

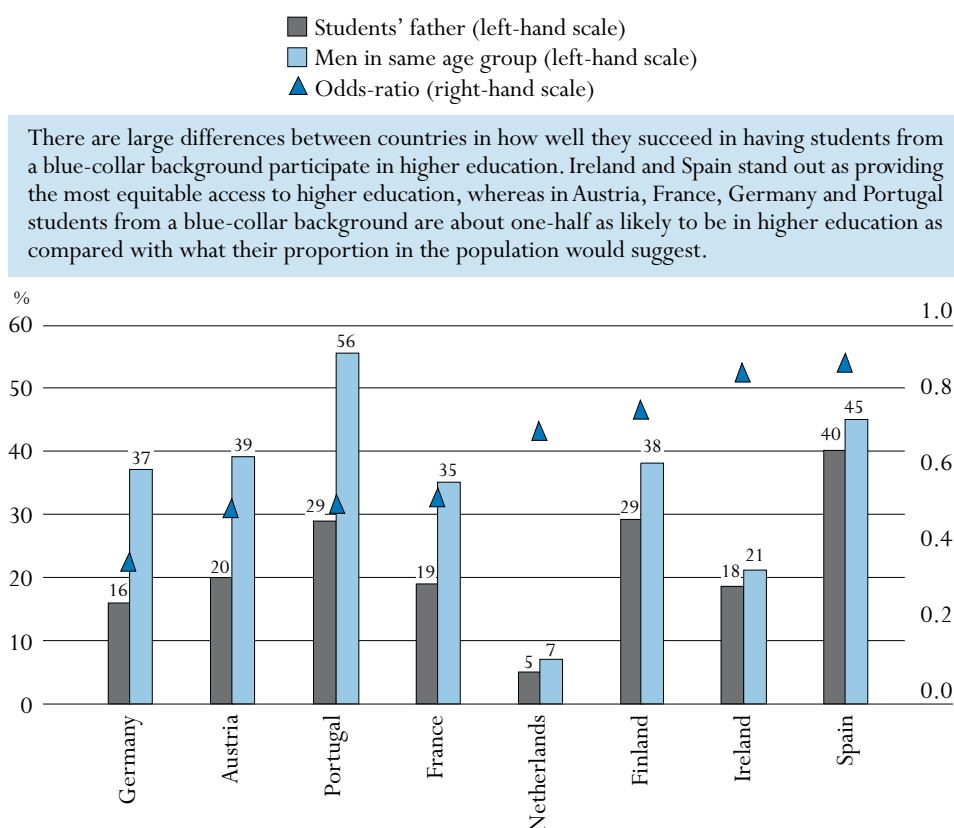
DOES THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THEIR PARENTS AFFECT STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

This indicator examines the socio-economic status of students enrolled in higher education, an important gauge of access to higher education for all. International comparable data on the socio-economic status of students in higher education is not widely available and this indicator is a first attempt to illustrate the analytical potential that would be offered by better data on this issue. It takes a close look at data from ten OECD countries, examining the occupational status (white collar or blue collar) of students' fathers and the fathers' educational background and also considers data from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 survey.

Key results

Chart A7.1. Occupational status of students' fathers

This chart depicts the proportion of higher education students' fathers compared with the proportion of men of corresponding age (40-to-60-year-olds) from a blue-collar background, in %.



There are large differences between countries in how well they succeed in having students from a blue-collar background participate in higher education. Ireland and Spain stand out as providing the most equitable access to higher education, whereas in Austria, France, Germany and Portugal students from a blue-collar background are about one-half as likely to be in higher education as compared with what their proportion in the population would suggest.

Source: EUROSTUDENT 2005.
 StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/068114616808>

Other highlights of this indicator

- When measuring the socio-economic status of students in higher education by their fathers' educational background large differences between countries emerge. In many countries, students are substantially more likely to be in higher education if their fathers completed higher education. Students from such a background are more than twice as likely to be in higher education in Austria, France, Germany, Portugal and the United Kingdom than are students whose fathers did not complete higher education. In Ireland and Spain this ratio drops to 1.1 and 1.5, respectively.
- Among the countries providing information on the socio-economic status of students in higher education it appears that inequalities in previous schooling are reflected in the intake of students from less advantaged backgrounds. Countries providing more equitable access to higher education – such as Finland, Ireland and Spain – were also the countries with the most equal between-school performances in PISA 2000.

Policy context

The pool of available workers with sufficient education and skills will be increasingly important for countries in securing innovation and future growth. Few countries can afford to rely only on families rich in wealth and/or human capital to provide society with higher educated individuals. The transfer of low skill jobs to countries with substantially lower cost structures further suggests that having a large fraction of the workforce with skills too low for them to be able to compete for jobs on the international arena will lead to an increasing social burden and deepening inequalities.

The socio-economic status of students in higher education is one way of examining to what extent countries are using their full potential in generating future human capital. A key issue for educational systems is to provide equal opportunity to education for all in the society, regardless of the socio-economic status. Levelling the playing field between affluent and less affluent students is not only a matter of equality, but more importantly it is also a way of increasing the recruiting ground for high skilled jobs and of increasing the overall labour competitiveness.

Expanding higher education depends on a corresponding quality in outputs of schools. Findings from the PISA 2000 survey suggests that in most countries performance is linked to students' socio-economic status and it thus appears that interventions are warranted at an earlier stage (primary and lower secondary education) to correct these disadvantages. Successful completion rates of upper secondary education by students with lower socio-economic status is another important threshold that needs to be considered in understanding potential skewed intakes to higher education.

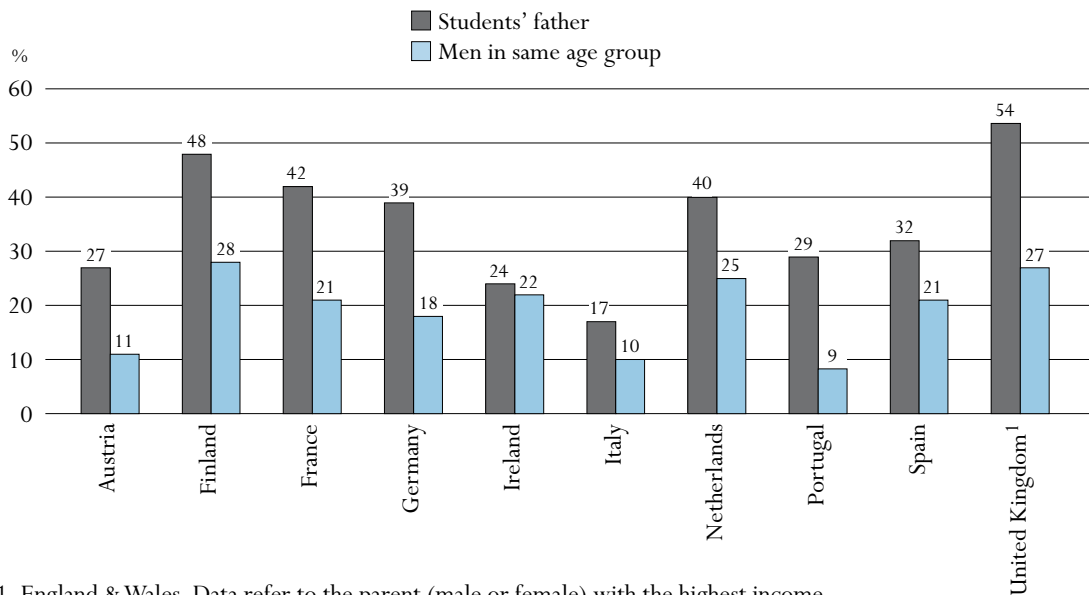
Evidence and explanations

Chart A7.1 above shows substantial differences between countries in the socio-economic composition of the student body in higher education. Note that students in higher education are defined as those students attending ISCED level 5B, 5A, and 6 courses. At 40%, Spain has the largest proportion of students with fathers who have blue-collar occupations, followed by Finland and Portugal at 29%. For the remaining six countries covered in this indicator, students with fathers who have blue-collar occupations comprise 20% or less of the student body. The overall intake of students from such backgrounds is dependent on the composition of blue-collar jobs as a whole within countries and as such the relation between the two country bars shown in Chart A7.1 is more informative about the socio-economic status of the student body. This relation is illustrated by the odds-ratio in the chart. With the exception of Ireland and Spain, countries still recruit proportionally more students to higher education whose fathers' have white-collar occupations.

The proportion of students in higher education with fathers having completed higher education provides another angle on the same topic. Chart A7.2a shows the proportion of students' fathers with higher education and the corresponding proportion of men with higher education in the same age group as students' fathers. Finland, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have the largest intake of students with fathers holding a higher education degree, whereas Ireland and Italy have the lowest intake from this group. This circumstance reflects to some extent the attainment levels in different countries and to have a better view of the social selectivity in higher education the attainment level of men in the same age group as students' fathers need to be taken into account. The ratio of the proportion of students' fathers with higher education to


Chart A7.2a. Educational status of students' fathers

Proportion of students' fathers with higher education compared with the proportion of men of corresponding age group as students' fathers (40-to-60-year-olds) with higher education



1. England & Wales. Data refer to the parent (male or female) with the highest income.

Source: EUROSTUDENT 2005.

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the proportion of men of the corresponding age group with higher education is shown in the second chart.

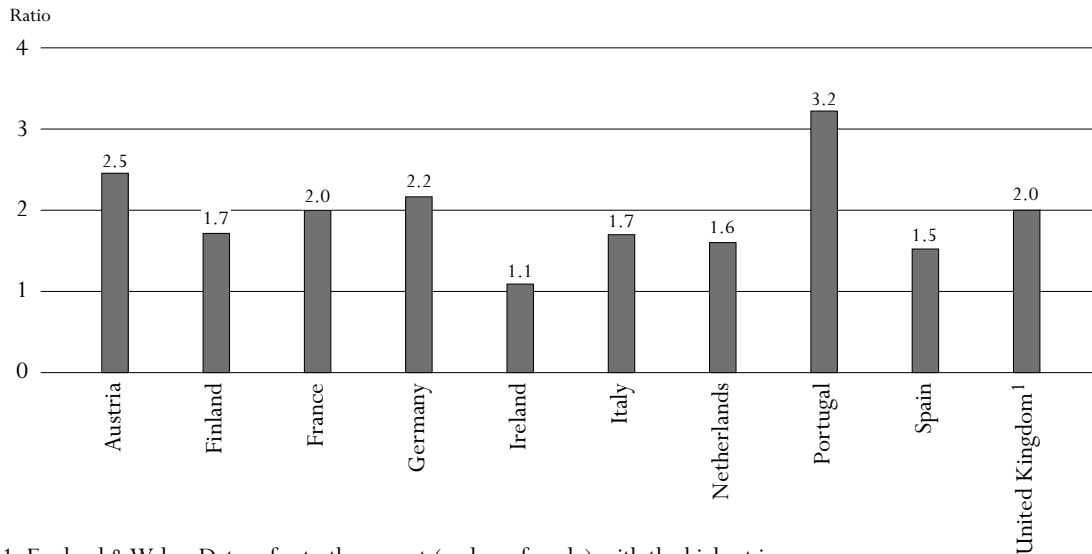
For all ten countries, more students are recruited from backgrounds where their father has a higher level of education than is warranted by the percentage of such families in the population. There are substantial differences between countries on this socio-economic status indicator as well. The strongest selectivity into higher education is found in Portugal, with a ratio of 3.2. In Austria, France, Germany and the United Kingdom students are about twice as likely to be in higher education if their fathers hold a university degree as compared with what their proportion in the population would suggest. Ireland stands out with a ratio (1.1) almost matching that of the general population.

In most countries, there is a strong socio-economic selection into higher education where students from homes with higher educational background are overrepresented and students from a blue-collar background are underrepresented (in many cases severely so). Some countries appear to do better in this respect, and in this relatively confined sample of countries, Ireland and Spain perform substantially better in terms of providing higher education for all, irrespective of students' background.

Differences between countries in duration of higher degree programs, the type of degree students pursue and the existence of non-university institutions all play a role in explaining participation in higher education by students from less advantaged backgrounds. Students from lower educational family backgrounds are more frequently enrolled in non-university institutions and this might, to some extent, explain differences in the socio-economic status of students between countries,


Chart A7.2b. Educational status of students' fathers

Ratio of the proportion of students' fathers with higher education to the proportion of men of the corresponding age group as students' fathers (40-to-60-year-olds) with higher education



1. England & Wales. Data refer to the parent (male or female) with the highest income.

Source: EUROSTUDENT 2005.

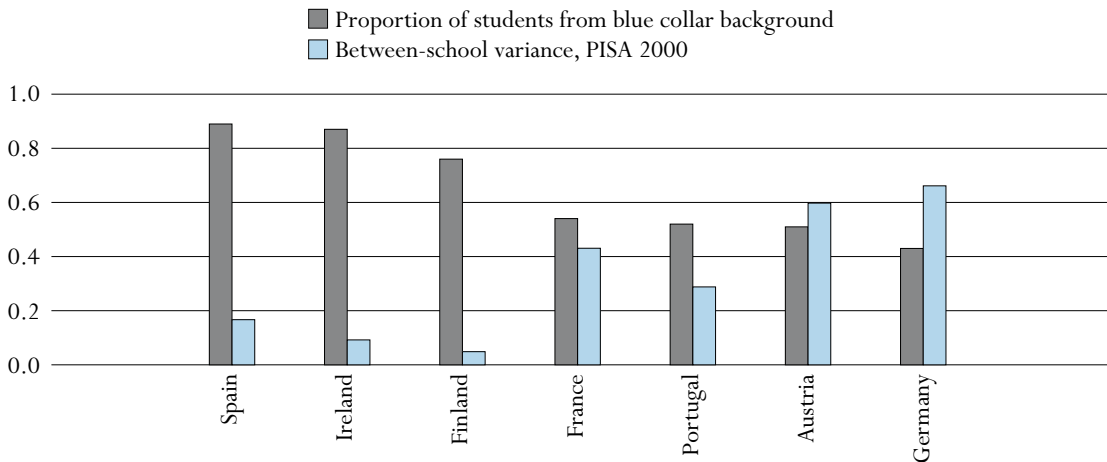
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as not all countries provide this opportunity in higher education. Countries that have expanded their tertiary education in recent years will also, by default, have a higher intake of students from less advantaged backgrounds.

Beside these and other factors, there are indications that previous schooling plays an important role in building the ground for equal opportunities in higher education. Not surprisingly, inequalities in the performance of students in the PISA survey (15-year-olds) are also carried forward to higher education. Measures such as the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) of students and variation of PISA scores related to students' fathers educational background are linked to the intake of students from less affluent backgrounds. The more prominent link, however, appears to be related to inequalities between schools and the extent to which education systems are stratified.


Chart A7.3 shows the relation between the ratio of students from blue-collar backgrounds (from chart A7.1) and the between-school variance in mathematic performance in PISA 2000. For the dark-blue bar, a ratio closer to 1 indicates an intake of students from blue-collar background in line with the population as a whole. The light-blue bar shows between school variance in PISA. The lower the between-school variance, the more equal is the school system in terms of providing similar quality of education irrespective of schools attended by the students. Ranking countries on equal opportunities in higher education largely resembles the ranking of countries with respect to providing equal education between schools. Among the countries for which data is available on the socio-economic status of students in higher education, it thus appears that providing an equitable distribution of learning outcomes and opportunities at school is important in order to have more students from less affluent backgrounds participating in higher education.

Chart A7.3. Proportion of students in higher education (2003–2005) from a blue-collar background and between-school variance in PISA 2000



Note: The first bar shows the ratio of students with fathers from a blue collar background compared with men of corresponding age group (40-to-60-year-olds) in blue collar occupations. The second bar shows the between school variance in mathematics from PISA 2000 survey.

Source: OECD PISA 2000 survey, EUROSTUDENT 2005.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/068114616808>

International comparable data on the socio-economic status of students in higher education is at present reported only in a limited way. More information and better country coverage is required for a better understanding of what policies might work and when actions need to be taken for improving the prospect of having more students from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education. In the present sample, there is a fairly strong ranking linking inequalities between schools in lower secondary education and inequalities in higher education. With better country coverage and with data over time considerably more could be done in understanding what the main obstacles are in having a more equal distribution of students in higher education. The economic motivation for recruiting more students from less affluent homes is in place and better information on student background is essential to respond to the question how to best achieve this objective.

Definitions and methodologies

The participating countries survey their students using the EUROSTUDENT core questionnaire within a specific time frame. In many cases, these questions are integrated into larger national surveys. Most countries have included students attending ISCED 5B and 5A programmes, exceptions are Austria, Germany, Italy, and Spain where only students in ISCED 5A were surveyed, and Portugal where students in 5A, 5B, and 6 level of education were surveyed. That some countries included ISCED 5B and 6 levels of education whereas other countries did not, might to some extent distort the comparability. The definition used in EUROSTUDENT for blue-collar background and higher education varies between countries but is harmonized within each country so that ratios will provide consistent estimates. Note also that the corresponding age group as students' fathers with higher education is 40-to-64-year-olds in Italy and that the corresponding age group as students' fathers in blue-collar occupations is defined in Ireland as "fathers of children who are 15 years old or younger".

A7

The number of responses varied between 994 students in Latvia to 25 385 students in France, with a response rate between 30% (Germany) and 100% (Spain, Portugal) depending on survey method used. Most countries used a randomized design (stratified, quota) in sampling the students. However, the survey method varied: a postal questionnaire was used in four countries; an online survey in two countries; telephone interviews in one country; face-to-face interviews in three countries; and classroom questionnaires in two countries.

Further references

This indicator draws on data collected as part of the EUROSTUDENT project (<http://www.eurostudent.eu>) and published in the *EUROSTUDENT Report 2005: Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe 2005*, available on the EUROSTUDENT website.

READER'S GUIDE

Coverage of the statistics

Although a lack of data still limits the scope of the indicators in many countries, the coverage extends, in principle, to the entire national education system (within the national territory) regardless of the ownership or sponsorship of the institutions concerned and regardless of education delivery mechanisms. With one exception described below, all types of students and all age groups are meant to be included: children (including students with special needs), adults, nationals, foreigners, as well as students in open distance learning, in special education programmes or in educational programmes organised by ministries other than the Ministry of Education, provided the main aim of the programme is the educational development of the individual. However, vocational and technical training in the workplace, with the exception of combined school and work-based programmes that are explicitly deemed to be parts of the education system, is not included in the basic education expenditure and enrolment data.

Educational activities classified as “adult” or “non-regular” are covered, provided that the activities involve studies or have a subject matter content similar to “regular” education studies or that the underlying programmes lead to potential qualifications similar to corresponding regular educational programmes. Courses for adults that are primarily for general interest, personal enrichment, leisure or recreation are excluded.

Calculation of international means

For many indicators an OECD average is presented and for some an OECD total.

The OECD average is calculated as the unweighted mean of the data values of all OECD countries for which data are available or can be estimated. The OECD average therefore refers to an average of data values at the level of the national systems and can be used to answer the question of how an indicator value for a given country compares with the value for a typical or average country. It does not take into account the absolute size of the education system in each country.

The OECD total is calculated as a weighted mean of the data values of all OECD countries for which data are available or can be estimated. It reflects the value for a given indicator when the OECD area is considered as a whole. This approach is taken for the purpose of comparing, for example, expenditure charts for individual countries with those of the entire OECD area for which valid data are available, with this area considered as a single entity.

Note that both the OECD average and the OECD total can be significantly affected by missing data. Given the relatively small number of countries, no statistical methods are used to compensate for this. In cases where a category is not applicable (code “a”) in a country or where the data value is negligible (code “n”) for the corresponding calculation, the value zero is imputed for the purpose of calculating OECD averages. In cases where both the numerator and the denominator of a ratio are not applicable (code “a”) for a certain country, this country is not included in the OECD average.

For financial tables using 1995 data, both the OECD average and OECD total are calculated for countries providing both 1995 and 2004 data. This allows comparison of the OECD average and OECD total over time with no distortion due to the exclusion of certain countries in the different years.

For many indicators an EU19 average is also presented. It is calculated as the unweighted mean of the data values of the 19 OECD countries that are members of the European Union for which data are available or can be estimated. These 19 countries are Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

■ **Classification of levels of education**

The classification of the levels of education is based on the revised International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97). The biggest change between the revised ISCED and the former ISCED (ISCED-76) is the introduction of a multi-dimensional classification framework, allowing for the alignment of the educational content of programmes using multiple classification criteria. ISCED is an instrument for compiling statistics on education internationally and distinguishes among six levels of education. The glossary available at www.oecd.org/edu/eag2007 describes in detail the ISCED levels of education, and Annex 1 shows corresponding typical graduation ages of the main educational programmes by ISCED level.

■ **Symbols for missing data**

Six symbols are employed in the tables and charts to denote missing data:

- a* Data is not applicable because the category does not apply.
- c* There are too few observations to provide reliable estimates (*i.e.* there are fewer than 3% of students for this cell or too few schools for valid inferences). However, these statistics were included in the calculation of cross-country averages.
- m* Data is not available.
- n* Magnitude is either negligible or zero.
- w* Data has been withdrawn at the request of the country concerned.
- x* Data included in another category or column of the table (*e.g.* *x*(2) means that data are included in column 2 of the table).
- ~ Average is not comparable with other levels of education.

■ **Further resources**

The website www.oecd.org/edu/eag2007 provides a rich source of information on the methods employed for the calculation of the indicators, the interpretation of the indicators in the respective national contexts and the data sources involved. The website also provides access to the data underlying the indicators as well as to a comprehensive glossary for technical terms used in this publication.

Any post-production changes to this publication are listed at www.oecd.org/edu/eag2007.

The website www.pisa.oecd.org provides information on the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), on which many of the indicators in this publication draw.

Education at a Glance uses the OECD's StatLinks service. Below each table and chart in *Education at a Glance 2007* is a url which leads to a corresponding Excel workbook containing the underlying data for the indicator. These urls are stable and will remain unchanged over time. In addition, readers of the *Education at a Glance* e-book will be able to click directly on these links and the workbook will open in a separate window.

Codes used for territorial entities

These codes are used in certain charts. Country or territorial entity names are used in the text. Note that in the text the Flemish Community of Belgium is referred to as "Belgium (Fl.," and the French Community of Belgium as "Belgium (Fr.)."

AUS Australia	ITA Italy
AUT Austria	JPN Japan
BEL Belgium	KOR Korea
BFL Belgium (Flemish Community)	LUX Luxembourg
BFR Belgium (French Community)	MEX Mexico
BRA Brazil	NLD Netherlands
CAN Canada	NZL New Zealand
CHL Chile	NOR Norway
CZE Czech Republic	POL Poland
DNK Denmark	PRT Portugal
ENG England	RUS Russian Federation
EST Estonia	SCO Scotland
FIN Finland	SVK Slovak Republic
FRA France	SVN Slovenia
DEU Germany	ESP Spain
GRC Greece	SWE Sweden
HUN Hungary	CHE Switzerland
ISL Iceland	TUR Turkey
IRL Ireland	UKM United Kingdom
ISR Israel	USA United States

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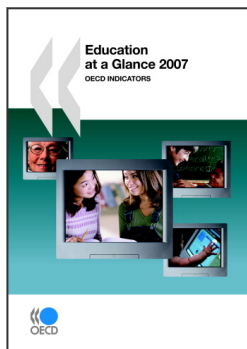
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C1, C2

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