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**"The social differences in leaving home across Europe"**

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**Abstract**

Patterns of home-leaving vary widely across Europe. Despite the fact that a wealth of literature exists, important unanswered research questions remain - particularly in relation to differences in leaving home and the different pathways out of the parental home across Western and Eastern Europe, and how overall leaving home patterns are related to education and class differences. Using data from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGG) for 46,945 young women (aged 16 – 35 years) in 17 European countries, the paper addresses the following research questions: To what extent does the timing of leaving home and the different pathways out of the parental home vary by education and class in Europe? And how do these social differences interact with national context across Europe? How can social differences in home-leaving be explained in terms of individual and contextual effects?

**Keywords**

leaving home, living arrangements of young adults, transition to adulthood

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## **Introduction**

Patterns of leaving home vary widely across Europe. On average, young people leave the parental home earlier in Western and Northern Europe, while they stay longer with their parents in Eastern and Southern Europe. For example, the average age of leaving the parental household is lowest for both sexes in France, the Netherlands, Finland and the United Kingdom, whereas both young women and young men establish their own household relatively late in Italy and Slovakia (Choroszewicz and Wolff 2010). Despite the fact that a wealth of literature exists describing the leaving home behavior of young adults in Europe (e.g., Kiernan 1986; Aassve et al. 2002; Aassve et al. 2007; Aassve, Arpino, and Billari 2013; Chiuri and Del Boca 2010; Iacovou 2001; Iacovou 2010), many studies are based on data for single countries, or compare only a small number of European countries (Holdsworth 2000; Aassve et al. 2002; Mulder, Clark, and Wagner 2002; Bernhardt, Gähler, and Goldscheider 2005). There are cross-national studies focusing on large-scale comparisons, but they are also in part descriptive and particularly Eastern European countries have only rarely been included (Billari, Philipov, and Baizán 2001; Mandic 2008; Billari and Liefbroer 2010; Iacovou 2010).

Prior research has furthermore pointed to the importance of distinguishing between different pathways out of the parental home, because different motives can underlie young adults' leaving home (Corijn and Klijzing 2001; Iacovou 2001). For example, leaving home to get married and leaving home for college have repeatedly proven to be very different processes with different causes and effects (e.g., Buck and Scott 1993; Mulder, Clark, and Wagner 2002; Zorlu and Mulder 2010). Iacovou (2010) additionally distinguishes between those young adults moving out to live alone; with a partner; or leaving for educational purposes. All these studies find that some of the determinants of leaving home vary

according to the reason for leaving home, but studies that compared the different pathways out of the parental home across a large number of European countries are rare (cf. Iacovou 2010). The importance of distinguishing between these two different pathways is also highlighted by the findings of Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1999) and Rusconi (2004).

Finally, while some light has been shed on the effect of income on the home-leaving decision of young adults in a comparative European perspective (Aassve et al. 2002; Aassve et al. 2007; Iacovou 2010), important unanswered questions remain, particularly in relation to how overall cross-national patterns are related to gender and educational differences. Both of these factors – gender and education - are likely to play a role in the home-leaving decision, but the direction of this effect across countries is not clear a priori. We know, for example, that on average in the EU-27, young women leave the parental household on average more than two years earlier than men (at the ages of 25.1 and 27.5 respectively). This is partly but not fully attributable to the younger age at which women start living with a partner. Furthermore, women's recently increased participation in Higher Education (HE) has meant that women's transitions to residential independence have become more like those of young men.

Against these backdrops, this paper addresses the following research questions: (1) To what extent does the timing of leaving home - along and the different pathways out of the parental home - vary by education and class in Europe? (2) And how do educational and class differences interact with national context across Europe? (3) How can social differences in home-leaving be explained in terms of individual and contextual effects?

Ideally, leaving home in Europe should be analyzed in a multi-level framework of analysis, but the small number of countries (N = 17) prevents us from doing so. Because we want to highlight differences in leaving home between countries instead of making broader

comparisons across groups of countries – an approach that has been adopted in a fair number of studies (e.g., Iacovou 2001; Iacovou 2004) but risks masking within-group differences – we conduct discrete-time event history analyses that include, among variables measuring individual and family characteristics, country fixed effects. This paper contributes to the literature in two key ways. First, while most of the comparative literature on leaving home is based on Western European countries, we expand the analysis to Eastern European countries that have been mostly overlooked in the comparative literature. Second, we do not confine the analysis to leaving home as such but also examine different pathways out of the parental home. Like in much previous research but notably for a greater number of European countries we distinguish between leaving home to live alone and leaving home for union formation (including both marriage and cohabitation).

### **Background**

Taken together, previous studies suggest that the timing of leaving home and the different pathways out of the parental home are linked to a host of individual characteristics (e.g., income, education, (un-)employment, family structure and gender), but also to contextual characteristics such as wider social institutions, broad historical trends and sociocultural regimes and cultures that frame young adult's decision to leave the parental home across countries (e.g., Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1999; Blaauboer and Mulder 2010; Aassve, Arpino, and Billari 2013).

### **Leaving Home and Education**

Educational enrolment and the level of education attainment have a strong impact on the transition to leaving the parental home. Current evidence shows that across all developed societies young people from lower educational backgrounds leave school and start working earlier (Bynner 2005; Muller and Shavit 1998), which in turn suggest that they achieve

financial independence earlier and leave the parental home when they become financially self-sufficient. This negative effect could also be due to normative expectations where being a student and being married or cohabiting are viewed as incompatible so that young adults wait with union formation and leaving home until they have left education (Blossfeld and Huinink 1991). The incompatibility of being a student and forming a union seems to hold specifically for women. A higher completed level of education often indicates a high degree of non-traditionalism and highly valuing independence, possibly leading to postponement of partnership formation and late marriage. But then research also shows that a high educational degree has a positive effect on leaving the parental home to live without a partner (Mulder and Hooimeijer 2002).

We expect to find a higher probability of not living with parents among those who achieved some sort of financial independence, even with some differences across countries. In addition, the relationship between education and the pathways out of the parental home is expected to differ for women and men. The difference between men and women in the importance of education is likely to be greater in countries where the differences between the labor supply and wage rates of men and women are larger and where marital separation is less common and traditional values prevail.

### **Welfare Systems and Social Norms and Family Systems**

The institutional characteristics of the country the young adult lives in also play a role. The most important institutions that appear to affect the independence of young adults are national labor and housing markets, as well as education opportunities. Several studies have analyzed this link (e.g., Kiernan 1986; Buck and Scott 1993; Billari, Philipov, and Baizán 2001; Bernhardt, Gähler, and Goldscheider 2005). Other studies have linked the patterns in the home-leaving behavior of young adults to long-term cultural continuities: Iacovou (2010)

specifies that the strong preference for prolonged intergenerational co-residence in Southern and Eastern European countries exists especially among parents, while Aassve and colleagues (2013) demonstrate the impact of societal pressure on what is considered an acceptable age for home leaving. The theoretical argument is that countries differ with respect to how much emphasis is put on family relationships versus individualistic relationships, depending on specific contextual realities such as marriage regimes, family systems and demographic structures (Reher 1998). Welfare regimes have a strong impact on leaving home. Various studies (e.g., Albertini, Kohli, and Vogel 2007; Isengard and Szydlik 2012), for instance, show that the structure of parental support strongly differs between country clusters that largely follow existing welfare regime classifications.

We expect that in countries where completion rates are high and vocational training is widespread and where normative expectations favor individual's priority over the family and place a high importance of young people's autonomy, young adults will leave the parental home comparatively early and there is a stronger link with union formation (mostly cohabitation). In countries where welfare state transfers are weak and mainly family-oriented, where there is hardly any vocational training and where family is the locus of support, young adults leave home (very) late. Because having a stable job and economic self-sufficiency are important conditions to form a family, union formation and first parenthood occur also at later ages.

### **Other Independent Factors**

It is also known that leaving home is associated with other variables, such as personal income and family background. A first line of research has emphasized the role of economic factors such as personal resources and socioeconomic status of the young adult her/himself but also socioeconomic status of the family of origin (i.e., parents' income, educational level

or occupation) – in the timing of leaving home for young adults, because they are linked to the ability to afford (solitary) living arrangements and thus the decision to leave the parental home (e.g., Aassve et al. 2002; Le Blanc and Wolff 2006; Billari and Liefbroer 2007). Whether or not (and when) young adults leave the parental home depends partly on having the sufficient means to afford living on their own. The socioeconomic family background also defines the economic resources available to young adults, although there appears to be no simple relationship between parental resources and leaving home and the particular way in which family resources influence young adults' leaving or staying is difficult to predict: parents may take part in intergenerational exchanges, by either making financial contributions to the shared home, or paying in full for the accommodation of their adult children, which would then delay the leaving home of young adults. However, by transferring resources, parents may also support their adult children with independent household formation, which would then accelerate leaving home of young adults (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1999).

The presence of additional household members or number of children living in the parental home reduces the amount of resources and space available to each child (crowding effect) and may thus speed up the process of leaving the parental home. Indeed, the presence of a younger child was shown to reduce the likelihood of intergenerational coresidence (Ward and Spitze 2007)

## **Data, measures, and methods**

### **Data**

The data are made available by the Harmonized Histories Project (see [www.nonmarital.org](http://www.nonmarital.org)) (Perelli-Harris, Kreyenfeld, and Kubisch 2010) and are mainly built from the first Wave of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), an internationally comparable and harmonized set of

survey data (United Nations, 2005). The dataset includes information about a broad range of socio-economic, demographic and family characteristics. We use data for women born between 1945 – 1972 from 17 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Sweden).<sup>2</sup> Because we make this selection the initial sample was approximately halved. We deemed cases where respondents reported leaving the parental home before age 16 as unrealistic and dropped them from the analysis (n= 3,486), as well as cases with missing information on whether or not, or if at all, respondents have left the parental home (n= 1,959). There were three variables (number of siblings, parental education, and education) with missing values that we addressed through a simple univariate sampling imputation (hot deck). This method is a more suitable means of imputation than, for example, mean imputation or multiple imputation because the variables with missing values are categorical and the missing values were less than five percent.<sup>3</sup> Our final sample included 46,945 women, representing 321,412 person years.

## **Measures**

### **Dependent Variable: Exit from the Parental Home**

Based on the detailed life history calendar (i.e., the year of specific life course transitions), we constructed two different pathways out of the parental home (i.e., leaving home to live alone versus leaving home to live with a partner). If respondents start to live with a partner in the same year they leave home, they are classified as "leaving home to live with a partner". All others are classified as "leaving home to live alone", if they left the parental

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<sup>2</sup> We had to drop Spain from the (multivariate) analysis because of the unavailability of certain key demographic variables (parental education and parental divorce). Note though that we calculated and present some basic descriptive statistics for the Spanish subsample, too.

<sup>3</sup> Comparing the original sample with our final sample of 321,412 person years using a t test for mean/proportion differences, we found no differences on most key variables.



home. Process time starts at age 16 and ends at age 35 because this event happening before or after that age is considered to be out of the ordinary.<sup>4</sup> Cases were censored at the time of interview or at age 35 when the transition out of the parental home had not been made by that age.

### **Independent Variables**

We used information on the completed level of education of the respondent at the time of interview and the year of obtaining this qualification to construct a yearly time-varying covariate combining both enrolment and level of education. (We corrected the date with average time spent in education, if there were inconsistencies). The variable has four categories: 0 = in education, 1 = low education (ISCED 0–2), 2 = medium education (ISCED 3–4), and 3 = high education (ISCED 5–6).

Parental education was included as dummy variable, indicating whether at least one parent had a high education (ISCED 5–6) (= 1) or not (= 0). To control for possible crowding effects, we included a categorical variable for the number of siblings 0 = no siblings, 1 = one sibling, 2 = two siblings, and 3 = three or more siblings. Whether or not the respondents' parents had divorced or separated before the respondent was aged 15 was included, too. A separate category "unknown" was used for those who did not provide information on this question. We also included categorical variables measuring the birth cohort: 1 = 1945 – 1954, 2 = 1955 – 1964, and 3 = 1965 – 1972, as well as dummy variables for the 17 European countries. The age variable is reconstructed from the life history calendar as a variable with

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<sup>4</sup> Defining young adults as persons aged between 16 – 35 is somewhat arbitrary; but (1) has been used in prior research (e.g., Blaauboer and Mulder 2010), and (2) ensures a bigger sample size. Starting from 18 years onwards would have reduced the sample by  $n = 10,300$ .

four categories: 1 = 16-20, 2 = 21-25, 3 = 26-30, and 4 = 31-35. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of the variables.

**Table 1 Descriptive statistics**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Pathway out of the parental home</b>		
Not having left	2,899	6.18
Left to live alone	17,942	38.22
Left to live with a partner	26,104	55.61
<b>Education</b>		
In education	10,876	23.17
Low	8,105	17.26
Medium	21,654	46.13
High	6310	13.44
<b>Parental education</b>		
Not high	40,345	85.94
High	6,600	14.06
<b>Number of siblings</b>		
0	4,271	9.10
1	15,215	32.41
2	11,509	24.52
3 or more	15,950	33.98
<b>Parental divorce (before age 15)</b>		
Yes	2,304	4.91
No	35,852	76.37
Unknown	8,789	18.72
<b>Cohort</b>		
1945-1954	15,514	33.05
1955-1964	16,928	36.06
1965-1972	14,503	30.89
<b>Country</b>		
Austria	1,138	2.42
Belgium	1,917	4.08
Bulgaria	2,979	6.35
Czech Republic	2,318	4.94
Estonia	2,014	4.29
France	2,828	6.02
Georgia	2,717	5.79
Germany	2,472	5.27
Hungary	2,909	6.20

**Table 1 continued**

Variables	N	%
Italy	3,239	6.90
Lithuania	1,960	4.18
Netherlands	2,844	6.06
Norway	3,757	8.00
Poland	5,460	11.63
Romania	2,792	5.95
Russia	3,195	6.81
Sweden	2,406	5.13

Source: Harmonized Histories. N = 46,945

### Method: A Discrete-Time Competing-Risks Model

We estimated discrete-time event history models (multinomial logistic regressions of person-years)<sup>5</sup> to model young adults' leaving home and used a competing risks approach, where leaving the parental home to live alone and leaving home to live with a partner are the outcomes of interest (Allison 1982; Steele 2005).<sup>6</sup> The period of observation starts at age 16 years and ends either at the date of leaving home (either to live alone or to live with a partner) or right-censoring at the date of the interview or when the respondent reaches age 35 years (whatever happens first). By using a competing risks approach, we examine whether or not the decision to leave the parental home to live alone is guided by different determinants than the decision to leave the parental home to live with a partner (Iacovou 2010). In discrete time, an alternative competing risks model is the multinomial logit model, given by:

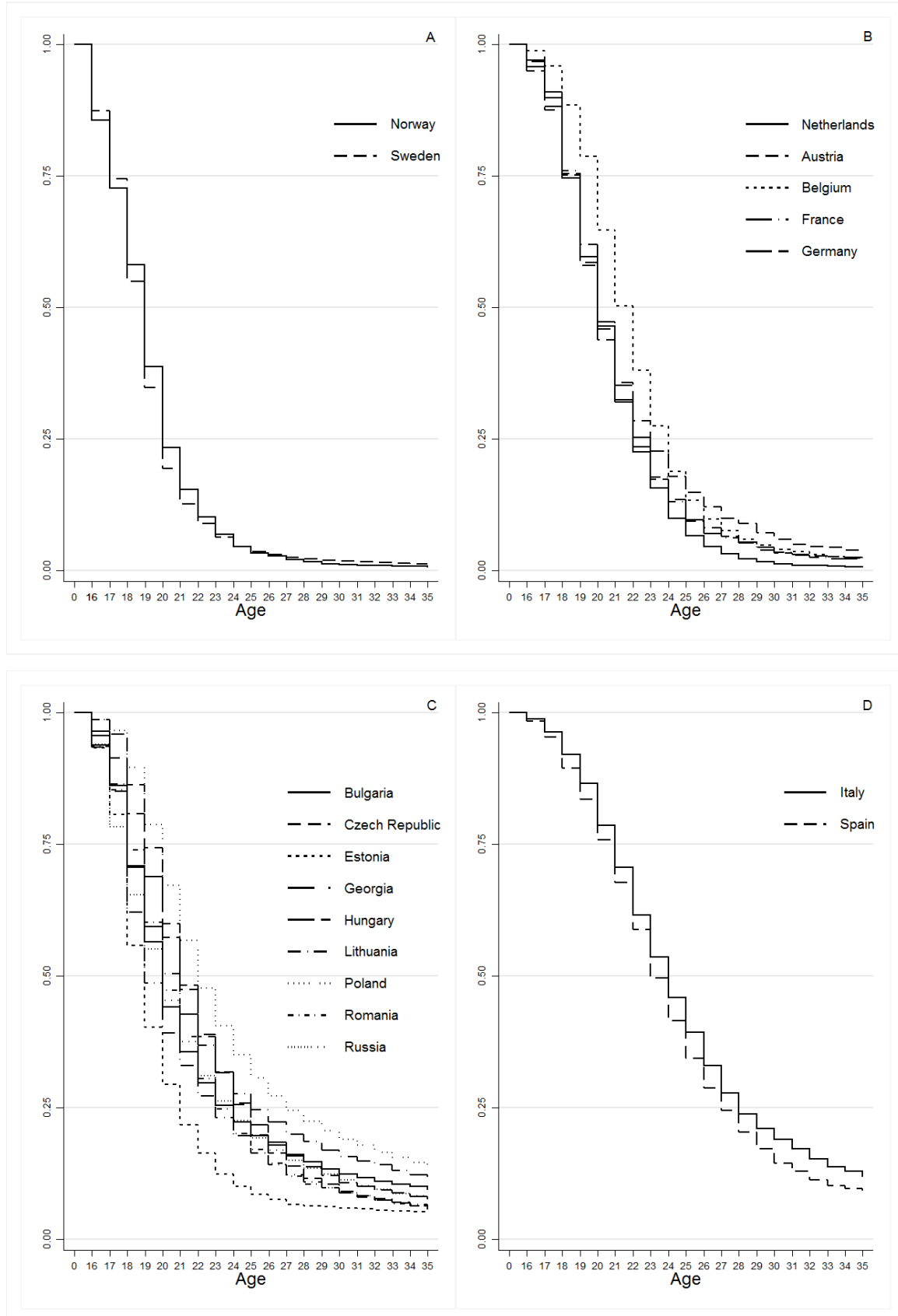
$$\log \frac{h_{ti}^{(r)}}{h_{ti}^{(r)}} = \alpha^{(r)}(t) + \beta^{(r)'} x_{ti}^{(r)} \quad r = 1, \dots, k$$

<sup>5</sup> We also estimated proportional hazard models (Cox regression) in preliminary analyses. These analyses lead us to believe that discrete-time models are more suitable for our analysis. The discrete-time approach more specifically has the advantage that it is straightforward to allow for non-proportional hazards and time-varying covariates (Steele 2005).

<sup>6</sup> A single-spell model is used because only the first exit out of the parental home after the age of 16 years is modelled; we do not have information on home-returning.

Our interest lies also in highlighting differences between countries, because the decision to leave the parental home (via different pathways) is likely not only to differ between individuals (with different characteristics) within countries, but also between countries with distinct institutional and normative settings (Iacovou 2010; Chiuri and Del Boca 2010). The number of countries ( $N = 17$ ) in our sample is too small to apply multilevel modelling, which is why we opt to alternatively use country fixed effects. In an earlier step, we also considered broader comparisons across groups of countries – an approach that has been adopted in a fair number of studies (e.g., Iacovou 2001; Iacovou 2004) but risks masking within-group differences. For this, we firstly looked at the overall timing of leaving home in order to get a better idea of the differences across countries and to see if there are indeed differences between the 17 countries in somewhat broader groups of countries: Northern, Western, Eastern and Southern Europe. The four groups of European countries identify not only geographical contiguity, but also similar culture as well as similar welfare states. Figure 1 contains the survival functions, showing differences across groups of countries and homogeneity within. As we can see, the country groupings are fairly consistent for Northern (Panel A) and Western (Panel B) Europe, but not for Eastern (Panel C) and Southern (Panel D) Europe.

Figure 1 Kaplan-Meier estimates by broad country groups.



## Preliminary results

### Descriptive results

Figure 2 shows the age by which half of all young adults have left the parental home in each country. Clearly, young adults may move out of home and back again several times during their life (home-returning). This measure of age at leaving home is uncontaminated by these complications, though, since the proportion of young adults living away from home rises steadily with age in each country, so it is a relatively simple exercise to identify the point at which half of young people are living independently. For women, this varies from age 20.0 in Sweden and Norway to almost age 26 in Italy. Countries seem to fall into the four groups defined earlier, with home-leaving earliest in the Nordic countries and latest in the southern countries – with the Eastern European countries in the middle.

**Figure 2 Women's mean age at leaving home, by country.**

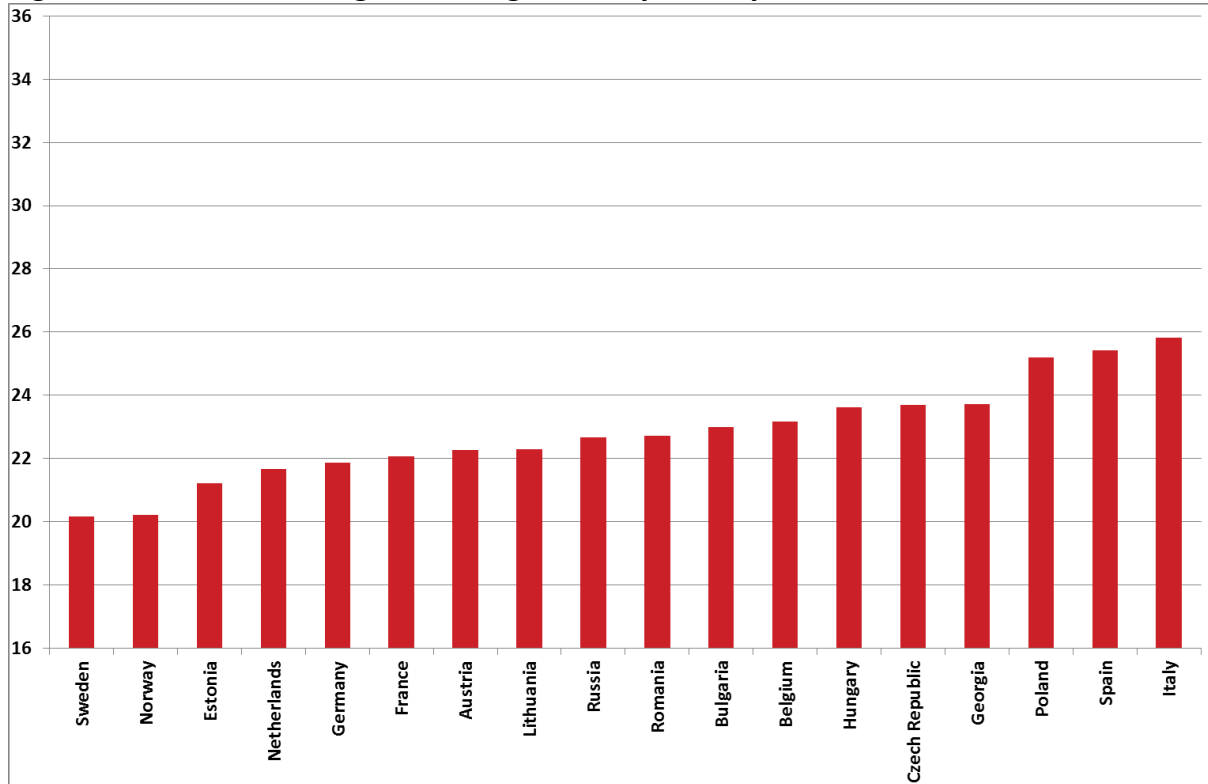
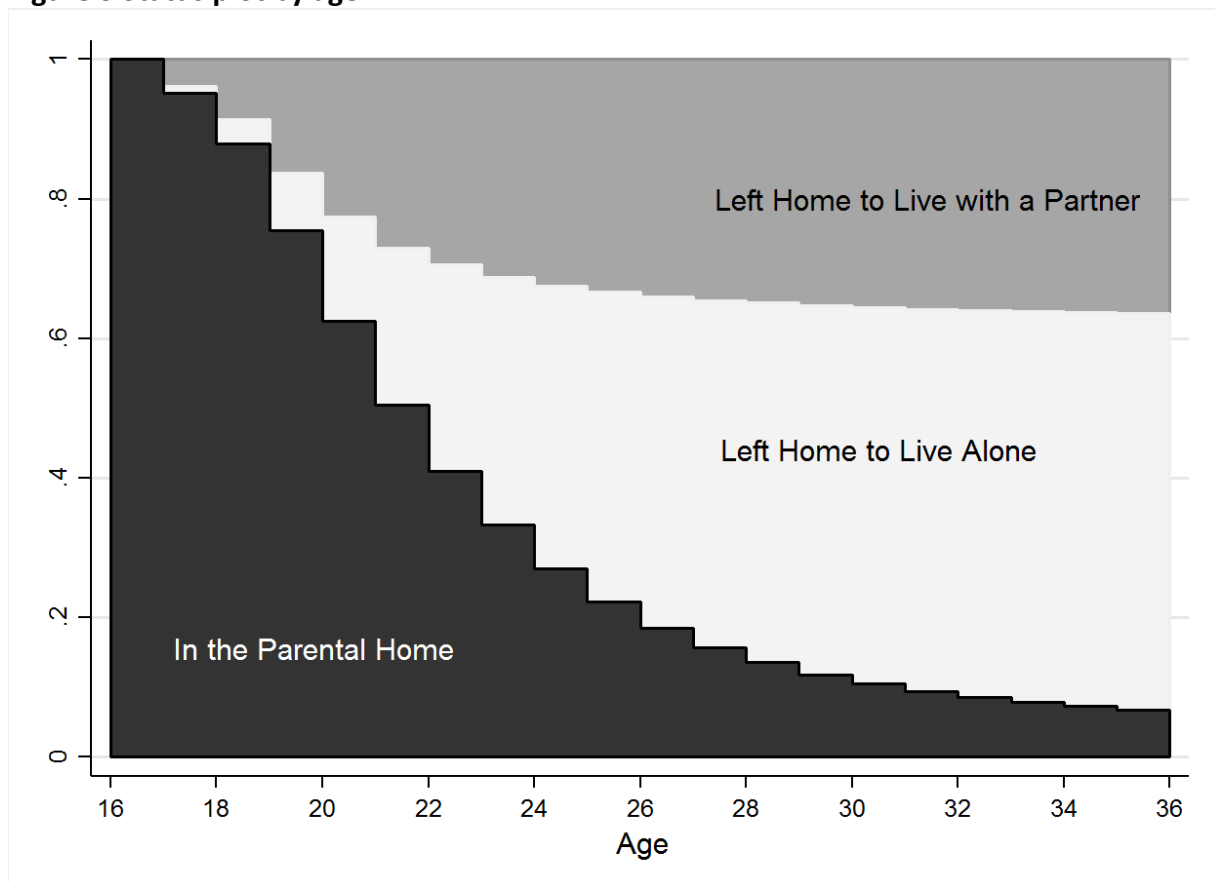


Figure 3 presents the combined statuses between the ages 16 and 35. The green area is the survival function, showing the probability of remaining in the parental household, and the two incidence functions tell us that leaving to live alone and leaving to live with a partner are only at older ages approximately likely.

**Figure 3 Status plot by age.**



**Multivariate results**

Table 2 presents the effects of education and parental educational—and its relevant interactions and fixed country effects— on the rate of entry into leaving home to live alone and leaving home to live with a partner versus staying in the parental home. The standard errors of the models were corrected for the clustering of observations in period-country combinations.

Chiuri and Del Boca (2010), studied the impact of various factors that affect women’s and men’s home-leaving decisions. Their results indicated that young women’s decisions

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appear to be more responsive than young men's to family structure and institutional factors (e.g., labor and mortgage markets). Family size appears also to have an important impact. The higher is the number of siblings, the earlier young adults leave the parental home. The proxy dummies for welfare system/culture is significantly different from zero, indicating that there are institutional differences across these four groups of countries. (Note: specific measures on the context levels are not (yet) included.)





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