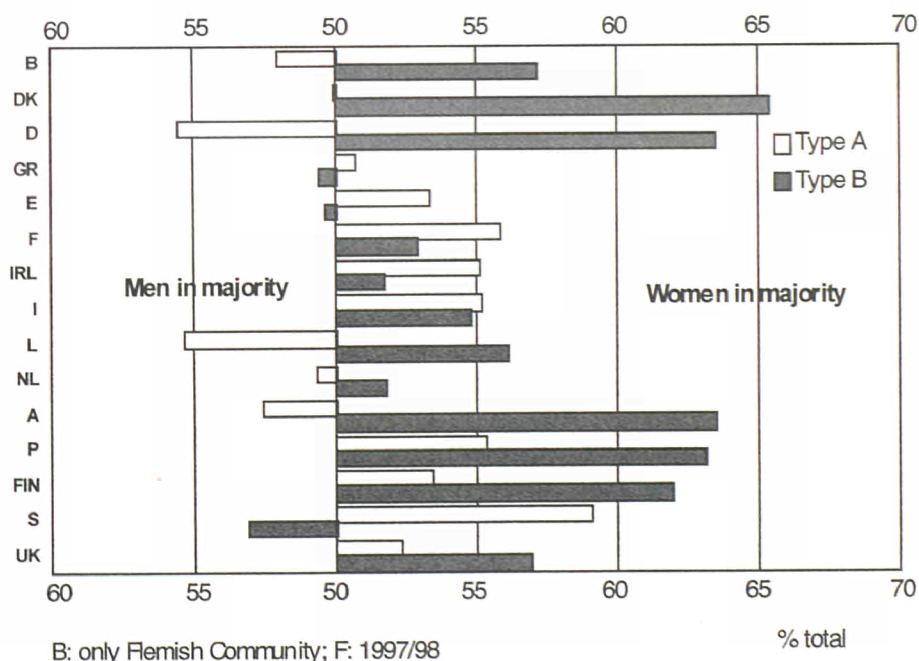


# Women and men in tertiary education

Mary Dunne

More women than men are being educated to tertiary level in most EU Member States. According to the latest data (for 1998-99), women represent the majority of those enrolled in university or equivalent programmes in 12 of the 15 countries and account for an even larger proportion of those graduating. Moreover, the number of women with tertiary level education seems to be increasing faster than that of men throughout the Union. Nevertheless, there are still far fewer women than men enrolled in science and technology subject areas and women are significantly less likely to go on to postgraduate study. Equally, a larger proportion of women than men tend to participate in more practical/technical/occupationally-specific programmes (Type B) as opposed to more theoretically-based/research preparatory ones or programmes giving access to professions with high skill requirements (Type A).

Fig. 1 Enrolments of women and men in the first stage of tertiary education in Member States, 1998/99



B: only Flemish Community; F: 1997/98

% total

## Statistics in focus

### POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THEME 3 – 18/2001

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## Enrolments

In the Union as a whole, women accounted for around 52.5% of all students enrolled in tertiary level education (i.e. levels 5 or 6 according to the International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED) in 1998-99. However, women accounted for 56.5% of those enrolled in practically-oriented, vocationally-specific programmes (i.e. Type B), as against 52% of those enrolled in more theoretically-based programmes (i.e. Type A), aimed at providing entrance into advanced research programmes and professions with high skill requirements. Moreover, some 55% of students enrolled in postgraduate programmes (ISCED 6) were men.

This pattern is repeated in most Member States. Only in Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, did men represent the majority of those enrolled in tertiary level education programmes and, in most Member States, the proportion of women as opposed to men undertaking Type B programmes was larger than in the

case of Type A programmes. Women, however, still accounted for most students undertaking Type A programmes in all EU countries, except the three listed above plus Belgium and Luxembourg, as well as, in most cases, for those undertaking Type B programmes – the only exceptions being Greece, Spain and Sweden (Fig. 1). (It should be noted that the distinction between Type A and Type B programmes may differ between Member States, so that programmes classified as, say, type B in one country may be very similar to ones classified as type A in another.)

In the case of postgraduate programmes (ISCED 6), men represented the majority of those enrolled in all Member States, except Spain (marginally), Italy and Portugal (Table 1). In Belgium, Greece and the UK, they accounted for over 60% of students and in the Netherlands and Austria, for almost 60%.

**Table 1: Proportion of women and men enrolled and graduates in the second stage of tertiary education, 1998/99**

% total	B	DK	D	GR	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK	EU
<b>Enrolments</b>																
Men	66.6	55.6	:	64.3	49.3	53.3	55.8	47.7	:	59.8	59.3	49.1	53.6	57.8	60.5	54.9
Women	33.4	44.4	:	35.7	50.7	46.7	44.2	52.3	:	40.2	40.7	50.9	46.4	42.2	39.5	45.1
<b>Graduations</b>																
Men	67.9	68.5	66.6	:	56.2	59.3	56.2	54.8	:	70.0	65.5	:	57.4	66.0	63.3	63.1
Women	32.1	31.5	33.4	:	43.8	40.7	43.8	45.2	:	30.0	34.5	:	42.6	34.0	36.7	36.9

B: Flemish Community only; F: 1997/98; I graduations: 1997/98

## Graduations

In 1998-99, women accounted for some 55% of those graduating from ISCED 5 programmes in the Union as a whole. This proportion is slightly larger than in the case of enrolments, which *might* signify that more women than men complete their studies successfully.

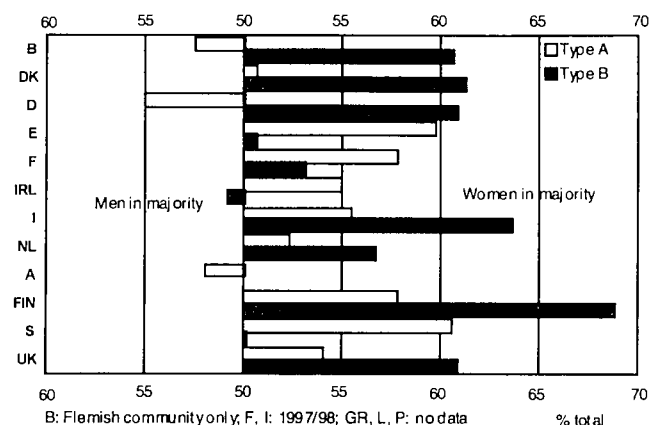
This pattern is common to most Member States. In all countries, apart from Austria, more women than men graduated in 1998-99 at ISCED 5 level – in all except Belgium, Germany and Austria with type A qualifications and in all except Ireland with type B qualifications (Fig. 2). In addition, in all countries, apart from Austria, the proportion of total graduates that women represented was higher than in the case of enrolments.

The picture, however, is very different at ISCED 6 level. Here, men were in a substantial majority of those graduating (i.e. achieving a PhD or doctorate). In the 12 Member States for which data are available (i.e. excluding Greece, Luxembourg and Portugal), men accounted for 63.1% of students graduating from ISCED 6 programmes in 1998-99, a significantly higher proportion than in the case of enrolments at this level (Table 1). In all Member States, they represented much more than half of graduates and in 6 of the 12 countries,

for around two-thirds or more. Moreover, in all Member States for which data exist, the proportion of ISCED 6 graduates who were men was higher than for enrolments.

These figures suggest a stronger tendency among women to fail to complete programmes at postgraduate level and/or to take longer to do so.

**Fig. 2 Graduations of women and men in the first stage of tertiary education in Member States, 1998/99**



## Enrolments by field of study

There remains a marked difference between the fields of study typically undertaken by men at tertiary level and those undertaken by women. In 10 of the 11 Member States for which data are available (i.e. excluding Belgium, France, Greece and Portugal), men were the majority of those enrolled in Science, Mathematics and Computing programmes at ISCED 5 level in 1998-99, in most cases significantly so. The sole exception was Italy, where the proportion of men was only marginally less than half. The difference was particularly pronounced for Type B programmes (i.e. the more practically-oriented ones), where for the 9 Member States for which data are available, almost 70% of those enrolled were men as against just over 60% in the case of Type A programmes.

A similarly large difference is evident for studies in the area of Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, where 78% of students undertaking type A programmes and almost 87% of those undertaking type B programmes were men (Fig. 3).

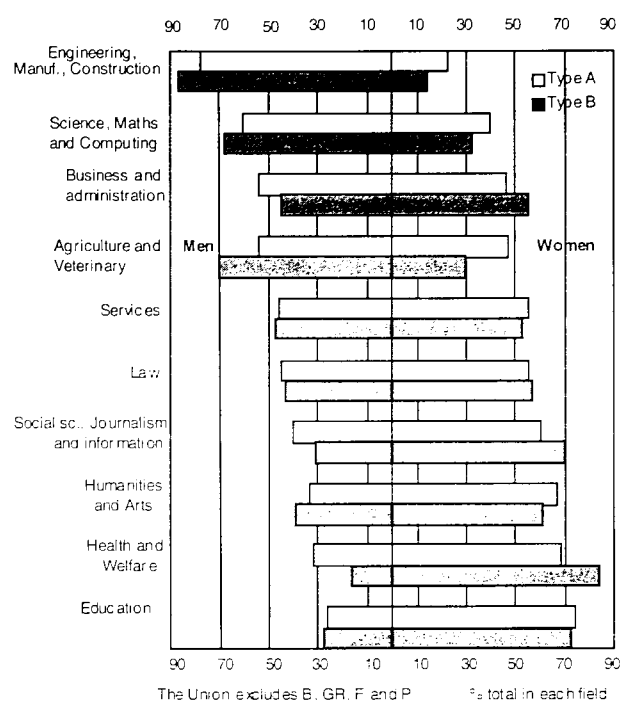
By contrast, women predominate in the Humanities and Arts, Health and Welfare and Education. In the 11 Member States for which data are available, women accounted, on average, for around two-thirds of those studying Humanities and Arts in type A programmes – and for around 60% of those studying in type B programmes.

In Health and Welfare, the difference was similar for type A programmes (but much larger in Finland and Sweden) and considerably wider for type B programmes, where an average of 83% of all those enrolled were women. In educational sciences, the overall difference was even larger, women representing an average of 74% and 72% of students enrolled in type A and type B programmes respectively.

Women also represented the majority of students in Social and behavioural science and Journalism and information (59% in type A programmes for the 11 Member States for which data are available and 69% in type B programmes) and were also in a majority in the case of Law. In Business and administration, on the other hand, men were in the majority in most countries.

There are marked differences in the relative numbers of men and women studying particular subjects at tertiary level. Some 25-35% of all those enrolled, for example, studied Science, Mathematics and Computing, Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction in 1998/99 in all Member States, except in Denmark (11%) and the Netherlands (17%). Luxembourg had an equally low figure but it is a special case because of its small

Fig. 3 Enrolments of women and men in the first stage of tertiary education by field of study in the Union, 1998/99



size. Similarly, Health and Welfare accounted for 25% of all students in Denmark (and 34% of all women students) but for fewer than 10% in Spain, Italy and Austria.

**Table 2: Women and men enrolled in the first stage of tertiary education by field of study, 1998/1999**

<i>% total</i>	DK	D	E	IRL	I	L	NL	A	FIN	S	UK	EU
<b>Education</b>												
<i>Type A</i>												
Men	0.4	2.3	2.0	1.1	0.5	:	3.6	3.4	1.0	3.0	2.1	1.9
Women	1.0	4.4	6.0	3.6	4.0	:	9.2	6.9	4.3	10.0	5.5	5.3
<i>Type B</i>												
Men	3.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.5	9.8	:	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.3
Women	7.0	1.2	0.3	0.1	0.4	25.4	:	3.5	0.1	0.1	0.8	0.8
<b>Humanities and Arts</b>												
<i>Type A</i>												
Men	6.3	6.3	3.6	5.5	3.5	3.2	3.4	4.3	3.7	4.4	4.8	4.5
Women	11.6	10.4	6.2	11.0	11.7	5.9	4.8	7.3	9.6	8.6	7.5	8.9
<i>Type B</i>												
Men	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.9	0.3	:	:	0.1	0.3	0.0	1.4	0.4
Women	1.0	0.1	0.3	1.6	0.5	:	:	0.2	0.6	0.0	2.0	0.6
<b>Social and behavioural science, Journalism and information</b>												
<i>Type A</i>												
Men	2.8	3.2	3.5	0.6	4.4	0.6	5.4	4.1	2.3	3.9	3.3	3.6
Women	4.1	3.5	5.7	2.0	7.2	0.6	5.6	6.5	4.1	7.3	4.8	5.3
<i>Type B</i>												
Men	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.1	:	:	:	:	:	0.0	0.5	0.1
Women	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.1	:	:	:	:	:	0.0	1.2	0.2
<b>Business and administration</b>												
<i>Type A</i>												
Men	9.2	8.0	7.6	6.8	7.0	11.2	13.8	9.5	5.5	4.7	6.0	7.6
Women	4.8	4.3	9.2	7.1	6.2	7.5	9.4	7.1	8.0	5.6	5.6	6.4
<i>Type B</i>												
Men	1.7	1.1	0.6	4.2	:	4.2	0.4	0.1	0.7	0.2	2.1	0.9
Women	1.7	1.1	1.4	7.0	:	3.8	0.1	0.2	1.6	0.2	2.0	1.1
<b>Law</b>												
<i>Type A</i>												
Men	1.9	2.9	4.6	1.0	6.8	4.8	2.6	4.4	0.8	1.6	1.6	3.7
Women	1.9	2.4	5.9	1.3	9.6	3.9	2.9	4.0	0.9	2.1	2.1	4.5
<i>Type B</i>												
Men	:	0.0	:	0.0	:	:	:	:	:	:	0.1	:
Women	:	0.0	:	0.0	:	:	:	:	:	:	0.2	:
<b>Science, Mathematics and Computing</b>												
<i>Type A</i>												
Men	3.0	8.3	6.8	6.9	3.9	3.6	4.4	6.8	5.5	5.2	8.4	6.6
Women	2.4	3.9	4.7	6.2	4.0	2.0	1.4	3.3	3.7	4.4	5.8	4.3
<i>Type B</i>												
Men	1.8	0.1	0.6	3.3	:	:	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.4	1.8	0.6
Women	0.3	0.0	0.2	3.5	:	:	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.8	0.3
<b>Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction</b>												
<i>Type A</i>												
Men	0.7	11.6	10.5	5.7	12.6	:	9.6	10.4	18.8	13.1	7.4	10.7
Women	0.8	2.8	3.8	1.7	4.4	:	1.4	2.3	3.9	5.0	1.6	3.1
<i>Type B</i>												
Men	1.1	1.8	1.5	6.3	:	9.2	0.0	1.5	1.9	0.9	1.8	1.3
Women	1.0	0.2	0.3	0.8	:	0.6	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2
<b>Agriculture and Veterinary</b>												
<i>Type A</i>												
Men	0.7	0.6	1.8	0.8	1.2	:	1.3	0.8	1.1	0.3	0.4	1.0
Women	0.9	0.6	1.4	0.5	0.9	:	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.4	0.5	0.8
<i>Type B</i>												
Men	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.0	:	:	:	:	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.1
Women	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	:	:	:	:	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1
<b>Health and Welfare</b>												
<i>Type A</i>												
Men	1.5	3.3	1.9	2.1	3.9	2.6	4.3	3.3	2.0	2.8	2.4	2.9
Women	2.3	4.8	5.4	4.1	6.0	1.3	12.1	4.6	10.0	12.9	6.0	6.1
<i>Type B</i>												
Men	3.3	1.5	0.2	0.2	:	:	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.0	1.2	0.7
Women	18.0	6.5	0.6	2.0	:	:	0.4	1.2	2.8	0.3	7.2	3.5
<b>Services</b>												
<i>Type A</i>												
Men	0.0	0.6	1.1	0.1	0.3	:	1.3	0.7	0.9	0.6	:	0.6
Women	0.0	0.7	1.4	0.2	0.3	:	1.1	0.4	2.0	0.8	:	0.7
<i>Type B</i>												
Men	1.4	0.5	0.3	1.0	:	:	0.0	0.1	0.4	0.2	:	0.2
Women	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.5	:	:	0.1	0.3	1.1	0.3	:	0.3

The figures are percentages of the total enrolled for whom the field of study is known. B, GR, F, P: data not available

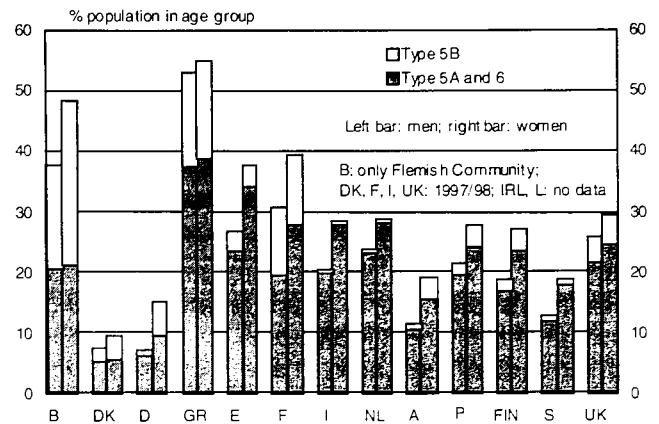
## Enrolment by age

There are significant differences between Member States in the age at which both men and women typically undertake tertiary level programmes as well as in the duration of programmes. In Germany, Austria and the three Nordic countries, in particular, people tend to start ISCED 5 programmes at an older age and to continue them for a longer period than in other Member States. In 4 of these 5 countries, therefore – the exception being Finland – under 20% of both men and women aged 18 to 21 were enrolled in ISCED 5 programmes in 1998-99 (Fig. 4), though in each case a large proportion in this age group participated in non-tertiary levels of education or training). This contrasts with over 50% of both men and women in Greece and between 20% and 45% in other countries. For the 22 to 24 age group, the proportion of men and women enrolled was still relatively high in Spain, France and Italy, but in Greece, it had fallen to below 10% and in the UK, it was not much higher (Fig. 5). In Denmark and Sweden, however, the proportion of both men and women enrolled was well over 20% and in Belgium, Germany and Austria, it was around 20%, while in Finland, it was well over 30%. In this age group, although the proportion of women enrolled was higher than for men in all but three countries, the difference was generally less than for the younger age group.

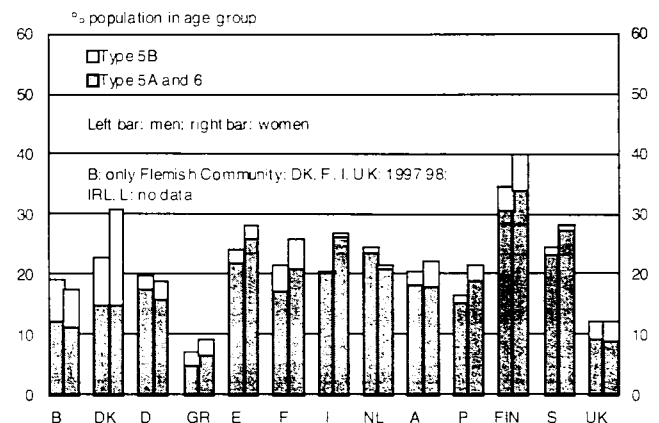
For men and women aged 25 to 28, the proportion enrolled in tertiary education was around 20% in Finland, over 15% in Denmark and over 10% in Germany, Austria and Sweden. In all other Member States apart from Spain and Italy, the proportion for both was well under 10% (Fig. 6). In most countries, apart from Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, where the figure for men was significantly higher than for women, and Denmark, where the reverse was the case, there was not much difference between the proportions of men and women enrolled.

There is, however, in a number of cases, a substantial difference between enrolment in tertiary level education and the successful completion of programmes.

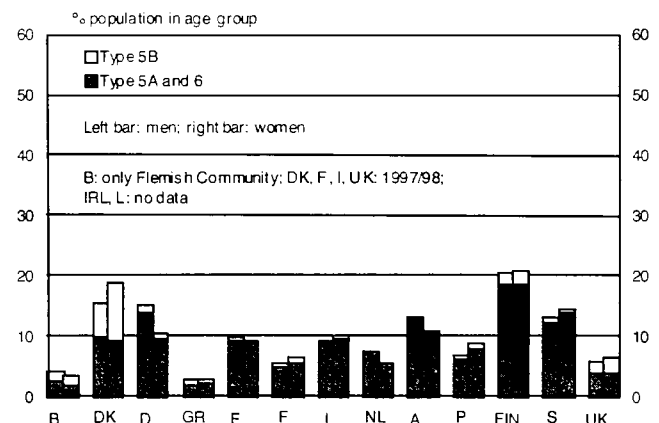
**Fig. 4 Enrolment rates of women and men aged 18-21 in Member States, 1998/99**



**Fig. 5 Enrolment rates of women and men aged 22-24 in Member States, 1998/99**



**Fig. 6 Enrolment rates of women and men aged 25-28 in Member States,**



## Educational attainment

Data on education attainment levels are collected as part of the EU Labour Force Survey. Although the data are not strictly comparable between years, an examination of the education attainment levels of men and women in successive age groups provides an estimate of the changes in the relative numbers holding tertiary level qualifications in different Member States over time.

Across the EU as a whole, there is some evidence of a long-term increase in the proportion of both men and women with ISCED 5 or 6 level educational attainment, though the increase in the proportion with upper secondary attainment is even greater. For women, educational attainment levels, both for upper secondary and for tertiary education, have increased to a far greater extent than for men. In Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, however, the proportion of men with this level of qualification was less for the 30 to

34 age group than for those aged 50 to 54, while in Italy and the UK, there was little difference (Fig. 7). This might reflect a decline in the former two countries in the relative numbers graduating over the 20 years separating these two age groups, though given the potential importance of inward migration, this does not necessarily follow.

For women, by contrast, there is evidence of a general increase in education attainment levels between successive generations across Member States. The proportion of those aged 50 to 54 with tertiary qualifications averaged under 16% as against 20% for those aged 40 to 44 and just over 24% for those aged 30 to 34 (Fig. 8). Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the UK are the only countries where the proportion of men aged 30 to 34 with tertiary qualifications is higher than for women.

Fig. 7 Education attainment levels of men by age group, 2000

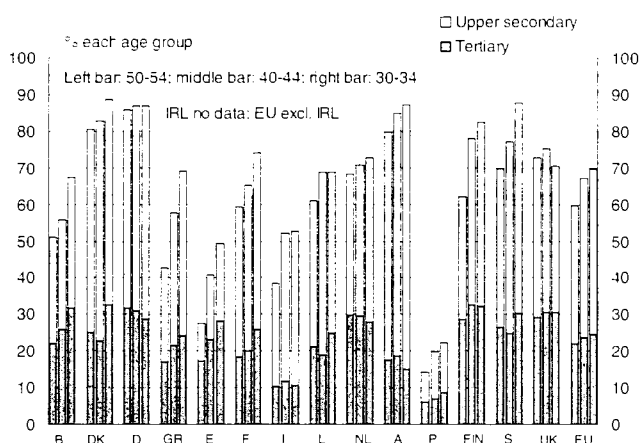
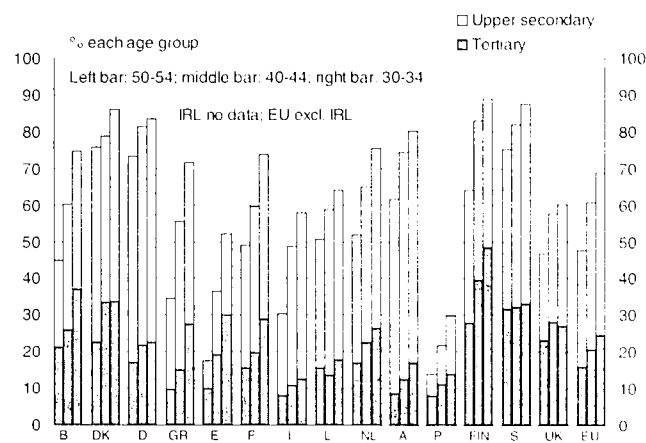


Fig. 8 Education attainment levels of women by age group, 2000



## Tertiary education in the rest of Europe

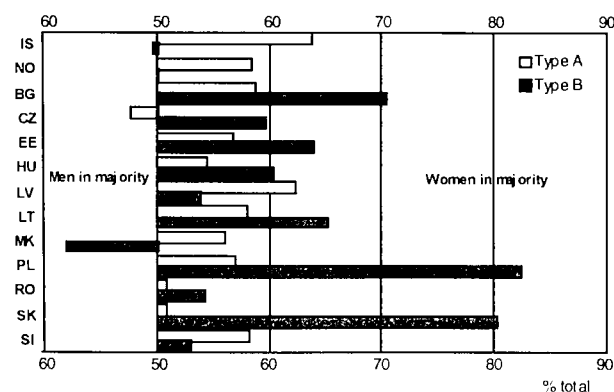
Women also represent the majority of both those enrolled in tertiary education (with the exception of the FYROM) and those graduating in the candidate countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in two EEA for which data are available.

The predominance of women in the above countries is especially marked in the more practically oriented Type B programmes. In Poland and Slovakia, women accounted for 80% or more of the students enrolled in such programmes in 1998-99, while in Bulgaria, they accounted for just over 70% (Fig. 9). Only in the FYROM were men in the majority in type B programmes and only in the Czech Republic did they account for more than half of those enrolled in Type A ones.

The disparity between men and women is even more

pronounced, in respect of those graduating successfully

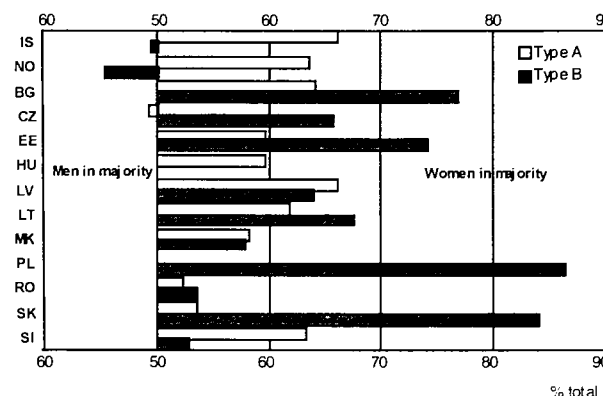
Fig. 9 Enrolments of women and men in the first stage of tertiary education in the rest of Europe, 1998/99



from a tertiary programme of study. In most non-EU countries in Europe, around 60% or more of those graduating from level 5 programmes, both type A type B, in 1998/99, were women. Indeed, Romania was the only country where women represented less than 55% of ISCED 5 graduates (Fig. 10).

Equally, a similar pattern of difference in the fields of study undertaken by men and women is evident in these countries as in the EU, though in a number of the candidate countries, it is less pronounced. In Bulgaria, Latvia, Poland and Romania, women are in the majority of those enrolled in science. Everywhere, however, many more men than women study engineering, just as women predominate in humanities and arts and health and social services, especially in the latter case in type B programmes.

Fig. 10 Graduations of women and men in the first stage tertiary education in the rest of Europe, 1998/99



## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Abbreviations: : not available . not applicable 0 negligible – nil

### Data sources, classification and definitions:

The data presented here (with the exception of Figures 7 and 8) are from administrative sources (UOE data collection). Data for Figures 7 and 8 are from the EU Labour Force Survey. Data are classified according to the International Classification of Education (ISCED), revised in 1997 and relate to ISCED levels 5 and 6, which are defined as follows:

ISCED 5 – First stage of tertiary education (not leading directly to an advanced research qualification), covering programmes of at least two years' duration, divided between:

- Type A: programmes that are theoretically based and/or preparatory to research (history, philosophy, mathematics, etc.) or give access to professions with high skill requirements, such as medicine, dentistry, and architecture.
- Type B: programmes that are practically oriented/occupationally specific and are mainly designed for participants to acquire the practical skills and know-how needed for employment in a particular occupation or trade, the successful completion of which usually culminates in a qualification relevant for the labour-market.

ISCED 6 – Second stage of tertiary education, covering programmes leading to an advanced research qualification (e.g. PhD or Doctorate), which are devoted to advanced study and original research and not based on course-work only.

The term *enrolment rates* in the text relates to the number enrolled in tertiary-level programmes of a particular type relative to the total number of men or women in the age group concerned.

The term *educational attainment level* refers to the highest level of education a person has achieved.

### Data coverage

Data on enrolments and graduations refer to the academic year 1998/99 and to 1997/98 in France for both total enrolments and graduations, in Italy for graduations and in Denmark, France, Italy and the UK for enrolments and graduations by age group.

All data for Belgium refer to the Flemish community only (except Figures 7 and 8 which relate to all Belgium).

No data are available for enrolments by field of study in Belgium, Greece, France and Portugal, for enrolments by age in Luxembourg and for enrolments by age and type (A or B) in Ireland.

In Germany, data are only available for ISCED 5 and 6 programmes combined.

Data on education attainment levels are for the year 2000. It should be noted that for the UK, 'O-levels' and 'GCSEs' are regarded as lower secondary educational qualifications. No data are available for Ireland.

# Further information:

## > Databases

New Cronos, Domain: Theme 3, Educ

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