

Chapter B4

Types and modes of study

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Key

Study flexibility across Europe

Across the EUROSTUDENT countries, various forms of study flexibility are evident. On average, 15 % of students have part-time status, 9 % are enrolled in distance learning programmes, and 23 % are studying predominantly or entirely online (categories not exclusive).

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Structural variations in study modes across national higher education systems

National higher education systems exhibit varied relationships between study intensity and flexible study modes. Students appear to create their own flexibility through lower study intensity when formal structures are lacking. While most correlations lack significance, there are notable links between online and distance learning as well as between low study intensity and online learning.

Patterns in flexible study preference across demographics

Socio-demographic factors influence the uptake of flexible study modes across countries, with older students and those without tertiary educational background favouring part-time, distance, or online studies. Additionally, students reliant on their own employment income, studying Education or Business, Administration and Law, low study intensity, or with longer transition periods and alternative access routes into higher education are more inclined towards flexible modes.

findings

Satisfaction with study programme

On cross-country average, around two thirds of students recommend their main study programme, with similar satisfaction rates among online students and above-average satisfaction among part-time students in many countries.

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Social disparities across types of HEIs

Universities and research-intensive institutions enrol higher proportions of students from well-off and tertiary educated backgrounds. Similarly, institutions with high academic staff provision and research intensity also attract students from more privileged backgrounds. However, differences based on field specialisation and institutional control are less pronounced.

Study mode disparities across types of HEIs

Non-universities, institutions with higher imbalance in the student-to-academic staff ratios, less research-intensive, as well as subject-specialised HEIs show higher proportions of flexible study formats among their student populations. Although public HEIs more often offer part-time studies, students at private HEIs are more often distance or online students.

Main issues

While > [Chapter B3](#) addresses the openness of (re-)entry options to higher education (as an instrument for ensuring lifelong learning), the present chapter is dedicated to the different modes through which broad participation may be ensured (Annex II to the Rome Communiqué, 2020; EHEA Ministerial Conference, 2020), as well as the diversification of the institutional higher education landscape that might provide study structures for opening participation, but also has the potential to contribute to and enhance social inequalities (Arum et al., 2007).

Understanding the prevalence, demographics, and satisfaction levels associated with flexible study modes – such as part-time studies, distance learning, and online lectures – offers insight into the evolving landscape of higher education, particularly in the context of rapid technological advancements (Orr et al., 2018) and global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Coughlan et al., 2022; Katić et al., 2021). By examining the commonality and interconnections of flexible study modes between and within countries, we can gain a deeper understanding of shifting paradigms in educational delivery and accessibility (Fiorini et al., 2022; Hunt & Loxley, 2021; Orr et al., 2018). Exploring the demographics of students engaging in flexible study modes allows for a more nuanced understanding of educational equity and inclusivity, shedding light on the diverse needs and preferences of learners across different contexts (Matthews & Kotzee, 2020). Investigating student satisfaction in flexible study modes provides valuable feedback for educational institutions to refine and optimise their offerings, ultimately enhancing the quality of the learning experience and fostering student success (Ober & Kochmańska, 2022).

- How common are flexible study modes and how are they connected?
- Who studies in flexible study modes?
- How satisfied are students in flexible study modes with their course of study?

Exploring various characteristics of higher education institutions (HEIs) offers valuable insights into the diversity and dynamics of educational landscapes (Lepori, 2022). This includes different types of HEIs, such as universities and non-universities, and the level of private sector involvement, as well as education intensity (students per academic staff; Chifamba & Pedzisai, 2022; Palmisano et al., 2022), PhD intensity (as a proxy for institutional research intensity), and subject concentration (HEIs specialisation in certain study subjects). While institutional diversity can enrich a higher education system in numerous ways, such diversity becomes problematic when it reproduces and perpetuates social inequalities (Arum et al., 2007; Marginson, 2016; Palmisano et al., 2022; U-Multirank, 2022). Access to certain types of HEIs may be made difficult for specific societal groups, thereby reproducing and institutionalising social divides associated with obtaining a degree from e.g. a particularly research-intensive or highly specialised institution. Of particular concern here are the prosperity within students' families (which, according to the European objectives for the social dimension of education, should not influence institutional choice) and the educational background (a categorisation in which many inequalities in the endowment with economic, social, and cultural capital culminate). Understanding different HEI characteristics in the context of flexible modes of study sheds light on how these institutions create opportunities for flexible learning and cater to various student demographics. This understanding is essential for

addressing questions about the differential access and opportunities among students across diverse institutional settings.

- Are different types of HEI socially selective?
- Do the study modes differ between different types of HEI?

Data and interpretation

Variations and connections of flexible study modes

At the level of cross-country averages, considerable differences can already be identified regarding different types of flexible study modes (Figure B4.1). On average across countries, 15 % of students have an official part-time status, with an additional one percent having an officially classified ‘other’ status. In contrast, there are an average of 9 % of students enrolled in distance learning programmes. Finally, almost a quarter (23 %) were predominantly or entirely studying online at the time of survey (in most countries summer 2022/2023, see > [Chapter C3](#)), with an additional 20 % balancing their courses between online and in-person lectures.

Box B4.1

Methodological note: Types of flexible study modes

In the analyses presented in this chapter, three forms of flexible study modes are distinguished:

- Full-time vs. part-time (+ other) students: This classification is based on students’ formal current status, as recognised by law and HEIs in their respective countries. Students are expected to report their status according to their ‘de jure status’, not their ‘de facto status’ (which can be different based on the time allocation). The ‘other’ category encompasses alternative study modes officially recognised by institutions.
- Distance learners vs. attendance learners: This categorisation identifies students enrolled in study programmes that lack physical face-to-face interaction in lectures, classes, or taught studies, excluding exams.
- Students studying mostly/completely online vs. students studying in balanced modes vs. students studying mostly/completely in person: This categorisation stemmed from students’ responses to a Likert scale question, where they rated their current ratio of online to in-person teaching, with options ranging from 1 for completely online to 5 for completely in person. Students who chose options 1 and 2 were grouped as ‘students studying mostly/completely online’, those who chose option 3 were categorised as ‘students studying in balanced modes’, and those who selected options 4 and 5 were classified as ‘students studying mostly/completely in person’.

Even greater variance becomes apparent when examining the range of these three different forms of flexibilisation across EUROSTUDENT countries:

- At least a third of students in Poland and Malta have an official part-time status, while such an official part-time solution is not offered in Austria, Denmark, and Georgia. ‘Other’ official regulations regarding time commitment exist in relevant proportions only in Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Romania.

Figure B4.1

Study statuses and modes

Shares of students (in %)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, C.5, C.5b, TM.51. No data: FR (formal status of enrolment), CH, ES (learning modalities), CH, DE (delivery mode).

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), DE (summer 2021), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 1.8 What is your current formal status as a student? 1.2 Is your current # (main) study programme formally defined as a distance learning programme? M3.1 Please indicate the actual current and what you consider the ideal ratio between online and in-person teaching and learning in your studies. [actual current ratio]

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions: AT, CH, CZ, DK, FI, HR, NO, PL, SE.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

- In Georgia and Iceland, distance learning is very prevalent – with over a third and just under a quarter of students, respectively, studying in this mode – whereas the possibility of distance learning is not available in Azerbaijan, the Czech Republic, Croatia, and Hungary.
- While about half of students in Finland, Latvia, and Iceland predominantly or entirely attend their courses online, the proportion in Croatia, France, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Austria, and Portugal is less than 10 %.

Table B4.1

Relationship between part-time study status, distance learning, online mode, and low study intensityPearson's correlation coefficient (r), statistical significance (p)

	Part-time + other	Distance learning	Mostly/Completely online	Low study intensity
Part-time + other	$r = 1.000$			
Distance learning	$r = -0.034$ ($p = 0.883$)	$r = 1.000$		
Mostly/Completely online	$r = 0.255$ ($p = 0.252$)	$r = 0.589$ ($p = 0.005$)	$r = 1.000$	
Low study intensity	$r = 0.355$ ($p = 0.088$)	$r = 0.128$ ($p = 0.571$)	$r = 0.462$ ($p = 0.027$)	$r = 1.000$

Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, C.5, C.5b, TM.51, H.54. **No data:** FR (formal status of enrolment), CH, ES, NO (learning modalities), CH, DE (delivery mode).

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), DE (summer 2021), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 1.8 What is your current formal status as a student? 1.2 Is your current #(main) study programme formally defined as a distance learning programme? M3.1 Please indicate the actual current and what you consider the ideal ratio between online and in-person teaching and learning in your studies. [actual current ratio] 3.2 How many hours do you spend in taught courses and on personal study time in a typical week during the current #lecture period?

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions: AT, CH, CZ, DK, FI, HR, NO, PL, SE.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

Box B4.2

Methodological note: Correlation

Correlation is a measure of a relationship between variables. Correlation coefficients (i.e. Pearson's product-moment coefficient; r) do not indicate causality and are not used to make predictions, but instead show the degree of association between variables. In correlated data, the change in the magnitude of one variable is associated with a change in the magnitude of another variable, either in the same (positive correlation) or in the opposite (negative correlation) direction. Values of r closer to 1 or -1 indicate stronger relationships, while values closer to 0 indicate weaker relationships. Taking established thresholds as a reference, the resulting correlation coefficients can be classified as ranging from negligible (r : 0.00 to (-)0.10) or weak (r : 0.10 to 0.39) to moderate (r : 0.40 to 0.69; Schober et al., 2018). Established significance levels such as $p < 0.05$ indicate the probability of observing the correlation coefficient by chance – p -values above 0.05 indicate random findings; only selected findings in Table B4.1 may consequently be interpreted as statistically significant (i.e. relationships between online mode and distance learning as well as between low study intensity and online mode) and only these therefore do not represent random findings.

The correlation matrix shown in Table B4.1 analyses whether the three mentioned forms of flexible studying go hand in hand within countries and establishes a connection to the [study intensity](#) in countries. Most relationships are not significant, indicating the diversity and variation between national higher education systems regarding their study statuses and modes: In most cases, one characteristic does not coincide with another. Specifically, low study intensity is not correlated with the aggregated part-time and ‘other’ statuses or distance learning, again confirming (and expanding) the finding that student populations are creating their own flexibility in case the higher education system lacks a formal way to provide it (Hauschildt et al., 2021). However, online and distance learning are moderately ($r = 0.589$) and significantly ($p = 0.005$) correlated. Finally, low study intensity (mainly with regard to taught studies; [> Chapter B5](#)) is more common in higher education systems where broader shares of the student population are studying mostly or completely online ($r = 0.462$, $p = 0.027$).

In lack of formal flexible modes, students create their own flexibility.

Socio-demographic and study-related preferences for flexible study modes

Complementing socio-demographic and study-related trends in different forms of flexible study mode utilisation.

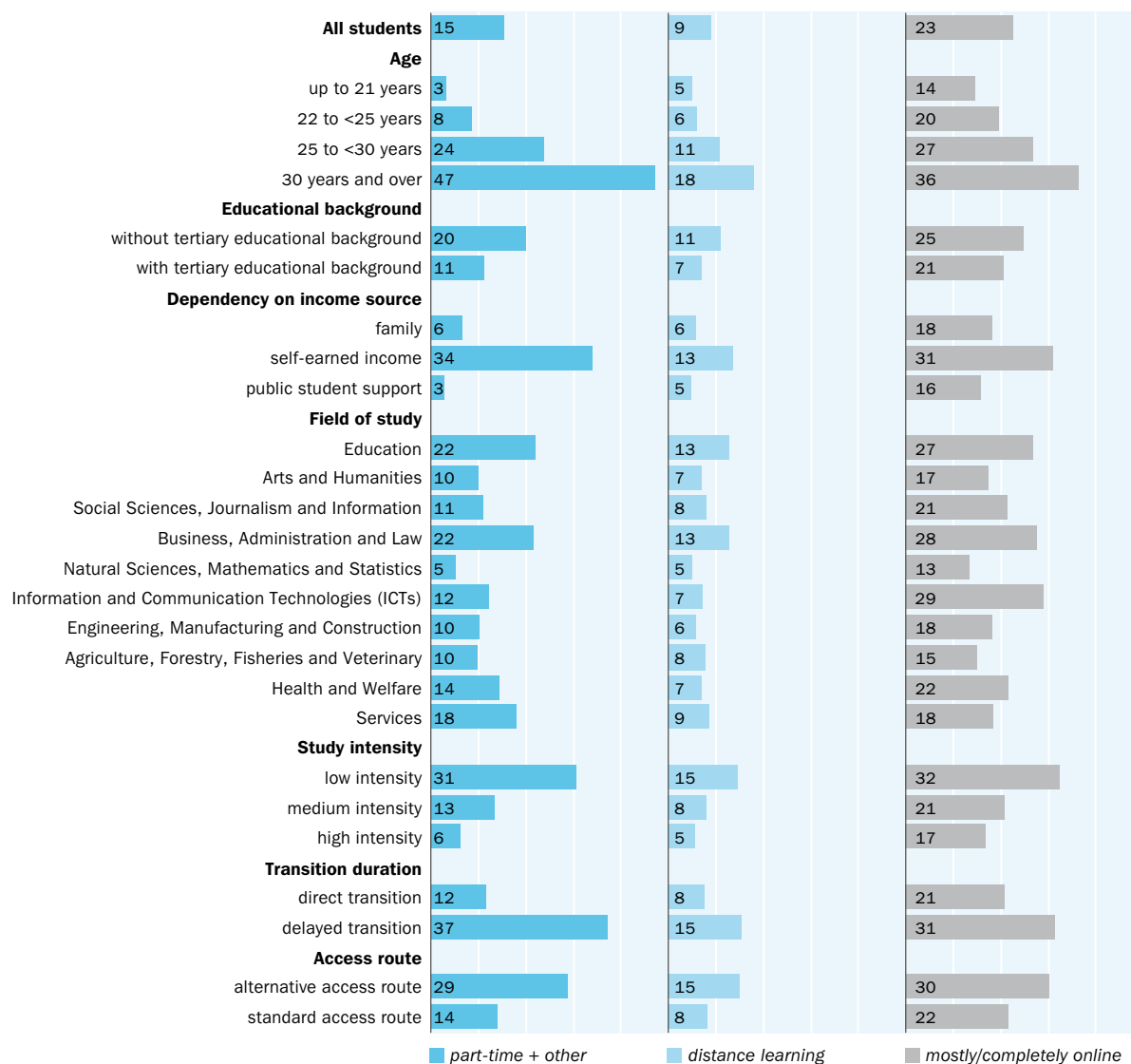
We now know that national higher education systems differ considerably in terms of the prevalence and extent of study flexibility. However, it remains to be seen whether common trends exist regarding the user groups of these flexible study forms. So, who are the students making use of the opportunities of part-time, distance, and online studies? In fact, despite all national differences regarding the range of offerings, common trends can be observed concerning a variety of student characteristics (Figure B4.2):

- The higher the age group, the more likely it is that part-time, distance, or online studies are embraced.
- Students without a tertiary educational background more frequently utilise the three forms of flexible studying on average across countries.
- Students whose income relies heavily (> 50 %) on earnings from employment make use of the opportunities of flexible studying much more often than students whose income stems mostly from family sources or public student support.
- Students in the fields of Education as well as Business, Administration and Law more frequently engage in part-time, distance, or online studies compared to those in other subject groups. Additionally (and not surprisingly), the group of students in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) stands out with a disproportionately high level of online studies.
- The higher the study intensity (i.e. the time spent on lectures and personal studies), the less likely a flexible study mode is adopted.
- Students who have a transition period of more than 2 years between leaving the school system and entering higher education more frequently opt for part-time, distance, or online studies than students with a relatively direct transition path from school into higher education.
- This finding is also reflected in terms of the access route (see [> Chapter B3](#) regarding the association between delayed entry to higher education and non-traditional study qualification routes); students with alternative pathways to higher education are disproportionately engaged in part-time, distance, or online studies.

The trends shown and described can be observed in all countries, with very few exceptions and to varying degrees ([> Database](#)).

Figure B4.2 [↓](#)**Study statuses and modes by student characteristics**

Cross-country averages (unweighted, in %)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, C.5, C.5b, TM.51. **No data:** FR (formal status of enrolment), CH, ES, NO (learning modalities), CH, DE (delivery mode).

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), DE (summer 2021), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 1.8 What is your current formal status as a student? 1.2 Is your current # (main) study programme formally defined as a distance learning programme? M3.1 Please indicate the actual current and what you consider the ideal ratio between online and in-person teaching and learning in your studies. [actual current ratio]

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions: AT, CH, CZ, DK, FI, HR, NO, PL, SE.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

Flexible study modes and satisfaction

Generally, on cross-country average, nearly two-thirds of all students would agree with the statement that they would recommend their current main study programme (65 %; Figure B4.3). This also corresponds to the proportion of the subgroup of predominantly online students (65 %). Students with part-time study status would

recommend their programme even more at 69% – slightly higher than the overall average of students across countries. However, a closer look at specific countries reveals a somewhat more nuanced picture of satisfaction with the study programme by study mode:

- While the proportion of online students who would recommend their study programme (as depicted in the cross-country average) roughly corresponds to that among all students in a large number of countries, Georgia and Romania stand out, where online students would recommend their programme much more frequently than their respective peers in balanced and predominantly face-to-face study modes. Conversely, in the Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal, and Croatia, students in face-to-face studies are more satisfied than their peers in online study.
- Satisfaction with the study programme is significantly higher among part-time students in a large number of countries; in 8 out of the 21 countries where official part-time studies are possible, the proportion of part-time students who would recommend their study programme is at least 5 percentage points above the average of all students. Only in Estonia and (again) the Netherlands is satisfaction among part-time students considerably below the average of all students.

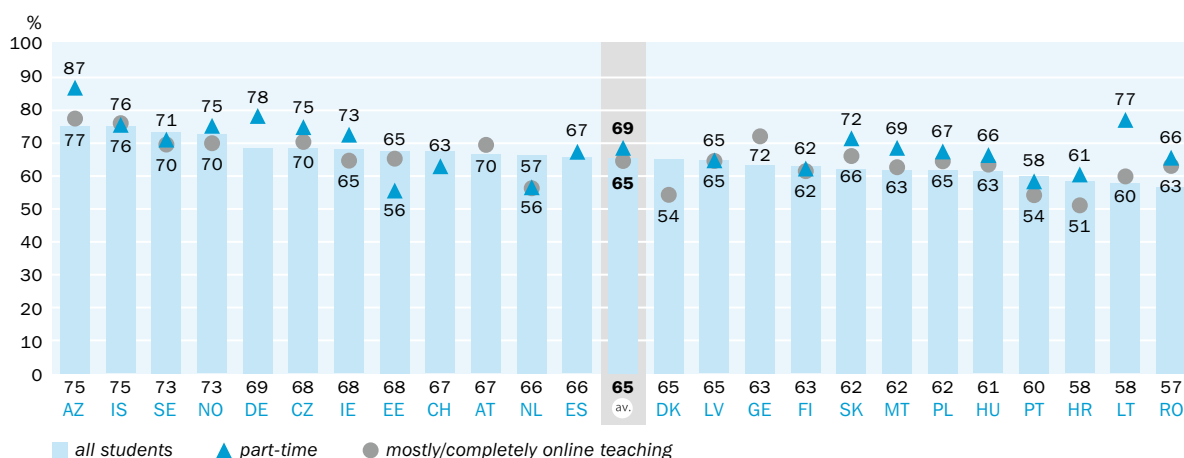
Part-time students would commonly recommend their study programme.

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Figure B4.3 ↓

Student endorsement of current study programmes by part-time study status and online mode

Shares of students (in %)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, C.11. **No data:** FR.

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), DE (summer 2021), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 3.1 Generally, to what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your studies? [I would recommend my current # (main) study programme. (Strong) agreement.]

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

Fields of study and degree structure

Large shares of students in the field of Business, Administration and Law. Different subject groups are taken up by students in the EUROSTUDENT countries to varying degrees (Table B4.2). A common finding is that the Business, Administration and Law subject group constitutes the largest (18 out of 25 countries) or at least the second-largest (in an additional 5 countries) proportion in most countries. A lower proportion can only be found in Azerbaijan (where the Education field has the largest share) and Sweden (where Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction takes the top rank). Additionally, in many countries, large proportions of students are found in the

groups of Health and Welfare or Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction. Considerable differences in subject group preferences regarding gender are outlined in > [Chapter B1](#).

In line with standardisation efforts within the Bologna Process, large majorities of students are enrolled in programmes following the two-cycle degree structure, i.e. Bachelor (ISCED 6) and Master programmes (ISCED 7). Relatively large proportions (more than 10 %) of students in short-cycle degree programmes are found in Denmark, France, Ireland, Latvia, and Malta. Apart from Sweden (19 %) and Norway (9 %), short national degree programmes (corresponding to an ISCED level of 6) as well as other types of degrees play a relatively minor or no role. Long national degree programmes, corresponding to an ISCED level of 7, have a significantly higher importance in many countries and can account for up to 21 % (France) or even 32 % (Sweden) of students in a country.

Social selectivity across HEI types

As expected (and in line with the high correlation between parental finances and students' educational background; > [Chapter B2](#)), most trends in the composition of HEIs regarding social and educational backgrounds run parallel to each other (Figure B4.4):

Certain HEI types tend to be socially selected.

- Universities, typically institutions with the right to award doctoral degrees, have a higher proportion of students who rate their parents to be (very) well-off and students with tertiary educated parental backgrounds.
- HEIs with (very) high balance between students and academic staff at HEIs consist of higher proportions of students from affluent backgrounds and with tertiary education background compared to HEIs with lower staffing levels.
- The more research-intensive the HEI (as approximated here by doctoral student enrolment), the higher the proportion of students from well-off and tertiary educated parental backgrounds.

A marked difference in social composition is not initially evident regarding the differentiation of different types of HEIs based on their field specialisation (Figure B4.4). Interestingly, the differentiation of social composition between public and private HEIs does not yield differences, whereas the differentiation of educational background by institutional control does indeed suggest that a higher proportion of students from tertiary educated parental backgrounds study at public HEIs. What is the underlying mechanism? As a glance at Table B4.3 and Table B4.4 reveals, the cross-country averages depicted in Figure B4.4 provide only a rough and necessarily abbreviated overview – national specifics, which certainly exist¹, are thus levelled out. At the same time, despite the strong relationship between parental financial status and educational background (> [Chapter B2](#)), it should not be assumed lightly that there is a simple match between both characteristics: Differences based on educational background are not only an expression of economic disparities between students' parental homes but also encompass the entire interplay of social and cultural resources that shape educational decisions.

¹ For example, in countries like Austria or Lithuania, contrary to the cross-country trend, private HEIs are composed to a greater extent of students from tertiary educational backgrounds than public HEIs.

Box B4.3

Methodological note: EUROSTUDENT-ETER data merge

The European Tertiary Education Register (ETER)² is a comprehensive database encompassing information about HEIs across 41 European Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries, offering detailed insights into institutional activities, including student demographics, personnel, finances, and outputs like graduates (Lepori et al., 2023). ETER aims to provide reliable, standardised data for comparative analysis and policymaking in the European higher education landscape. In order to explore potential synergy effects, EUROSTUDENT's extensive student survey data have been supplemented with a selection of eight institutional insights sourced from the most recent information available (2020, in some cases 2019) in the ETER database (Lepori, 2023). While the ETER indicators may not cover the entire EUROSTUDENT sample (due to missing HEIs in the ETER database), they are nevertheless informative for uncovering broader patterns. In the context of the chapter at hand, four indicators are analysed:

- institutional control (differentiating HEIs under public control or mostly financed by the state from private HEIs and those mostly funded by private sources),
- education intensity (HEI's number of diploma, Bachelor, and Master students divided by academic staff),
- PhD intensity (HEI's number of PhD students divided by number of students),
- and subject concentration (index computed as the sum of the squares of the share of Bachelor and Master students in each of the 10 ISCED-F 2013 subject fields (Herfindahl concentration index), ranging from 1 = all students in a single field to 0.1 = students equally distributed between fields).

Study mode differences between types of HEI

The range of flexible study modes is related to the type of HEI.

After analysing the prevalence of flexible study modes and their utilisation by specific student groups on one hand, and the social selectivity of certain types of institutions on the other hand, the question arises regarding the interconnection of study modes and institutional characteristics. Regarding formal status of enrolment, learning modalities, and delivery mode, there are often parallel and mostly very clear differences between types of institutions (Figure B4.5):

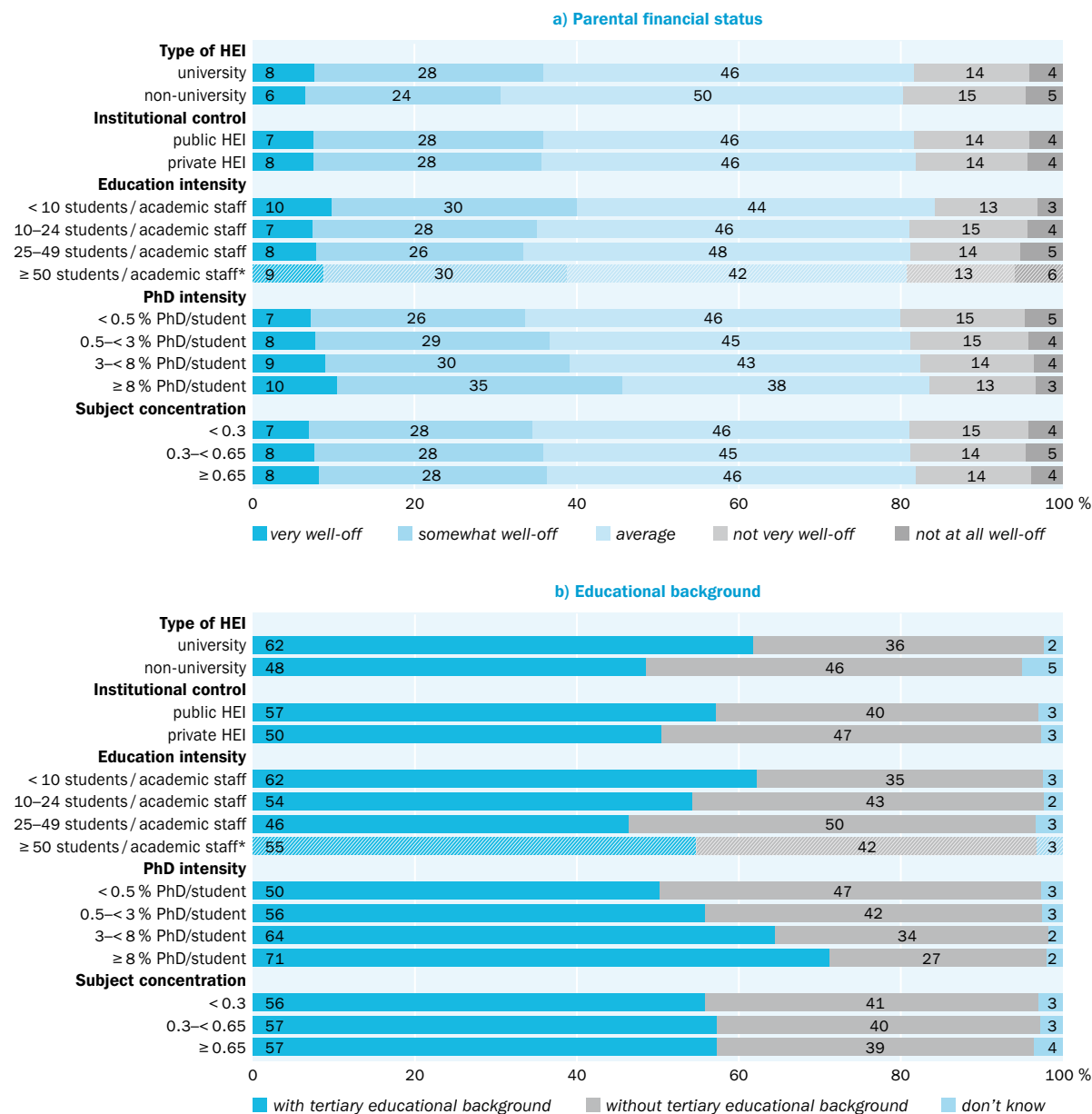
- Non-universities appear as providers of part-time, distance, and online study formats to considerably higher extent than universities.
- While public HEIs more frequently offer part-time studies than private HEIs, they lag behind in terms of distance and online formats.
- The larger the imbalance between students and academic staff at HEIs, the more likely its students are engaged in part-time, distance, or online study formats.
- The higher the research intensity of HEIs (PhD intensity), the lower the proportion of part-time, distance, or online study formats among students.
- The more specialised HEIs are in certain fields of study, the higher the proportion of part-time, distance, or online study formats.

² <https://eter-project.com/>

Figure B4.4 ↓

Composition of types of HEIs by social background

Cross-country averages (in %)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, D.4, D.3. **No data:** CH (parental financial status), ES (educational background).

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), DE (summer 2021), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 6.7 What is the highest level of education your mother/#guardian and father/#guardian have obtained? 6.8 How well-off financially do you think your parents (or #guardians) are compared with other families? Source: PIRLS 2006. Copyright © 2005 International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). Publisher: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Lynch School of Education, Boston College.

Note(s): * Due to low number of cases (i.e. few countries with ≥50 students / academic staff) and large variation of values between these few cases, the cross-country average is not significant, and can consequently not serve as reliable source of information.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions: AT, CH, FR, GE, NL, SE.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

It is evident that different types of institutions also serve different target groups, and the specialisation of the higher education landscape can indeed contribute to the diversification of various study offerings (and thus to offering demanded flexible study modes). The trends shown and described can be observed in all countries, with very few exceptions and to varying degrees (> [Database](#)).

Figure B4.5 [↓](#)

Composition of types of HEIs by study statuses and modes

Cross-country averages (unweighted, in %)

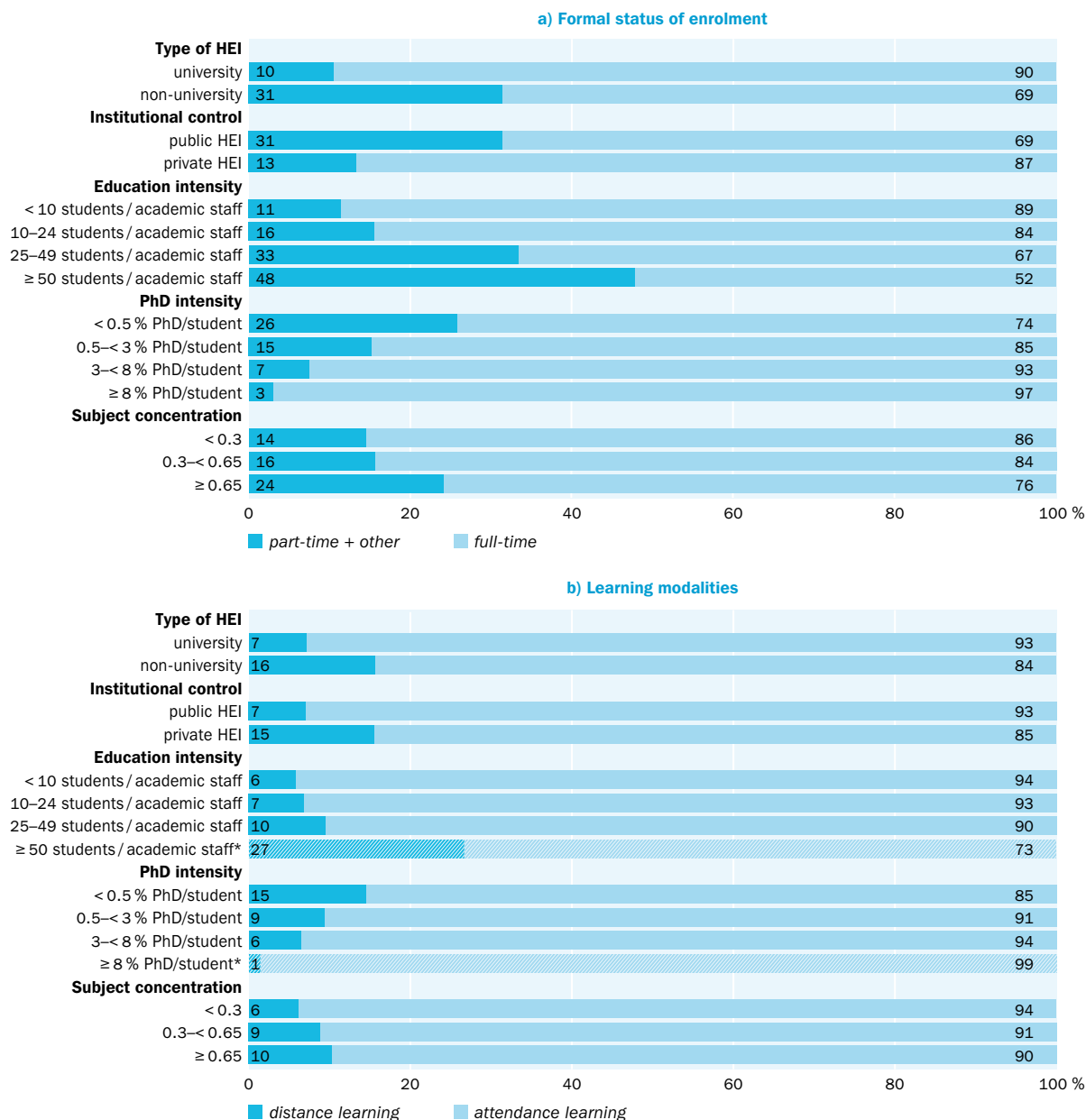
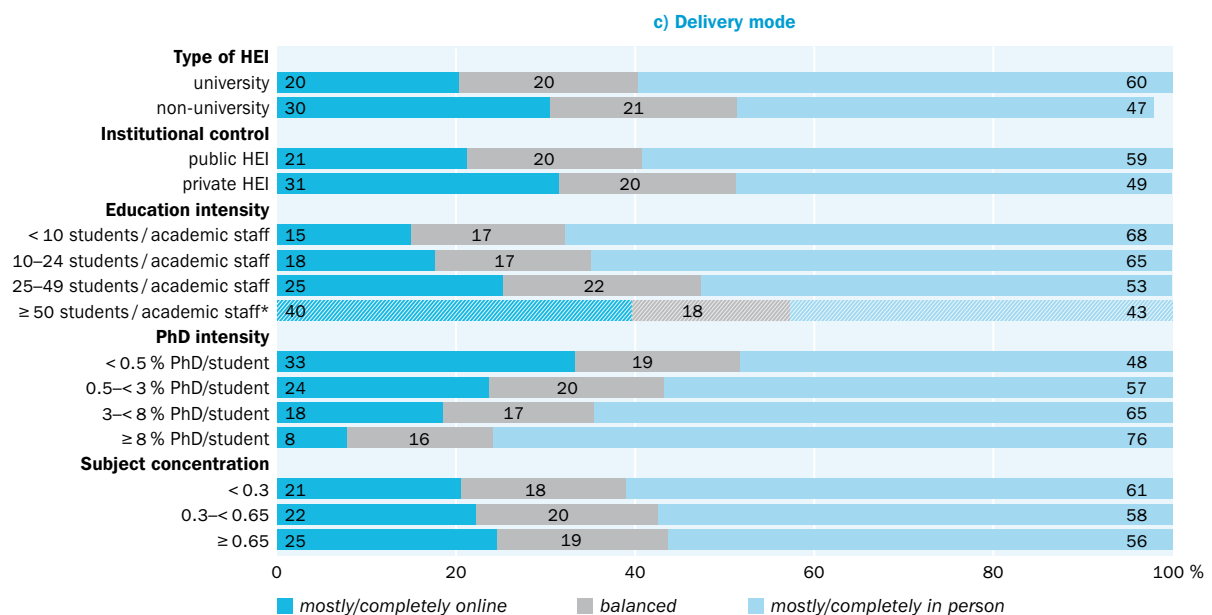


Figure B4.5 (continued) ↓



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, C.5, C.5b, TM.51. **No data:** FR (formal status of enrolment), CH, ES, NO (learning modalities), CH, DE (delivery mode).

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), DE (summer 2021), AT, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 1.8 What is your current formal status as a student? 1.2 Is your current #(main) study programme formally defined as a distance learning programme? M3.1 Please indicate the actual current and what you consider the ideal ratio between online and in-person teaching and learning in your studies. [actual current ratio]

Note(s): * Due to low number of cases (i.e. few countries with ≥ 50 students / academic staff, ≥ 8 % PhD/student) and large variation of values between these few cases, the cross-country average is not significant and can consequentially not serve as reliable source of information.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions: AT, CH, CZ, DK, FI, HR, NO, PL, SE.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

Discussion and policy considerations

The findings about types and modes of study reveal a diverse landscape of study flexibility across European higher education systems, with significant variations in part-time enrolment, distance learning availability, and online study prevalence. National systems demonstrate varied relationships between study intensity and flexible modes, highlighting students' adaptability amidst structural differences. Socio-demographic factors strongly influence study mode preferences, with older students, those without tertiary educational background, job income-dependent, low intensity students, as well as students with delayed higher education entry, or alternative access route favouring flexible modes. Overall, satisfaction with study programmes is high, particularly among part-time students – with certain national exceptions. Social disparities are apparent across institution types, with universities, institutions with a favourable student-staff ratio, and research-intensive institutions enrolling students from more well-off backgrounds. Study mode disparities reflect the diverse target groups served by different institution types: Non-universities, institutions with higher imbalance in the student-to-academic-staff ratios, less research-intensive, as well as subject-specialised HEIs show higher proportions of flexible study formats among their student populations. Understanding these findings is crucial for addressing inequities and enhancing access to higher education opportunities.

Considerations for policymakers

At the system level, there are no significant correlations between the shares of students with official part-time study status and those enrolled in distance learning programmes, nor between part-time study statuses and students predominantly studying online (Table B4.1). This underscores the varied and diverse structure of higher education systems concerning flexible study modes. The insignificant correlations between low study intensity and both part-time and distance studies reinforce previous findings that student populations tend to find their own ways to adapt higher education to their needs when formal structures are lacking. However, it is crucial for policymakers to consider formalising these flexible study modes to effectively plan resources and enhance student satisfaction. Establishing official frameworks for part-time and distance learning can provide clarity for students and institutions, leading to better resource allocation and increased satisfaction among students. This approach aligns with the analysis indicating increased satisfaction among part-time students (Figure B4.3), highlighting the importance of formalising flexible study options in higher education policy planning. Additionally, policymakers should ensure that resources and support services are readily available to students engaging in flexible study modes, including access to academic advising, counselling, and technical assistance (Schirmer, 2024).

Considerations for HEI staff

However, too strong reliance on flexible education in the form of distance or online learning might considerably disrupt peer integration (Fiorini et al., 2022; Głodowska et al., 2022; Schirmer, 2024). Consequently, part-time studies, distance education, and online lectures should be evaluated regularly to ensure student satisfaction and retention – particularly in countries where lower recommendation levels among part-time students have been identified (i.e. Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, and Portugal) – as is already planned within the framework of the European quality assurance measures³. Provision of comprehensive support services tailored to the needs of students engaging in flexible study should be ensured, including academic advising, technical support, and access to resources. Moreover, exploring avenues to foster peer interaction and community building within flexible study programmes can contribute to a more enriching learning experience. This may involve exploring innovative approaches like virtual study groups or online discussion forums. Furthermore, collaborating with policymakers and stakeholders to advocate for supportive policies and resources can enhance the delivery of flexible study modes and bolster student success.

Considerations for researchers

Further research could delve deeper into the complex relationship between study modes and their user groups on the one hand and social selectivity in institutional types: Going beyond the highly aggregated information presented in the chapter at hand will most certainly enhance our knowledge about segregational processes in the field of higher education. Additionally, analyses could be enriched by adding qualitative information about national legislation specifics regarding part-time study statuses, distance learning modalities, and online teaching infrastructure.

³ <https://www.ehea.info/page-eqar>, <https://www.eqar.eu/>.

Tables

Table B4.2

Field of study and current degree programme

Share of students (in %)

	Field of study										Current degree programme					
	Education	Arts and Humanities	Social Sciences, Journalism and Information	Business, Administration and Law	Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	Health and Welfare	Services	Short-cycle	Bachelor	Master	Short national	Long national	Other
AT	15	11	10	21	9	7	13	1	12	1	n/a	59	30	n/a	11	n/a
AZ	21	11	9	18	3	4	19	2	7	6	n/a	90	10	n/a	n/a	n/a
CH	12	10	11	23	10	4	13	1	14	1	n/a	71	28	n/a	n/a	1
CZ	13	9	9	21	6	7	11	4	13	6	n/a	64	25	n/a	12	n/a
DE	5	13	9	24	10	8	18	1	9	2	n/a	57	32	n/a	11	n/a
DK	6	9	10	19	7	6	15	1	25	2	10	64	26	n/a	n/a	n/a
EE	8	14	9	15	7	10	15	1	15	5	n/a	67	25	n/a	8	n/a
ES	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n/a	66	15	n/a	17	1
FI	6	10	6	19	4	11	19	3	19	4	n/a	72	26	n/a	2	n/a
FR	3	13	9	30	12	3	15	1	12	3	14	40	22	0.4	21	3
GE	4	10	15	27	4	5	10	3	20	4	n/a	71	11	2	17	n/a
HR	7	9	5	29	4	7	16	3	14	5	n/a	59	24	0.0	17	n/a
HU	11	8	10	25	3	9	13	3	13	5	4	62	15	n/a	18	n/a
IE	5	14	6	20	13	9	13	2	16	3	11	72	14	n/a	n/a	4
IS	15	12	13	22	5	5	9	1	17	1	8	66	24	0.4	0.3	2
LT	4	10	10	28	4	7	14	2	19	2	n/a	75	16	n/a	9	n/a
LV	7	8	7	26	2	8	14	2	18	8	19	57	16	0.4	8	n/a
MT	11	10	10	28	4	7	6	n.d.	20	4	12	53	30	n/a	5	n/a
NL	9	8	14	26	7	5	10	1	16	4	2	76	20	2	n/a	n/a
NO	19	9	10	20	4	5	10	1	20	2	n/a	47	18	9	18	8
PL	7	10	13	24	4	6	14	2	14	8	n/a	62	22	n/a	16	n/a
PT	4	10	12	20	7	3	19	3	18	5	5	67	18	n/a	9	1
RO	4	8	10	21	4	7	23	5	18	1	n/a	66	21	n/a	13	n/a
SE	15	11	14	12	6	6	19	1	16	1	1	27	13	19	32	8
SK	13	6	10	19	4	6	11	3	21	6	n/a	64	27	n/a	9	n/a
av.	9	10	10	22	6	6	14	2	16	4	3	63	21	1	10	1

n.d.: no data. n/a: not applicable. Decimal points shown for values < .5

Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, C.3, C.4.

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), DE (summer 2021), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 1.7 What is your current #(main) study programme? 1.6 With which degree does your current #(main) study programme conclude?

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT conventions: AT, AZ, CH, CZ, DK, FR, IS, GE, LT, NO, PL, RO, SE.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

Table B4.3

Composition of HEIs by educational background (part 1)

Share of students (in %)

	Type of HEI				Institutional control				Education intensity							
	University		Non-university		Public HEI		Private HEI		< 10 students/ lecturer		10–24 students/ lecturer		25–49 students/ lecturer		≥ 50 students/ lecturer	
	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background
AT	43	56	55	45	46	53	31	68	42	57	48	52	42	57	17	83
AZ	34	66	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
CH	33	64	46	48	38	57	51	45	38	57	41	57	48	46	n/a	n/a
CZ	47	53	61	38	47	53	58	40	41	59	50	50	68	30	66	32
DE	33	62	40	51	36	58	36	60	30	65	38	56	41	48	49	42
DK	18	81	28	68	22	75	n/a	n/a	18	80	20	79	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
EE	30	68	42	54	32	65	35	60	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
ES	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
FI	21	78	39	58	30	67	n/a	n/a	21	78	40	57	29	68	n/a	n/a
FR	32	64	27	68	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
GE	14	83	14	84	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
HR	54	45	65	33	56	43	55	43	65	35	55	44	74	24	n/a	n/a
HU	39	59	53	46	41	58	48	51	32	67	42	57	45	54	n/a	n/a
IE	33	64	47	46	38	58	n.d.	n.d.	37	59	55	41	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
IS	41	58	n/a	n/a	41	58	n/a	n/a	27	72	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
LT	34	63	53	43	40	56	34	62	34	62	37	60	48	45	n/a	n/a
LV	30	66	50	45	31	65	38	58	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
MT	41	49	39	32	40	47	n/a	n/a	39	49	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NL	22	76	38	56	30	65	n.d.	n.d.	19	79	30	65	33	63	t.f.c.	t.f.c.
NO	21	76	24	73	22	75	22	75	16	82	27	70	n/a	n/a	22	75
PL	45	54	66	30	45	53	56	41	36	63	48	51	57	42	56	41
PT	53	46	68	30	58	41	63	34	66	32	58	40	65	31	t.f.c.	t.f.c.
RO	54	45	n/a	n/a	54	45	53	46	t.f.c.	t.f.c.	59	40	58	41	n/a	n/a
SE	37	63	n/a	n/a	37	63	n/a	n/a	28	71	33	66	47	52	n/a	n/a
SK	53	46	77	22	53	46	77	22	46	54	58	41	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
av.	36	62	46	48	40	57	47	50	35	62	43	54	50	46	42	55

n.d.: no data. t.f.c.: too few cases. n/a: not applicable.

Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, D.3.

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), DE (summer 2021), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 6.7 What is the highest level of education your mother/#guardian and father/#guardian have obtained?

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT conventions: AT, CH, FR, GE, NL, SE.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

Table B4.4

Composition of types of HEI by educational background (part 2)

Share of students (in %)

	PhD intensity								Subject concentration					
	< 0.5 % PhD/student		0.5–< 3 % PhD/student		3–< 8 % PhD/student		≥ 8 % PhD/student		< 0.3 (low)		0.3–< 0.65 (medium)		≥ 0.65 (high)	
	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background	Without tertiary educational background	With tertiary educational background
AT	24	76	32	67	47	53	38	61	47	52	44	55	43	57
AZ	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
CH	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	36	61	31	65	40	55	25	72	45	52
CZ	56	42	53	46	42	57	35	65	49	50	44	56	53	46
DE	39	52	42	52	37	57	31	65	35	59	39	54	34	60
DK	n/a	n/a	21	77	17	81	15	82	21	77	25	71	20	77
EE	n/a	n/a	32	65	27	70	n/a	n/a	30	68	44	52	34	63
ES	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
FI	n/a	n/a	27	72	21	78	n/a	n/a	30	67	23	75	37	62
FR	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
GE	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
HR	66	33	60	39	45	54	n/a	n/a	55	44	59	40	67	31
HU	49	50	40	59	36	62	t.f.c.	t.f.c.	44	55	39	60	34	65
IE	54	41	41	53	27	70	n/a	n/a	38	58	42	52	30	67
IS	42	57	40	60	55	45	n/a	n/a	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
LT	22	73	36	61	29	69	n/a	n/a	40	56	41	56	27	69
LV	31	63	31	65	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	37	59	24	71	37	59
MT	n/a	n/a	41	49	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	40	49	t.f.c.	t.f.c.	48	24
NL	n/a	n/a	28	68	21	76	19	79	31	64	24	73	37	61
NO	25	72	27	70	16	81	16	83	22	75	25	71	20	78
PL	47	50	44	55	28	70	n/a	n/a	54	43	48	50	35	63
PT	58	39	69	29	48	50	n/a	n/a	58	41	67	31	57	41
RO	65	34	58	41	31	69	n/a	n/a	59	40	60	39	56	43
SE	44	56	47	53	32	67	29	71	38	61	30	69	29	71
SK	85	15	63	36	46	54	t.f.c.	t.f.c.	55	44	58	41	n/a	n/a
av.	47	50	42	56	34	64	27	71	41	56	40	57	39	57

n.d.: no data. t.f.c.: too few cases. n/a: not applicable.

Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, D.3.

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), DE (summer 2021), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 6.7 What is the highest level of education your mother/#guardian and father/#guardian have obtained?

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT conventions: AT, CH, FR, GE, NL, SE.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

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