UNEQUAL PATHWAYS? THE EFFECT OF GENDER, SOCIAL BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION ON EARLY LABOUR MARKET TRANSITIONS IN EUROPE

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Abstract
This paper uses data drawn from the EU LFS 2000 Ad Hoc Module on School to Work Transitions to explore the influence of gender and social background (measured in terms of parental education) on young people's educational and early labour market outcomes across twelve European countries. Our results show that social background is strongly related to the level of education achieved while gender is found to have a stronger effect on the field of study selected. Countries vary in the extent to which gender and social background affect young people's outcomes. Thus, social inequality in educational and labour market outcomes appears most marked in the Eastern European countries and least marked in Finland and Sweden. Part of the social advantage in access to employment and occupational status can be explained by education level but very little by field of study. Gender differentiation in the labour market across countries is not readily explicable in terms of education but reflects broader societal differences.

Key words: School to work transitions; social class; gender; education; field of study.

Introduction

Gender and social class of origin still shape young people's chances of achieving better educational and labour market outcomes. However, countries differ in the extent to which these factors matter and in the way gender and social class differences manifest themselves. This paper aims to analyse cross-country differences and similarities in the effect of gender and social background on young people's education and early occupational outcomes across a range of European countries. We examine the extent to which gender and social class differences in access to employment and occupational status of first job are mediated by differences in educational level and in field of study. We also explore the complex interrelation between gender and social class in shaping early labour market outcomes among young people.

Gender differences in educational attainment have disappeared or even reversed in recent years with the policy debate in many countries now focusing on the under-achievement of boys (Epstein et al., 1998). Official statistics show that women are nowadays more highly educated than men in most European countries (OECD, 2004; Eurostat, 2003). However, concerns remain in relation to gender differences in subject choices and post-school destinations and in relation to occupational segregation and its consequences for economic inequalities between men and women. Many young women continue to choose traditional "female" courses (such as biology, education, arts and humanities) which may lead to lower-level, less well paid occupations with restricted chances of career promotion.

There are different theories on the processes shaping gender differences in subject choice. Rational choice theorists have argued that these differences reflect the extent to which different occupations, and therefore related fields of study, facilitate (or constrain) potential career interruptions for child-rearing (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). Other rational choice theorists have viewed differences in subject choice as reflecting different comparative advantages for males and females in particular subject areas (Jonsson, 1999). Feminist theorists, in contrast, view educational segregation as reflecting the gendered nature of different subject areas with scientific and mathematical subject areas, for example, constructed as 'male' (see Kelly, 1985). Other researchers have examined a broader set of factors which potentially influence choice of field of study, including aspects of school organisation and process, the peer group, curriculum content and pedagogical approaches (see, for example, Dryler, 1999; Dekkers, 1996; Smyth and Hannan, 2002). In addition, current occupational segregation by gender within employment could be regarded as part of the context within which subject choice is framed, with young women and men restricting choices to what they see as 'available' to them in the labour market (see Gaskell, 1984).

Whether gendered subject choices in education are the cause or the consequence of sex segregation in the labour market is still a subject for debate. However, the strong association between educational segregation and occupational segregation by gender has been widely documented (Borghans and Groot, 1999; Erikson and Jonsson, 1998). The persistence of occupational segregation has raised concerns about continuing gender inequalities in the labour market. Thus, Anker (2001) argues that occupational segregation is negative for the economy and for women, viewing it as "a major source of labour market rigidity and economic inefficiency" and "detrimental to women" (Anker, 2001, p.129).

Social class inequalities in young people's educational and occupational outcomes have been documented in many national and international studies. Shavit and Blossfeld (1993) argue that social inequalities in education have been more resistant to change than gender inequalities because they are linked to cultural and economic disparities. Thus, an equalisation in cultural and economic resources is seen as a prerequisite to achieving equality

of educational opportunities between different social classes (pp. 241-242). While social class differences in educational level have been well documented, relatively little attention has been paid to potential differences in field of study by social class background. Some studies have indicated that young people from higher social classes are more likely to access prestigious subject areas within tertiary education (Davies and Guppy, 1997; Van de Werfhorst et al., 2000). However, other studies have found that the effect of social class background is much stronger on the level of education achieved than on the field of study pursued (see, for example, Reiner and Pollak, 2005).

In their comparative study, Shavit and Müller (1998) found that social background affects young people's occupational outcomes directly and indirectly *via* education. Moreover, they found that the choice of vocational or academic tracks within school leads to very differentiated outcomes in all of the countries under examination. Vocational tracks usually lead to direct labour market entry while academic tracks facilitate on-going educational participation. Young people from lower social class backgrounds tend to choose vocational subjects which may restrict their educational and labour market prospects. On the other hand, taking vocational courses may be seen as an advantage for those students who are unlikely to continue in education because vocational education provides them with specific skills which may enhance their chances of finding a job and, in particular, a skilled job (Gambetta, 1987; Arum and Shavit 1995). The tension between the "diversion" effect (diverting young people from reaching more desirable occupations) and the "safety net" effect (protecting them from unemployment and unskilled work) of taking a vocational course have been analysed by Shavit and Müller (2000). In their comparative analysis of eleven countries with different degrees and characteristics of vocational provision, they found that in most countries vocational education reduces the odds of unemployment and the chances of entering an unskilled job. However, vocational education appears to be more effective in those countries in which it is well focused and occupationally specific (that is, relevant for certain specific jobs). Graduates from vocational education attain lower occupational prestige than that attained by those from academic tertiary education. This pattern is most pronounced in countries where vocational education also serves as an effective safety net. While this research gives a useful insight into the different outcomes of vocational and academic education, relatively little attention has been given to exploring the impact of more detailed field of study on early labour market outcomes (for exceptions, see Teichler, 2000; Kim and Kim, 2003).

Previous research based on EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2000 ad hoc module data on the transition from school to work has shown that in most European countries young people's labour market outcomes vary by gender and social background. The expansion of female educational attainment has not always translated into labour market advantage with persisting gender segregation by occupation and industry, mainly linked to gender differences in the field of study chosen (Smyth, 2005). Parental education has also been found to be a significant factor affecting young people's educational and occupational opportunities (Iannelli, 2003). However, European countries vary in the extent to which gender and social class affect youth transitions in the labour market. Thus, those countries characterised by higher levels of gender segregation in education (such as Austria) were also characterised by higher levels of gender segregation in the labour market (Smyth, 2005). Moreover, the influence of parental background on young people's educational and occupational opportunities was stronger in the Eastern European countries and weaker in the Nordic countries, with the Western European countries in an intermediate position (Iannelli, 2003).

This paper advances upon these analyses to explore both gender and social class differences in early labour market outcomes and the extent to which these differences are related to differences in young people's educational attainment and field of study attended. The first

section of the paper describes the data and the definitions used in the LFS 2000 ad hoc module. The second section analyses gender and social class differences in young people's education, both level of education achieved and field of study last attended. The third section looks at two aspects of early labour market outcomes: employment chances and occupational status of the first significant job. Finally, the paper concludes by summarising the main cross-national similarities and differences found.

Data and definitions

The LFS 2000 ad hoc module data were collected in a large number of countries and cover practically all areas of Europe (from North to South and from the East to West of Europe). The data provide some retrospective longitudinal information on the transition from school-to-work of young people aged 15-35 who left education for the first time in the previous ten years [1]. The data were collected in twenty European countries, including six Eastern European countries. This paper draws only on data from the countries in which information on social background (measured in terms of parents' education) and field of education were collected and in which a sufficient degree of comparability has been established (see Iannelli, 2001). These countries are: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Slovakia. These countries are very different from each other and for this reason we have preferred to avoid any pre-grouping based on geographical proximity or other characteristics and have included them in our analyses individually. The profile of the sample across countries is outlined in Appendix Table 1.

In the collection of data within the LFS 2000 ad hoc module, a very extensive definition was proposed by Eurostat for identifying the time of leaving continuous education. "Leaving continuous education" should have included leaving from both education and training (with at least 10 per cent of the total training in the educational/training institution), leaving from full-time or part-time courses and from vocational and general courses [2]. However, a few countries - Hungary, Italy [3], Romania [4] and Slovakia – have adopted a more restricted definition which considers only leavers from the formal education system.

Field of study refers to the type of subject studied by young people before leaving continuous education. However, in a few countries, among them Italy [5], the information on field of education relates to the highest level of education completed rather than the level when young people left continuous education. Even though this information is not totally comparable with the information collected in the other countries, we have decided to include Italy, for which information on parental education is available, in our analyses [6].

In this paper, two early labour market outcomes are considered: employment chances and occupational status of the first significant job. The measure of employment chances is based on the proportion of young people who have obtained a first significant job by the time of the survey. "First significant job" is defined as a job started after leaving continuous education, with a duration of a minimum of six months, with a minimum of 20 hours per week and excluding casual work or training schemes. With the exception of Belgium, all countries have also considered as first significant jobs those jobs which started before leaving continuous education and continued after leaving education. The occupational status of the first significant job is measured using Ganzeboom and Treiman's International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI) scale (see Ganzeboom, De Graaf and Treiman, 1992).

Because we are looking at young people who have recently left continuous education, we expect gender differences in labour market outcomes to be less marked at this early stage than at a later stage in life (when family responsibilities and access to promotional routes may have differentially influenced men and women). However, gendered choice of field of

education may be fundamental in bringing about substantial gender differences in the nature of the first significant job. In contrast to gender disparities, differences due to social origin are likely to be stronger at earlier stages of the occupational career than at a later stage (Mare, 1980). Family resources may play an important role in supporting an individual's entry into the labour market (e.g. through social networks or financial support) but this early advantage is likely to be less relevant at a later stage when job experience and further education or training play a stronger role in finding another job or in career development.

Educational outcomes among young people

Educational attainment

Education is one of the most important factors in determining access to the labour market and to the most prestigious occupations. However, there are gender and social class differences in the chances of reaching a higher educational qualification which in turn affects the chances of gaining a job and, in particular, a 'good' job. As previously mentioned, official statistics and previous analyses based on the LFS 2000 Ad-hoc-module on Transitions from School to Work show that the past disadvantage that women had in reaching higher educational levels of attainment has been overcome and in some countries reversed (in favour of women). The LFS 2000 ad-hoc module data also show that, with the exception of Austria, Romania and Slovakia where gender differences are not significant, women are more likely than men to be upwardly intergenerationally mobile; in other words, they are more likely to have a higher educational level than that of their parents (see Table 1, first two columns). These findings hold when gender differences are analysed across different social groupings (Table 1, last four columns). Thus, in most countries women with less educated parents are more educationally mobile upwards than men (Belgium, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Slovenia). In a few countries, they are equally mobile (Romania, Sweden and Slovakia) and in two countries they are less mobile than men (Austria, Hungary). Moreover, women with more educated parents (that is, parents who achieved at least upper secondary, ISCED 3, education) are always more likely to achieve (at least) the same levels of educational qualifications as their parents than men (with the exception of Austria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia in which men and women have similar chances). This pattern is even more marked for young women with a parent with tertiary education: with the exception of Romania, in all countries the percentages of women achieving a tertiary qualification are higher than the percentages of men from the same social background (table not shown).

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

As we would expect, social background differences in educational attainment are more marked than gender differences in all countries under examination (see Figure 1); the only exceptions are Finland and Slovenia. Thus, the odds ratios of reaching at least an upper-secondary qualification vary between 0.9:1 in Austria and 1.8:1 in Greece in relation to the gender gap. The same odds ratios measuring the social background gap vary between 1.1:1 in Finland and 9.2:1 in Slovakia. The most marked social background differences in young people's educational attainment are found in three of the four Eastern European countries (Slovakia, Romania and Hungary), followed by Belgium, Spain, Greece and Italy.

In most European countries, social background differences in educational attainment are more marked among women than among men (table not shown). Worthy of mention is the pattern apparent in Eastern European countries: in these countries gender differences are less marked but social background differences more marked than in the other countries.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Field of study

An innovative aspect of the Labour Force Survey ad hoc module was the collection of information on field of study. Marked gender differences are found in field of study at both upper secondary and tertiary levels (see Smyth, 2005). Across Europe, engineering courses at upper secondary level tend to be male-intensive while health/welfare, arts/humanities, education courses and social science/business courses tend to be female-intensive. At tertiary level, health/welfare, arts/humanities and education remain female-intensive while engineering courses remain male-intensive.

While some regularities are evident across European countries in the gender-typing of fields of study, the extent to which young people with more highly-educated parents are over-represented in certain fields of study is more variable across countries. At upper secondary level, young people from more qualified backgrounds tend to be over-represented in arts/humanities courses and under-represented in engineering and agriculture courses (Table 2). However, there is little systematic patterning across countries in the kinds of courses taken by more advantaged young people at tertiary level (Table 3). Thus, young people from highly educated backgrounds are overrepresented on health/welfare courses in Austria but underrepresented on comparable courses in Sweden.

TABLES 2 AND 3 ABOUT HERE

The extent of gender and social class differentiation in type of education can be analysed using an index of dissimilarity measure which indicates the proportion of males (or females), and the proportion of people from different social backgrounds, who would need to 'change' fields in order to achieve an equal distribution across categories by gender and social groupings [7]. To ensure comparability across countries, indices were based on the broad (nine category) classification of field of study. The first two columns in Table 4 indicate cross-national variation in the extent of gender segregation at upper secondary and tertiary levels. At upper secondary level, gender segregation is found to be greatest in Austria and France, with high levels also evident in three of the four Eastern European countries (Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia). Levels of segregation are found to be lowest in Greece and Romania. At tertiary level, segregation levels are highest in Austria and Finland and lowest in Italy.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Moreover, some variation is evident across countries in the extent to which young people from different social backgrounds take different fields of study (Table 4, columns 3-4). Segregation by social background at both upper secondary and tertiary level is most marked in Romania, in contrast to the relatively low level of gender segregation apparent there. There are also higher levels of social segregation in Finland (at upper secondary) and Sweden (at tertiary level). The situation in Finland and Sweden is interesting, given the relatively low levels of social inequality in educational attainment (see Figure 1). It may be that in these countries, the middle classes mobilise resources to secure access to more prestigious fields of study within each level of education, a pattern which is consistent with research conducted in the Israeli context (Ayalon and Yogev, 2005). In contrast to Sweden, France, Finland and Spain show very low levels of class segregation at tertiary level. In general, levels of ‘class’ segregation are less marked than levels of gender segregation (Table 4). Social background matters a good deal for the *level* of education achieved, particularly in influencing persistence into tertiary education (see above), but appears to make less difference to the *type of course* taken. This may reflect in part the broad classification of field of study used; a more detailed classification may indicate class differentiation in access to élite courses such as medicine and law. Within upper secondary education, levels of gender and class segregation tend to be

lower in less differentiated educational systems; in other words, strong differentiation into different courses at an early stage appears to facilitate gender and class inequality.

Previous research has indicated that more gender-stereotyped course choices may be evident among young people from working-class backgrounds (see, for example, Gaskell, 1984). Analyses were carried out to investigate whether the extent of gender segregation into different fields of study differs according to young people's social background. There is no consistent support for the argument that gender segregation in courses taken is greatest for young men and women from more disadvantaged backgrounds. This is the case in Austria, France and Finland but the reverse is the case in Romania (see Table 4, columns 5-7).

In sum, gender and social background appear to operate as relatively independent influences on educational outcomes. Social background is of primary importance in influencing the level of education achieved while gender shapes the kind of courses taken by young women and men. Across Europe, there is no necessary relationship between gender and social class segregation; countries with high levels of gender segregation in field of study do not have correspondingly low levels of class segregation. The way in which gender and social class influence early labour market integration, and the extent to which these effects are mediated by level and type of education, are discussed in the following section.

Early labour market outcomes among young people

Two early labour market outcomes are considered in the remainder of this paper: access to paid employment among young people in the labour market and the occupational status of the first significant job. A similar strategy is adopted in analysing the two sets of outcomes: firstly, the impact of social background is assessed using the pooled sample of twelve countries; and secondly, the simultaneous impact of social background and gender (and the interaction between the two) is explored. The scale of cross-national differences is depicted using graphs derived from adding country dummy variables and interaction terms to these models.

Employment chances

Table 5 presents a series of logistic regression models which explore the impact of social background (measured in terms of parental education) on the chances of being in paid employment at the time of the survey.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Young people whose parents have upper secondary or tertiary qualifications are found to be at an advantage in terms of access to paid employment compared to those whose parents have lower secondary qualifications; those whose parents had tertiary qualifications are 1.7 times more likely than those whose parents had lower secondary education to have accessed paid employment. Social background differences in access to employment are more marked in some countries than in others. Figure 2 presents the relative advantage of those from upper secondary backgrounds compared to those from lower secondary backgrounds in the baseline; the other lines indicate the patterns controlling for young people's own educational level and field of study respectively. Comparing those whose parents had upper secondary education with those with lower secondary education, social background differences are found to be most marked in Belgium, Hungary, and, to a lesser extent, Spain and Italy (see Figure 2). Comparing those whose parents had tertiary education with the less-qualified group, social differences in employment chances are most marked in two of the Eastern European countries (Hungary and Slovakia) as well as Sweden and Belgium (Figure 3).

FIGURES 2 AND 3 ABOUT HERE

The second model in Table 5 includes young people's own educational level as well as that of their parents; those with upper secondary qualifications are 1.6 more times more likely, and those with tertiary qualifications 2.7 times more likely, to access paid employment than those with lower secondary qualifications. At least some of the social background difference is mediated by educational level; that is, young people from more educated backgrounds are more likely to enter paid employment because they are themselves more likely to achieve higher qualifications. However, having parents with higher qualifications continues to have a positive direct effect on employment chances, controlling for own educational level. The variation across countries in social background differences is also partially accounted for by variation in educational attainment, although cross-national variation is still apparent (see Figures 2 and 3).

The third model in Table 5 looks at the combined impact of young people's educational level and field of study on their employment chances. Field of study is found to have a significant influence on access to paid employment. At upper secondary level, those who had taken engineering courses have the highest employment rate while those who had taken education courses have the lowest rate. All tertiary courses yield advantages over upper secondary general courses in securing employment. However, these advantages are greatest for those who had taken engineering, science and health/welfare courses and lowest for those who had taken arts courses (Table 5). Although it accounts for variation at the individual level, field of study adds little to the explanation of social background differences in employment chances or the extent to which such differences vary across country (see Figures 2 and 3). In other words, young people from higher socio-economic groups have an employment advantage in the labour market primarily because they achieve higher qualifications themselves rather than because they enter more prestigious subject areas.

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

Analyses so far have focused on the influence of social background differences and have not taken account of gender differences within and across countries. On average, young women are less likely to access paid employment than men. However, the extent of their disadvantage varies by parental background with the greatest gap evident among those with less-qualified parents and the smallest gap among those with parents with tertiary qualifications (see the interaction terms between female and parents' education in Model 1, Table 6). The extent of the gender gap in access to paid employment varies across European countries. In the three Mediterranean countries along with France, women are less likely to access paid employment than men whereas the reverse is the case in Slovenia and Romania (Figure 4). However, given that women tend to have higher educational attainment levels than men (see above), one might expect differences in access to employment to advantage women. Controlling for educational level, the gender gap in employment chances becomes slightly more marked in the Mediterranean countries, France and Belgium (see Figure 4). As with social background differences, field of study adds little to the explanation of gender differences across countries in employment chances (although strong influences were found on the type of job obtained, see Smyth, 2005).

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

Some differences are evident between young women and men in the effects of education on employment chances. There are no significant differences in the returns to educational level for women and men (see Model 2, Table 6). However, there are gender differences in the returns to field of study. At upper secondary level, men receive lower returns than women to education, social science and arts qualifications, that is in fields which are typically

considered “female” (see Model 4, Table 6). At tertiary level, women receive higher returns to arts and social sciences, but lower returns to agriculture and services.

In sum, social background differences in access to paid employment are mainly perpetuated through differences in the level of qualifications obtained rather than in the type of course taken. In contrast, the level and type of qualifications play little role in explaining gender differences in employment chances across different European countries. These cross-national differences in the gender gap are likely to reflect other factors such as labour market and family systems along with the nature of welfare régimes. Access to employment is not the only aspect of early labour market integration of concern, however, since some young people may secure a quick transition into employment by entering low-skilled occupations. The following section considers the way in which parental background and gender influence the nature of the first significant job obtained.

Occupational status of first job

Young people’s occupational status is measured according to the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI), which has a range of 16 to 90, with the highest value attributed to the highest occupational status (Ganzeboom, De Graaf and Treiman, 1992). In most European countries, young people with highly educated parents tend to hold higher occupational status jobs than those with less educated parents (see Figure 5). Furthermore, in most cases, women occupy higher status positions than men, a pattern which is probably explained by their higher educational attainment (see below).

FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

The results of the OLS regression analysis show that on average young people with parents with upper-secondary education and tertiary education acquire an occupational status of 3.2 and 12.8 higher respectively in the ISEI scale than those with parents with lower-secondary education (Table 7, Model 1). This advantage is partly mediated by young people’s own educational attainment. Thus, the advantage of having more educated parents halves in the case of tertiary background and reduces by around 30 per cent in the case of upper-secondary background after introducing young people’s educational attainment into the model (Table 7, Model 2). As might be expected, educational level is strongly predictive of occupational status of the first significant job, with the highest status jobs secured by those with tertiary qualifications. It should be noted, however, that parental education continues to have a direct effect on occupational status at this early stage of the employment career.

TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

Social background differences in young people’s occupational status are more marked in certain countries than in others (Figures 6 and 7). Comparing young people from an upper-secondary background to those from a lower-secondary background, social background differences are more marked in the Southern European countries (Greece, Spain and Italy), in Belgium and in three of the Eastern European countries (Hungary, Romania and Slovakia). The same countries, but this time also Slovenia and, to a lesser extent, France, show higher social background differences when young people from a tertiary background are compared to young people from a lower-secondary background. Interestingly, Finland, Sweden and Austria are the countries where social background differences are least marked. These are also the countries in which we have found that social background differences in young people’s educational attainment are among the lowest. As we would expect, when controlling for level of education, country variations become smaller but the shape of the curve does not change much, meaning that country differences remain largely unchanged.

FIGURES 6 AND 7 ABOUT HERE

Field of education has a strong significant effect on occupational status (Table 7, Model 3). Thus, studying agriculture and, to a lesser extent, engineering, services and health at upper-secondary level, compared to studying for a general course at the same level, significantly reduces the chances of gaining a prestigious job. All the other fields of study increase the chances of entering a high status job. At tertiary level, sciences and education have the highest occupational returns while services and general courses have the lowest. Despite the strong influence that field of education has on individuals' chances of entering high occupational positions, this effect does not seem to be related to social background. Indeed, controlling for field of study hardly changes any of the results related to the effect of social background on occupational outcomes. This suggests that social background is primarily mediated by the level of education achieved by young people but not by the field of study attended.

Model 1 in Table 8 confirms that women, from whatever social background, are more likely than men to enter higher occupational positions. However, there are gender differences in the effect of social background on young people's occupational status: young women with parents with tertiary education are less likely to achieve a higher occupational position than men with a corresponding social background (Table 8, Model 1). This result holds even when controlling for the effect of young people's educational attainment and field of study attended (Table 8, Models 2 and 3). The occupational returns to upper secondary education are higher for women than for men while the reverse is true in relation to tertiary education. Moreover, women who studied education at upper-secondary level and engineering at tertiary level tend to achieve higher occupational positions than men who studied the same subjects. In the other fields of study, women gain similar, or more often lower, prestige occupations than men.

TABLE 8 ABOUT HERE

Countries differ significantly from each other in the extent to which women have enhanced chances of entering a higher occupational position than men. Women in the Southern and the Eastern European countries together with women in Belgium show the highest occupational returns while gender differences are much less marked in Sweden, Finland, France and Austria (Figure 8). With the exception of Austria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, where gender differences in educational attainment are lowest compared to the other countries, in most European countries part of women's advantage in acquiring a better occupational position than men is explained by women's higher educational attainment (Figure 8). Field of study is an important component in the explanation of women's advantage in the four Eastern European countries (especially Hungary), in Austria and France. Gender segregation in the field of study is particularly strong in these countries and this, contrary to our expectations, may have worked to the advantage of women in obtaining a more prestigious job at the beginning of their working career.

FIGURE 8 ABOUT HERE

Conclusions

This paper has explored the influence of two background characteristics, gender and parental education, on young people's educational and early labour market outcomes. The patterns of cross-national variations in the impact of gender and social background on educational and early labour market outcomes are summarised in Table 9.

The analyses of gender and social background differences in educational attainment and field of study have shown that in all countries under examination gender differences are more strongly related to the field of education attended by young people than to their level of education achieved. In contrast, social background differences are more marked in relation to level of education achieved than to field of study. This may indicate that there are different mechanisms through which gender and social inequalities are reproduced. However, we cannot disregard the possibility that a more detailed breakdown of course types in our data might yield evidence of a stronger social differentiation in the fields chosen, as some earlier studies have shown (see, for example, Davies and Guppy, 1997).

TABLE 9 ABOUT HERE

A very interesting result seems to emerge from our cross-country comparisons: in those countries where gender and social class differences in educational attainment are particularly low, such as Finland and Sweden, we have found a stronger differentiation based on field of study. A similar pattern in relation to gender differences in education can be observed in the Eastern European countries. These results suggest that even in those countries which have been successful in reducing gender and social class inequalities in educational attainment, those inequalities have reasserted themselves in a different way, that is, through horizontal differentiation according to the type of course attended. On the other hand, in Belgium, Greece and Spain where gender and social class differences in educational attainment are marked, gender and social class segregation according to field of study is less marked than elsewhere.

A separate remark has to be made in relation to social background differences in Eastern European countries. In these countries, social class differences in both educational attainment and field of study are more marked than in other European countries. It may be the case that parental education has become an increasingly important resource in the context of the rapid economic and social change taking place in the transition economies.

In relation to gender and social background differences in young people's occupational outcomes, two aspects of early labour market integration were considered in the paper: entry into paid employment and occupational status of the first significant job. We have found that employment chances are affected by parental education in the usual way: people with highly educated parents have higher chances of acquiring a job than people with less educated parents. However, part of this association is mediated by young people's educational attainment. In other words, educational level has an important role in the transmission of social class advantage in early labour market outcomes. In contrast, we have found that field of study plays little role in explaining the relationship between social background and early labour market outcomes.

Cross-national differences are evident in the degree of social differentiation in early labour market integration. We have found that in Sweden, Belgium, Hungary and Slovakia young people's employment chances are affected by their social background more strongly than young people in the other countries. On the contrary, the social gap is lower (or not existent) in Austria, Finland and Greece. Moreover, countries vary in the extent to which young people's educational level mediates the effect of social background.

Social inequality in occupational status appears relatively high in the Eastern European countries. These findings are consistent with research by Kogan and Unt (2003) which indicates the increasing importance of education in securing initial employment in Slovenia and Hungary. This social differentiation in Eastern Europe is partly, but not wholly, accounted for by inequalities in educational outcomes. It would appear that parental cultural

capital plays an important role in the transition economies, not just in securing higher education for their children but also in facilitating access to more prestigious occupations. At the other end of the spectrum, Finland, Sweden and, to a lesser extent, Austria and France show very low social background differences in young people's chances of entering a prestigious job.

Controlling for young people's educational attainment substantially reduces social inequalities in the occupational status of first job and reduces, but does not cancel out, country variations in this outcome. Once again we have found no, or only very limited, effects of field of education in explaining social class differences in young people's occupational status.

The influence of gender on early labour market integration processes is quite distinct to that of social background (see Table 9). In the Southern European countries along with France and Belgium, young women are found to be at a disadvantage in accessing paid employment compared with their male counterparts, in spite of their higher educational qualifications. However, when they do access employment, young women are found to occupy higher occupational status positions on entering the labour market than young men, primarily because of these higher educational qualifications. In Slovenia and Romania young women have higher chances of entering employment than young men. However, their advantage is related very little to their higher educational level or field of study attended. In all four Eastern European countries, the likelihood of entering more prestigious occupational positions is higher for women than for men. However, in these countries (with the exception of Romania) an important part of women's advantage is linked to women's choice of field of study. Noteworthy is the relative absence of marked gender differences found in the remaining countries, Sweden, Finland and Austria. In sum, cross-national variation by gender in early labour market outcomes is not readily explicable in terms of educational level and field of study and it is clear that these differences must be understood in terms of specific societal systems, including labour market regulation, family systems and welfare régimes.

Notes

[1] Finland and Sweden (as well as Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the UK, which are not included in this paper) chose a shorter time period, five years, as the time span between leaving education and the time of the survey.

[2] Interruptions of study lasting less than one year are not considered as "leaving continuous education".

[3] Regional vocational courses (which may have a component of training) are included.

[4] Initial training is considered as part of the education system.

[5] The other countries are Denmark, Portugal and United Kingdom for which information on parental education was not collected.

[6] In the Italian context, the information on field of study of the highest level of education completed is usually more relevant than the information on the field of education related to the level when young people left continuous education. It is the field of the qualification achieved that is mainly considered by the future employer. This is because in most universities in Italy a student may choose how many exams to take each year and he/she may be enrolled in the university for several years while passing only a few exams. Thus it is the subject studied of the course completed which is most relevant for knowing the skills or knowledge a young person has acquired through education or training.

[7] This is calculated by summing the absolute differences in the proportion of males and females (or in the proportion of young people from different social classes) in each educational field and dividing the total by two.

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List of tables and figures

Table 1: Intergenerational upward mobility and stability between young people's educational attainment and their parents' educational attainment (percentages)

	Total upward mobility		*Upward mobility rates for young people with low-educated parents*		*Stability rates for young people with high-educated parents*	
	F	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*
Austria	26	25	74	78	88	88
Sweden	32	24	82	81	91	87
Finland	34	27	90	84	90	87
France	53	45	76	71	88	85
Belgium	51	41	80	68	94	91
Greece	63	57	84	76	96	90
Spain	59	46	67	53	89	80
Italy	49	42	66	58	86	80
Hungary	26	24	65	68	92	91
Slovenia	46	32	93	86	95	92
Romania	30	28	53	53	87	87
Slovakia	19	19	86	85	98	98

Note: low-educated parents are those parents whose highest educational attainment is lower secondary or below (ISCED 1-2); high-educated parents are those parents whose highest educational attainment is upper secondary (ISCED 3) and above.

Table 2: Degree of over-representation of those with parents with tertiary education among different fields of education at upper secondary level

	General	Education	Arts	Social/ business	Science	Engineering	Agriculture	Health/ welfare	Services
Austria	3.8	1.8	1.5	1.1	1.0	0.7	0.9	0.9	0.5
Sweden	0.8	0.3	2.3	2.0	1.5	0.7	1.2	0.5	0.5
Finland	3.5	0.1	1.1	0.8	1.4	0.5	0.4	0.7	0.4
France	2.6	4.3	1.9	0.8	3.1	0.6	2.9	1.2	1.0
Belgium	1.0	1.1	1.8	1.2	1.3	1.0	0.8	1.2	0.7
Greece	0.8	2.1	2.1	1.7	1.8	0.7	0.0	0.5	1.9
Spain	1.4	0.7	1.4	0.4	2.1	0.8	0.5	0.7	0.3
Italy	0.3	1.0	3.3	0.8	4.8	0.6	0.7	0.4	0.4
Hungary	3.9	3.0	6.3	1.1	4.3	0.6	0.8	1.1	1.0
Slovenia	1.4	2.8	7.3	2.1	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.6	0.7
Romania	0.1	2.0	1.5	4.1	1.4	0.6	0.3	2.7	1.2
Slovakia	4.7	11.5	2.4	1.7	0.4	0.6	0.5	1.1	0.6

Note: The measure refers to the ratio between the proportion of those from tertiary backgrounds and the proportion of those from lower secondary backgrounds on the specified course. A ratio of one indicates equal representation, a ratio greater than one indicate over-representation while a ratio of less than one indicates under-representation.

Table 3: Degree of over-representation of those with parents with tertiary education among different fields of education at tertiary education level

	Education	Arts	Social/ business	Science	Engineering	Agriculture	Health/ welfare	Services
Austria	0.8	0.7	1.0	1.3	1.0	0.4	1.8	0.4
Sweden	0.7	0.7	2.2	1.3	1.1	1.5	0.5	1.5
Finland	1.2	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.3	0.8	1.0
France	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.3	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.1
Belgium	1.0	2.1	1.3	0.7	1.0	1.2	0.7	0.4
Greece	0.7	1.0	1.0	1.4	1.3	0.5	1.3	0.5
Spain	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.3	0.9	1.6	0.7	1.0
Italy	0.3	0.7	1.2	0.8	1.0	1.5	1.1	.
Hungary	0.6	1.2	1.0	2.5	1.4	1.6	1.7	0.6
Slovenia	1.3	0.9	0.8	0.7	1.3	1.8	3.2	0.9
Romania	0.3	0.4	1.1	1.8	1.4	1.9	3.1	0.4
Slovakia	1.1	1.3	2.3	0.9	0.9	0.2	1.0	0.0

Table 4: Educational segregation (index of dissimilarity) by gender and parental background

	Gender segregation		*Class segregation*		*Gender segregation within social class groupings*		
	Upper sec.	Tertiary	Upper sec.	Tertiary	Lower sec.	Upper sec.	Tertiary
Austria	58.9	44.5	18.7	13.6	55.8	55.0	39.5
Sweden	37.8	41.0	25.6	23.2	38.3	38.1	30.1
Finland	35.6	44.2	37.9	5.0	45.1	40.3	32.3
France	57.6	33.1	20.9	4.3	44.5	50.7	31.2
Belgium	32.4	28.4	4.9	13.6	35.8	32.7	32.2
Greece	16.7	31.4	15.1	10.9	20.8	23.3	22.0
Spain	32.1	38.2	20.3	5.5	32.7	32.5	32.2
Italy	38.1	20.4	30.3	11.8	27.4	32.1	24.7
Hungary	47.7	41.8	26.7	18.3	36.9	44.4	36.3
Slovenia	47.1	37.3	29.4	16.2	45.6	47.5	45.6
Romania	22.7	38.6	34.7	27.4	12.9	22.6	38.0
Slovakia	43.3	38.9	31.1	21.4	34.8	41.9	38.1

Table 5: Logistic regression model of employment chances, social background differences

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	1.480***	1.054***	1.316***
Parents' education (ref. Lower-secondary education or less)			
Upper secondary (ISCED 3-4)	0.235***	0.143***	0.116***
Tertiary (ISCED 5-6)	0.524***	0.241***	0.242***
Young people's educational attainment (ref. Lower secondary or below)			
Upper secondary (ISCED 3-4)		0.439***	
Tertiary (ISCED 5-6)		0.987***	
Young people's education: level and field of study combined (ref. Upper secondary general)			
Lower secondary (ISCED 1-2)			-0.257***
Upper sec.: Education			-0.240**
Upper sec: Humanities and Arts			-0.053
Upper sec.: Social Sciences			0.167***
Upper sec.: Sciences			0.019
Upper sec.: Engineering			0.338***
Upper sec.: Agriculture			0.145
Upper sec.: Health			0.349***
Upper sec.: Services			0.247***
Tertiary: General			0.934**
Tertiary: Education			0.723***
Tertiary: Arts			0.352***
Tertiary: Social Sciences			0.631***
Tertiary: Sciences			0.905***
Tertiary: Engineering			1.087***
Tertiary: Agriculture			0.700***
Tertiary: Health			0.865***
Tertiary: Services			0.694***

Note: * significant at 0.05 level; ** significant at 0.01 level; *** significant at 0.001 level

Table 6: Logistic regression model of employment chances, social background and gender differences

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	1.690***	1.281***	1.584***	1.703***
Female (ref. male)	-0.420***	-0.544***	-0.515***	-0.732***
Parents' education (ref. Lower-secondary education or less)				
Upper secondary (ISCED 3-4)	0.066*	-0.063	-0.088**	-0.082*
Tertiary (ISCED 5-6)	0.331***	0.000	0.007	0.014
Female parents' education*				
female*upper secondary education parents	0.332***	0.388***	0.397***	0.387***
female*tertiary education parents	0.385***	0.435***	0.423***	0.420***
Young people's educational level (ref. Lower secondary)				
Upper secondary (ISCED 3-4)		0.475***		
Tertiary (ISCED 5-6)		1.106***		
*Female*educational attainment*				
Female*upper secondary		0.030		
Female*tertiary		-0.053		
Young people's educational attainment (ref. Upper secondary general)				
Lower secondary (ISCED 1-2)			-0.311***	-0.418***
Upper sec.: Education			-0.141	-0.667***
Upper sec: Humanities and Arts			-0.003	-0.211
Upper sec.: Social Sciences			0.230***	-0.177*
Upper sec.: Sciences			0.008	-0.090
Upper sec.: Engineering			0.240***	0.176**
Upper sec.: Agriculture			0.088	0.015
Upper sec.: Health			0.460***	0.024
Upper sec.: Services			0.281***	-0.051
Tertiary: General			0.931**	0.692*
Tertiary: Education			0.815***	0.732**
Tertiary: Arts			0.404***	-0.030
Tertiary: Social Sciences			0.686***	0.543***
Tertiary: Sciences			0.899***	0.808***
Tertiary: Engineering			0.988***	0.940***
Tertiary: Agriculture			0.658***	0.964***
Tertiary: Health			0.957***	0.808***
Tertiary: Services			0.718***	1.066***
*Female*educational attainment:*				
Lower secondary (3-4)				0.188*
Upper sec.: Education				0.725**
Upper sec: Humanities and Arts				0.348*
Upper sec.: Social Sciences				0.631***
Upper sec.: Sciences				0.167
Upper sec.: Engineering				-0.058
Upper sec.: Agriculture				0.079
Upper sec.: Health				0.581**
Upper sec.: Services				0.571***
Tertiary: General				0.516
Tertiary: Education				0.173
Tertiary: Arts				0.680***
Tertiary: Social Sciences				0.252**
Tertiary: Sciences				0.157
Tertiary: Engineering				-0.113
Tertiary: Agriculture				-0.632*
Tertiary: Health				0.254
Tertiary: Services				-0.526*

Note: * significant at 0.05 level; ** significant at 0.01 level; *** significant at 0.001 level

Table 7: OLS regression of occupational status of first significant job, social background differences

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	39.81***	31.29***	37.95***
Parents' education (ref. ISCED 1-2, ie Lower-secondary education or less)			
Upper secondary (ISCED 3-4)	3.21***	2.31***	2.49***
Tertiary (ISCED 5-6)	12.76***	6.12***	6.15***
Young people's educational attainment (ref. ISCED 1-2)			
Upper secondary (ISCED 3-4)		6.17***	
Tertiary (ISCED 5-6)		21.74***	
Young people's educational attainment and field of study lastly attended (ref. ISCED 3-4 general)			
Lower secondary (ISCED 1-2)			-6.69***
Upper sec.: Education			4.73***
Upper sec.: Humanities and Arts			3.60***
Upper sec.: Social Sciences			4.15***
Upper sec.: Sciences			3.53***
Upper sec.: Engineering			-3.22***
Upper sec.: Agriculture			-7.02***
Upper sec.: Health			-2.09***
Upper sec.: Services			-3.06***
Tertiary: General			10.51***
Tertiary: Education			17.77***
Tertiary: Arts			15.40***
Tertiary: Social Sciences			14.62***
Tertiary: Sciences			19.83***
Tertiary: Engineering			13.97***
Tertiary: Agriculture			15.32***
Tertiary: Health			15.38***
Tertiary: Services			5.82***
R square (adjusted)	*0.078*	*0.348*	*0.377*

Note: * significant at 0.05 level; ** significant at 0.01 level; *** significant at 0.001 level

Table 8: OLS regression of occupational status of first significant job, gender and social background differences

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	37.95***	30.81***	36.51***
Female (ref. male)	4.08***	1.33***	3.08***
Parents' education (ref. ISCED 1-2, ie Lower-secondary education or less)			
Upper secondary (ISCED 3-4)	3.27***	2.23***	2.32***
Tertiary (ISCED 5-6)	14.12***	6.89***	6.67***
Female parents' education*			
female*education parents ISCED 3-4	-0.24	0.18	0.20
female*education parents ISCED 5-6	-3.07***	-1.54***	-1.36***
Young people's educational attainment (ref. ISCED 1-2)			
Upper secondary (ISCED 3-4)		5.02***	
Tertiary (ISCED 5-6)		22.45***	
Female Young people's educational attainment*			
female* ISCED 3-4		2.17***	
female* ISCED 5-6		-1.74***	
Young people's educational attainment and field of study last attended (ref. ISCED 3-4 general)			
Lower secondary (ISCED 1-2)			-5.70***
Upper sec.: Education			0.18
Upper sec.: Humanities and Arts			3.65***
Upper sec.: Social Sciences			4.31***
Upper sec.: Sciences			5.37***
Upper sec.: Engineering			-1.96***
Upper sec.: Agriculture			-6.62***
Upper sec.: Health			0.90
Upper sec.: Services			-1.72***
Tertiary: General			14.01***
Tertiary: Education			18.48***
Tertiary: Arts			15.96***
Tertiary: Social Sciences			17.37***
Tertiary: Sciences			21.11***
Tertiary: Engineering			14.40***
Tertiary: Agriculture			15.14***
Tertiary: Health			25.28***
Tertiary: Services			8.39***
Female educational attainment and field of study lastly attended (ref. ISCED 3-4 general)*			
Female*Lower sec.(ISCED 1-2)			-1.76***
Female* Upper sec.: Education			4.27***
Female* Upper sec.: Humanities and Arts			-0.77
Female* Upper sec.: Social Sciences			-1.17**
Female* Upper sec.: Sciences			-4.02***
Female* Upper sec.: Engineering			-1.81***
Female* Upper sec.: Agriculture			0.58
Female* Upper sec.: Health			-4.77***
Female* Upper sec.: Services			-2.82***
Female* Tertiary: General			-8.05***
Female* Tertiary: Education			-1.96*
Female* Tertiary: Arts			-1.56*
Female* Tertiary: Social Sciences			-5.06***
Female* Tertiary: Sciences			-2.57**
Female* Tertiary: Engineering			3.02***
Female* Tertiary: Agriculture			1.49
Female* Tertiary: Health			-14.18***
Female* Tertiary: Services			-4.98***
R square (adjusted)	*0.093*	*0.356*	*0.385*

Note: * significant at 0.05 level; ** significant at 0.01 level; *** significant at 0.001 level

Table 9: Summary of cross-national patterns in gender and social background differences (outliers)

	Educational level		Field of study (segregation)		Employment chances		Occupational status	
	Gender	Social background	Gender	Social background	Gender	Social background	Gender	Social background
Austria			++	- (upper sec.)		-		-
Sweden			+ (tertiary)	+ (tertiary)		+	-	--
Finland			++ (tertiary)	+ (upper sec.) - (tertiary)		-	-	--
France			++ (upper sec.)	-	-			-
Belgium	+	+		- (upper sec.)	-	+	+	
Greece	+	+	- (upper sec.)	-	-	-	+	
Spain	+	+		- (tertiary)	-		+	
Italy			- (tertiary)		-		+	
Hungary		++	+ (upper sec.)			++		++
Slovenia	+		+ (upper sec.)		+		+	+
Romania		++	- (upper sec.)	+	+		+	++
Slovakia		++		+		+		++

Gender: + outlier indicating female advantage; - outlier indicating female disadvantage.
Social background: + larger gap between upper secondary or tertiary and lower secondary backgrounds; - smaller gap between upper secondary or tertiary and lower secondary backgrounds.

Figure 1: Odds ratios of gaining at least upper-secondary education (women compared to men and young people with parents with upper-secondary education and above compared to young people with parents with lower-secondary education or less)

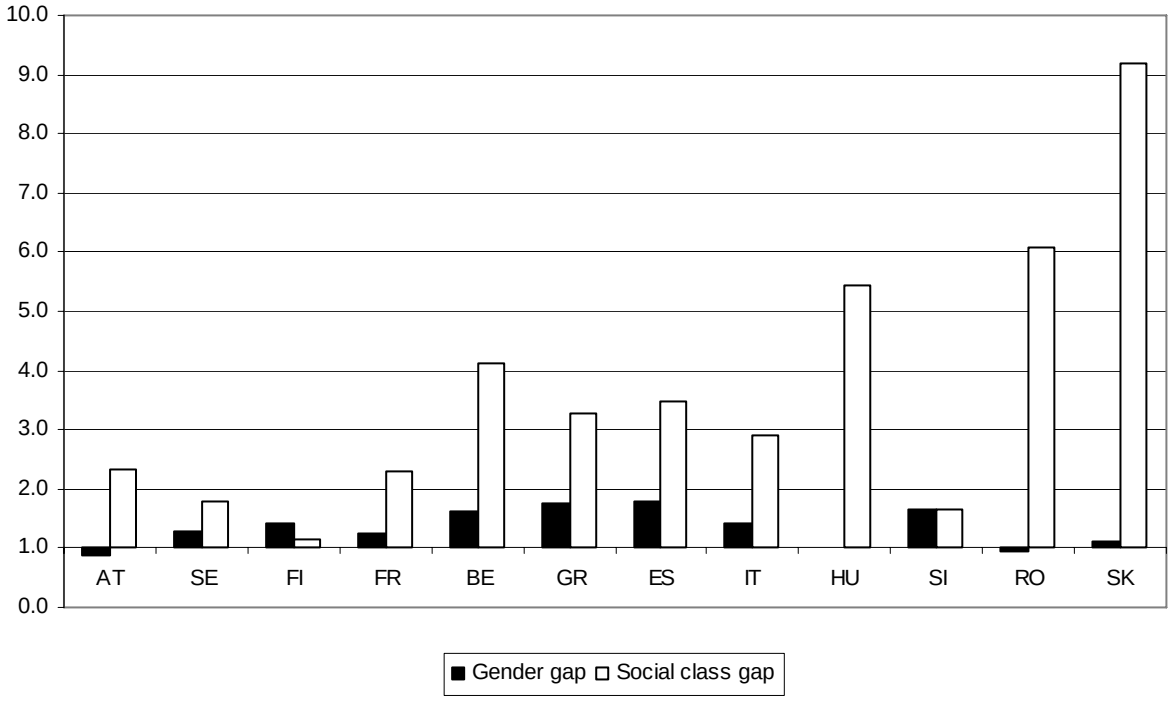


Figure 2: Social background differences in employment chances by country (comparing ISCED 3-4 with ISCED 1-2)

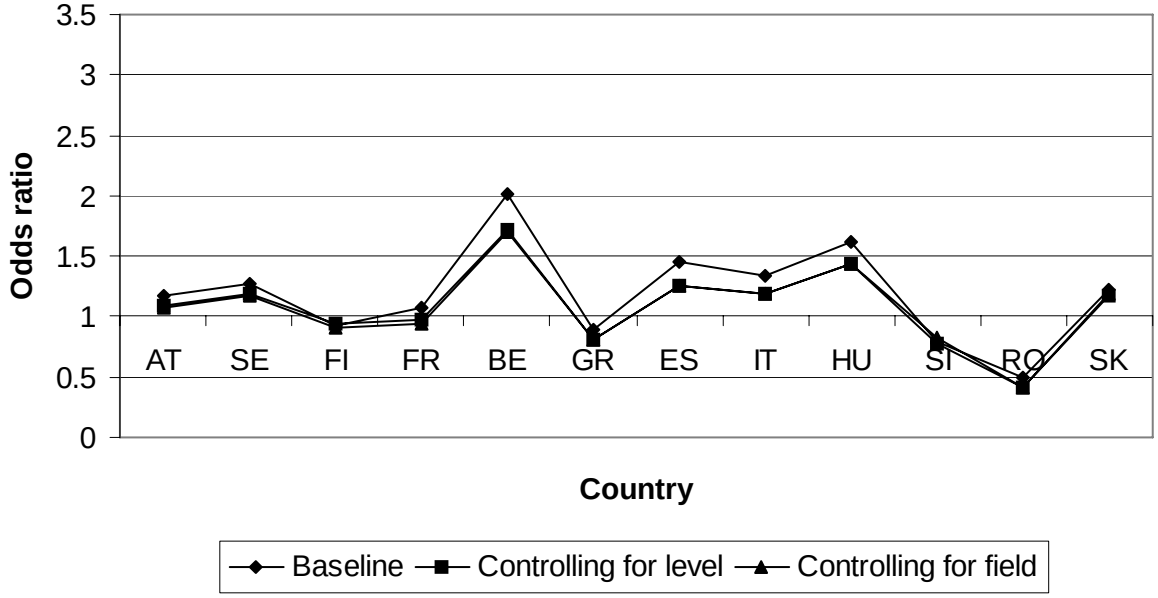


Figure 3: Social background differences in employment chances by country (comparing ISCED 5-6 with ISCED 1-2)

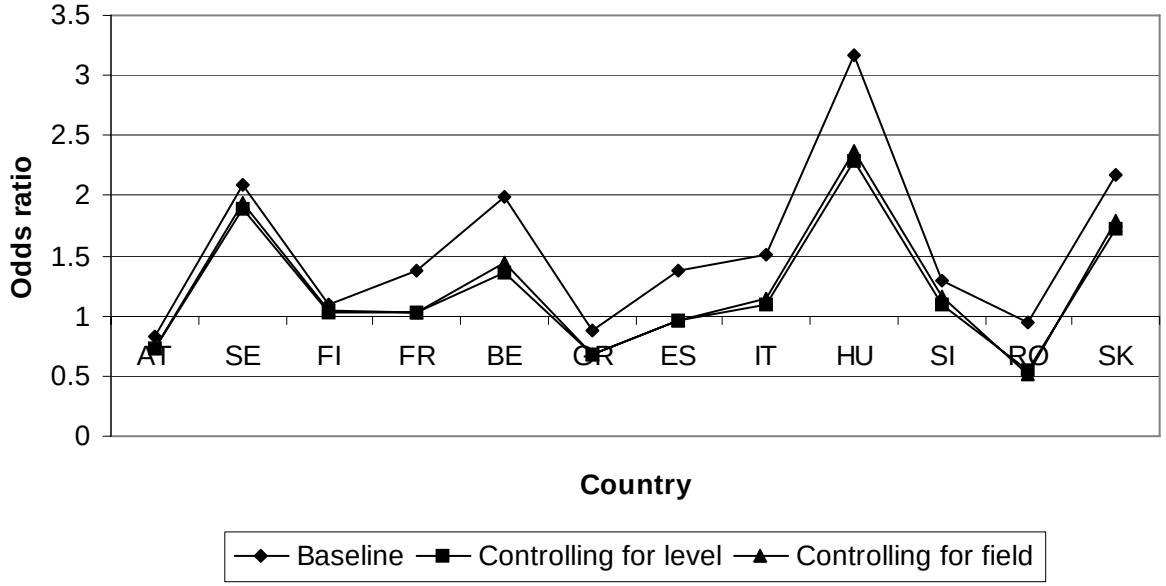


Figure 4: Gender differences in employment chances by country

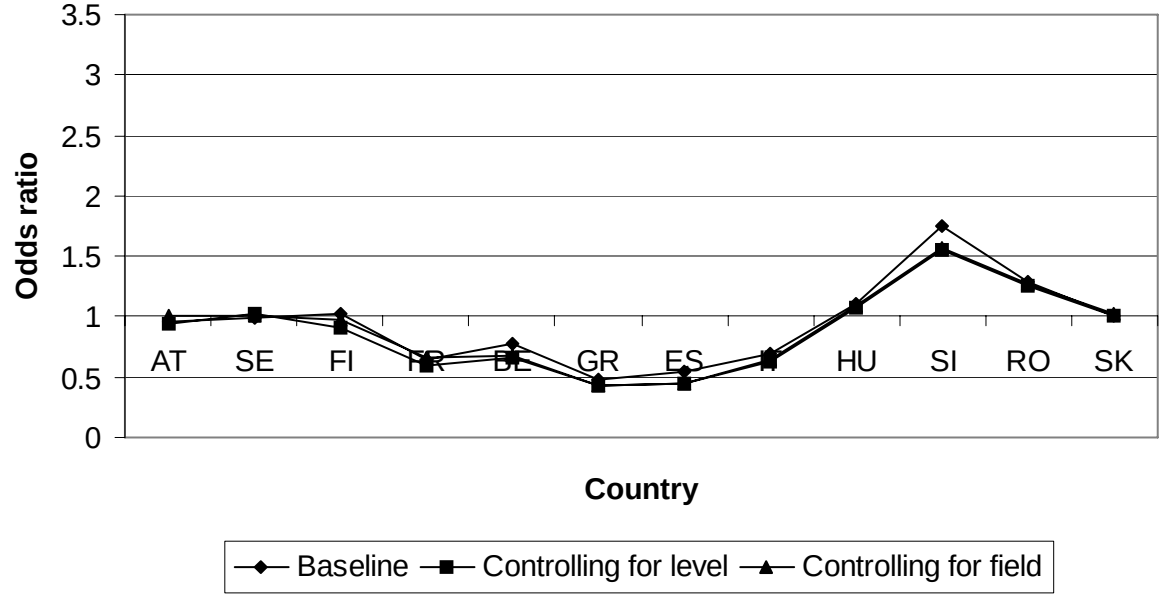


Figure 5: Average occupational status of men and women by parental education

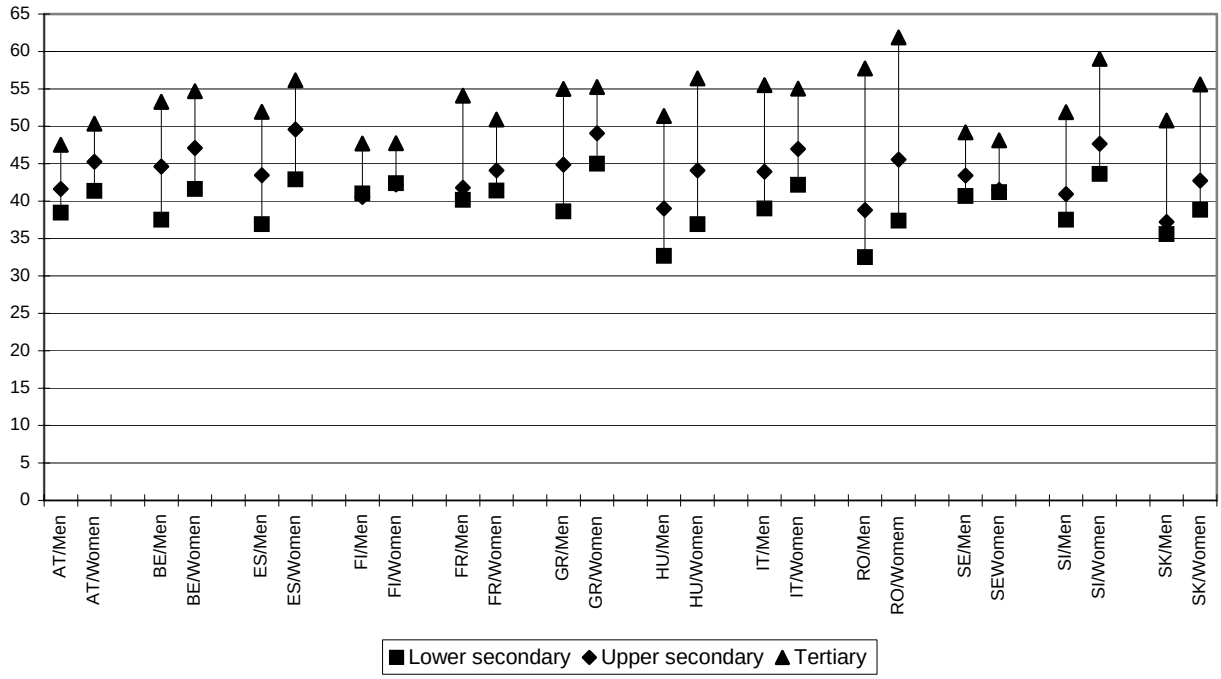


Figure 6: Country variation in social background differences in occupational status (young people with parents with ISCED 3-4 compared to young people with parents with ISCED 1-2)

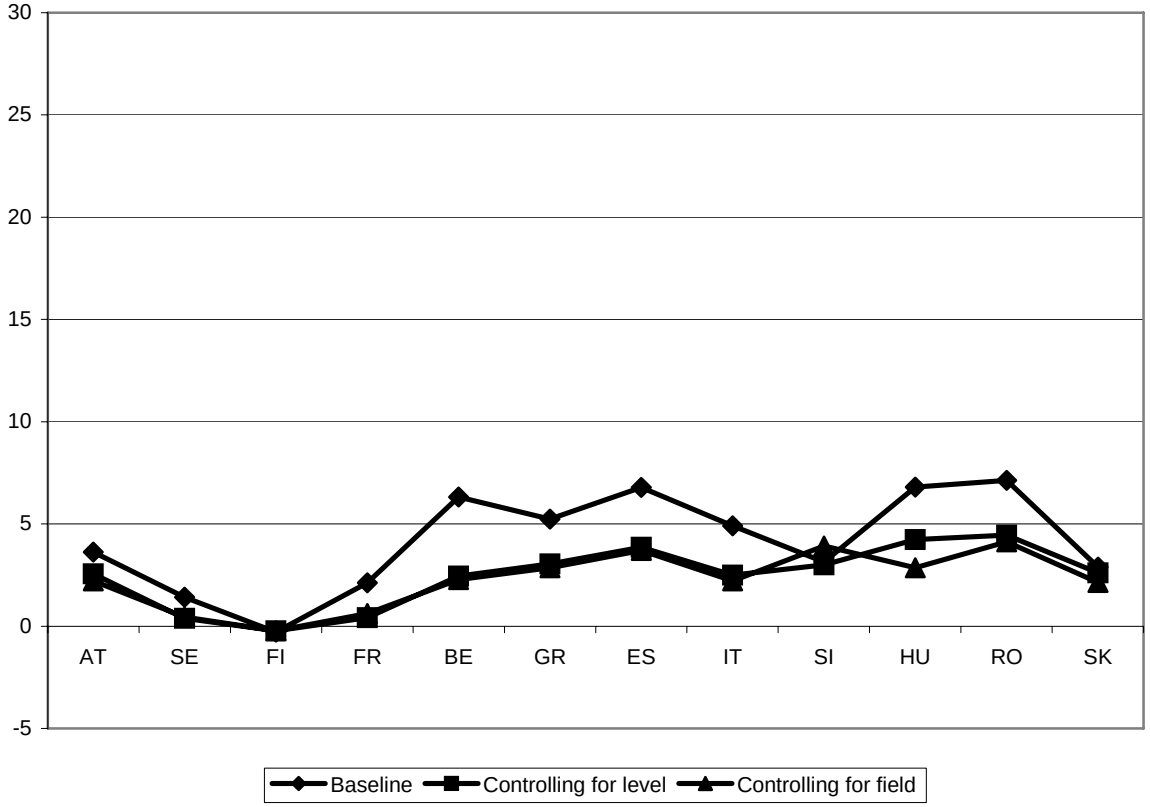


Figure 7: Country variation in social background differences in occupational status (young people with parents with ISCED 5-6 compared to young people with parents with ISCED 1-2)

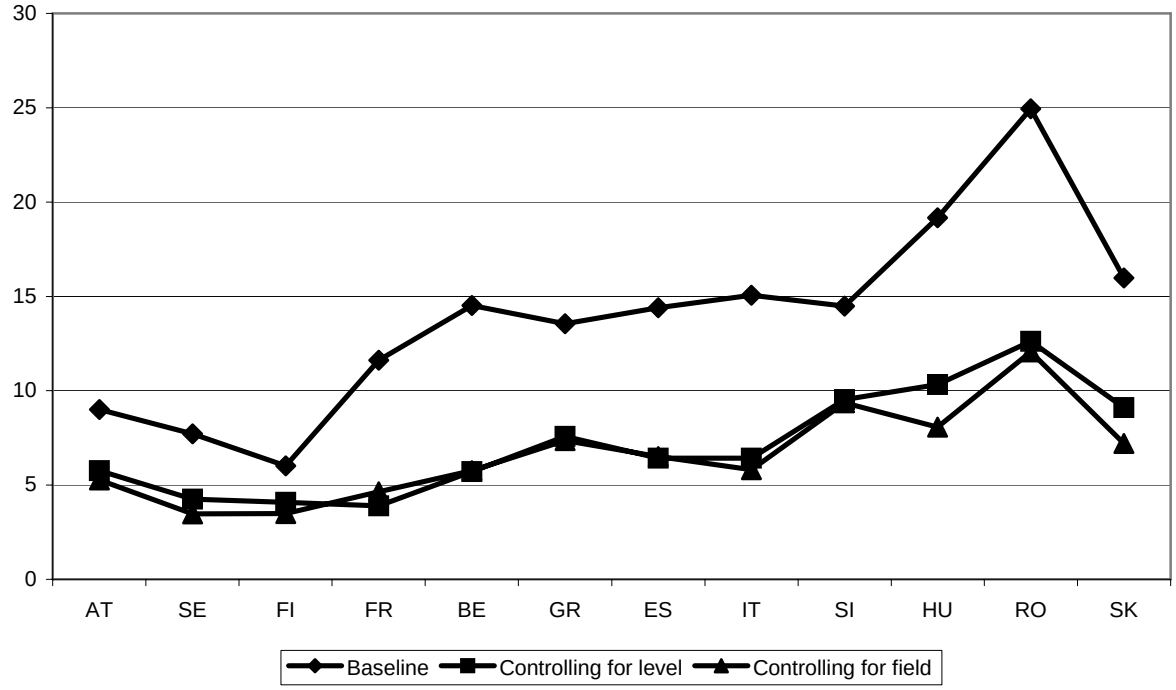
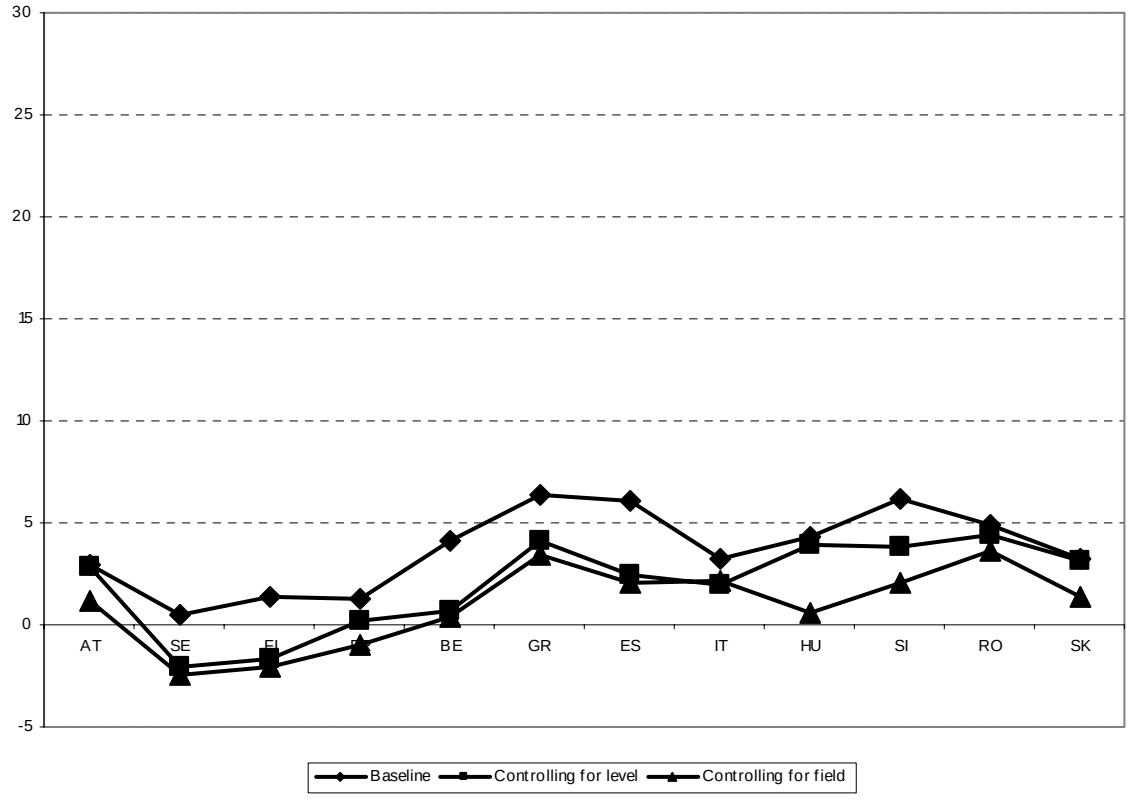


Figure 8: Gender differences in occupational status by country



Appendix Table 1: Mean (and in parentheses standard deviation) of the main characteristics of young people in the LFS 2000 ad hoc module data

	AT	BE	ES	FI	FR	GR	HU	IT	RO	SE	SI	SK
Total Number of cases	4632	2930	14909	3576	19444	7654	8614	17331	4693	1872	1750	3872
Female	0.48	0.48	0.47	0.49	0.50	0.52	0.49	0.48	0.46	0.51	0.47	0.50
	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.50)	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.50)
Highest educational attainment when leaving continuous educat./training												
Lower-secondary or less	0.15	0.17	0.35	0.12	0.20	0.15	0.15	0.29	0.27	0.14	0.08	0.04
	(0.36)	(0.37)	(0.48)	(0.32)	(0.40)	(0.36)	(0.35)	(0.45)	(045)	(0.35)	(0.27)	(0.19)
Upper-secondary	0.74	0.42	0.22	0.56	0.42	0.58	0.70	0.56	0.63	0.62	0.70	0.86
	(0.44)	(0.49)	(0.41)	(0.50)	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.46)	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.49)	(0.46)	(0.34)
Tertiary	0.11	0.41	0.43	0.32	0.37	0.27	0.15	0.14	0.10	0.24	0.22	0.10
	(0.31)	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.47)	(0.48)	(0.44)	(0.35)	(0.35)	(0.30)	(0.43)	(0.41)	(0.30)
Parents' highest educational attainment												
Lower-secondary or less	0.27	0.45	0.80	0.21	0.51	0.66	0.26	0.68	0.44	0.26	0.33	0.16
	(0.44)	(0.50)	(0.40)	(0.41)	(0.50)	(0.47)	(0.44)	(0.46)	(0.50)	(0.44)	(0.47)	(0.37)
Upper-secondary	0.54	0.29	0.10	0.42	0.34	0.25	0.61	0.26	0.50	0.37	0.51	0.76
	(0.50)	(0.45)	(0.30)	(0.49)	(0.47)	(0.43)	(0.49)	(0.44)	(0.50)	(0.48)	(0.50)	(0.42)
Tertiary	0.19	0.26	0.10	0.36	0.15	0.09	0.13	0.06	0.06	0.36	0.16	0.08
	(0.39)	(0.44)	(0.30)	(0.48)	(0.36)	(0.28)	(0.33)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.48)	(0.36)	(0.27)
Experience of first significant job												
Had a first significant job	0.75	0.86	0.68	0.66	0.80	0.71	0.84	0.71	0.48	0.84	0.83	0.67
	(0.43)	(0.34)	(0.47)	(0.47)	(0.40)	(0.45)	(0.37)	(0.45)	(0.50)	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.47)
Average occupational status of first significant job (ISEI)	43.2	45.2	41.8	43.7	43.2	44.3	41.5	43.6	40.7	43.7	44.5	40.7
	(14.4)	(16.2)	(16.5)	(16.7)	(14.5)	(15.2)	(14.2)	(14.5)	(14.7)	(16.1)	(15.3)	(13.7)