European Graduates: cross-country diversity and gender disparity

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Introduction

The current European employment strategy has two important pillars, which will be addressed in this article. The first is the upgrading of the skills of the labour force through higher education and the second is the goal of the European Union of a rapid increase in women’s employment. The European strategy stems from the Amsterdam Treaty, which defined employment as an area of common concern for the European Union. The Lisbon European Council of 2000 set the strategic goal for the EU to become ‘the most competitive dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.’ In this strategy, higher education and the societal returns of education play a vital role, together with the increase of women’s participation in the labour force. The overall aim was to increase the overall employment rate from 61% in 2000 to 70% and women’s employment rate from 53% to over 60% by 2010 (European Commission, 2001).

These issues will be addressed against the backdrop of the CHEERS project, Higher Education and Graduate Employment in Europe [CHEERS, Careers After Higher Education: A European Research Study]. It obtained support from the European Commission for the years 1998–2000 in the framework of the Targeted Socio-Economic Research Programme (TSER) and includes some 40,000 graduates from 12 countries. These are: Italy, Spain, France, Austria, Germany, Netherlands, UK, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Czech Republic and Japan. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, Japan is not included here.

The CHEERS study is based on a questionnaire on the 1994–1995 graduate cohort to analyse the relationship between higher education and employment four years after graduation and trends in conditions for young graduates. The respondents answered questions on their socio-biographical background, study paths, transition from higher education to employment, early career, links between study and employment, job satisfaction and their retrospective view on higher education.

There are several approaches to the issue of men and women’s occupational opportunities. Theories of socialisation address the psycho-social mechanisms behind the reproduction of feminine and masculine characteristics (Chodorow, 1978), whereas more macro-oriented theories focus on patriarchal relations and gender power (Hartmann, 1979). Another approach addresses institutional barriers (Kanter, 1977; Cockburn, 1991). These schools provide fruitful insights,
although they are difficult to operationalise at the empirical level. Macro approaches, such as theories of patriarchy (Hartmann, 1979), tend to be too wide-ranging to be a useful analytical tool, whilst psycho-social approaches tend to have too narrow a lens. Embedded in many approaches is the presupposition that women opt for fields of study and work settings that are compatible with their domestic and reproductive responsibilities. Whilst these perspectives may shed light on gender segregation in the labour market, they are flawed when it comes to the different configurations of employment patterns found in comparative studies. Many intervening factors complicate the picture.

Men and women’s choice of field of study has been an important feature of this issue, which addresses the horizontal segregation of the labour market (Anker, 1998; Bradley, 2000). Another theoretical school deals with the vertical segregation of the labour market, leading to different career paths for men and women and unequal positions. According to human capital theories, gender differences will be levelled out successively (Becker, 1964). Despite women’s efforts to increase their human capital in the last decades, vertical segregation persists. Another approach addresses family responsibilities and their impact on labour market opportunities and the interplay between gender, labour markets and the Welfare State (Sainsbury, 1994; Daly, 2000). Historical and comparative research has shed light on the similarities and differences between countries and stress the importance of contextualising these variations (Mósesdóttir, 2001).

This article follows in the same vein. First, we shall describe the main gender disparities based on the CHEERS study against the background of recent European trends. The CHEERS study focuses on the occupational opportunities and constraints for European graduates four years after graduation. Then, we shall analyse higher education and employment in the light of the role of the family and more especially children’s impact on the employment situation of women as compared to that of men.

Increasing Human Resource Capacities in Europe

In the EU, the number of students in tertiary education has more than doubled in the last 20 years. The increase was greatest in Portugal, where 4 times as many students were enrolled in 1997 as in 1975, whilst the increase in Germany and the Netherlands was 1.6 times. This is partly due to the rapid growth in women’s enrolment. On average, more women than men graduate, and in countries such as France and Portugal, they already outnumbered men in tertiary education in 1980. This has been the case in Sweden, Iceland and Norway since 1985, and a few years later in Denmark, Spain and Italy. However, women enrolments have remained below those of men in Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Greece, where difference has been minimal since 1985 (European Commission/EURYDICE/EUROSTAT, 2000).

In 1997, more women than men graduated in all EU countries, except Germany. Again, Portugal is at the forefront, with the highest ratio (7 women for 4 men). In Germany, it was the lowest (4 women for 5 men). In Greece, the Netherlands and Austria, the proportion is almost the same for men and women (European Commission/EURYDICE/EUROSTAT, 2000). However, mass student enrolment is not synonymous with equality or the levelling out of differences between men and women.
One main finding of the CHEERS study is that the differences between men and women are small at the beginning of their career, but evolve into a substantial gender disparity within a short period. Women slightly more often than men have academic secondary education and rate their grades slightly higher than men (according to a subjective assessment). They are more internationally mobile than men prior to study (7% and 3% respectively), for educational as well as employment reasons. At the time of the survey, these differences are reversed and only 16% of the women are professionally mobile against 23% of the men. The proportion of employed male and female graduates develops in a similar fashion during the first two years. After nearly 4 years, however, the percentage of employed women is considerably lower than that of men (74% against 83%); they are in lower occupational positions, are more often employed temporarily (27% against 17%), work part-time (16% against 6%), are more frequently in public employment (46% against 29%) and their average income is 78% of men’s.

Age has a considerable impact on the educational path, as more women than men enter education in the youngest (<20) and in the oldest cohort (>30). The trend for late enrolment is more prominent in the Scandinavian countries. This may be due to childcare and family responsibilities. In some cases, gender differences in early enrolment (<20) are very great because men must do their military service.

The socio-biographical background also influences the educational path. CHEERS graduates from better educated backgrounds are more likely to attend more academic and more traditional institutions and study subjects that are different from those who come from less educated backgrounds. They also tend to study for longer degrees. The same holds true for men and women. Men are more likely to study certain subjects and do longer degrees in most countries. Older students are more likely to have vocational entry qualifications than younger students and to be women. They are also more likely to go to less traditional and less academic institutions and to study for shorter degrees.

Gender differentiation in the choice of field of study is well documented (Lie, Malik & Harris, 1990). In an analysis based on a wide range of countries from 1965 to 1990, Bradley found that it had declined surprisingly little and that there were few differences between the more and the less economically developed countries (Bradley, 2000). Almost one-third of the students graduates in social sciences, including commercial and business administration, mass communication and documentation. Engineers and architects account for 16% of the graduates, whilst students in mathematics and computer science account for only 3%. Men and women are very unevenly distributed in these fields. European statistics show that more women graduate in educational sciences, arts and humanities, and medical science (65%–73%), but more men graduate in mathematics, computer science and engineering (European Commission/EURYDICE/EUROSTAT, 2000). These gender differences are confirmed by the CHEERS survey, as can be seen in Table I. The table reflects conventional trends insofar as men are over-represented in mathematics and engineering and women are over-represented in education, arts and humanities, social sciences and health (both medicine and nursing). Some of the traditionally male-dominated professions, such as law, are
becoming gender-balanced. The figures concerning medical sciences in the table hide the current trend, since they do not make a distinction between medicine and nursing. Women are in a great majority in nursing, but medicine is also evolving into a women-dominated field in many countries. They form the majority of medical students in all the Nordic countries and represent 51% of Finnish physicians (Nordic Medical Association, 2001). Another gender-balanced subject according to European data and the CHEERS data is natural sciences. But it should be noted that it includes many sub-fields that are highly gender-segregated and lead to different employment opportunities.

**Men and Women’s Employment Status in Europe**

The employment rate in Europe reached 63.3% in 2000, having risen by 3.3 percentage points since 1995. This is mainly due to a strong pick-up of women’s participation. In 2000, the employment rate of women was approximately 53%, having increased rapidly since 1995. However, the gender gap is still 18.6 percentage points. As previously stated, the European Council has set the aim of raising the overall employment rate and to increase the number of women in employment to over 60% (European Commission, 2001).

But labour force status differs greatly between European countries. Overall, employment rates ranged from 70%–76% in Denmark, Sweden, the UK and the Netherlands to less than 55% in Spain, Greece and Italy. Male activity rates are relatively similar, ranging from 67% in Italy, which has the lowest rates, to 70%–80% in Sweden, Denmark, the UK, Austria and the Netherlands. Even though women employment rates increased significantly between 1995 and 2000 in all EU countries, there are huge differences. They varied between 70% or more in Denmark and Sweden and less than 40% in Greece and Spain. The gender gap ranges from 3.8% in Sweden to around 30% in Greece and Spain (European Commission, 2001). Table II shows the overall employment rates for men and women for the partner countries in the CHEERS study in 1999.

The CHEERS data allow us to trace the emergence of gender differences in labour force status at the beginning of the graduates’ careers. Six months after graduation the same proportion of men and women are employed (53% and 52%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I: Field of study by gender (Percent, CHEERS graduates employed approximately four years after graduation)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educ.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table II: Employment rates in 10 European countries 1999 by gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Employment in Europe 2001.*
respectively). But nearly 4 years after graduation the rate is 83% for men and 74% for women.

**Gender Disparities**

New entrants in the European labour market are better qualified than ever before according to new data (European Commission, 2001). Between 1995 and 2000, there was a 4-percentage point increase in the share of those with tertiary education and that trend seems to be more evident for women than for men. It is interesting to note that the share of low-skilled women in the labour force is lower than that of low-skilled men and that the share of highly-skilled women is higher than that of highly-skilled men (European Commission, 2001). But their employment opportunities are marked by various constraints. They are, according to the CHEERS data, more frequently in temporary jobs than men. In this respect, the trend is the same as was mentioned above: the gender difference is slight in the beginning but then increases. Employment stabilises after 8–9 months at 12%–13% for men and 16%–18% for women. The number of unemployed men and women is almost identical the first two years after graduation: about 17% one year after graduation and 14%–15% two years after graduation. However, 2 to 4 years after graduation the proportion halves for men to about 7%, whereas it is about 12%–13% for women.

The CHEERS study also shows that field and type of education are related with various employment opportunities. The field is related to job search duration, the quality of work after graduation and hourly wages. No simple cross-country pattern is found, but many of these aspects are directly or indirectly linked to gender. Women search longer for jobs than men in some countries. As far as field of study is concerned, graduates in the social sciences seem to search longer in several countries, whereas health graduates often seem to search less long. The probability of holding a job that corresponds to one’s level differs strongly by field of study in most countries. Graduates in arts and humanities are most likely to have a lower quality job than health graduates. Negative effects are observed for age and gender. Women are generally less likely to have a job level that corresponds to their education. Fields and types of education also affect the probability of having a temporary job. CHEERS graduates in arts and humanities are more likely to have such jobs than business and engineering graduates and, in most countries, women graduates are much more likely to hold a temporary job.

The CHEERS graduates’ labour market situation in terms of employer also follows well-known patterns. In general, women are more frequently in public employment (46% as compared to 28% of the men), whilst more men are in private employment (58% as compared to 38% of the women). However, there are cross-country differences related to the size of the public sector. There are fewer gender differences in Southern Europe where the public sector is small than in Northern Europe where the public sector is large. In Norway, twice as many women as men are employed in the public sector, whilst in Spain the respective percentages are 33% and 26%. The strong representation of women in the public sector and men in the private sector holds true regardless of field of study. Graduates in arts and humanities are the only ones to be equally distributed between these two sectors.
Gendered Occupational Hierarchy of the CHEERS Graduates

Occupational segregation by gender remains extensive at the lowest level in the hierarchy according to European data (European Commission, 2001). However, it can also be observed amongst those with higher education in the high-skilled non-manual occupations (according to the most common categories of occupational groups, ISCO 88). Thus, there are more men than women ‘managers, legislators and senior officials’ (10% against 6%). At the same time, it has decreased in other groups, especially amongst professionals (European Commission, 2001).

Using the categories of ISCO 88, we examined how far women graduates as compared to men in the CHEERS survey succeeded in finding employment in those occupational groups that are usually considered as appropriate for higher education graduates. No gender difference was found amongst those in the highest positions, i.e. ‘managers, senior officials and legislators’. 10% of both men and women held these types of positions. In the European data above, a somewhat lower proportion of women than amongst CHEERS graduates was in that group. A slightly lower proportion of women were professionals (57% against 63% men) or technicians or in associate professional positions (15% against 22%). No gender difference was found amongst clerks, service and trade workers, and skilled and manual workers (11% women, 12% men). However, the position of women graduates varied according to field of study. Thus, women health graduates were less often in professional positions than men, probably because more women chose shorter programmes (e.g. nursing and laboratory programmes). Women in engineering, natural sciences and humanities were less often in managerial and professional positions than men.

Not all CHEERS graduates hold a position that is usually considered in keeping with their study field and type of education. Men are more likely to accept a job that is not linked to their studies because it gives them better opportunities for career prospects, higher income, and more interesting work. Women graduates, in contrast, either have less choice in their present situation, or seek more part-time jobs for family reasons.

One important aspect of the occupational situation is wages. The hourly wages of the CHEERS graduates differ strongly in most countries according to field of study. Graduates in arts and humanities seem to be at the lower end of the average wage distribution in most countries, whereas in other fields, differences are more unsystematic and contingent. Gender shows the most systematic pattern across countries. With the exception of Italy and Austria, women earn significantly less than their male counterparts.

Higher Education, Employment and the Role of the Family

Not only have women been participating to a greater degree in the labour market in all European countries, but they are also taking fewer and shorter breaks, not least in those countries where they used to interrupt their careers when they had children. These converging participation patterns are reinforced by the increasing number of women entering further and higher education (Rubery et al., 2001). This can be explained by a demand-pull on the one hand and an acceleration of the generational shift on the other (European Commission, 2001). The demand-pull is predominantly due to a stronger employment growth in the women-
dominated service sector. In addition to population ageing, which puts pressure on health care and social services, greater women participation overall stimulates demand for services which were previously supplied in the household.

The generation shift reflects changes in women’s activity patterns. Increasingly, young women do not leave the labour market when they get married or have children but remain in activity longer. This seems to be a general trend, but it is more evident in countries where their participation is relatively low (European Commission, 2001). At the same time, there are great differences in family patterns and stability of households across Europe. Divorce rates are rising and marriage rates are falling. This is taking place alongside falling fertility rates, which have reached below replacement stage in Southern Europe, with Italy and Spain being the lowest (Rubery et al., 2001).

One approach argues that increases in women’s employment rates and relative earnings have increased the opportunity costs of child-bearing, whilst another suggests that high consumption aspirations encourage both spouses to remain in full-time employment. A third suggests that contraception allows women to be engaged more fully in the labour market and still another emphasises individual autonomy (Lesthaeghe & Willems, 1999). Another stresses the impact of cultural differences between countries, which are clearly seen in family patterns. Fertility levels in OECD countries tend to have remained high in countries where women’s employment levels are relatively high. The general pattern of the OECD countries is falling fertility and rising employment rates. This is particularly true of Southern Europe and Ireland, whilst Sweden and Finland show relative stability (McDonald, 2000).

Employment rates of women remain highest in the Nordic countries and are relatively low in Southern Europe. Employment rates of mothers with children under the age of 5 are rising rapidly. Those of well-educated mothers are far higher than those of mothers with less education in almost all countries and the gap is tending to grow everywhere. In the EU Member States, approximately half of working mothers with a child under the age of 6 works part-time. There is a positive correlation across countries between indicators of policies designed to improve the work/family reconciliation and women’s employment rates (OECD, 2002).

Education has a positive impact on women’s participation in the labour force and on the probability of their working full-time in all countries (Rubery et al., 2001). Less educated women and women with two or more children are much less likely to be in employment than those with a tertiary qualification or without children (OECD, 2002). Research also indicates that education has a positive impact on women’s commitment to their careers and their job satisfaction (Carrier, 1995). Education thus acts as a force for convergence between countries and as a means of reducing gender differences, whilst another source of convergence across countries to a certain extent reinforces gender difference (Rubery et al., 2001).

Socio-biographical Background and Family Situation

At the time of the CHEERS survey, 52% of the women and 46% of the men lived with a partner. As regards cross-national differences, the proportion is clearly below average in Spain and Italy. 26% of the women and 21% of the men report that they have a child or children. This is far more common in Nordic countries.
where social norms and welfare systems are more favourable to students with children. Table III shows the relationship between patterns of cohabitation and the presence of children.

Men seldom interrupt study or employment for reasons of child rearing and family care, while women often do. At the time of survey, this was the case of 7% of the women. The CHEERS data show a gradual increase each year after graduation.

As can be seen in Table III, there are interesting regional differences in the socio-biographical situation of the CHEERS graduates. In Italy and Spain a minority lives with a partner (<37%), and few have children (<15%). In France, Austria, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK, a majority lives with a partner (46%–65%) and few have children (13%–29%). In Finland, Sweden and Norway half the graduates lives with a partner (>50%), and more than a third has a child or children (30–50%). To some extent this pattern is affected by age, as there are minor cross-country differences between the median ages of graduation.

Table III: Rates of cohabitation and children in the household by country and gender (Percent, CHEERS graduates employed approximately four years after graduation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Living with a partner</th>
<th>Children in the household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count (n)</td>
<td>(6014)</td>
<td>(6947)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Swedish graduates were asked whether they had a partner (not whether they lived with a partner).

Work Patterns

Gender divisions in work patterns arise primarily from differences in the household, but these are moderated and mediated by national working time regimes where there are no simple rules (Rubery et al., 1998). In the CHEERS survey, work patterns were investigated both in terms of weekly working hours and of full-time vs. part-time employment. It confirms common knowledge of men having longer working hours per week than women, but there are also new insights. Of those in employment about four years after graduation, 16% of the women are working part-time as compared to 6% of the men. Women work on average 41 hours a week, as compared to 46 hours for men.
As regards full-time vs. part-time employment, gender differences across countries are striking. They are huge in the Netherlands, where 27% of the women against 8% of the men work part-time, followed by Norway, where the gender difference is somewhat smaller (21% vs. 4%) and Germany (25% vs. 8%). These differences are only marginal in Finland and the Czech Republic.

Total working hours are shown by gender and country in Table IV. The working hours (regardless of sex) range from approximately 40–41 hours in France to 47 hours in Austria and the Czech Republic. The overall gender difference is pronounced, men working approximately 5 hours more than women (46 hours against 41). The country with the smallest gender gap is the UK and the country with the biggest gap is Italy. The difference between men and women within countries is largest in Italy where men work 7 hours a week more than women. The difference between women across countries is lower than that between men. The cross-country difference of women’s working time is approximately 6 hours weekly, whereas it is 8 hours for men.

**Working Hours – the impact of children**

Some arguments indicate that children affect the work patterns of men and women differently, although few empirical studies have been conducted and discussions and perceptions are largely based on stereotypes (Carrier, 1995). As discussed earlier, a third of the CHEERS graduates have children (26% of the women and 21% of the men). There is a very small but statistically significant difference between men who have children and those who do not, insofar as 95% of men with children work full-time against 94% of those who do not have children (this difference is not reflected in working hours). The situation is the opposite for women, as 87% of childless women work full-time, against 72% of those who have children. It is worth mentioning that the gender differences in working hours hold true even for different occupational groups amongst the CHEERS graduates.

In Table IV, the impact of children on working hours in paid work is also shown for men and women separately. It shows that the men’s working hours are...
the same regardless of whether they have children or not (46–47 hours), in contrast to women, whose working hours are approximately 5 hours longer for those who are childless than for those who have children (37 for those with children against 42 for those without). The longest working hours for women CHEERS graduates are in the Czech Republic, Austria, Sweden, Germany, and the UK and the shortest are in France and Italy. When children are taken into account, a cross-country comparison reveals a more complex picture. Children do not affect the working hours of women in Spain and only to a very limited degree in Finland and France (less than 3 hours a week). This difference is much greater in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, where women who have children work much shorter hours than those who do not (9–12 hours less per week).

Three distinct features are reflected in the table. First, there is no simple relation between fertility rate (i.e. the presence of children, cf. Table III) and women’s working hours. Swedish women, for example, seem to have rather long working hours, regardless of whether they have children or not. The same holds true for Finnish women who work full-time to a large extent and have long working hours. Norway is an exception in the Nordic league, with a high fertility rate and working hours below average for both women who have and do not have children.

The second interesting aspect is the pattern of women in Mid-European countries, e.g. Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. They are in a middle position regarding fertility and presence of children in the household (cf. Table III), but they have the greatest differences in working hours when women with and without children are compared. The third aspect worth mentioning is that women in countries with low fertility rate and low presence of children in the household, such as Southern European countries (cf. Table III), show strong similarities, although they do not necessarily follow a uniform pattern. Thus, for example, in Spain and France, there is no big difference in women’s working hours depending on whether they have a child or not. France and Spain show many similarities. All are at the lower end in overall working hours and this holds true regardless of children.

As regards the majority of employment aspects examined, there is a consistent gap between men and women CHEERS graduates. When different aspects of the employment situation is looked at in relation to the family status of women, it seems that women without a partner do not differ in the employment situation from childless women with a partner. Cohabitation as such is not very important for the employment status. But there are clear advantages in the employment situation of men compared to women without children.

Moreover, there is a gap between women, depending on whether they have children or not. Women with children are less often in managerial and professional ranks, less frequently in the private sector, more often employed part-time and have fewer weekly working hours than women without children. In comparison to the impact of study field, it can be stated that the child-rearing responsibilities of women graduates clearly have a stronger negative impact on their career than their frequent choice of female-dominated fields of study.

Another issue examined against the backdrop of family situation in the CHEERS survey is the labour market situation in terms of public vs. private employment. Women with children are strongly represented in the public sector.
From the CHEERS data, it cannot be said whether this is to find a family-friendly employment or whether conditions in the public sectors encourage employed women more often to opt for a child.

The Income of the CHEERS Graduates

According to European statistics, the gender pay gap between men and women with children tends to be wider than the overall male/female gap for a variety of reasons. Women with young children are more likely to be in part-time jobs, where wages tend to be lower. Fathers of young children tend to work longer hours than other men and earn higher wages. Third, some employers may discriminate against mothers since they expect them to be less committed to their jobs (OECD, 2002). Table V shows the overall gender gap among the CHEERS graduates by country. We can see the relative income advantage of men over women, both for all active persons and for those in full-time paid work.

Professionally active male graduates in the CHEERS survey earn, on average, 28% more than women (gross income, including additional jobs). The income advantage is 24% for those employed full-time. The Czech Republic and Sweden have the largest income differences between men and women, with full-time working men having 42% and 40% higher incomes than women respectively. Italy has the smallest gender difference, with men having a 16% higher income than women.

Income differences according to gender vary by occupational group. Among those very few CHEERS graduates who end up in unqualified jobs (‘clerks’, ‘workers’ and other groups usually considered as inappropriate for graduates), the income advantage of men to women is very high (40%). The gender ratio in other groups is smaller, ranging from 16% advantage for men among full-time working technicians to 22% advantage for men among full-time working legislators and managers. It should be borne in mind that working hours are not taken into account. These are considerably longer for men, as discussed earlier.

Another important aspect in the discussion on family and household organisation is how children affect the earnings of men and women. Table VI shows the ‘child bonus’ in wages. The European trend of negative impact of children on the wages of women is only confirmed for some countries and not for the CHEERS group as a whole.

In contrast to the overall trends and previous findings, we note that women with children have a slightly higher income than those without children. One explanation might be the higher average age of women with children and wages components related to age, seniority and experience. However, it does not explain the differences across countries. Women with children have a higher income in Italy, Spain and France (ranging from +2% to +9%).

| TABLE V: Gender ratio of income by country (women = 100, CHEERS graduates employed about four years after graduation) |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| IT | ES | FR | AT | DE | NL | UK | FI | SE | NO | CZ | TOT |
| All  | +19 | +33 | +26 | +33 | +33 | +26 | +28 | +42 | +35 | +49 | +28 |
| Full-time  | +16 | +34 | +22 | +20 | +23 | +23 | +26 | +40 | +28 | +42 | +24 |

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Table VI also shows that men with children have a much higher income than childless men. This advantage is much greater than that of women with children in relation to childless women. There are huge benefits of having children for men in the Netherlands, and somewhat less in France (+34% and 11% respectively); but children have negative impact on men’s wages in Sweden and Norway (−5% and −3% respectively).

As regards the reversed pattern for Swedish and Norwegian men, one suggestion could be the rigorous paternity rights and the men’s extensive use of these schemes (Brandt & Kvande, 2001). Thus, the negative impact of children might be explained by their more frequent absences. Concerning the cross-country differences found among women, Rubery et al. (Rubery et al., 2001) have emphasised that the European employment strategy and the targets of greater female employment rates are developed through a narrow lens which only focuses on labour market settings. They claim that women employment is taking place in very different social, family and labour market conditions and that the current framework must be broadened to include provision of welfare schemes (Rubery et al., 2001).

The findings of the CHEERS study show that women with children have a higher income than those without children in Italy, Spain and France, but a lower income in various other countries, notably the Nordic countries. Against the background of Rubery’s discussion, one suggestion would be that employers in Southern Europe are to some extent offering extra payment to qualified women with children.

This is also in line with new trends within Europe, which show that the impact of children on parents’ employment differs greatly between countries. In a European survey conducted in 2000, one of the main findings was that the presence of children does not necessarily mean fewer women in employment (Eurostat, 2002). In 6 out of 12 EU Member States, the percentage of couples with both partners in work in 2000 was the same or higher for couples with children as those without. Moreover, the higher a woman’s level of education, the more likely both partners are to have a job, regardless of whether they have children or not. The percentage of dual participant couples varies significantly between Member States. In Greece, Spain and Italy it was between 40% and 50% in 2000 for couples both with and without children, while in France, the Netherlands, Austria and the UK the proportion was two-thirds or more for both types of couples (Eurostat, 2002).
Conclusion

This article addressed the employment situation and prospects of young European graduates against the background of two pillars of the European employment strategy, namely the upgrading of the skills of the labour force, indicated by the rise in higher education, and the goal of the European Union of a rapid increase in women’s employment. The discussion shows that very small differences between men and women graduates in the beginning of their career proved to accumulate to considerable gender disparity after four years on the labour market.

Generally, the background of men and women at the entrance of their higher education is rather similar. In some respects women have certain advantages over men before enrolling in higher education. They more often have academic secondary education, they rate their grades slightly higher, and they are more internationally mobile, for educational as well as for employment reasons. One conspicuous feature of the CHEERS graduates is the gendered choice of educational field. Women are the majority in the humanities and education as well as in medicine and health studies, whereas men are the majority in engineering and to a certain extent in mathematics.

Women are more responsible for child rearing and family issues. Their working hours are shorter than men’s, both in terms of full-time vs. part-time and of weekly working hours. Moreover, the impact of children is considerably stronger on women’s work patterns than men’s. Men’s weekly working hours are 46 hours, regardless of children, whereas women’s depend on whether they have children or not. Men’s income is much higher than women’s (22%–24%) when only full-time employers are considered.

A cross-country comparison indicates considerable differences between Northern, Mid and Southern European regions. According to the findings, the gender differences are a complex issue, confounded by many intervenient factors. A striking observation is that despite women’s effort to increase their human capital, in terms of higher education, traditional patterns are constantly reproduced. That holds true for the horizontal segregation in the labour market, and to some extent for the vertical segregation as well.

Another interesting trend is that of persisting family organisation despite decreasing numbers of children in the household. Thus, the male breadwinner model persists in Southern European countries, although fertility rates there are the lowest in the world. At the same time, a cross-country comparison reveals interesting findings concerning the impact of children. In contrast to the previous findings, the chapter indicates that women with children have a higher income than women without children in several countries, especially in Italy, Spain and France.

Still another finding, which conflicts with extant research, is that not all men benefit from having children when it comes to wages. The benefits are huge for men in the Netherlands and France, but the effects are the opposite in some of the Nordic countries (Sweden and Norway).

Traditional patterns are being reproduced, even among young, highly qualified, well-educated people. The findings of the article need to be related more strongly to differences in welfare state systems, family systems, labour market regulatory systems and equal opportunities policies. However, they show that the European employment strategy needs to take into account the critical
role of the family in order to pursue an efficient and successful employment policy.

REFERENCES


