

The economic activity of women in the European Union

66% of men and 45% of women in the European Union as a whole were economically active in 1995.

The activity rate of women is lower than that of men in every single Member State.

Similarly, for each age-group the activity rate of women is lower than that of men. The difference is relatively small among men and women under 25-30 years, but women above this age are much less likely to be involved in economic activity, especially in Ireland, Luxembourg, Greece, Italy and Spain. These are the Member States where the differences between male and female activity rates are therefore most striking.

For obvious reasons, the activity rate of women is connected with the number and age of their children. It is also linked, to a greater degree than is the case for men, to the level of education which they have received.

Table 1
Activity rates by sex - 1995

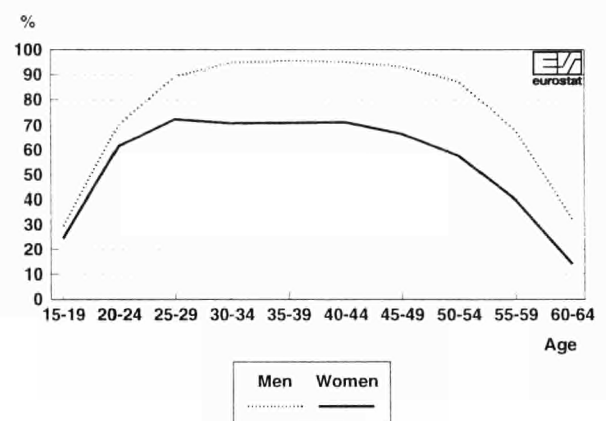
	EUR 15	B	DK	D	GR	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK
Men	66.2	61.2	72.1	68.6	64.4	61.9	63.4	68.4	61.9	66.4	70.4	70.5	67.8	66.3	67.6	71.2
Women	45.0	40.5	57.5	47.7	35.5	35.4	48.2	39.9	33.9	35.9	48.3	49.4	49.5	56.2	58.5	52.4
Total	55.2	50.5	64.6	57.7	49.2	48.2	55.4	53.9	47.4	50.8	59.3	59.4	58.1	61.1	62.9	61.5

Activity rates are calculated as the percentage of persons who either have a job or are unemployed, out of the population aged over 15 years.

The activity rate for 1995 in the European Union as a whole is 55%. The rate for women alone is 45%. (If the figures are calculated on the base of the population between 15 and 65 years, they are 67% for the total and 57% for women).

In every Member State of the European Union, the activity rate for women is lower than for men. It also varies far more between Member States, ranging from 34% in Italy to 58% in Sweden, whereas the male activity rate varies only between 61% and 72% (in Belgium and Denmark respectively).

Figure 1:
Activity rates by age and sex - EUR15 - 1995



Manuscript completed on = 15.12.1996

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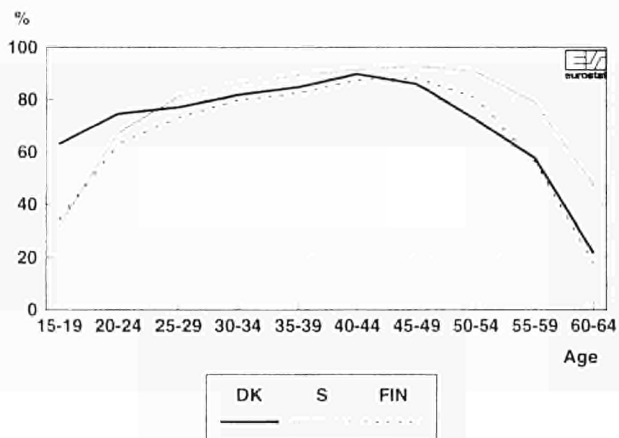
Price (excl. VAT) in Luxembourg: Subscription 'Statistics in focus' of all themes: ECU 310
Subscription 'Statistics in focus' of Theme 2 'Population and social conditions': ECU 85
Single copy: ECU 6

Catalogue number: CA-NK-97-001-EN-C

Activity for women is linked to part-time work

In the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden), women are more likely to be involved in economic activity, at all ages, than in the other EU Member States (Figure 2). Here the activity rates of men and women are quite similar, except in the 25-40 age-group where women generally have the most demanding family commitments. Over 30% of women aged between 15 and 64 and with a job, work part-time in Sweden (43%) and in Denmark (35%).

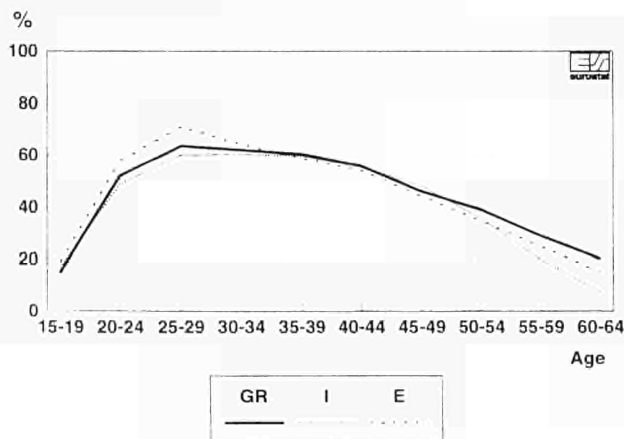
Figure 2:
Activity rates for women by age in 1995 - Denmark, Sweden, Finland



Activity rates for women are particularly low on the other hand, at all ages, in Greece, Italy and Spain (figure 3). It is in these countries that part-time work is least common.

It is therefore interesting to observe, for example, that although the activity rate of women is much lower in Greece than in Sweden, the percentage of women working full-time is higher in Greece (51%) than in Sweden (45%).

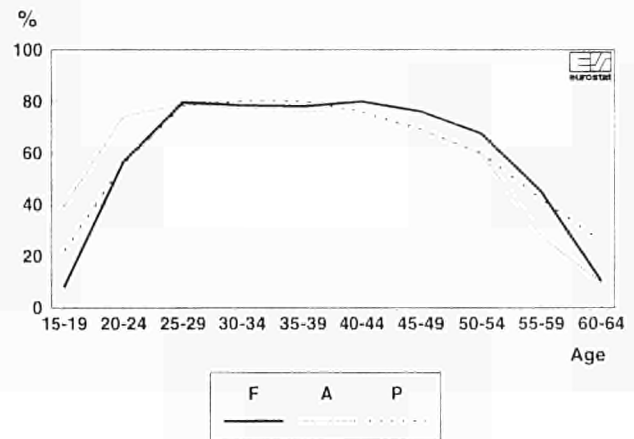
Figure 3:
Activity rates for women by age in 1995 - Greece, Spain, Italy



In France, Austria and Portugal the activity rates of women are lower than for men, but the distribution by age follows the same curve for both sexes.

Part-time working is quite widespread in France (accounting for 29% of women aged 15-64 with a job) and in Austria (where the corresponding figure is 26%), whereas in Portugal it is much lower at 11%.

Figure 4:
Activity rates for women by age, 1995 - France, Austria, Portugal

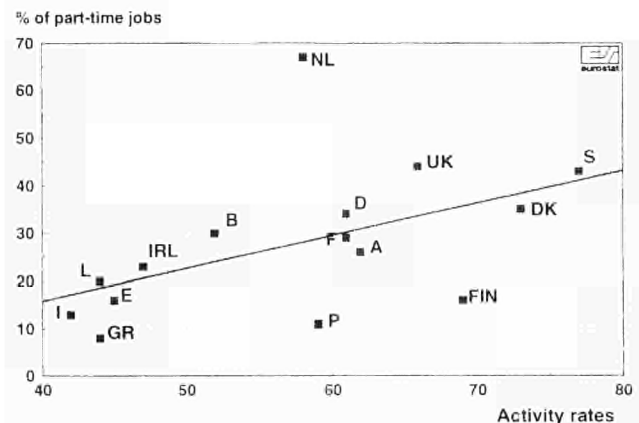


Activity rates by age-group represent the active population (persons with a job or unemployed) as a percentage of the population in this age-group.

Figure 5 shows the connection between the activity rate and the percentage of part-time jobs for women aged between 15 and 64 years.

The only Member States which are far from the regression line are the Netherlands (where part-time work is particularly common), Portugal and Finland.

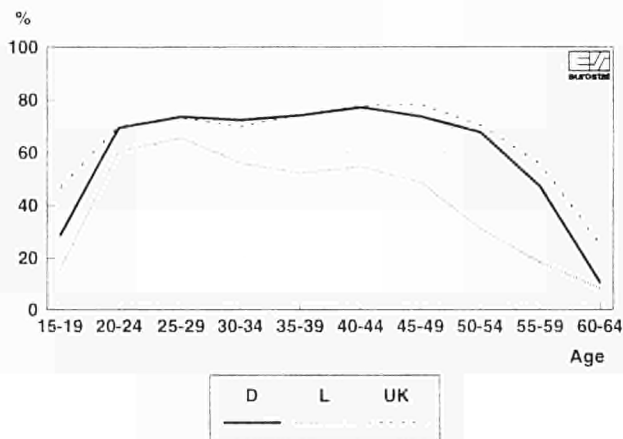
Figure 5:
Activity rates and percentage of part-time jobs for women aged between 15 and 64 years - 1995



Re-entry into the labour market after 35?

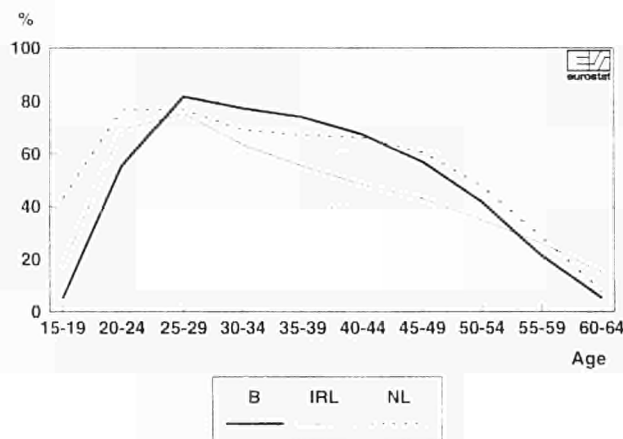
The figures for Germany, the United Kingdom and Luxembourg (Figure 6) and also the Netherlands (Figure 7) show a tendency for women to re-enter the labour market after the age of 35, resuming economic activity as their children become older.

Figure 6:
Activity rates for women by age, 1995 - Germany, Luxembourg, United Kingdom



The activity rates for women aged up to 30 in Belgium and Ireland (Figure 7) are so high as to approach those of men, but after this age they fall progressively.

Figure 7:
Activity rates for women by age, 1995 - Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands



Effect of the number of children on female activity rates different between Member States

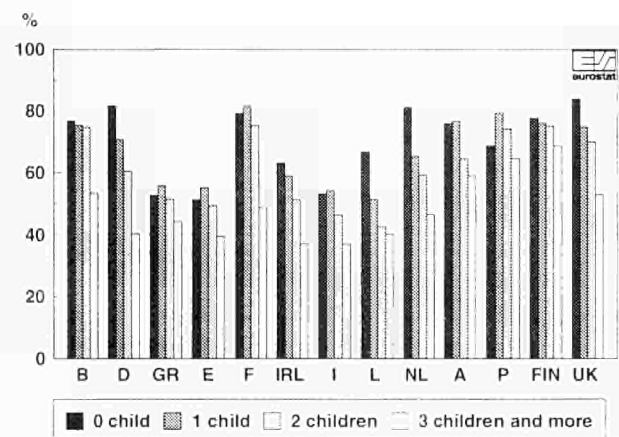
Figure 8 shows the activity rates of women aged between 20 and 45, according to the number of children aged less than 15. This age-group is chosen to concentrate on women involved in child-rearing, excluding those

who may be economically inactive for other reasons than bringing up a family (those under 20, for example, are often still in education). Data on the constitution of households is not available for Denmark and Sweden.

The diagram shows that female activity rates generally fall as the number of children increases, but the exact effect varies between the Member States. In Finland, the number of children makes little difference at all to the rate of activity. On the other hand, in Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, activity rates for women with one child are noticeably lower than for those with no children. This difference increases with the number of children.

In Italy and Austria, it is the presence of a second child which has the greatest effect on the activity rate, while in France and Belgium it is only mothers of more than two children who are noticeably less likely than other women to be in the labour market.

Figure 8:
Activity rates for women between 20 and 45 years, by the number of children - 1995



Activity rates of women are affected by the level of education which they have obtained

In all the EU Member States, activity rates rise with the level of education (Table 2). A comparison of activity rates for women and men also shows that the gap between them diminishes as the educational level increases (Figures 9 and 10). For the EU as a whole, the difference in the activity rates for men and women aged between 25 and 59 is 10 points for persons who have received higher education (95% for men and 85% for women), whereas for those who have received the educational level ISCED 0-2 it is as much as 34 points (86% and 52% for men and women respectively). In most countries, the difference between the activity rates of men and women with the same educational level is greater for those aged over 40, but this is noticeably not the case in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) nor in the United Kingdom.

Table 2:
Activity rates by age, educational level and sex - 1995

EUROSTAT	25-39 years						40-59 years					
	ISCED 5 - 7		ISCED 3		ISCED 0 - 2		ISCED 5 - 7		ISCED 3		ISCED 0 - 2	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
B	96.4	90.1	96.2	81.6	90.9	61.7	93.4	74.1	87.5	57.8	72.5	35.9
DK	95.6	89.6	94.3	81.5	86.7	64.9	93.9	91.4	88.5	78.9	80.4	63.8
D	96.7	84.4	91.1	74.8	91.3	56.4	93.6	83.8	87.4	68.8	80.4	51.7
GR	95.5	85.8	96.0	62.9	95.6	48.7	89.7	71.8	87.1	39.0	88.9	40.1
E	93.2	84.2	93.1	70.4	93.1	53.8	94.8	81.3	93.2	61.7	85.7	34.3
F	95.4	87.1	97.2	82.5	94.0	66.5	95.6	83.5	89.8	74.7	81.6	61.6
IRL	96.1	84.8	95.7	68.9	90.0	44.8	94.7	71.3	91.6	43.9	81.2	30.0
I	92.0	84.1	87.8	69.8	91.1	47.4	95.9	83.3	90.2	61.0	77.1	31.5
L	95.3	72.8	93.3	60.1	94.3	53.0	95.2	66.7	88.8	40.3	78.9	35.3
NL	94.8	87.3	95.8	70.7	82.8	52.0	93.2	76.9	86.4	54.8	72.8	37.7
A	94.7	92.5	94.2	78.9	92.0	70.3	97.0	81.9	86.6	62.6	81.6	53.4
P	98.0	95.6	90.3	79.4	94.7	75.6	95.0	90.5	91.1	75.2	86.5	58.3
S	93.7	90.4	92.9	87.4	94.5	75.6	97.8	97.0	97.6	95.8	95.5	89.3
FIN	95.0	85.3	89.6	78.6	86.9	68.4	91.9	91.1	82.8	81.4	73.4	73.5
UK	96.9	87.0	95.3	76.7	91.4	63.2	93.8	84.5	89.4	77.6	81.8	65.0

Level of education obtained

The different categories of education ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) have been grouped into three different levels :

- level ISCED 0-2 covers people who have received education up to and including the middle of secondary school, corresponding usually to the minimum school-leaving age
- level ISCED 3 covers people who have continued their education beyond the minimum school-leaving age to a level corresponding usually to the end of secondary school
- level ISCED 5-7 covers people who have received some recognised form of higher education and obtained the appropriate qualification

Figure 9:
Activity rates by level of education and age - Men - EUR15 - 1995

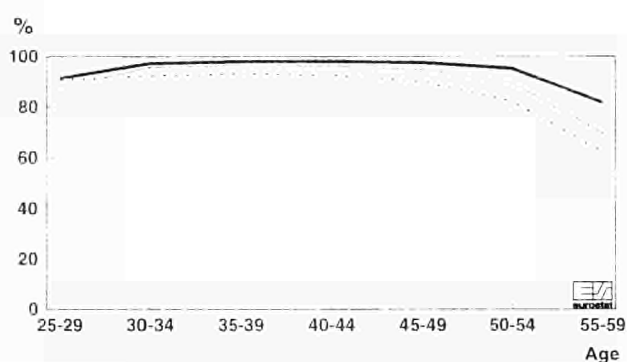
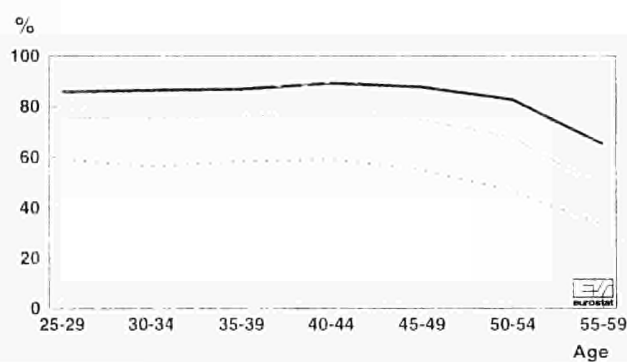


Figure 10:
Activity rates by level of education and age - Women - EUR15 - 1995



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