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Gateway Policy Explorer: Education Policy Series

Education Tracking Policies

Age at First Selection

1900-1975

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Preface

This document is intended for researchers who want to understand the evolution of policy or the policy in place at a particular point in time. This document is not intended for personal advice or to aid in decision-making. The authors have made significant effort to identify and collect historical information pertaining to these policies, to accurately represent these policies, and to communicate how policies may interact to determine legal requirements. The policies presented in this document focus on rules applicable to most individuals aged 50 and older from 1992. Many systems include special policies for specific groups. We encourage all users to complete their own review of literature in this area depending on the research questions they have in mind.

If you have feedback or questions or identify an error, please contact policy@g2aging.org.

Background — Gateway Policy Explorer: Education Policy Series

The *Gateway Policy Explorer* (<http://g2aging.org/policy-explorer>) is part of the Gateway to Global Aging Data (<http://g2aging.org>) project. The *Education Policy Series* captures historical policy that affects the birth cohorts of respondents in the surveys covered by the Gateway. It was motivated by the rapid evolution of policies during the lifetimes of older people across the world. As the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) began in 1992 and many of the international network of studies (HRS-INS) cover more than a decade, understanding the policies in place at the time of the survey has become more demanding for researchers.

Why are we tracking past policy? Individuals make choices based on current policies and the outcomes we see today may reflect responses to past policies. When interpreting the survey responses of individuals, an understanding of the policy environment under which those individuals operate is critical. The collection of contextual information in the *Gateway Policy Explorer* aims to support researchers who want to understand or use policy changes in their research and provide context for longitudinal or cross-country differences. Over the period 2023–2026 the *Gateway Policy Explorer* will be expanded to include information on retirement, long-term care, education, and other policies affecting the life cycle.

The key dimensions to the *Gateway Policy Explorer: Education Policy Series* are country and time. In the United States, policy is reported at the state level. We prioritize data collection for each country or state based on when respondents, largely born after 1900, would be affected by the policy topic.

A separate document, like this one, is developed for each policy covered in the *Gateway Policy Explorer: Education Policy Series*. Depending on the complexity of the topic, separate documents may be created for each country as well.

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Education Tracking Policies — Age at First Selection

1900-1975^{*} †

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* If you have questions or suggestions, please contact policy@g2aging.org.

† Detailed information and definitions are provided in tables, formulas and a glossary at the end of this document. To facilitate switching back and forth, this document is designed with hyperlinks. Most PDF readers have shortcuts that permit a reader to return to the previous location after selecting a hyperlink. In Adobe Acrobat on a PC: “Alt” + “←”; In Adobe Acrobat on a MAC: “command” + “←”; In Preview on a MAC: “command” + “[”.

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1. Introduction

Educational tracking is the process of selecting and sorting students who are enrolled in the same grade or educational level into different instructional programs, schools, or ability groups (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020). Tracking aims to place students in similar educational environments based on their interests or performance (i.e., evaluations of the students' skills or abilities). Differentiation of students into tracks often occurs during secondary schooling.

Across countries, tracking systems share key features. They sort students into programs with different curricula; for example, some tracks are academic, designed to prepare students for higher education, while others are vocational, designed to prepare students to enter trade school or the workforce. Academic tracks are frequently categorized as higher-performance programs, while vocational tracks are often viewed as lower-performance programs (Brunello & Checchi, 2007; Hanushek & Wößmann, 2006; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2005).

The practice of tracking – and specifically tracking students at young ages – is controversial. According to proponents, tracking students when they are younger allows school systems to provide education that is better aligned to students' needs and perceived strengths. Opponents of early tracking, however, assert that the practice erodes opportunities. Once selected into a pathway, students' ability to move between vocational and academic tracks is often limited. Further, tracking may limit the opportunities of some groups. In particular, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and marginalized communities are less likely to be selected into a high-performance program (Brunello & Checchi, 2007; Burris, Heubert, & Levin, 2006, 1; Card & Giuliano, 2014; Holmlund & Öckert, 2021).

Researchers have studied the impact of tracking policies on a variety of outcomes, including educational achievement and adult earnings (Meghir & Palme, 2005, 1); however, scholarship on the impact of tracking on old age outcomes, including cognition, cognitive decline, and diseases such as Alzheimer's Disease, is scarce. To enable such research, we have systematically documented policy reforms on educational tracking affecting countries and cohorts represented in the Health and Retirement Study International Network of Studies (HRS-INS), which are longitudinal, nationally representative panel studies that survey older adults on changes in labor force participation and the health transitions through the end of their lives. The main goal of this documentation is to provide indicators of educational tracking policy changes that can be used by quantitative researchers.

Throughout this document, we focus on the indicator of *age at first selection*, which is the earliest age in which children are selected to different tracks (i.e., specialized schools, programs, or curricula). We choose to focus on the age at first selection indicator because its use is widespread in the tracking literature and it is more readily identifiable in legislation than other measures of tracking (such as the number of different programs/schools in an education system). This document summarizes historical policies that have affected the age at first selection, provides harmonized cross-country classifications of those policies, and includes details about policy implementation whenever such information is available.

The data on age at first selection by cohort is presented in table form and the Gateway Policy Explorer website provides a dataset that can be merged with other datasets by birth year and month.

Historical Context and Scope

This document provides context around the educational tracking policies affecting countries and cohorts represented in the HRS-INS; therefore, we limit our documentation to policies affecting cohorts born 1900-1975. Tracking predates the 20th century, particularly in European countries where the earliest tracking systems stratified students primarily according to socioeconomic class. The beginning of our policy documentation timeline falls in the middle of a historical transition in which education became more accessible to the public and tracking shifted from a concept based predominantly on social class to one based on ability. As such, the historical context prior to 1900 and how we define educational tracking in this document require clarification.

In the 19th century, as European states expanded access to education, segmented parallel school systems arose: the majority of children attended primary schools for the masses, while a small share of the population (mostly boys from upper-class backgrounds) enrolled in elite educational institutions geared towards university entrance (Westberg, 2023; Müller, Ringer, & Simon, 1990). Because the general population in the 19th century did not attend the same preparatory primary schools or secondary schools as the upper class, students' educational trajectories were essentially determined upon initial school enrollment.

Leading up to the 20th century, countries across Europe expanded the types of secondary schools available to the broader population while retaining the exclusivity of elite institutions (Anderson, 2004; Müller et al., 1990). Practical programs took on a more academic character, so that by 1900 parallel schooling systems were replaced by a system that included elite secondary, non-elite secondary, and higher primary education schools (Müller et al., 1990).

In the early 20th century, states continued to expand secondary education so that, in principle, all children regardless of social class could attend secondary school after 4-6 years of primary schooling and graduates of the non-elite secondary schools could attend universities (Anderson, 2004). This expansion process, however, was gradual. Many secondary schools remained restrictive; even by 1955, full-time secondary school enrollment across Europe was low, with enrollment rates of 15-30% of the population between ages 15 and 19 attending secondary school in the majority of European countries, and rates of 10% or less in countries such as Italy and Spain (Goldin, 2001). Although elite institutions persisted, the expansion of mass secondary education was ongoing, and these increasingly standardized, modernized, and inclusive education systems characterize the policy contexts we document.

In this report, we include information on class-based tracking as context for the tracking systems that developed by the early to mid 20th century. However, we are primarily interested in tracking as a function of a student's ability. Whereas class-based tracking only applied to certain groups, ability-based tracking is a population-wide policy intervention that theoretically equalizes tracking opportunities. Therefore, we begin to document the age at first selection when a country introduced ability-based tracking into their educational system.

Technical Approach

Our goal is to develop a consistent cross-country measure for the age at first selection based on the policy in place when today's adults were tracked as children. We limit our study to the cohorts represented in the HRS-INS. These studies focus on populations aged 50 and older from 2002 to 2025; therefore, we limit our policy documentation to cohorts born between 1900 and 1975.

For each of the selected countries, our research team searched for primary and secondary sources to establish the prevailing policies in 1900 and record changes in policy since 1900. The team relies on the original legislation as the primary source of information, supplemented by secondary sources when necessary. Secondary sources are used only if they provided a valid account of the legislation and primary sources are not available or are unclear.

Determining Age at First Selection and Cohorts

Once we identified the prevailing laws throughout the period of interest, we used that information to calculate the age at first selection for every cohort (by year and month of birth). Age at first selection is defined as the earliest age at which a child may have been selected to go into a particular education track.

Typically, the laws stipulate the grade at first tracking – that is, the grade in which any specialized education program may begin. We assume, however, that track selection occurs in the grade preceding the start of tracking. We identify the age of first selection based on the age reached during the grade of track selection. The age reached in a particular grade will vary across countries based on their school starting age.

As a hypothetical example, assume that in a given country, a new law effective for school year (SY) 1950-51 implements tracks from grade 5, and that children start school at age 7. We assume that track selection happens at the end of grade 4. Under the new policy, the *age at first selection is 11*.

If that country based initial entry into school on the age reached during the calendar year that a SY begins, the oldest students affected by this policy would be those born in January 1940 who reached age 11 during grade 4. Likewise, if that country based initial entry into school on achieving an age by a qualifying date preceding the start of the SY, say September 1, then this policy would have first affected those born in September 1939 who would reach age 11 during grade 4.

Technical Concerns and Assumptions

Our determination of the age at first selection often builds from information on compulsory schooling starting age, the deadline to reach the enrollment age, and the grade in which the earliest track differentiation takes place. Our approach assumes that children enroll for the first time in accordance with the compulsory school starting age and enrollment deadlines stated in the law or official regulations, and that the students remain continuously enrolled and complete one grade per year until they are selected into tracks.¹ We also assume that track selection processes (i.e., assessments and admissions procedures) take place at the end of the academic year prior to the year in which tracks begin.

Even when treating the above conditions as constant, there may still be some variation in age at first selection. For example, when the enrollment age deadline is not based on the academic year, the age students reach at the end of a grade differs depending on the month of birth. This happens in some cases where, for instance, the school year starts in September, but the starting age is based on the child's age by the end of that calendar year. In this case, students with birthdays from January through July would reach a certain age just prior to starting their tracks, while students with birthdays from September through December would only reach that age minus 1. Thus, there is some ambiguity about which single age would constitute the age at first selection. Our rule for handling these cases is to establish the age at first selection based on the age attainment of those with birthdays preceding the academic year start date. That is, we consider the age at first selection to be the age that the *oldest* cohort members affected by a tracking policy reach by the end of the affected academic year. While it may seem counterintuitive to indicate the age of the *oldest* affected cohort members to represent the *earliest* track selection age, we argue that this age is appropriate as it reflects the age of the very first cohort members affected by a tracking reform and it captures the age that the bulk of the affected cohort likely reaches just before they could enter a track.

Notes:

1. The Gateway to Global Aging Data has also produced a document on international compulsory schooling laws. Please refer to this document for additional contextual information regarding different countries' compulsory schooling legislation and to compare the birth cohorts affected by compulsory schooling policy changes to those affected by tracking policy changes.

The document can be found here:

Gateway to Global Aging Data (2026). Gateway Policy Explorer: International Compulsory Schooling Policy Details, 1900-2024, Version: 1.2 (March 2026), University of Southern California, Los Angeles. As of March 17, 2026: <https://doi.org/10.25553/gpe.edu.ce.int>.

2. Austria

Policy history, 1900–1975

By the mid-19th century, Austria expanded access to secondary education with the creation of the *Bürgerschulen* and *Realschulen*, which offered vocational and technical training to students who were not planning to attend university (Moore, 2020). During this time, the longstanding university preparatory *Gymnasien* were restricted to the sons of the upper and middle classes.

The Imperial Elementary School Act (Reichsvolksschulgesetz) of 1869 (Imperial Law Gazette of the Empire of Austria, 1869) specified that the general population could enter secondary schools after grade 5 (age 11); however, the *Gymnasien* remained exclusive to middle- and upper-class boys, and entrance into these schools occurred 1 year earlier, following grade 4 (Moore, 2020). The Imperial Elementary School Act remained in place well into the 20th century, until the implementation of the 1927 Austrian law on secondary education (Federal Law Gazette for the Republic of Austria, 1927).

The 1927 law effectively standardized the start of secondary school for the whole population, stipulating that secondary tracks followed the completion of 4 years of general primary education. Consequently, most students entered secondary school and began tracked education in the month of September following their 10th birthday. While the specific tracks available in secondary school have varied over time, the age of initial tracking has remained 10 in Austria until the end of the period under review (Bodenman, 1981).

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 1.

Table 1: Austria—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900–1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	6	5	11	January 1900 - August 1917
<i>Reform years</i>				
1927	5	4	10	September 1917 - December 1975

Source: Bodenman (1981), Federal Law Gazette for the Republic of Austria (1927), and Imperial Law Gazette of the Empire of Austria (1869)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

The school year (SY) in Austria typically spans from early September to the end of August (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2021). Children start school in September following their 6th birthday, with the cutoff date being September 2nd. We assume this enrollment deadline applies to each of the policies in place for cohorts born from 1900 to 1975. The oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 6 and reach age 7 during their first year of schooling.

Cohorts born in 1900 would have been subject to the tracking policy in place under The Imperial Elementary School Act (Reichsvolksschulgesetz) of 1869 (Imperial Law Gazette of the Empire of Austria, 1869), which established tracks beginning in grade 6. We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 5 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 11.

The Federal Law of 2 August 1927, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1927–28, established the structure of secondary schooling, with various tracks starting from grade 5 (Federal Law Gazette for the Republic of Austria, 1927). We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 4 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 10. Those completing grade 4 in SY 1927–28 were the first affected by the reform, with the oldest born in September 1917. These students would have undergone selection in grade 5 under the previous policy, but would be selected 1 year sooner following this change.

There were no further reforms altering the age at first selection through 1975.

3. Belgium

Policy history, 1900–1975

Belgium had a secondary school tracking system in place in the 19th century, which the *Organic Law of June 1, 1850 on Secondary Education* modified: as a result of this law, the Belgian public and subsidized private school systems tracked students as early as the end of primary school (the end of sixth grade) (Donato Di Paola, 2018). Students were given two main pathways: a general program, known as “athénées royaux” (royal athenaeums), aimed at preparing them for higher education and liberal professions, or a shorter, practice-oriented track known as “écoles moyennes” (middle schools). The establishment of compulsory schooling from ages 6 to 14 in 1914 opened up another track for students: rather than pursuing secondary or vocational education at age 12, they could choose to remain in elementary school until completing their compulsory education at age 14 (Henkens, 2004).

From September 1969, comprehensive schools began to open as an experiment in the French-speaking State Public Education Network, followed by the Flemish State Public Education Network from September 1970 (Henkens, 2004) and the French- and Flemish Catholic schools. The new comprehensive system was known as the Reformed Secondary Education (RSE). By introducing a 2-year observation period in grades 7 and 8 (during which the curriculum was largely common for all students), the reform postponed the age at first selection until age 14. Under this policy, tracks commenced from grade 9 at the earliest; however, grades 9 and 10 comprised an orientation period during which the curriculum retained some common elements and choice of orientation was not final.

The Law of July 19, 1971 formalized the new comprehensive system, although adoption remained voluntary on a school-by-school basis (Moniteur Belge, 1971). Shortly after, the Royal Decree of July 31, 1975 made the comprehensive system mandatory in Flemish public schools, and this system remained optional for private schools and French language public schools (Henkens, 2004). Starting in the 1978-79 school year, all public schools adopted the comprehensive system, while it remained optional for private schools (Henkens, 2004).

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 2.

Table 2: Belgium—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900-1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900 ^a	7	6	12	January 1900 - December 1959
<i>Reform years</i>				
1971 ^b	9	8	14	January 1960 - December 1963
1975 ^c	9	8	14	January 1964 - December 1966
1978 ^{*d}	9	8	14	January 1967 - December 1975

Source: Donato Di Paola (2018), Henkens (2004), and Moniteur Belge (1971, 1983)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

Students start grade 1 in the fall of the calendar year that they reach the age specified by law. Students with birthdays after the start of the school year (i.e., September-December) will be 1 year younger at the end of the grade of first selection.

* No official record explicitly stating the tracking age or grade. The ages and grades indicated here are inferred based on other information provided in education policies and/or secondary sources.

^a The adoption of the comprehensive school system is optional for private schools, where a large share of the population is schooled. Students in private schools may still be tracked as early as age 12.

^b Adoption of policy voluntary on a school-by-school basis.

^c Policy only compulsory in Flemish-speaking public schools.

^d Policy compulsory in French-speaking public schools (in addition to Flemish schools).

In Belgium, the school year (SY) starts in September and school starting age is based on the calendar year (Moniteur Belge, 1983). We assume that the December 31 enrollment deadline applies to each of the policies in place for cohorts born from 1900 to 1975. The oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 6 and reach age 7 during their first year of schooling.

Cohorts born in 1900 would have been subject to the tracking policy in place under the 1850 law which first defined secondary education with tracks beginning in grade 7 (Donato Di Paola, 2018). Selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 6 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 12.

The 1971 reform came into effect in September 1971, which we interpret as first affecting students during the SY 1971-72 (Moniteur Belge, 1971). Only students in schools that voluntarily adopted the reform would have been affected; otherwise, the age at first selection remained age 12. For students in the affected schools, selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 8 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 14. Those entering grade 7 in SY 1971-72 were the first students affected by the reform, with the oldest born in January 1960. These students would have undergone selection at the end of grade 6 under the previous policy, but would wait 2 years for first selection following this change.

The 1975 reform, effective September of that year (which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1975-76), made this system compulsory in the Flemish public school system, while the 1978 reforms, effective SY 1978-79, made this system compulsory in the French-speaking public school system (Henkens, 2004). Only students in these schools who had not previously adopted the 1971 reform would have been affected; otherwise, the age at first selection remained age 12. Students in the affected Flemish-speaking schools who entered grade 7 in SY 1975-76 were the first students affected by the 1975 reform, with the oldest born in January 1964. Students in the affected French-speaking schools who entered grade 7 in SY 1978-79 were the first students affected by the 1978 reform, with the oldest born in January 1967.

4. Croatia

Policy history, 1900–1975

Croatia underwent numerous territorial changes following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, first joining the State and later the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, which became Yugoslavia. Croatia eventually declared independence in 1991.

Although education laws were in place in Croatia since before the start of the 20th century, they were not systematically enforced across the country. This led to large regional variation in tracking practices in the first half of the century (Tomich, 1963). Due to difficulties in accessing Croatian digital repositories, the following sections rely primarily on secondary sources (Britannica, 2025).

Under Austro-Hungarian rule, present-day Croatia followed an educational structure established by the 1874 and 1888 School Acts, which applied to the Croatian-Slavonian territories within the Hungarian half of the empire. These laws established the dual system of *pučke škole* (general public schools) and *građanske škole* (civic schools). The 1874 and 1888 School Acts both established the starting age at 7 years old; however, the 1874 law mandated 5 years of compulsory schooling, while the 1888 law required only 4. Under the 1888 law, students upon completing grade 4 could choose to apply to a civic school or to continue in a general public school. Civic schools functioned as a vocational track for the upper grades of primary school, with classes differing for girls and boys (Lukaš, 2012).

Yugoslavia's 1929 Law of Popular Schools attempted to extend compulsory schooling to 8 years. In practice, however, the reform was never effectively implemented. In many areas of the country, the 4-year school was the sole provider of elementary education as the law was ultimately not enforced (Georgeoff, 1982; Tomich, 1963). As a result, the legislation maintained the educational framework established by the 1874 and 1888 School Acts, which mandated 4 years of compulsory schooling beginning at age 7 and maintained the dual system structure (Batinić, 2003; Federal Ministry Education Republic of Austria, 2025; Laat, Dadić, & Bušljeta, 2020). Because the 1929 act was declaratory in nature, the practice of tracking students after primary school, beginning in grade 5 when students are age 11, remained unchanged.

The 1958 General Education Law of Yugoslavia maintained the school starting age of 7, extended the duration of schooling to 8 years, and created a uniform curriculum which established tracks for students starting in grade 9 (Farmerie, 1972; Georgeoff, 1982; Laat et al., 2020; Tomich, 1963). After 8 years of compulsory elementary school, students who remained in school could either attend a 4-year academic high school, a 3-year vocational school, or a 4-year vocational school, depending on their schooling performance and aptitude (Obradović, 1986; Zilic, 2018).

The 1975 Yugoslavia education reform further delayed tracking. After completing 8 years of compulsory schooling, students entered a new 4-year secondary school system consisting of two phases. The first phase lasted 2 years and offered a common curriculum for all students. Upon completion of the first phase after grade 10, students could either enter the labor market or continue on to the second phase, which lasted either 1 or 2 years and provided vocational preparation. Students' grades from the first phase determined their admission to specialized vocational programs in the second phase (Zilic, 2018).

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 3.

Table 3: Croatia–Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900–1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	5	4	11	January 1900 [†] - August 1948
<i>Reform years</i>				
1958	9	8	15	September 1948 - August 1960
1975	11	10	17	September 1960 - December 1975

Source: Georgeoff (1982), Tomich (1963), and Zilic (2018)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

[†] Indicates earliest date in time frame of interest and not a cohort birth year associated with a reform.

The school year (SY) in Croatia lasts from September to August of the following year, with classes typically completed in June (Tomich, 1963). Since early Yugoslavian compulsory schooling legislation does not specify an enrollment deadline, we operate under the assumption that individuals needed to enter school by the start of the SY in early September. Since 1958, students must start school if they have reached age 7 by the beginning of September (Tomich, 1963).

For cohorts born in 1900, tracks started in grade 5. We assume track selection occurred at the end of grade 4, when students reached age 11 (Tomich, 1963).

The 1958 reform, effective for SY 1959–1960, postponed tracking from grade 5 to grade 9. We assume track selection occurred at the end of grade 8, when students reached age 15. The first cohort affected was born in September 1948 and reached age 11 in SY 1959–60. Under the previous policy, they would have been tracked at the start of grade 5, at age 11; under the new policy, they needed to wait an additional 4 years before being tracked (Georgeoff, 1982; Tomich, 1963).

The 1975 policy created a new 4-year secondary school, with the first phase (grades 9 and 10) consisting of a unified curriculum and tracking occurring in the second phase (grades 11 and 12). The reform therefore delayed track selection from the end of grade 8 to the end of grade 10, meaning that students were not tracked until they reached age 17. The first phase was implemented for students entering grade 9 in SY 1975–1976, while the second phase was implemented for the same cohort, entering grade 11, in the SY 1977–78 (Zilic, 2018). The first cohort affected by this reform was born in September 1960 and reached age 15 in SY 1975–76. Under the new policy, they needed to wait 2 additional years to be tracked.

5. Czech Republic and Slovakia

Policy history, 1900–1975

Under Habsburg rule, the Czech lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia) formed part of the Austrian half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while Slovakia belonged to the Hungarian half until 1918. The Czech Republic and Slovakia then existed as a single state, Czechoslovakia, from 1918 until its dissolution in 1993. Since this document addresses policies affecting cohorts born between 1900 and 1975, during the period when the two nations were still unified, we present them together in one chapter.

The Imperial Primary Education Act of 1869 required minors to attend school starting at age 6 for a duration of 8 years in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, 1869). Upon completing grade 5, students could either apply to civic school (an academic lower secondary school) or gymnázium (a higher level academic secondary school), or they could choose to remain in primary compulsory education (Eurydice, 2009). After the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, the new country adopted the same compulsory schooling measures from the Austrian education system via the Reception Law (Zákony pro lidi, 1918).

Following the German occupation in March 1939, Czechoslovakia was divided into the Slovak state and the Protectorate lands of Bohemia and Moravia. The Slovak Republic existed as an independent state, while the Czech land was placed under direct German rule. Beginning in 1941, Bohemia and Moravia were required to follow the German rules of educational tracking, with selection occurring at the end of grade 4, when individuals were 10 years old. German education tracking policies were in place in these regions until 1945, when the school system reverted to its pre-war state under the Constitutional Decree of the President of the Republic (Czech Republic of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2013; Zákony pro lidi, 1945).

After the Communist coup in February 1948, Czechoslovakia introduced the Basic School Act, establishing a 9 year comprehensive school. This policy also delayed educational tracking so that students were now tracked after completing grade 9 at age 15. Students could apply to enter a basic vocational school, specialized vocational school, or academic secondary school (gymnázium) (Zákony pro lidi, 1948).

The influence of the Soviet education system in Czechoslovakia was reflected in the 1953 School System Act. The reform required individuals to attend primary school for 8 years. We infer that tracks began in grade 9, and students could enter either a general comprehensive school or a vocational school (Zákony pro lidi, 1953b).

Under the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the Education Act of 1960 dismantled the earlier Soviet-influenced system and extended compulsory schooling from 8 years to 9, maintaining the starting age of 6 (Zákony pro lidi, 1953a). At the end of basic school (grade 9), at age 15, students were tracked between the general educational school or vocational school pathways. Admissions into gymnázia prepared students for higher education, remaining highly selective and access varied depending on location.

Following the 1968 Soviet invasion, Czechoslovakia passed the 1978 and 1984 School Acts. The 1978 law established a 10 year compulsory schooling duration which the 1984 law maintained. Under the 1978 law, students were required to attend primary school for 8 or 9 years, depending on the school type, with the remaining 1-2 years of compulsory education completed at the secondary level (Zákony pro lidi, 1978). Therefore, students could be selected into tracks as early as the end of 8th grade, at age 14. The 1984 policy formalized this structure by requiring individuals to attend primary school for 8 years, with the remaining 2 years of compulsory education completed in secondary school. Thus, selection into tracks officially began at the end of grade 8, at age 14, when students chose between an academic secondary education track or a vocational training pathway (Zákony pro lidi, 1984).

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 4.

Table 4: Czech Republic—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900-1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	6	5	11	January 1900 - August 1931
<i>Reform years</i>				
1941	5	4	10	September 1931 - August 1935 ^a
1941	6	5	11	September 1931 - August 1937 ^b
1945	6	5	11	September 1935 - August 1937 ^a
1948	10	9	15	September 1937 - August 1939
1953	9	8	14	September 1939 - August 1946
1960	10	9	15	September 1946 - August 1970
1984	9	8	14	September 1970 - December 1975 ^c

Source: Reichs-Gesetzblatt (1919, 1920), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (1869), and Zákony pro lidi (1945, 1948, 1953a, 1953b, 1978, 1984)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

^a Only affecting the Protectorate lands of Bohemia and Moravia (Czech lands) under German occupation.

^b Only affecting the Slovak State.

^c The 1984 policy established 14 as the age at first selection throughout the country. However, the 1978 policy also permitted tracking at age 14. Therefore, the first students tracked at age 14 may have been born as early as September 1964. The cohort birth dates reported in the table reflect the first cohort subject to the tracking age of 14 once it was implemented statewide.

In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the school year (SY) starts at the beginning of September and students begin school in September following their 6th birthday (Zákony pro lidi, 1948). The oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 6 and reach age 7 by the end of the school year. This rule remained in effect throughout the period of observation.

Cohorts born in 1900 were subject to the tracking policy under the Imperial Primary Education Act of 1869. This law established tracks beginning in grade 6. We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 5, when the oldest students in the cohort reached age 11 (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, 1869).

From 1941 until 1945, the Czech Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia followed German education laws (Czech Republic of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2013). Based on the provisions established in the 1919 Weimar Constitution and the 1920 Law Concerning Elementary Schools and the Abolition of Preschools, as well as information in secondary sources, we infer that selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 4, when students were age 10 (Reichs-Gesetzblatt, 1919; Reichs-Gesetzblatt, 1920; Führ, 1997; Garrouste, 2010; Geissler, 2005; Li, 2020). The adoption of the German tracking laws first affected individuals born in September 1921 in Bohemia and Moravia. These individuals reached age 10 in SY 1941-42. Individuals born in the Slovak State continued to be tracked at the end of grade 5, at age 11.

In 1945, the school system in Czechoslovakia reverted to its pre-war state, effective for SY 1945-46 (Zákony pro lidi, 1945). Students were again tracked at the end of grade 5, at age 11. This change first impacted people born in Bohemia and Moravia in September 1935, who reached age 10 in SY 1945-46 and now needed to wait 1 additional year to be tracked. The age and grade of first selection for individuals born in the Slovak State remained unchanged.

The 1948 policy was effective January of that year, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1948-49. The reform established a unified primary school through grade 9 and established tracks beginning in grade 10 (Zákony pro lidi, 1948). We assume track selection occurred at the end of grade 9 when the oldest students in the cohort reached age 15. The first students affected by this reform were born in September 1937. These students would have undergone track selection in grade 5 (age 11) under the previous policy, but under the new policy needed to wait 4 additional years to be tracked.

The 1953 policy was effective July of that year, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1953-54. The policy lowered the duration of compulsory schooling to 8 years (Zákony pro lidi, 1953b). We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 8, and students entered a track in grade 9, after the end of compulsory schooling. The oldest cohort affected by this reform was born in

September 1939. These individuals completed grade 8 in SY 1953-54 and were tracked at age 14.

The compulsory schooling law of 1960 was effective in December of that year, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1961-62. The law established tracks beginning in grade 10. We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 9 when the oldest students in the cohort reached age 15 (Zákony pro lidi, 1953a). This policy first affected individuals born in September 1946, who were 14 years old when the law went into effect. Under the previous policy, these individuals would have started their track in grade 9, but under the new policy they needed to wait 1 additional year to be tracked.

The 1984 policy was effective September of that year, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1984-1985. The law established that for all students, selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 8, when students were 14 years old (Zákony pro lidi, 1984). The first cohort affected by this reform across the Czech Republic was born in September 1970, and completed grade 8 in SY 1984-85. However, under the 1978 policy, individuals beginning in SY 1978-79 could be tracked at either the end of grade 9, as they were previously, or at the end of grade 8 (Zákony pro lidi, 1978). Under this system, the earliest cohort that could have undergone selection at the end of grade 8 was born in September 1964. These individuals completed grade 8 at age 14 in SY 1978-79.

There were no further reforms altering the age at first selection up to 1975.

6. Denmark

Policy history, 1900–1975

The 1903 Act on Higher General Schools was Denmark's first law in the 20th century that established ability tracking. This law created a middle school for children aged 11-12 which linked the primary folkeskole to higher level general education in the gymnasium. Students took an exam in the 5th grade to enter middle school and gain access to further education (Arendt, 2005; Danmarkshistorien.dk, 2012d). If students did not take or pass the exam, they continued in a practical education curriculum and completed school after grade 7.

The Proclamation of the Act on Primary Schools in 1958 reformed Denmark's tracking system. This law extended Folkeskole through grade 7. Students were selected in grade 7 into either a basic line, which led to the continuation of Folkeskole, or an advanced line, which led to secondary school, both of which began in the 8th grade (Birkelund, Karlson, & Reimer, 2019; Danmarkshistorien.dk, 2012a).

In 1972, compulsory schooling increased from 7 to 9 years. A few years later, the 1975 Act on Primary Schools formally abolished secondary school tracking after the 7th grade, extending primary education to grades 1-9 and establishing a comprehensive program in schools known as *enhedsskolen* (Birkelund et al., 2019; Danmarkshistorien.dk, 2012c; Folketingstidende.dk, 1972). Students entered different educational paths following grade 9, which effectively raised the age at first selection to age 16. By abolishing lower secondary school tracking, the 1974 reform raised the age at first selection to the end of grade 9, allowing students to either leave school or enroll in an academic (gymnasium) or vocational track. The provisions of this act stayed in place until 1993 and no other reforms altered the tracking policies affecting school-age children during the period from 1900 through 1975.

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 5.

Table 5: Denmark—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900–1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	6	5	12 [†]	January 1900 - July 1946
<i>Reform years</i>				
1958	8	7	14	August 1946 - December 1961
1975	10	9	16 [‡]	January 1962 - December 1975

Source: Arendt (2005), Danmarkshistorien.dk (2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d), and Folketingstidende.dk (1972)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

[†] Students start grade 1 in the fall of the calendar year that they reach the age specified by law. Students with birthdays after the start of the school year (i.e., September-December) will be 1 year younger at the end of the grade of first selection.

[‡] The 1975 law notes that children may be age 11 during the selection into middle school.

In Denmark, the school year (SY) starting date and enrollment deadline have changed over time. In 1937, the SY began April 1 for students who reached aged 7 by the start of the SY (Danmarkshistorien.dk, 2012b). This is the earliest SY definition we have identified for Denmark, and we assume this enrollment deadline applies to previous policies when calculating cohorts.

The 1958 reform moved the SY starting date to August 1 (Danmarkshistorien.dk, 2012a). In 1972, Denmark's enrollment eligibility deadline changed again. Before, an individual could enroll in school if they reached age 7 before the start of the SY. Under the 1972 policy, an individual could enroll in school if they reached age 7 before December 31 of that SY (Folketingstidende.dk, 1972, §44).

For cohorts born in 1900, students were selected into tracks at the end of the 5th grade (Arendt, 2005; Danmarkshistorien.dk, 2012d). Since students at this time began schooling at age 7, we determine the age at first selection to be age 12.

The 1958 law was effective from June of that year, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1958-59. This reform extended primary school through grade 7 and established tracks beginning in grade 8 (Danmarkshistorien.dk, 2012a). Track selection occurred

at the end of grade 7 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 14. By the time of this policy change, the start of the school year had been shifted to August 1 (Danmarkshistorien.dk, 2012a). Those completing grade 5 in SY 1958-59 were the first students affected by the reform, with the oldest born in August 1946. These students would have undergone selection in grade 5 (age 12) under the previous policy, but under the new policy needed to wait 2 years to be tracked.

The 1975 law was effective from June of that year, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1975-1976. This reform extended a unified primary school through grade 9 and established tracks beginning in grade 10 (Danmarkshistorien.dk, 2012c). We assume track selection occurred at the end of grade 9 when the oldest students in the cohort reached age 16. By the time of this policy change, the enrollment deadline was based on age attainment during the calendar year (Folketingstidende.dk, 1972, §44). Those completing grade 7 in SY 1975-76 were the first students affected by the reform, with the oldest born in January 1962. These students would have undergone selection in grade 7 (age 14) under the previous policy, but under the new policy needed to wait 2 additional years to be tracked.

There were no additional reforms in Denmark altering the age at first selection for cohorts born through 1975.

7. England & Wales

Policy history, 1900–1975

At the end of the 19th century, secondary school attendance was predominantly stratified by social class, so that upper class students were more likely to attend secondary school compared to students from lower classes. During the 20th century, access to secondary education gradually expanded and opened up more educational pathways for inclusion of the broader school-age population. In the early 1900s, the majority of students attended elementary schools, which hosted children from age 5 until the compulsory school leaving age, which was age 12 in 1900 and age 14 in 1918 (Gillard, 2018). Students from the middle and upper classes seeking education beyond compulsory schooling could attend fee-based secondary schools.

Beginning in 1907, secondary schools offered scholarships for low-income elementary school students to attend secondary schools for free (Parliament of Great Britain, 1907). To receive this award, elementary school students needed to pass an attainment test, after which they entered secondary school at age 12. During this period, approximately 10% of all students in England and Wales were selected to attend secondary schools; the remainder stayed in elementary schools until they had completed compulsory schooling (Gillard, 2018).

In the following decades, there was a growing push to uniformly track students at age 11. Central schools emerged in 1918 for students pursuing a general education with a commercial focus; they entered this track at age 11 (Parliament of Great Britain, 1918; Gillard, 2018). The 1944 Education Act, which allowed for the implementation of a “tripartite” education system in England and Wales, legitimized the tracking age of 11 on a larger scale (Parliament of Great Britain, 1918; Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1944; Gillard, 2018; West, 2016; Simon, 2000). Under the new education system, students took an exam at age 11. If they were among the top performers, then they could attend grammar school, a higher level academic track; if they passed the exam but did not outperform their peers, then they could attend technical school, the main vocational track; if they did not pass the exam, then they attended secondary modern schools, a lower level academic track. Each track led to different certifications (Brooks, 2008). In practice, the tripartite system more closely resembled a bipartite system; low technical school enrollment meant that most students attended either grammar schools or secondary moderns starting at age 11 (Gillard, 2018; Simon, 2000; West, 2016). Some early experimental comprehensive schools also began operating during this period (West, 2016).

The Labour Government’s Circular 10/65 in 1965 first requested that Local Education Authorities (LEAs) begin switching to a comprehensive school system, which would have ended tracking at age 11; however, the Conservative Government reversed this directive in 1970 (Gillard, 2018; United Kingdom Department of Education and Science, 1965, 1970; West, 2023). These tensions about comprehensive schooling continued throughout the 1970s, with the Labour Government again requiring LEAs to submit proposals for comprehensive reorganization in 1976, and with the Conservative Government reversing this order in 1979 (Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1976; United Kingdom Department of Education and Science, 1976; Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1979; West, 2023). Throughout the 1960s and going into the 1970s, though, public and LEA support for comprehensive schooling grew so that, even with the 1979 Education Act, the majority of English and Welsh LEAs adopted comprehensive schools (West, 2023; Danechi, 2020). Students *may* still be tracked at age 11 into grammar schools, and at present, approximately 5% of students attend grammar schools in England (Long, Maisuria, & Danechi, 2023). However, since the inception of comprehensive schools, students in grammar and comprehensive schools have been able to receive the same leaving certificates (Capsada-Munsech & Boliver, 2019; Gillard, 2018).

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 6.

In England, the school year (SY) starts in September and students must reach the starting age by August 31 (Gov.uk, 2025). We assume that this deadline applies to previous policies when calculating birth cohorts. The oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 5 and reach age 6 during their first year of schooling.

For cohorts born in 1900, individuals could first be selected into a track at age 12 (Parliament of Great Britain, 1907).

The Education Act of 1918 was enacted August 1918, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1918-19 (Parliament of Great Britain, 1918). This policy introduced central schools, which were designed for students beginning at age 11, and therefore effectively lowered the age at first selection from 12 to 11 (Gillard, 2018). Those starting school in September 1918 were the first students affected by the reform, with the oldest born in September 1907. These students would have undergone selection at age 12 in the previous policy,

Table 6: England & Wales—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900-1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	8	7	12	January 1900 - August 1907
<i>Reform years</i>				
1918*	7	6	11	September 1907 - August 1966
1965	No tracking [†]	.	.	September 1966 [‡] - December 1975

Source: Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (1944) and United Kingdom Department of Education and Science (1965)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

* No official record explicitly stating the tracking age or grade. The age indicated here is inferred based on other information provided in education policies and/or secondary sources

[†] A small share of students are still tracked into grammar schools; however, the vast majority attend comprehensive schools and students can obtain the same leaving certificates regardless of which school type they attend

[‡] Since this reform was gradually implemented, the first students possibly affected by this policy may have been born as early as September 1954. The cohort birth dates reported in the table reflect the first cohort subject to the policy once it was implemented for the majority of the population.

but now were tracked 1 year earlier following this change.

The 1965 policy's introduction of comprehensive schools intended to eliminate tracking in England and Wales at age 11, but due to the tumultuous political environment in the 1960s and 1970s, tracking was never fully eliminated (United Kingdom Department of Education and Science, 1965; West, 2023). Based on secondary sources' description of the policy's implementation, we conclude that the majority of LEAs in England and Wales adopted a comprehensive system by November 1976, when the 1976 Education Act went into effect (West, 2023; Danechi, 2020). This policy would have first impacted SY 1977-78, and people born September 1966 were the first affected by this change. These individuals were 11 years old at the start of grade 7 during SY 1977-78, and were now less likely to enter their track at that age. However, the earliest cohort that could have been affected by the 1965 policy (effective for SY 1965-66) was born in September 1954.

8. Finland

Policy history, 1900–1975

In the early 20th century, Finland had a parallel system of education consisting of elementary schools (*kansakoulu*, or “folk schools”) and private grammar schools (*oppikoulu*, or “learning schools”); however, education was not compulsory and attendance rates were very low (Kortekangas, Paksuniemi, & Ervast, 2019). In August 1921, Finland passed its first law on compulsory schooling, which also stipulated provisions for continuing education. The law mandated 6 years of compulsory schooling starting in the folk school beginning at age 7 (Eduskunta.fi, 1921). After grade 4 (age 11), students could apply to grammar school. Admissions were based on an entrance exam, primary school grades, and a teacher assessment (Pekkarinen, Uusitalo, & Kerr, 2009). Otherwise, after completing the 6 years of folk school, students could either leave the school system or attend vocational civic schools. First tracking was therefore at grade 4 (age 11) with the possibility to go to grammar school.

In 1968 compulsory schooling was extended to 9 years via comprehensive schools, which combined primary and lower secondary education and replaced the folk school system (Eduskunta.fi, 1968). Children still started school at age 7, and upon completion of the 9 years of comprehensive school at age 16, students could leave school, attend upper secondary school, or attend vocational school. This reform was enacted in August 1970 (Eduskunta.fi, 1968) but was implemented sequentially by municipality between 1972 and 1977 (Pekkarinen et al., 2009). The 1968 law references the Decree of 26 June 1970, Peruskouluasetus, 443/1970, which provides more details on the implementation of the comprehensive school reform; however, we are unable to locate the 1970 decree. Prior research investigating the 1968 reform notes that implementation occurred in 6 phases (Pekkarinen et al., 2009). Adoption of the reform began in 1972 in the northernmost region of Finland, comprising more rural municipalities, and spread southward incrementally each year to the more populated municipalities until 1977. This work does not explicitly identify the municipalities which adopted the reform in each phase or the share of the population that each implementation phase covered.

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 7.

Table 7: Finland—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900–1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	No Tracking	.	.	January 1900 - December 1910
<i>Reform years</i>				
1921*	5	4	11 [†]	January 1911 - December 1966
1968	10	9	16 [‡]	January 1967 [‡] - December 1975

Source: Eduskunta.fi (1921, 1968) and Kortekangas, Paksuniemi, and Ervast (2019)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

* No official record explicitly stating the tracking age or grade. The ages and grades indicated here are inferred based on other information provided in education policies and/or secondary sources

† Students start grade 1 in the fall of the calendar year that they reach the age specified by law. Students with birthdays after the start of the school year (i.e., August–December) will be 1 year younger at the end of the grade of first selection

‡ Since this reform was gradually implemented, the first students possibly affected by this policy may have been born as early as January 1962. The cohort birth dates reported in the table reflect the first cohort subject to the policy once it was fully implemented.

In Finland, the school year (SY) starts in August and the school starting age is based on the calendar year (Eduskunta.fi, 1968). We assume that the December 31 enrollment deadline applies to each of the policies in place for cohorts born from 1900 to 1975. The oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 7 and reach age 8 during their first year of schooling (Eduskunta.fi, 1921).

For cohorts born in 1900, no formal tracking system was established (Kortekangas et al., 2019).

The compulsory schooling law of 1921 became effective in August of that year, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1921–22. It established tracks beginning in grade 5. We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 4 when the oldest students in

the cohort reach age 11 (Eduskunta.fi, 1921; Pekkarinen et al., 2009). Those entering grade 5 in SY 1921-22 were the first students affected by the reform, with the oldest born in January 1911.

From 1972 to 1977, tracking moved from grade 5 to grade 10 with the gradual implementation of the comprehensive school system. Under the new policy, we assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 9 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 16. The last cohort to transition to comprehensive school was born in January 1967. These individuals would have been 11 years old at the time of the reform's adoption in their municipality in SY 1977-78, and would have needed to wait an additional 5 years before being tracked. However, cohorts born as early as January 1962 were affected if the reform was adopted in their municipality in SY 1972-73.

9. France

Policy history, 1900–1975

During the 19th century, secondary and higher education in France were brought under the jurisdiction of the state. At this time, children were schooled in two parallel systems, with children of the working class attending the “Primary” system (*École Primaire*) and children of the upper class attending the “Secondary” system (*École Secondaire*) (Giudici, Gingrich, Chevalier, & Haslberger, 2023). Students in these two systems generally attended different primary schools and only those in *École Secondaire* could advance to the elite university preparatory schools (*Lycée*). From the late 19th through the early 20th century, reforms made primary education compulsory and free (Journal Officiel de la République Française [JORF] [Official Gazette of France], 1881; Journal Officiel de la République Française [JORF] [Official Gazette of France], 1882) and intermediate educational programs (non-elite modern secondary programs) began to emerge; however, the *Lycée* remained exclusive to elites, and all forms of secondary schools were fee-paying and highly selective (Müller, Ringer, Simon, 1990; Robert, 2013). It was not until 1933 that secondary schools were made free to attend, in principal, making secondary school attendance possible for the broader public (JORF, 1933).

Over the first half of the 20th century, as secondary education gradually opened up to the middle and lower classes (allowing for an increasing share of the population to be tracked based on ability rather than social class), entry into secondary schools was contingent on successful completion of primary school by obtaining the primary school certificate (*Certificat d'études primaires élémentaires - CEPE*). The age at which the CEPE could be obtained, and thus the age at track selection (entry into secondary school), varied over time. While the 1882 law allowed individuals aged 11 to take the primary school exit exam to obtain the CEPE, the 1924 law (JORF, 1924) raised the minimum age to 12.

The age at first selection remained unchanged until 1941, when it was reverted back to age 11 (JORF, 1941). In the post-war period, successive reforms further increased the accessibility of secondary education with the creation of new secondary school types and introduction of greater flexibility in transitioning across tracks; however, the age at first selection remained 11 (JORF, 1959, 1963).

In 1975, the Haby reform (JORF, 1975) introduced a new type of comprehensive school, the (*Collège Unique*), for children aged 11 to 15, replacing all other types of schools for that age group. The curriculum was standardized until the end of grade 7 (French 5th grade, or *5ème*), after which pre-vocational tracks were available both within the same school and across different schools.

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 8.

Table 8: France–Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900–1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	6	5	11	January 1900 - June 1912
<i>Reform years</i>				
1924	6	5	12	July 1912 - December 1930
1941	6	5	11 [†]	January 1931 - December 1966
1975	8	7	13 [†]	January 1967 - December 1975

Source: Journal Officiel de la République Française [JORF] [Official Gazette of France] (1882, 1924, 1941, 1975)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

[†] Students start grade 1 in the fall of the calendar year that they reach the age specified by law. Students with birthdays after the start of the school year (i.e., September–December) will be 1 year younger at the end of the grade of first selection.

The school year in France typically spans from early September to the end of August of the following calendar year, with class attendance until the end of June. Children start school in September of the calendar year in which they turn 6. (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2021) We assume that the December 31 enrollment deadline applies to each of the policies in place for cohorts born from 1900 to 1975. The oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 6 and reach age 7 during their first

year of schooling.

Cohorts born from 1900 would have been subject to the tracking policy in place under the 1882 law which states that individuals must have turned 11 before attempting to pass the Certificate of Elementary Primary Studies (*Certificat d'études primaires élémentaires - CEPE*), allowing them to advance to secondary school, or *école secondaire* (JORF, 1882). This exam is generally completed at the end of the month of June.

The February 1, 1924 decree (JORF, 1924) was effective from May 1, 1924, which we interpret as first affecting students in school year (SY) 1924-25. The decree states that individuals must have turned 12 before the 1st of July in the year in which they attempt to pass the CEPE, which allows moving to secondary school. Those who turned 11 before July 1924 were the first students affected by the reform, with the oldest born in July 1912. These students would have to wait one more year to attempt the CEPE.

The August 15, 1941 law (JORF, 1941) took effect on October 1941, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1941-42. The law opened the possibility for individuals who turned 11 before December 31, 1942 to attempt the next set of CEPE examinations in July 1942. Those who turned 12 from July 1, 1942 were the first affected by the reform, with the oldest born in July 1930. These students would be able to attempt the CEPE one year earlier than cohorts under the previous policy.

The curriculum at the time was said to be “concentrical,” implying that the same material was revisited each year with different levels of depth. This implied that students took the exam if and when they were deemed ready, which could happen at different grades. Therefore, the 1924 and 1941 laws moved the age at first selection, while not changing the grade at which tracking first occurred.

From 1946 (JORF, 1946), only the first part of the CEPE would be required to enter secondary school, and no age requirement would need to be met to take this examination. However, students would still finish grade 5 (the last year of primary school, referred to as “CM2”) in the year they turned 11.

The Law of July 11, 1975 (JORF, 1975) took effect in September 1977, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1977-78. The reform replaced all existing lower secondary schools with a new comprehensive school (*Collège Unique*) which had a standardized curriculum in grades 6 and 7, after which students could enter pre-vocational tracks in grade 8. We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 7 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 13. Those completing grade 5 in SY 1977-78 were the first students affected by the reform, with the oldest born in January 1967. These students would have undergone selection in grade 5 under the previous policy, but would wait 2 years for first selection following this change.

10. Germany

Policy history, 1900–1975

Before Separation

Germany has a longstanding history of educational tracking, dating back to the mid-19th century with the establishment of a standard university entrance qualification (*Abitur*) across the country (Geissler, 2005). While the state did not supervise schools at the start of the 20th century, children across Germany could enter differentiated secondary schools at age 10. For those born in the first decade of the twentieth century, a very small share of the population (mostly boys from middle- and upper-class families) attended private preparatory schools (known in Germany as *Vorschulen*). These students transitioned directly into “higher schools” (*Höhere Schulen*) after completing *Vorschule*. In this sense, their track selection was determined upon primary school enrollment rather than at age 10.

The first laws to formally specify a nationally standardized school system were the 1919 Weimar Constitution and the 1920 “Law Concerning Elementary Schools and the Abolition of Preschools.” Together, these laws established a 4-year primary school (*Grundschule*) common to all students (Reichs-Gesetzblatt, 1919, 1920). While the Weimar Constitution and 1920 law reference the intermediate and higher schools that follow *Grundschule*, they do not provide details on the age children began schooling, the tracks, or regulations around the differentiation of students into tracks. However, we can infer this information based on secondary sources, which note that the basic structure of the school system was in place as of the Weimar era, and that compulsory schooling starting from age 6 dates back to the 17th century in Germany (Führ, 1997; Garrouste, 2010; Geissler, 2005; Li, 2020). Taken together, we assert that as early as 1920, children across Germany started primary school at age 6 and could be differentiated into alternate tracks as early as age 10 (following the fourth year of the universal primary school). The Weimar Constitution and 1920 law made no change to the school starting age or the grade at first tracking.

The 1938 Compulsory Schooling Act of the German Reich later reaffirmed that compulsory schooling begins for children at age 6 and established an enrollment cutoff of June 30 (Reichs-Gesetzblatt, 1938). The 1938 law is chiefly concerned with compulsory education and, while it alludes to alternative secondary-level schools, it does not go into detail about how students would be selected into these tracks as opposed to the compulsory vocational track. Secondary sources indicate that there was no change during this period in the age or grade level at which students would be sorted into alternative secondary schools.

Following the end of the World War II, Germany split into Eastern and Western Blocs and the individual states (*Länder*) of these two territories followed different paths for their respective education systems.

East Germany

The first collective education reform in East Germany, the “Law for the Democratization of the German School,” was adopted by the five *Länder* in the Soviet Zone in 1946 (Führ, 1997). The 1946 law specified a compulsory schooling starting age of 6 years old. Students spent 8 years in a common elementary school followed by vocational training unless they were selected at the end of grade 6 into the advanced high school (*Oberschule*) (Regierungsblatt für das Land Thüringen, 1946). Thus, differentiated tracks started as early as grade 7.

The subsequent 1950 Compulsory Schooling Act retained the structure of the school system but raised the compulsory schooling starting age to 7, which effectively shifted the age at first selection into the *Oberschule* (Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1950).

In 1959, the school system changed so that students spent 10 years in a common Polytechnic High School (*Polytechnische Oberschule*, or *POS*) followed by at least two years in either vocational training (*Berufsschule*) or a course of study in the Extended High School (*Erweiterte Oberschule*, or *EOS*) (Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1959). The shift to a 10-year universal school (*POS*) from the previous 8-year school resulted in an increase in the grade at which students in East Germany could be tracked by four years.

There were no other legislative changes which affected age at first selection in East Germany until the reunification of Eastern and Western German states in 1990.

West Germany

In West Germany, schooling policy was set by the individual Länder but the general structure of the school system in each of the western states closely resembled the system in place before World War II (with tracking occurring at age 10). The first national schooling reform took place in 1964 with the Hamburg Accord, an agreement between the ministers of education from each of the West German states. This agreement formalized or reaffirmed many aspects of the German education system relevant to age at first selection including: 1) the compulsory schooling starting age (age 6 by June 30 preceding the school year); 2) the structure of the common 4-year primary school; 3) details on the alternative secondary school types following the primary school; and 4) the earliest grade at which the alternative secondary schools can begin (grade 5) (Kultusminister Konferenz, 1964). From this information we can discern that age at first selection in the Western German Länder remained age 10 since this is the age at which students would be entering their fifth year. The Hamburg Accord also made provisions for a “support” or “orientation” stage in grades 5 and 6 in which students could determine which educational path they were suited for. Thus, under the new regulations, first selection could have occurred as late as age 12, but the absolute earliest age at first selection remained age 10. No other national education reforms affecting age at first selection took place in West Germany through 1990, when the Western and Eastern Länder were reunified.

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 9 for East Germany and in Table 10 for West Germany.

Table 9: Germany (East)–Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900-1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900*	5	4	10	January 1900 - June 1936
<i>Reform years</i>				
1946	7	6	12	July 1936 - June 1939
1950	7	6	13	July 1939 - June 1947
1959	11	10	17	July 1947 - December 1975

Source: Führ (1997), Garrouste (2010), Geissler (2005), Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (1950, 1959), Li (2020), Regierungsblatt für das Land Thüringen (1946), and Reichs-Gesetzblatt (1919, 1920, 1938)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

* No official record explicitly stating the tracking age or grade. The ages and grades indicated here are inferred based on other information provided in education policies and/or secondary sources

Table 10: Germany (West)–Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900-1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	5	4	10	January 1900 - June 1975

Source: Führ (1997), Garrouste (2010), Geissler (2005), Kultusminister Konferenz (1964), Li (2020), and Reichs-Gesetzblatt (1919, 1920, 1938)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

The start of the school year (SY) in Germany has changed over time. Before 1941, the SY started in April, but changed to September from 1941 to 1945 (Kultusminister Konferenz, 1963). Following 1945, the federal states established different starting dates until the implementation of the 1964 Hamburg Agreement, which established that the SY in Germany starts in August (Kultusminister Konferenz, 1964). For the policies reported here, individuals needed to reach the school starting age by a certain date preceding the SY (typically June 30) to enroll in school (Kultusminister Konferenz, 1964; Regierungsblatt für das Land Thüringen, 1946; Reichs-Gesetzblatt, 1938). We assume that the June 30th cutoff applies to each of the policies in place for cohorts born from 1900 to 1975 when this information is not presented in the law text. From the start of the 20th century, the oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 6 and reach age 7 during their first year of schooling (Garrouste, 2010; Li, 2020).

For cohorts born in 1900, the first tracks began in grade 5 (Führ, 1997; Garrouste, 2010; Geissler, 2005; Li, 2020; Reichs-Gesetzblatt, 1919, 1920). We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 4 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 10. Subsequent educational reforms before World War II in Germany made no changes to the grade or age at first selection. No effective changes impacted grade or age at first selection in Western Germany after the war.

Following the end of World War II, several education reforms affected age at first selection in East Germany.

The 1946 law was effective from May 1946, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1946-47. The reform established tracks beginning in grade 7 (Regierungsblatt für das Land Thüringen, 1946). We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 6 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 12. Those completing grade 6 in SY 1946-47 were the first students affected by the reform, with the oldest born in July 1936. These students would have undergone selection in grade 4 under the previous policy, but would wait 2 years for first selection following this change.

The 1950 law was effective from December 1950, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1951-52. The reform did not change the grade when tracks began (i.e., grade 7). However, the law raised the compulsory school starting age (Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1950). Following this change, the oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 7 and reach age 8 during their first year of schooling. We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 6 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 13. Those completing grade 6 in SY 1951-52 were the first students affected by the reform, with the oldest born in July 1939. These students would have undergone selection at age 12 under the previous policy, but would wait 1 year for first selection following this change.

The 1959 law was effective from December 1959, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1960-61. The reform established tracks beginning in grade 11 (Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1959). We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 10 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 17. Those entering grade 7 in SY 1960-61 were the first students affected by the reform since the earlier tracking would not be in place. The oldest in this cohort were born in July 1947. These students would have started their track in grade 7 under the previous policy, but would wait 4 years for first selection following this change.

11. Greece

Policy history, 1900–1975

In 1834 Greece established its education system. Primary schooling was compulsory for 4 years, from ages 7 to 11. Secondary school extended up to 7 years, consisting of 3 compulsory years in Hellenic school and an optional 4-year Gymnasium (Zervas, 2022; Government Gazette of the Kingdom of Greece, 1834).

A 1929 reform introduced educational tracking in Greece. Students began school at age 6, and after completing 6 years of compulsory primary education, were tracked into either general or vocational schools at age 12 (Government Gazette of the Republic of Greece, 1929). The 1929 reform reached its peak implementation levels by 1933; afterwards, political upheaval and the Great Depression limited further development, although the legislation remained in force. The rise of conservatism and the authoritarian rule of Ioannis Metaxas, beginning in 1936, led to various educational reforms, including the establishment of an 8-year Gymnasium (Government Gazette of the Republic of Greece, 1939b; Government Gazette of the Republic of Greece, 1939a; Government Gazette of the Republic of Greece, 1937). Despite these changes, academic tracking starting in grade 7 remained in place until 1976 (Ifanti, 1992).

Attempts in 1964 to restructure the Greek education system only lasted 1 year due to political turmoil, but laid the basis for Law 309 in 1976. This reform increased the duration of compulsory schooling in Greece from 6 to 9 years, requiring students to finish 6 years of primary school (demotiko) and 3 years of lower secondary school (gymnasium). After completing gymnasium, students were required to pass an entrance exam to be admitted into general and technical school (lyceum) (Foukas, 2018). By changing the structure of compulsory schooling, this law also changed the structure of tracking, so that students entered tracks in grade 10 rather than grade 7. Since students had to stay an additional 3 years, this effectively raised the age at first selection from 12 to 15, after students completed lower secondary school (Government Gazette of the Republic of Greece, 1976). There were no further policy changes affecting the age at first selection during the period under review.

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 11.

Table 11: Greece—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900–1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	No formal tracking	.	.	January 1900 - December 1917
<i>Reform years</i>				
1929	7	6	12 [†]	January 1918 - December 1964
1976	10	9	15 [†]	January 1965 - December 1975

Source: Government Gazette of the Republic of Greece (1929, 1976)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

[†] Students start grade 1 in the fall of the calendar year that they reach age 6. Students with birthdays after the start of the school year (i.e., September–December) will be 1 year younger at the end of the grade of first selection.

The school year (SY) in Greece lasts from September to August of the following year. Children begin school in the calendar year that they reach at least 5 years and 6 months old by October 1 (Government Gazette of the Kingdom of Greece, 1964, Article 4; Government Gazette of the Republic of Greece, 1985). We assume that the December 31 enrollment deadline applies each of the policies in place for cohorts born from 1900 to 1975. We place the starting age as 6 because that is the age achieved by the oldest person in a cohort during their first year of primary school.

Cohorts born in 1900 were not subject to formal tracking.

The 1929 law was effective from August 1929, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1929–1930. The reform established tracks beginning in grade 7. We assume that selection occurred at the end of grade 6, when the oldest students in the cohort reached

age 12 (Government Gazette of the Republic of Greece, 1929). This policy first impacted people born in January 1918, who were 12 years old when the law was passed.

The 1976 reform was effective from April 1976, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1976-1977. The reform established tracks beginning in grade 10. We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 9 when the oldest students in the cohort would have turned 15 (Government Gazette of the Republic of Greece, 1976). This change first impacted people born in January 1965, who were 12 years old when the law was adopted. Under the new policy, they needed to wait 3 additional years to be tracked.

12. Hungary

Policy History, 1900–1975

In the early 20th century, the social class system, not policies based on academic ability, shaped educational tracks in Hungary. Students from elite families typically attended gymnasiums (academic secondary schools) that prepared them for higher education, while middle-class students were channeled into *polgári iskola* (junior secondary schools), which provided limited vocational qualifications. Working-class students were further segregated into vocational schools (*szakiskola*), which focused on manual trades (László, Felkai, 1969).

The 1924 Klebelsberg Reforms introduced a formal ability-based tracking system at the end of primary school. Students entered one of three secondary tracks: classical gymnasiums (humanities-focused, preparing for university), scientific lyceums (STEM-oriented), or *Realschulen* (applied sciences). However, less than 5% of gymnasium students came from working-class backgrounds, and ability tracking at age 14 did not fully replace class-based tracking until 1948 (Szabó, Attila, 2000; Kornis, 1932; Hungarian Government, 1948). In 1961, a new three-track structure was introduced (academic, vocational-technical, and apprenticeship), but selection into these tracks continued to occur at age 14 (Hungarian Government, 1961).

The 1985 Education Act allowed for education providers to adopt alternative schooling structures, meaning that students could be tracked earlier; however, the law did not explicitly specify the forms that these alternative structures could take (Horn, 2010; Hungarian Government, 1985). Several years later, the 1993 Education Act formally allowed for the creation of 6-year and 8-year secondary grammar schools, which allowed students to be tracked earlier, at either age 10 or 12. However, the majority of students were still tracked at age 14 (Hungarian Government, 1993; Horn, 2010).

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 12.

Table 12: Hungary—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900–1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	No formal tracking	.	.	January 1900 - August 1910
<i>Reform years</i>				
1924	9	8	14 ^a	September 1910 - December 1975

Source: Horn (2010), Hungarian Government (1948, 1961, 1993), László, Felkai (1969), and Szabó, Attila (2000)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

^a Students start grade 1 in the beginning of the academic year after they reach 6 years of age, the age specified by law.

The school year (SY) in Hungary begins in September (European Commission, 2023; László, Felkai, 1969). During our time period of interest (1900–1975), individuals who turned 6 years old by June 30 were required to enroll in grade 1 at the start of the following school year (Parliament of Hungary, 1940, §3). The oldest members of each cohort begin grade 1 at age 6 and turn 7 during their first year of schooling.

For cohorts born in 1900, there was no formal ability-based tracking system (Szabó, Attila, 2000).

The 1924 reform, effective for SY 1924–25, introduced formal tracking at the end of grade 8 (age 14) (Szabó, Attila, 2000; Kornis, 1932). Individuals then began tracked courses at the start of grade 9. Students completing grade 8 in SY 1924–25 were the first cohort affected by this reform, with the oldest born in September 1910.

The 1985 and 1993 Education Acts changed the age at first selection, introducing the possibility for students to be tracked as early as age 10 or 12; however, the first cohorts affected by these policies fall outside of our policy period of interest (1900–1975), and are therefore not included in the table or this discussion (Hungarian Government, 1985; Hungarian Government, 1993).

13. Ireland

Policy history, 1900–1975

Ireland was part of the United Kingdom from 1801 until 1922. The Anglo-Irish Treaty established the Irish Free State in 1922 and brought an end to the Irish War of Independence (1919–1921). This treaty granted independence to Southern Ireland, now the Republic of Ireland, while Northern Ireland continues to be part of the United Kingdom.

Throughout the early 20th century, Ireland’s education system was shaped by British policies, particularly up until 1924, when Ireland introduced its own education legislation.

The 1926 School Attendance Act made school attendance compulsory from ages 6 to 14, starting from January 1, 1927; however, it did not introduce formal educational tracks (Government of Ireland, 1926). At that time, most students completed primary school around age 14, and only a minority transitioned to post-primary education, which was dominated by academic secondary schools (Raftery & Hout, 1993). The first legal and institutional recognition of distinct educational tracks occurred with the Vocational Education Act of 1930, which created a parallel system of vocational schools alongside the existing academic secondary schools (Government of Ireland, 1930). The Act specifically targeted “young persons” defined as those aged 14 to under 16, establishing age 14 as the official point of educational tracking. From this age, students could follow one of three paths: academic secondary education, vocational education, or exit into the workforce. Access to these paths was determined by entrance exams, geographic access, and socioeconomic background (Raftery & Hout, 1993).

During this period, admission to most academic secondary schools required passing entrance exams administered by individual schools (Raftery & Hout, 1993). However, the 1967 reform to provide free secondary education removed this requirement (O’Dubhlaing, 1997; Raftery & Hout, 1993). Despite these changes, the age at first tracking remained unchanged - starting at the beginning of secondary school (age 14) - throughout the period under review. Starting in the 1970s and 1980s, changes in societal norms, accelerated by the 1967 reform, led families to enroll children in primary school at earlier ages, often at 4 or 5; however, the official compulsory school starting age in Ireland remains 6. As a result of these changes, the typical age of primary school completion gradually shifted to 12, enabling students to enter post-primary education - and thus tracking - at a younger age than in previous decades. Because this shift occurs outside our period of interest, we do not include this information in our discussion below; however, it is possible that small shares of cohorts born in the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s may have been affected by these shifts.

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 13.

Table 13: Ireland–Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900–1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	No formal tracking	.	.	January 1900 - August 1916
<i>Reform years</i>				
1930	9	8	14 ^a	September 1916 - December 1975

Source: Government of Ireland (1924)

- Notes:**
- The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.
 - For the ease of cross-national comparisons, we use the term “grades” to refer to a child’s level of schooling across all chapters in this document; however, it is important to note that Ireland uses different terms. Primary education consists of “junior and senior infants” as the first two years of schooling, followed by “1st class to 6th class.” Secondary schooling consists of “1st year to 6th year.”

^a In the 1970s and 1980s, the age at first selection began to evolve as a result of children beginning primary school earlier, and eventually became age 12. Because these changes were gradual and occurred outside of our period of interest, we do not include them in the table.

In Ireland, the school year (SY) starts in September. Children *may* start school in September following their 4th birthday and *must* start school before their 6th birthday. They complete 2 grades of early primary education before they begin grade 1. Consequently, children are typically aged 6 or 7 when they begin grade 1 (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2021).

For cohorts born in 1900, there was no formal tracking system in Ireland.

The 1930 Vocational Education Act allowed students to start vocational school at age 14, corresponding to the end of primary school (grade 8) (Government of Ireland, 1930). The first affected cohort was born in September 1916. They turned 14 years old in grade 8 in SY 1930-31, and were the first to undergo selection in grade 8 and enter their track in grade 9.

Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, typical post-primary paths entry age has moved towards 12 (O'Dubhlaing, 1997; Raftery & Hout, 1993). However, there were no reforms in Ireland formally altering the age at first selection for cohorts born through 1975.

14. Italy

Policy history, 1900–1975

Educational tracking in Italy dates back to the country’s unification in 1861 when the 1859 Casati Law was nationally implemented (Gazzetta Piemontese, 1859). Under this law, children attended elementary school starting from age 6 for 2 or 4 years, depending on size of the population in their municipality of residence. After 4 years of elementary education (typically at age 10), students could be selected into two different secondary school tracks: Classical Secondary Education (*Istruzione Secondaria Classica*), which featured classical humanistic education in the *Ginnasio* and *Liceo*, leading to the university, or Technical Secondary Education (*Istruzione Secondaria Tecnica*) which featured scientific and mathematical training in a municipal technical school followed by a state technical institute. The classical secondary schools were highly selective and intended for the elite, while little emphasis was placed on educating the mostly rural lower class.

The 1923 Gentile reform altered the structure of the education system, establishing tracks after the completion of a 5-grade primary school. These tracks, located in different schools, included classical education in the liberal arts and sciences, technical education, teaching education, and a complementary professional training track (Gazzettaufficiale.it, 1923b). Students’ track selection remained limited by the availability of schools offered in their area, and transitions across tracks after initial enrollment were uncommon.

The law of December 31, 1962 established state middle schools comprising 3 years of free lower secondary education. The law also extended a common curriculum three grades beyond the 5-year primary school, moving tracking from grade 6 to grade 9 (Gazzettaufficiale.it, 1962).

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 14.

Table 14: Italy–Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900-1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	5	4	10	January 1900 - December 1913
<i>Reform years</i>				
1923	6	5	11 [†]	January 1914 - December 1951
1962	9	8	14 [†]	January 1952 - December 1975

Source: Gazzetta Piemontese (1859) and Gazzettaufficiale.it (1923a, 1923b, 1962)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

[†] Students start grade 1 in the fall of the calendar year that they reach the age specified by law. Students with birthdays after the start of the school year (i.e., September-December) will be 1 year younger at the end of the grade of first selection.

In Italy, the school year (SY) starts in September and the school starting age is based on the calendar year (Ministry of Education and Merit, 2024). We assume that the December 31 enrollment deadline applies to previous policies when calculating birth cohorts. The oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 6 and reach age 7 during their first year of schooling.

For cohorts born in 1900, the first tracks began in grade 5 (Gazzetta Piemontese, 1859). We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 4 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 10.

The 1923 Gentile reform, effective for SY 1923-24, established tracks beginning in grade 6 (Gazzettaufficiale.it, 1923a, 1923b). We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 5 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 11. The first students affected by the reform were those who completed grade 4 in SY 1923-24, with the oldest born in January 1914. Under the previous policy, these individuals would have selected their track at the end of grade 4 and started their track in grade 5; under the new policy, they needed to wait 1 more year to begin their track.

The 1962 reform, effective for SY 1963-64, delayed tracking from grade 6 to grade 9 (Gazzettaufficiale.it, 1962). The first students affected by the reform completed grade 5 in SY 1962-63 and entered grade 6 in SY 1963-64, with the oldest born in January 1952. Under the previous policy, these individuals would have started their track in grade 6; under the new policy, they needed to wait 3 more years to begin their track.

15. Luxembourg

Policy history, 1900–1975

Since the late 1800s, secondary education in Luxembourg has started at grade 7, when students reach age 12; in some municipalities, the secondary school starting age could be delayed until 13 (Chambre des députés, 1881; Siggy Koenig, n.d.). Although early education policies in Luxembourg do not explicitly state the age at track selection, secondary sources suggest that tracking occurred at the start of secondary school in the early 20th century, and students could choose an academic or a vocational secondary pathway (Chambre des salaires Luxembourg, 2012). Therefore, it is likely that the age at first selection in the early 1900s was 12.

The May 10, 1968 law on education reform confirmed that selection occurs at the end of grade 6 in Luxembourg and changed the mechanism of selection (Chambre des députés, 1968). Following the completion of the sixth grade in primary school, a decision council assigned students a secondary school (lycée) track based on their grades from the main courses and results from a standardized test administered in the sixth grade (Klapproth, Glock, Bohmer, Krolak-Schwerdt, & Martin, 2012). Students either entered the *enseignement secondaire classique* (ESC), an academic track, or to the *enseignement secondaire général* (ESG), which encompasses several vocational tracks (Eurydice, 2024).

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 15.

Table 15: Luxembourg–Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900–1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	7	6	12	January 1900 - December 1975

Source: Chambre des députés (1881, 1968)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

The school year (SY) in Luxembourg begins September 15, and individuals must reach the compulsory school starting age by September 1 to enroll in school for that SY (Chambre des députés, 2009).

For cohorts born in 1900, the first selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 6, corresponding for most students to age 12 (Chambre des députés, 1881; Siggy Koenig, n.d.; Chambre des salaires Luxembourg, 2012). The 1968 reform, and subsequent education reforms in Luxembourg, made no changes to the grade or age at first selection (Chambre des députés, 1968).

16. Netherlands

Policy history, 1900–1975

Tracking from the start of secondary school has been a feature of the education system in the Netherlands since at least the late 1800s, with a variety of secondary school types persisting through the 20th century (Garrouste, 2010; Luijckx & de Heus, 2008). These schools have historically provided students who have completed their primary schooling with the option of continuing general education, or taking on pre-university education, technical training, or instruction in housekeeping (Luijckx & de Heus, 2008). Secondary education in the Netherlands was not compulsory until August 1968, when the Secondary Education Act of 1963 mandated 3 years of post-primary school following grade 6 of primary school (Staatsblad van het koninkrijk der Nederlanden [Official Journal of the Netherlands], 1963). This same reform also redefined the different secondary schools and for the first time implemented schools dedicated to pre-vocational training.

For the period from 1900 through 1975, the timing of entry into secondary school tracks was contingent on the duration of primary school. Since the first act on compulsory education in 1900 until 1975, the Netherlands mandated 6 grades of compulsory primary schooling for children ages 6 to 12, after which they could pursue secondary education (Garrouste, 2010; Kippersluis, O'Donnell, & Doorslaer, 2011; Luijckx & de Heus, 2008; Staatsblad, 1901a, 1901b; Staatsblad van het koninkrijk der Nederlanden [Official Journal of the Netherlands], 1963). Thus, we assume that secondary school tracks started after grade 6 (age 12) and did not change during the period of interest.

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 16.

Table 16: Netherlands–Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900-1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900*	7	6	12	January 1900 - December 1975

Source: Garrouste (2010) and Luijckx and de Heus (2008)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

* No official record explicitly stating the tracking age or grade. The age indicated here is inferred based on other information provided in education policies and/or secondary sources

Currently, the school year (SY) in the Netherlands begins in August or September, but children enter school immediately upon reaching compulsory schooling age. Since students enter school mid-year, first affected cohorts would be determined based on the month of implementation of each law impacting the age at selection.

For cohorts born in 1900, the first tracks began in grade 7 (Garrouste, 2010; Luijckx & de Heus, 2008; Staatsblad, 1901a, 1901b; Staatsblad van het koninkrijk der Nederlanden [Official Journal of the Netherlands], 1963). We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 6 when the oldest students in the cohort reach age 12.

There were no reforms in the Netherlands altering the age at first selection for cohorts born through 1975.

17. Northern Ireland

Policy history, 1900–1975

Prior to the 1919 Irish War of Independence, Ireland was a constituent country of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Following 1919, Ireland was divided into the Irish Free State (later the Republic of Ireland), an independent country, and Northern Ireland, a state that remains part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

While the Northern Irish education system closely followed the English and Welsh system in many respects in the early 1900s, its approach to tracking varied (Secondary Education and Social Change, 2017; Akenson, 2012). The educational system that was in place in 1918, shortly before the establishment of the Northern Irish state in December 1922, was in fact three largely disconnected educational systems (Parliament of Great Britain, 1918; Akenson, 2012). Starting in 1918, the majority of students stayed in national (primary) schools until the leaving age of 14 (Akenson, 2012). After some level of primary education, students could also enter technical schools (which had existed since 1899) to pursue a vocational secondary track, intermediate secondary schools to pursue an academic secondary track, or they could enter the workforce. The ages of entry into the technical and intermediate schools during this period, however, are unclear. The central government did little to coordinate between the three school types, and technical schools preferred students to have more experience prior to entry, while intermediate schools preferred students to enter prior to 14 (Akenson, 2012).

Northern Ireland implemented its first uniform tracking policy as an independent state in 1947, three years after a tripartite tracking system was formally established in England and Wales (Parliament of Northern Ireland, 1947). Upon successful completion of a transfer test at age 11 (colloquially known as the “Eleven Plus”), students could transition from elementary school to grammar school. Grammar schools were the academic track designed for the middle and upper classes. If students did not receive a high enough score on the transfer test, they could attend a technical college or an intermediate school.^[1] In practice, the tripartite system functioned as a bipartite system; technical school enrollment was low, with the majority of students either attending grammar schools or intermediate schools from age 11 (Gallagher & Smith, 2000).

Tracking at age 11 has remained a constant in Northern Ireland since 1947, despite concerted pushback against the practice in the early 21st century (Ruane, 2007; Northern Ireland Assembly, 2008; McMurray, 2020; Independent Review of Education, 2022; BBC, 2023).

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 17.

Table 17: Northern Ireland—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900–1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	No formal tracking	.	.	January 1900 - August 1904
<i>Reform years</i>				
1918	10	9	14*	September 1904 - August 1937
1947	7	6	11	September 1937 - December 1975

Source: Parliament of Northern Ireland (1947)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

* We use 14 for cohort calculations because this is the age at which the majority of students completed national (primary) school. Secondary sources indicate, however, that students may have been tracked into intermediate schools at an earlier age.

The school year (SY) in Northern Ireland begins in September and ends in June, and students must reach the starting age by September 1 (Legislation.gov.uk, 1986). We assume that the September 1 enrollment deadline applies to previous policies when calculating birth cohorts. For cohorts born 1900–1975, the oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 5 and reach age 6 during their first year of schooling.

For cohorts born in 1900, no formal tracking system was established. Technical schools had existed as a secondary school alternative

since 1899, but the age of entry into these programs is unclear (Beale, 2006; Akenson, 2012).

The Education Act of 1918, effective for school year (SY) 1918-19, raised the leaving age in Northern Ireland from 12 to 14 (Parliament of Great Britain, 1918). The majority of students during this period left primary school at age 14; therefore, we use age 14 in our cohort calculations. The first individuals impacted by this policy were born in September 1904, and reached age 14 when the policy went into effect.

The 1947 Education Act, effective for SY 1948-49, established tracking at age 11 (Parliament of Northern Ireland, 1947; Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 2007). Individuals born in September 1937 were the first affected by this policy, since they reached age 11 at the start of SY 1948-49.

Notes:

1. Different terms are used to describe Northern Irish secondary schools that were neither grammar schools nor technical schools. “Junior secondary schools,” “secondary intermediate schools,” and “high schools” were all common terms (Hyland, Milne, Byrne, & Dallat, 1995). We have chosen to use “intermediate schools” for this chapter since this term appeared the most frequently in the legislation and secondary sources that we reviewed.

18. Poland

Policy history, 1900–1975

At the beginning of the 20th century, Poland did not have a uniform educational tracking system in place. In an effort to unify the fragmented education systems inherited from the territory's partition between Germany, Russia, and Austria, and establish continuity between primary and secondary education, the Dekret o obowiązkach szkolnym of February 7, 1919 mandated a universal primary school. Students entered school in the calendar year in which they reached age 7, and were required to complete 7 years of schooling prior to reaching age 14; therefore, they could leave school as early as age 13 (Dziennik Ustaw n14, 1919). However, this law was not uniformly implemented across Poland, resulting in an informal tracking system (Sadowska, 1999).

It was not until the 1932 Jędrzejewicz Reform that Poland uniformly implemented 7 years of universal primary schooling and a formal tracking system to structure secondary education (Dziennik Ustaw n14 n38, 1932). After completing primary school, students could enter either Gimnazjum (general secondary education) or vocational schools in the 8th grade. Social inequalities in access to education persisted, with lower-income families being disproportionately represented in vocational schools. (Krasuski, 1985).

During World War II (1939–1945), Poland's education system was severely disrupted. The German occupation closed Polish secondary schools and universities, and as such, no formal tracking system was in place at this time. However, an extensive underground education movement emerged, maintaining access to secondary and higher education in secret schools and informal networks (Sadowska, 1999; Katarzyna Charzyńska, 2012).

Following the war, the enactment of the 1952 constitution effectively reinstated formal tracking at grade 8 (Republic of Poland, 1952).

The 1961 Act on the Development of the Education System expanded access to general education, extended compulsory schooling to age 15, and increased the duration of primary education from 7 to 8 years (Dziennik Ustaw n14 n32, 1961). Tracking was still officially implemented after the completion of primary school, meaning students would now enter into different educational paths from 9th grade (Sadowska, 1999; Tran, 1995).

There were no other reforms affecting the timing of first tracking for the period under review.

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 18.

Table 18: Poland—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900-1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	No formal tracking	.	.	January 1900 - December 1919
<i>Reform years</i>				
1932	8	7	13 [†]	January 1920 - December 1926
WWII	No tracking	.	.	January 1927 - December 1939
1952	8	7	13 [†]	January 1940 - December 1948
1961	9	8	14 [†]	January 1949 - December 1975

Source: Dziennik Ustaw n14 n32 (1961) and Dziennik Ustaw n14 n38 (1932)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

[†] Students start grade 1 in the fall of the calendar year that they reach the age 6. Students with birthdays after the start of the school year (i.e., September-December) will be 1 year younger at the end of the grade of first selection.

In Poland, the school year (SY) starts in September and, at present, the school starting age is based on the calendar year (Apanasewicz, 1976). We assume that the December 31 enrollment deadline applies to previous policies when calculating birth cohorts. The oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 6 and reach age 7 during their first year of schooling.

Cohorts born in 1900 were not subject to any formal tracking.

The Jędrzejewicz Reform of March 2, 1932, effective SY 1932–33, established formal educational tracks beginning in grade 8 (Dziennik Ustaw n14 n38, [1932](#)). We assume that selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 7, when students reached age 13. The first students affected by the reform were those completing grade 7 in SY 1932–33, meaning the oldest affected students were born in January 1920.

The Second World War caused a major disruption to the Polish education system and temporarily suspended formal tracking in Poland. The first students who reached age 13 in SY 1939–1940, during WWII, were born in January 1927 and were not formally tracked.

The 1952 Constitution (Article 61), implemented in SY 1952–53, reinstated 7 years of compulsory primary schooling, after which students entered tracks. Per our rules, the AFS would be 13, the age reached in 7th grade by the older students in the cohort (Republic of Poland, [1952](#)). The first students affected by these changes were those completing grade 7 in SY 1952–53, meaning the oldest affected students were born in January 1940.

The July 15, 1961 Act on the Development of the Education System, which took effect in SY 1961–62, extended the duration of primary schooling from 7 to 8 years (Dziennik Ustaw n14 n32, [1961](#)). This change delayed tracking by 1 year, until age 14. We assume that selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 8. The first students affected, then, were those completing grade 7 in SY 1961–62, who were born in January 1949. Under this new policy, they needed to attend 1 additional year of primary schooling before being tracked.

19. Portugal

Policy history, 1900–1975

The Portuguese legislature introduced tracking in 1905; students could choose between a more prestigious general academic track, offered through a 2-year complementary course that typically led to higher education, or a lower status technical track, which generally led directly to the workforce (Garrouste, 1997; Fontes, n.d.). The 1905 law does not explicitly state the age or grade of first selection; however, based on the ages stated in later legislation and secondary sources, we infer that students were first selected at age 10 (Diário da República, 1911, Chapter 5, Article 37; Diário da República, 1964, Article 9; Diário da República, 1967, Preamble, §2; Álvares, 2018).

The 1967 policy (effective for the 1968-69 school year) explicitly raised the age of first selection from 10 to 12, so that tracking occurred at the end of a newly-created unified 2-year preparatory cycle for upper secondary education (Diário da República, 1967, Preamble, §2, Article 28). Following the end of this cycle, students either took an entry exam to enter an academic or technical secondary track, or they received a preparatory cycle qualification if they did not wish to continue secondary education.

In the wake of the democratic revolution of 1974, in 1975, the Portuguese legislature created a unified course for grades 7 to 9 for secondary education; this change effectively delayed tracking until grade 10 (Santos, 1977; Garrouste, 1997). Shortly thereafter, in 1978, the Portuguese legislature eliminated the technical track and required students to follow an academic course of study (Diário da República, 1978a, Article 1; Diário da República, 1978b, Article 1).

The legislature reintroduced the technical track on an experimental basis throughout Portugal in 1983, with tracking into either an academic or vocational path beginning in grade 10 (when students typically have reached age 15) (Diário da República, 1983, Articles 1, 4). This change was formally implemented in 1986 (Diário da República, 1986, Article 10).

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 19.

Table 19: Portugal—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900-1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	5	4	10	January 1900 - September 1958
<i>Reform years</i>				
1967	7	6	12	October 1958 - September 1963
1978	No tracking			October 1963 - September 14, 1971
1986	10	9	15	September 15, 1971 [†] - December 1975

Source: Diário da República (1911, 1967, 1978a, 1983, 1986)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

[†] Since this policy change was initially introduced on an experimental basis, the first students possibly affected by this policy may have been born as early as October 1968. The cohort birth dates reported in the table reflect the first cohort subject to the policy once it was fully implemented.

From 1947 until 1986, the school year in Portugal began on October 1 (Diário do Governo, 1947, Article 10). We assume that this starting date applies to previous policies when calculating birth cohorts. Since 1986, students must reach the compulsory schooling starting age of 6 by September 15 (Diário da República, 1986, Article 6).

For cohorts born in 1900, we interpret the age at first tracking to be 10, when students entered grade 5 (Garrouste, 1997; Diário da República, 1911, Chapter 5, Article 37; Diário da República, 1964, Article 9; Diário da República, 1967, Preamble, §2; Álvares, 2018).

Education tracking reforms in the 1960s and 1970s delayed the timing of selection. The 1967 reform, effective for school year (SY) 1968-69, introduced a 2-year preparatory cycle and therefore increased the age at which individuals were first tracked to 12, when students entered grade 7 (Diário da República, 1967, Preamble, §2, Article 28). This change first impacted people born in October 1958,

who reached age 10 in SY 1968-69 when the reform went into effect. Under the previous policy, they would have been tracked at age 10, and entered tracks at the start of grade 5; under the 1967 policy, they remained together with their peers for 2 additional years, and entered tracks at the start of grade 7.

The 1975 reform, effective for SY 1975-76, created the unified course for grades 7-9, effectively delaying tracking from ages 12 to 15 (Santos, 1977; Garrouste, 1997). This policy first affected individuals born in October 1963, who were 12 years old when the law was adopted. Under the new policy, these individuals could not be tracked for an additional 3 years; however, as a result of the subsequent 1978 reform, students in this cohort were not tracked and remained together with their peers in an academic course of study.

The 1978 reform, effective for SY 1978-79, abolished tracking by eliminating the technical track (Diário da República, 1978a, Article 1). This law first affected people born in October 1963, who were 15 years old when the law was passed. Under the 1975 policy, these individuals would have been tracked at age 15; as a result of this new law, they were not tracked.

The 1986 policy, effective for SY 1986-87, re-established the technical course and therefore re-introduced ability tracking in Portugal (Diário da República, 1986, Article 10). This reform first impacted individuals born on September 15, 1971, who entered grade 10 in SY 1986-87, when they reached age 15. While this cohort was the first fully affected by the reform, tracking at grade 10 had been piloted since 1983 (Diário da República, 1983, Articles 1, 4). The first cohort affected by the pilot programs was born in October 1968.

20. Slovenia

Policy history, 1900–1975

Slovenia experienced various regime changes during the 20th century, until it gained independence in 1991. Consequently, education policy also experienced multiple reforms during this period. Unfortunately, records predating independence have not been systematically digitized and we have had to rely on secondary sources in the writing of this section. Furthermore, although education laws existed since before the start of the 20th century, systematically enforced across the country. This led to large variations in implementation between regions, in particular in the first half of the century (Tomich, 1963).

At the start of the 20th century, school was compulsory for 4 years with a school starting age of 6 years old. In 1929, the Folk School Act made education compulsory for 8 years across Yugoslavia (Laat et al., 2020). This reform created tracking after primary school (starting at grade 5) (Georgeoff, 1982; Tomich, 1963). In the 1940s, some sources mention that there were 7 years (7 to 14) of compulsory elementary school, followed by secondary for those fit for it (Brown, 1946). However, this did not impact tracking and first tracking remained at grade 5 (age 10).

In 1958, the school system was reformed through the General Education Law. This reform created a single track for the entire compulsory schooling period of 8 years. School starting age was set at 7 years old (Farmerie, 1972; Georgeoff, 1982; Laat et al., 2020; Tomich, 1963).

Upon completing compulsory education, individuals could opt for a 4-year academic high school, or either 3 or 4-year vocational schools (Obradović, 1986; Zilic, 2018). In 1975, the system was reformed and a new 4-year system consisting of two phases was created. The first phase, which lasted 2 years, would take place immediately upon the completion of compulsory school and have a curriculum common to all students. The second phase would last either 1 or 2 years and provide vocational preparation (Zilic, 2018).

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 20.

Table 20: Slovenia—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900–1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	5	4	11	September 1900 [†] - August 1948
<i>Reform years</i>				
1958	9	8	15	September 1948 - August 1960
1975	11	10	17	September 1960 - December 1975

Source: Georgeoff (1982), Tomich (1963), and Zilic (2018)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

[†] Indicates earliest date in time frame of interest and not a cohort birth year associated with a reform.

We were not able to recover specific information about school year start and end before the independence of Slovenia. However, school presently starts in the beginning of September (Eurydice, 2025). This is also the case for the other former republics of Yugoslavia (Eurydice, 2025), therefore we assume that the school year also started in September before Slovenian independence. Children typically start school if they have reached age 7 at the start of September. However, this practice may vary between municipalities, with some municipalities using calendar year to define the school starting age.

At the start of the 20th century, there were four years of compulsory elementary education. Tracking would start at the beginning of 5th grade. With the school starting age set at 6, children would be 10 years old at first selection during grade 4. Slovenia experienced an important education reform in 1929 that increased compulsory schooling, however age at first selection remained unchanged until 1958.

In 1958, age at first selection moved from the end of grade 4 to the end of grade 8 and school starting age increased to 7 years old. This

means that age at first selection increased to 15 years. The first cohort affected by this reform was 10 years old in 1958, thus it consisted of children born in 1948. Those children would need to wait an additional 5 years before being tracked.

In 1975, age at first selection moved from the end of grade 8 to the end of grade 10, which means that students would need to wait until they reached 17 years old before being tracked. The first cohort affected by this reform were the students who were 15 years old when the reform was implemented, i.e. individuals born in 1960.

21. Spain

Policy history, 1900–1975

Educational tracking in Spain dates back to the 19th century; however, this early system was dominated by private secondary schools and attendance rates were low (Insa-Sánchez & Díez-Mingueta, 2023; García, 2011). By 1900, students could first be tracked at age 9 after completing mandatory primary schooling and passing an exam (Gaceta de Madrid, 1857). These students would pursue *estudios generales*, an academic track. The vocational track, *estudios de aplicación*, was open to students beginning at age 10.

In 1938, the age at first tracking was raised to age 10 (Cortes Generales, 1938). Individuals could either enter secondary school at this age, or they could remain in primary school until they had fulfilled their compulsory schooling requirements at age 13.

The 1970 General Law on Education (Ley General de Educación—LGE) expanded comprehensive basic education to 8 years, increasing Spain's age at first tracking. Compulsory schooling concluded at age 13, after which students could either leave school or pursue their *bachillerato* (post-obligatory secondary schooling) at age 14 (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1970). Within the *bachillerato*, students could follow either an academic or a vocational track.

Through the 1980s, the number of students enrolled in schooling beyond age 14 increased, and the state began experimenting with a model that extended comprehensive education to age 16 (Library of Congress, 1990; Marchesi, 1992). The 1990 Organic Law 1/1990 of October 3, which formally established 10 years of comprehensive schooling through age 16, delaying track selection by 2 years (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1990). The first cohort affected by this policy (born in 1977) falls outside of the timeframe covered in this report, so we have not included it in our cohort discussion below; however, it is possible that small shares of cohorts born in the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s may have been affected by earlier comprehensive school experimentation.

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 21.

Table 21: Spain—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900-1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900	4	3	9	January 1900 - August 1929
<i>Reform years</i>				
1938	5	4	10	September 1929 - August 1960
1970	9	8	14	September 1960 - December 1975

Source: Boletín Oficial del Estado (1970), Cortes Generales (1938), and Gaceta de Madrid (1857)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

The school year in Spain typically spans from September to June (Ministerio de Educación, Formación Profesional y Deportes, n.d.; Gaceta de Madrid, 1909). We assume that the cutoff date for enrollment is September 1. The oldest members of each cohort start grade 1 at age 6 and reach age 7 during their first year of schooling.

For cohorts born in 1900, the age at first tracking in Spain was 9, when students entered grade 4 (Gaceta de Madrid, 1857). The 1938 reform, effective for school year (SY) 1938-39, increased the age at which individuals are first tracked to 10, when students entered grade 5 (Cortes Generales, 1938). This change first impacted people born in September 1929, who reached age 9 in SY 1938-39 when the reform went into effect. Under the previous policy, they would have been tracked at age 9; under the 1938 policy, they remained together with their peers for 1 additional year.

The 1970 reform, effective for SY 1970-71, increased the age at first tracking to 14, when students entered grade 9 (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1970). This policy first affected individuals born in September 1960, who were 10 years old when the law was adopted. Under the new policy, these individuals could not be tracked for an additional 4 years.

22. Sweden

Policy history, 1900–1975

During the 19th century, Sweden’s education system followed parallel paths according to an individual’s social class: upper class boys attended elite grammar schools (*läroverk*) following preparatory education, while lower class children attended mass primary schools (*folkskola*) (Elmersjö, 2018). As with other European countries during the 19th and 20th centuries, Sweden systematized and expanded secondary education, making secondary schools with modernized curricula more accessible to the public (Müller et al., 1990; Westberg, 2026). As part of this transition, Sweden began to merge the parallel education systems. The first effort to do so occurred in 1905 with the division of the *läroverk* into a lower level intermediate school (*realskola*) and an upper secondary school (*gymnasium*) (Riksdag, 1904; Statistiska Centralbyrån, 1977). The gymnasium remained an elite institution, but under the new system, the broader school-age population could now potentially be tracked at the earliest into the *realskola* after they had completed 3 years of *folkskola*, at age 10. If they were not tracked, then they remained in *folkskola* until age 13, when they were done with compulsory schooling (Riksdag, 1904).

In the following decades, the state continued to expand secondary school options for the general population. A 1927 reform introduced tracks within *realskola* which impacted the age at first tracking. Under this policy, students could either follow a 5-year lower secondary track, beginning at age 11, or a 4-year lower secondary track, beginning at age 13 (Riksdag, 1927). If students did not follow one of the academic tracks, they could either remain in *folkskola* until they were done with compulsory schooling at age 13 (before 1949) or age 14 (after 1949), or they could pursue one of several technical or vocational tracks that began as early as age 15 (Fischer et al., 2021).

In SY 1949-50 Sweden began experimenting with a comprehensive school (*grundskola*) which would replace the *folkskola* and *realskola*. After completing *grundskola* students continuing their education would join the *gymnasieskola* (upper secondary school) at age 16 (Holmlund, 2008). Only municipalities that expressed interest were selected for this pilot program (Fischer et al., 2021). In 1962, the Swedish legislature decided that the *grundskola* would be implemented nationwide, and this process was complete by 1972 (Riksdag, 1962b; Riksdag, 1962a; Elmersjö, 2018). Municipalities could choose when to adopt the reform, and those that did so first tended to be higher income, have higher education levels, and have higher employment in manufacturing (Fischer et al., 2021). Following the adoption of the *grundskola*, students in Sweden were no longer tracked during the compulsory schooling period; tracking moved up to age 16, when additional secondary schooling became voluntary.

Effective policy by cohort

Based on the rules established in the introduction, we assign the following birth cohorts and dates in Table 22.

Table 22: Sweden—Key Educational Tracking Ages (1900-1975)

	Grade tracks begin	Grade at first selection	Age at first selection	Birth cohorts
Policy for people born in 1900*	4	3	10 [†]	January 1900 - December 1917
<i>Reform years</i>				
1927*	5	4	11 [†]	January 1918 - December 1961
1962	10	9	16 [‡]	January 1962 [‡] - December 1975

Source: Elmersjö (2018), Fischer et al. (2021), Holmlund (2008), Riksdag (1904, 1927, 1962a, 1962b), and Statistiska Centralbyrån (1977)

Note: The cutoff dates for birth cohorts are January 1900 - December 1975 to reflect the population of interest in the Health and Retirement Study and its international network of studies, which are individuals aged 50 and older.

* No official record explicitly stating the tracking age or grade. The age indicated here is inferred based on other information provided in education policies and/or secondary sources

[†] Students start grade 1 in the fall of the calendar year that they reach the age specified by law. Students with birthdays after the start of the school year (i.e., September-December) will be 1 year younger at the end of the grade of first selection.

[‡] Since this reform was gradually implemented, the first students possibly affected by this policy may have been born as early as January 1952. The cohort birth dates reported in the table reflect the first cohort subject to the policy once it was fully implemented.

In Sweden, the school year begins in August; however, starting ages are based on the age reached during the calendar year (Riksdag,

[1962b](#); Svensk författningssamling, [2010](#)). For cohorts born January 1900 - December 1975, the oldest members of each cohort started grade 1 at age 6 and reached age 7 during the first grade.

For cohorts born in 1900, most individuals were tracked after completing grade 3, when the oldest members of the cohort reached 10. (Riksdag, [1904](#); Statistiska Centralbyrån, [1977](#)).

The 1927 policy was enacted in February 1927, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1927-28. By restructuring the *realskola*, this reform effectively delayed tracking from grade 4 to grade 5 (Riksdag, [1927](#); Statistiska Centralbyrån, [1977](#)). We assume selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 4 when the oldest students in the cohort reached age 11. This change first affected students completing grade 3 in SY 1927-28, with the oldest born in January 1918.

The 1962 policy reforms were enacted in March 1962, which we interpret as first affecting students in SY 1962-63. The reforms were gradually implemented until SY 1972-73, and delayed tracking until the end of compulsory schooling, at age 16 (Riksdag, [1962b](#); Riksdag, [1962a](#); Holmlund, [2008](#); Statistiska Centralbyrån, [1977](#)). We assume that selection into tracks occurred at the end of grade 9. People born in January 1962 were the first impacted across Sweden by this change. However, the earliest cohort that could have been affected by the policy was the one who reached age 11 in SY 1962-1963 who would have been selected into tracks at the end of grade 4 during that SY. These individuals were born in January 1952.

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Version information

Current Version: 1.1 (March 2026)

Version history

- 1.0 (November 2025): First version.
- 1.1 (March 2026): Added Czech Republic/Slovakia, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia.