Greece at 7.5%, then Portugal and Spain, considerably lower at 3.3% and 3.2% respectively. All the others were well under 3.0%.

December rates in Member States, in ascending order of inflation, with corresponding figures for a year earlier

	<u>Dec. 1996</u> <u>Dec. 1995</u>	<u>Dec. 1995</u> <u>Dec. 1994</u>		<u>Dec. 1996</u> <u>Dec. 1995</u>	<u>Dec. 1995</u> <u>Dec. 1994</u>
Sweden	-0.2 %	2.6 %	United Kingdom	2.5 %	3.2 %
Finland	0.8 %	0.3 %	Belgium	2.5 %	1.5 %
Germany	1.4 %	1.8 %	The Netherlands	2.5 % ^p	1.7 %
France	1.7 %	2.1 %	Italy	2.7 % ^p	5.6 %
Luxembourg	1.8 %	1.3 %	Spain	3.2 %	4.3 %
Ireland*	1.9 %	2.4 %	Portugal	3.3 %	3.4 %
Denmark	2.3 %	1.8 %	Greece	7.5 %	8.1 %
Austria	2.3 % ^p	1.8 %	EUR 15	2.2 % ^p	3.0 %

* The index for Ireland is quarterly; Nov. 1996/1995 and Nov. 1995/1994; p = provisional.

Corresponding rates in some non-EU countries were: **Japan** +0.2%^p (-0.3%), **Switzerland** +0.8% (+1.9%), **Norway** +1.8% (+2.2%), **Canada** +2.2% (+1.7%), **Iceland** +2.1% (+2.0%) and the **USA** +3.3% (+2.5%).

Unemployment

**EU unemployment fell to
10.8% in December**

EU seasonally-adjusted unemployment fell to 10.8% in December after eight months at 10.9%. This was back to the level of December 1995.

The slight year-end fall was due mainly to the United Kingdom drop to 7.5% from 7.8% in November.

In the four years to the end of 1996 the Danish rate fell by nearly one half (standing at 5.5% in December) and that of the UK and Ireland (11.8%) by a quarter.

Luxembourg (3.5%) and Austria (4.0%) had the lowest rates at the end of last year, Spain (22.2%) and Finland (15.0%) the highest.

Unemployment for women was 12.6%, the same as at the end of 1995 and 1994. The rate for men was a quarter lower at 9.5%.

An estimated 18.1 million people were unemployed in the EU in December.

Unemployment rates in December and November 1996

	Dec.	Nov.		Dec.	Nov.
Luxembourg	3.5%	3.3%	Sweden	10.6%	10.2%
Austria	4.0%	4.0%	EUR15	10.8%	10.9%
Denmark	5.5%	5.5%	Ireland	11.8%	11.9%
The Netherlands	:	6.5%	Italy	:	:
Portugal	7.1%	7.1%	France	12.4%	12.4%
UK	7.5%	7.8%	Finland	15.0%	15.3%
Germany	9.3%	9.3%	Spain	22.2%	22.3%
Belgium	9.5%	9.5%	Greece	:	:

: data not available.

External trade

The yearly growth rates of extra-EU exports and imports for this period were 8.4% and 5.5% respectively

Extra-EU trade

In the first eight months of 1996 the European Union's⁽¹⁾ external trade balance was ECU 23.4 billion in surplus whereas in the same period of 1995 it had shown a surplus of 11.7 billion. The yearly growth rates of extra-EU exports and imports for this period were 8.4% and 5.5% respectively.

The EU balance with its Central and Eastern European (CEEC) partners showed the largest surplus in the first eight months of 1996 (ECU 12.8 billion). On the contrary, trade with Japan and China registered the highest deficits (ECU

11.4 and 10.2 billion respectively).

During the first eight months of 1996, the EU's trade balance in machinery and transport equipment recorded the greatest surplus (ECU 57 billion), while fuel products showed the largest deficit (ECU 40 billion).

Germany and Italy showed the two largest extra-EU surpluses among the EU countries (ECU 19.3 and 16.1 billion respectively). The Netherlands (ECU 12.4 billion) and the United Kingdom (ECU 14.9 billion) registered the highest external deficits.

Intra EU trade

The first estimate of intra-EU trade⁽²⁾ in the period January-August 1996 showed a total value for dispatches (i.e. exports which are the more reliable measure of intra-EU trade) of around ECU 685 billion, an increase of 4.7% compared to a year earlier.

The Netherlands was the Member State with the largest intra-EU surplus, which in the first eight months of 1996 grew to ECU 26.2 billion, up by 3.4 billion compared with the same period of 1995.

In the first eight months of 1996, Germany registered the second-largest intra-EU trade surplus (ECU 15.1 billion), a fall of 0.1 billion compared with the same period of the previous year.

Portugal, Spain and Greece registered internal deficits of ECU 2.7, 4.5 and 5.3 billion respectively. However, it must be pointed out that Spain's intra-EU exports and imports were fairly dynamic in this period, showing growth rates of 10.6% and 7.1% respectively.

(1) The European Union's figures for 1996 are provisional and subject to frequent revisions.

(2) On 1 January 1993, following the abolition of customs controls in the EU, a new collection system for intra-EU data (Intrastat) was introduced. Instead of being derived from customs declarations, trade figures are now compiled from data provided directly by companies.

Money and finance

Exchange rates and interest rates

Dollar continues its climb... .. but little movement of currencies within the ERM

The US Dollar continued its advance on the foreign exchange markets in January, breaching the 1.65 level against the Deutschemark on 28 January, the highest rate for two and a half years. Similarly, against the Japanese yen, the dollar strengthened to a highpoint of 122.0 on 29 January, a level not seen since February 1993. At the end of 1996 the dollar had stood at DEM 1.554 and YEN 116.4.

DEM weakness did not have a significant impact on the EMS, though on 20 January the DEM recorded its lowest levels against the Portuguese escudo, Finnish mark, and Italian lira (and on 13 January against the Danish krone) for more than a year. There was little change in the position of currencies in the exchange rate mechanism (ERM), as measured by their bilateral fluctuations. The Irish pound maintained its position as the strongest currency: it appreciated to 2.652 against the DEM on 22 January, the highest level since the currency's devaluation in the ERM in 1993, before weakening late in the month. By the end of January, the band within which ERM currencies fluctuated was 7.97%, slightly narrower than at the end of December 1996. Excluding the Irish pound the fluctuation band was 2.81%, which, though wider than in December, indicates that the ERM remained very stable.

Outside the ERM, the pound sterling reached a peak of 2.72 against the DEM on 22 January (a trend mirrored by the

Irish pound). This was the highest rate since the GBP left the ERM in September 1992, when the lower limit of its fluctuation band was DEM 2.778. However, sterling fell to DEM 2.62 by the end of January, slightly below the end-1996 level. The Greek drachma, by contrast, ended the month stronger than it began against the DEM, at GRD 157.5.

In January, the central bank of Norway intervened to stem the Norwegian Krone's sharp rise. Official interest rates were cut twice in early January, the advances rate falling to 5.25%, but the krone appreciated further to 3.919 against the DEM on 20 January before ending the month at 3.959. The krone reached its highest level against EU currencies since the decision was made to float the currency in 1992.

Other official interest rate cuts in January took place in Portugal and Spain (to historical lows), France, Sweden, and Italy, where the Bank of Italy cut both the discount and Lombard rates by 0.75 percentage points to 6.75% and 8.25% respectively, following favourable news on inflation. Contrary to the general trend in Europe, Iceland raised its official rates in January, for the second time since October 1996.

Note:

Exchange rates are as supplied to the European Commission by central banks on a daily basis.

EU yields continue to fall in January, moving close to their historical lows

Government bond yields

Comparing the end of 1996 with the end of January 1997, yields on 10-year EU government bonds fell or were more or less unchanged, as bond markets continued to perform strongly. Excluding Greece (data not available), UK bonds were confirmed as having the highest yield for the second month running, despite a fall of nearly 0.2 percentage points in January, to 7.5%. The yield on Dutch bonds (the lowest yielding in the EU) fell by around 0.3 percentage points, to 5.5%, ahead of French yields (5.6%), and Belgian and German yields (5.7%). The differential between the highest and lowest yields therefore widened slightly to 2%, though this is still much smaller than in the early part of 1996 when it was around 4%.

As a result of the downward trend in yields since March of last year, they are now at or close to their historical lows. For Spain and Portugal, both long-term bond yields and short-term official interest rates fell to historical lows in January. The US bond market suffered a small setback in the month, the Treasury yield edging higher to 6.5%, whereas the Japanese market regained momentum following December's correction, the Japanese bond yield falling to 2.4%, close to the record low.

Note:

The above-mentioned yields relate to government bonds of around 10 years to maturity.

France announces target for both narrow and broad money supply of 5% as a medium-term objective

Money supply

The Bank of France has announced, as part of its monetary policy for 1997, a medium-term objective for both narrow and broad monetary aggregates of 5%. This is consistent, according to the central bank, with price stability, defined as keeping the rate of growth of consumer price inflation to within 2%, both in 1997 and in the medium term. In the year to October 1996 French M3 fell by 0.5%, while M1 grew by 5.6%. (For a description of the monetary targets announced by the German Bundesbank, see last month's Key Figures.)

In the year to November 1996 Spain's main broad monetary measure ALP expanded by 7.3%, staying within the official medium-term objective of 8%. The annual rate of growth has been fairly constant throughout 1996. Annual growth in the UK's M4 measure, however, has tended to be slightly above its 3-9% monitoring range during 1996: in November the rate of growth accelerated

to 10.8%. Ireland has consistently had the fastest expansion of broad money among the Member States in 1996: annual growth in its M3 measure reached 20.6% in November. By contrast, Finland's M3 measure has been consistently the lowest: M3 fell 0.6% in the year to October. Finland and Ireland showed the fastest growth in M1 in the year to November: by 17.2% and 15.6% respectively. The lowest rate of M1 growth in the year to October was in Belgium (provisionally, 2.9%).

Generally,

M1 = notes and coin in circulation + bank sight deposits;
M2 = M1 + savings deposits + other short-term claims on banks;

M3 = M2 + certain placements in a less liquid or longer-term form;

M4 (for the UK) is a broader measure than M3, including all sterling deposits held with UK banks and building societies by the public.

Reserves of Spain and Italy strengthen further in September, along with those of most EUR 15 countries

Foreign official reserves

Foreign official reserve levels (excluding gold) generally rose in September 1996 among the EUR 15 (not all country data are available). The US dollar's appreciation during the month would have contributed to that rise: as the most important reserve currency, a stronger dollar raises the value of reserves when expressed in another currency, in this case the ECU. Over the month there were notable increases in Denmark (+6.0% to ECU 11.2 bn), Italy (+4.9% to ECU 38.8 bn), Greece (+4.6% to ECU 12.6 bn), and Spain (+3.9% to ECU 41.9 bn). In the year to September, Spain's reserves grew a remarkable 62.8%, and Italy's by 56.4%. Meanwhile, Finland's reserves recorded a fall of 30.3% (to ECU 5.4 bn) over the year, despite a rise of 2.2% in September, and the

Netherlands a fall of 17.2% (to ECU 22.3 bn), having moved 1.4% lower in September.

In August 1996, reserves of the EUR 15 in aggregate were ECU 315.9 bn, an increase of 0.6% on July, and of 8.5% since August 1995. The level of EUR 15 reserves has been fairly steady since April, but moved sharply upwards in the early part of the year. Of the ECU 29.7 bn increase in the first eight months of 1996, 24.6 bn was accounted for by increases in the reserves of Spain and Italy.

Japan's reserves reached a new world record in September 1996 when measured in ECU terms, of ECU 170.2 bn, helped by the strong dollar. In the same month reserves of the USA amounted to ECU 51.3 bn.

Industrial production

European Union industrial production up by only 0.3% last year

EU industrial production was up by only 0.3% last year. This is much less than 1995's rise of 3.8%.

The estimate is based on production indices for total industry available up to last November.

The Netherlands showed the best results over 1996 - doubling growth to

4.4% from 2.4% in 1995. Finland had an increase of 2.3% (7.5% in 1995), Sweden 2.1% (10.0% in 1995). Belgium (0.2%), Germany (0.3%) and France (0.2%) recorded weak growth.

Italy (-2.3%), Spain (-0.9%) and Luxembourg (-0.9%) had falls.

Estimated growth in total industrial production

(1996 compared with 1995 and 1995 compared with 1994)

	1996/95	1995/94		1996/95	1995/94
EUR15	0.3%	3.8%	Italy	-2.3%	6.1%
Belgium	0.2%	4.2%	Luxembourg	-0.9%	0.5%
Denmark	1.2%	4.1%	Netherlands	4.4%	2.4%
Germany	0.3%	2.1%	Portugal	0.9%	4.8%
Greece	1.8%	1.8%	Finland	2.3%	7.5%
Spain	-0.9%	4.6%	Sweden	2.1%	10.0%
France	0.2%	1.8%	United Kingdom	1.2%	2.5%

Ireland and Austria: not enough data for reliable estimate

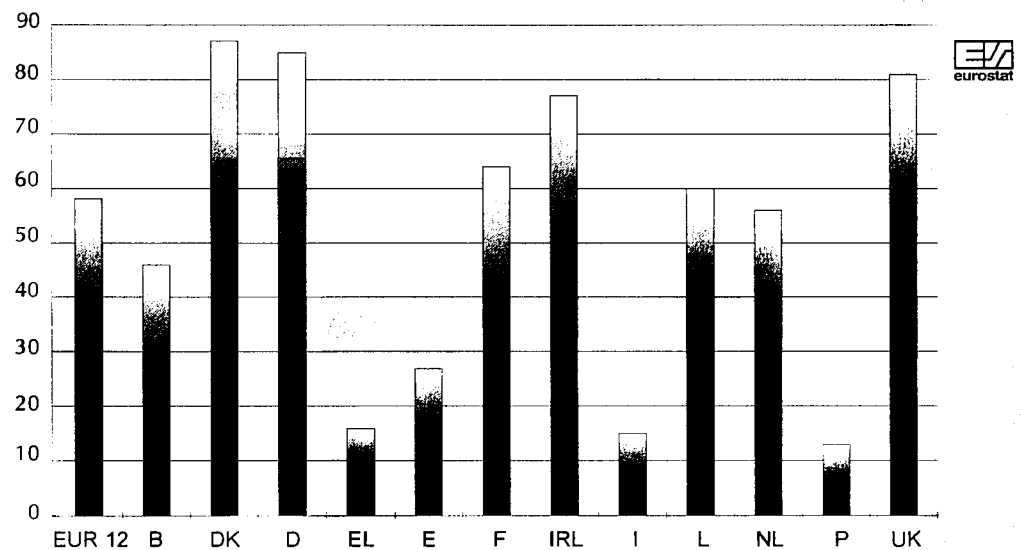
Dossier of the month

Continuing vocational training in enterprises

Within the European Union, nearly 60% of enterprises with 10 or more employees provided continuing vocational training courses for their employees in 1993. These enterprises are termed "training" enterprises

Danish, German, British and Irish enterprises provided the most training courses (from 77% for Ireland to 87% in Denmark). The enterprises providing the least training are to be found in Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal (from 13% to 27%).

Percentage of training enterprises by Member State (1) - 1993



Training enterprises by Member State (1) - 1993

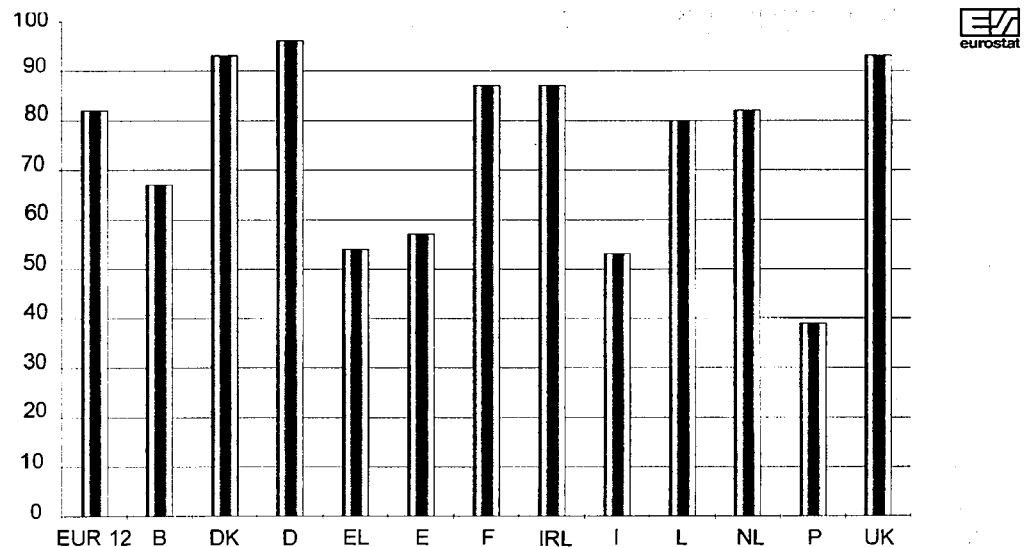
	EUR 12	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	P	UK
Nb (1000)	898,7	26,8	34,3	178,7	14,9	116,2	114,3	7,7	128,8	2,3	47,1	31,9	195,7
%	58	46	87	85	16	27	64	77	15	60	56	13	81

(1) Enterprises with 10 or more employees

In 1993, 82% of employees in the European Union worked in an enterprise which offered training courses. Within these so-called "training" enterprises, 35% of employees actually took part in training

The proportion of employees in training enterprises ranged from 39% (Portugal) to 96% (Germany). Participation in training courses was higher than 30% in all Member States except Greece (24%) and Italy (27%).

Employees in training enterprises as a % of total employees



Employee participation in continuing vocational training - 1993

	EUR 12	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	P	UK
1	82	67	93	96	54	57	87	87	53	80	82	39	93
2	35	41	37	25	24	36	42	49	27	30	32	35	41

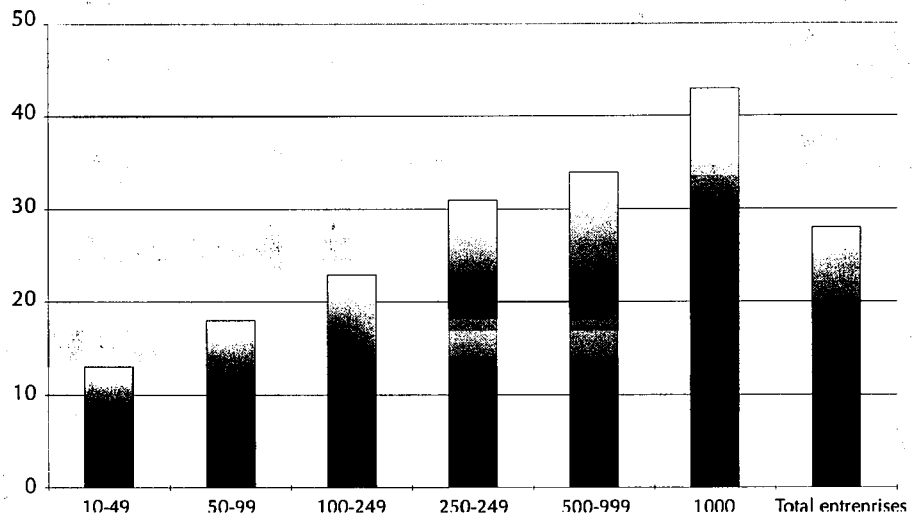
1 =employees in training enterprises as a % of total employees

2 =employees participating in training courses as a % of employees in training enterprises

Opportunities for taking part in continuing training are generally better in large enterprises than in smaller ones

13% of employees in enterprises with fewer than 50 employees took part in training courses in 1993, compared with 43% in enterprises with over 1 000 employees. This is a feature common to almost all Member States, except for Denmark, where the participation rate is the same regardless of the size of the enterprise.

Employees taking part in continuing training courses by size of enterprise, 1993 - EUR 12 (% of total employees)



Employees taking part in continuing training courses by size of enterprise, 1993 - EUR 12

	10-49 employees	50-99 employees	100-249 employees	250-249 employees	500-999 employees	1000 employees	Total employees
% of total employees	13	18	23	31	34	43	28

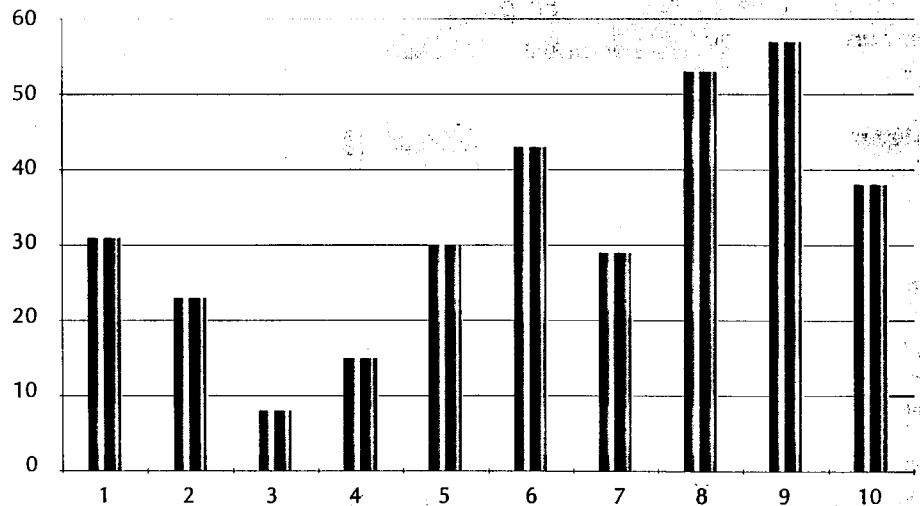


(*) Enterprises with 10 or more employees

The participation of employees in training is highest in the financial sector, the public services and the more modern branches of industry, as compared with the most traditional branches

In the "financial intermediaries" and "post and telecommunications" sectors, for instance, 53% and 57% of employees respectively took part in training, as against 15% in the "construction" sector and only 8% in the "textiles, clothing and leather" sector.

Percentage of employees taking part in training, by sector of the economy, 1993 - EUR 12



Training enterprises by sector of the economy - 1993

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
% of training enterprises	42	50	26	51	62	81	48	66	87	73
% of employees taking part in training	31	23	8	15	30	43	29	53	57	38



1 Mining; 2 Foodstuffs; 3 Textiles, clothing and leather; 4 Construction; 5 Mechanical engineering (including electrical appliances); 6 Electricity, gas and water; 7 Transport; 8 Post and telecommunications; 9 Financial intermediaries (banking and insurance); 10 Real estate, leasing.

Accidents at work in the European Union

Almost five million victims

Over 120 million people are employed in the 15 Member States of the European Union. According to estimates, almost five million of these sustained an accident at work leading to an absence of more than three days in 1993, i.e. a mean estimated number (1) of 4 800 947 accidents.

In 1993, the overall European frequency index (2) was 4 505 industrial accidents per 100 000 persons employed in the six major branches covered by the data (3). Furthermore, 5 977 accidents led to the death of the victim, i.e. 6.1 fatal accidents per 100 000 persons.

Construction: a high-risk sector

Taking together the six major branches observed, an average of one person in 20 was the victim of an accident leading to an absence of more than three days. The most frequent and serious accidents occur in the construction sector, which has the highest frequency index at 9 885, or 2.2 times the overall index. This corresponds to 905 004 accidents, of which 1 395 were fatal, i.e. 23.3% of the total. The frequency index for fatal accidents in the construction sector (17.0) is three times

higher than the overall index. Next comes manufacturing, with an index of 5 054 and 1 526 084 accidents, and 21.4% of the total number of fatal accidents, the frequency index being 5.0.

Of the branches not yet completely covered by the 1993 data, transport and communication account for 8.9% of the total number of accidents and 15.1% of fatal accidents. Agriculture accounts for 7.4% of fatal accidents.

Men involved in accidents more frequently

Men are more frequently involved in accidents at the place of work. The frequency index was 5 936, or 78.7% of the total number of accidents (one person in 17). By contrast, 17.4% of accidents involved women, which is a frequency index over three times lower than that for men (1 881). For 3.9% of accidents, the sex of the victim was not specified. Although

relatively more women work part time, which reduces exposure to risk, this only partly explains the disparity between men and women. The disparity is even more marked in the case of fatal accidents: their frequency index was 8.7 for men (5 598 deaths) compared with 0.9 (328 deaths) for women.

Accident seriousness increases with age

Workers under the age of 26 are most frequently involved in accidents at the workplace (frequency index of 5 830 in 1993). The frequency index declines steadily with age: 4 290 for 26 to 45 year-olds and 3 841 for 46 to 65 year-olds.

By contrast, accident seriousness increases with age: the frequency of fatal accidents is 3.6 for the under-26 age-group, 5.1 for 26 to 45 year-olds and 8.9 for 46 to 65 year-olds.

In 1993, injuries sustained from industrial accidents could be classified as follows: 40% to the upper limbs (29% of which were to the hands, fingers or wrists), 27% to the lower limbs and 16% to the head, neck or spine.

For fatal accidents, 32% of injuries were to the whole body (1 912 deaths), 29% to the head, neck and spine (1 746 deaths) and 17% to the ribcage and abdomen (1 004 deaths).

**Work accidents in 1993 in the EU by sex and age group
Six major common branches**

	Work accidents			of which: fatal work accidents		
	Mean estimated number	% of total number	Mean estimated frequency index	Number	% of total number	Frequency index
Men	3 778 795	78.7	5 936	5 598	93.7	8.7
Women	835 655	17.4	1 881	328	5.5	0.9
Unspecified	186 497	3.9		51	0.9	
Total	4 800 947	100.0	4 505	5 977	100.0	6.1
26 years	1 110 981	23.1	5 830	622	10.4	3.6
26-45 years	2 416 831	50.3	4 290	2 618	43.8	5.1
46-65 years	1 155 926	24.1	3 841	2 340	39.2	8.9
65 years	49 014	1.0	3 609	164	2.7	17.5
Unspecified	68 195	1.4		233	3.9	
Total	4 800 947	100.0	4 505	5 977	100.0	6.1

Notes:

(1) The mean estimated number of accidents is the number of notified accidents corrected by an evaluated notification rate where this is less than 100%. The estimated number is taken into account when calculating the mean estimated frequency and European totals.

(2) The frequency index is the number of industrial accidents per 100 000 persons in employment. Taking account of working time, and thus risk exposure, would not change the findings for the European total. However, the pattern of activities in a given country affects the value of its total frequency index.

(3) According to NACE Rev. 1: manufacturing; construction; wholesale and retail trade, repairs; hotels and restaurants; financial intermediation; real estate, renting and business activities.

Source: Accidents at work in the European Union in 1993 : **Statistics in Focus: Population and social conditions No 2/97:**

The economic activity of women in the European Union

Women still lag in the labour market

Across the EU 45.0% of women over 15 are 'economically active' (have a job or are unemployed) compared with 66.2% of men - but with big differences among Member States. The Nordic countries have the highest rates for women and smallest gaps between the rates for men and women. Italy, Spain, Greece, Luxembourg and Ireland are at the other end of the scale. Women are less economically active

than men in all Member States. The rate varies from 33.9% in Italy to 58.5% in Sweden. For men the range is much smaller: from 61.2% in Belgium to 72.1% in Denmark. Women lag at all ages. As an EU average, the gap is relatively small in age groups up to the second half of the twenties but after that it widens substantially. These figures also show significant variations between different parts of the Union.

Economic activity rates in % for 1995

	Women	Men	Total		Women	Men	Total
Sweden	58.5	67.6	62.9	Germany	47.7	68.6	57.7
Denmark	57.5	72.1	64.6	EUR 15	45.0	66.2	55.2
Finland	56.2	66.3	61.1	Belgium	40.5	61.2	50.5
United Kingdom	52.4	71.2	61.5	Ireland	39.9	68.4	53.9
Portugal	49.5	67.8	58.1	Luxembourg	35.9	66.4	50.8
Austria	49.4	70.5	59.4	Greece	35.5	64.4	49.2
The Netherlands	48.3	70.4	59.3	Spain	35.4	61.9	48.2
France	48.2	63.4	55.4	Italy	33.9	61.9	47.4

Effect of part-time work

In the Nordic countries, women are more likely to be economically active at all ages than elsewhere in the EU. Rates for men and women are quite similar, except between 25 and 40 when women have the most demanding family commitments. Peak rates for women are at 40-45 in Denmark; slightly later in Sweden and Finland.

In Sweden, 43% of women between 15 and 64 work part-time compared to Denmark with 35%.

In Greece, Spain and Italy, where activity rates for women are low at all ages, the peak is much younger - at 25 to 29. In these countries, part-time

work is least common. In Greece, 51% of women aged 30 to 34 work full-time compared to 45% in Sweden, despite the latter's much higher activity rate.

In France, Austria and Portugal, although female activity rates are lower than those of men, the age curves are similar: they peak around 25 and stay level for around 15 years before declining.

Part-time working is quite widespread in France, accounting for 29% of women aged 15 to 64 with a job. The picture is similar in Austria (26%), but in Portugal it is only 11%.

Women re-entering the labour market after 35

Data from Germany, the UK and Luxembourg show a tendency for women to re-enter the labour market after 35, as their children become older. The age curves for Germany and the UK are

remarkably similar, peaking at 40 to 44. Women's activity in Belgium and Ireland soars to almost male heights by 30 but then falls progressively with no recovery.

Children make a difference

EU-wide, female rates generally fall as the number of children rises. However, in Finland the number of children makes little difference. On the other hand, in Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the UK, rates for women with one child are noticeably lower than for those with none. The difference

increases with the number of children. In Italy and Austria the arrival of a second child has the greatest effect on activity. In Belgium and France only mothers of more than two children are significantly less likely than other women to be in the labour market.

Gap narrows for women with higher education

To a greater degree than is the case for men, women's activity rates are linked to their level of education. Those with higher education aged 25 to 59, EU-wide, have an 85% activity rate - only 10 points below their male counterparts. For those with minimum education the gap is 34

points (men 86%, women 52%). In most Member States the gap between men and women with the same education is wider for those over 40. But this is not the case in Denmark, Finland, Sweden or the UK.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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