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**Leaving home in Europe:
the experience of cohorts
born around 1960**

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Running title: Leaving home in Europe

Abstract

In this paper we analyse the leaving home experience of men and women born around 1960 in 16 European countries. We use extensive empirical evidence from Fertility and Family Survey data, providing a large-scale comparison. We focus on some key indicators of the process of leaving home: the timing, sequencing and synchronisation of leaving home with the end of education and the formation of a first union. As far as these dimensions of leaving home are concerned, Europe appears to be extremely heterogeneous, and explaining this will undoubtedly be a challenge. The complex interplay between the present economic situation of young people and long-term institutional and cultural factors is thought to be the main driving factor. Our findings constitute a benchmark against which subsequent behaviour, such as that of cohorts coming of age after the fall of the Iron Curtain, could be compared.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we explore the contemporary patterns of leaving home in different European societies and we draw a picture that has hitherto been lacking in the literature. The topic provides the opportunity to reflect on the cultural and economic components of national differentials in the living arrangements of young adults and, broadly speaking, the transition to adulthood in present-day Europe. We exploit individual-level information from the series of Fertility and Family Surveys (FFS) carried out in many European countries, mostly in the 1990s, in order to describe and discuss the macro-level differences in the timing of leaving home. We also focus on the relationship (time sequencing and synchronisation) between leaving home and other connected events in the transition to adulthood. In particular, we perform a general analysis which includes several countries spread over different parts of the continent.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we introduce the basic theoretical framework. We see leaving home as embedded in the transition to adulthood and we outline the possible differences one can expect according to general societal dynamics. In Section 3 we review some past comparative studies and briefly discuss relevant historical patterns of family and household formation. The data we use are briefly introduced in Section 4. In Section 5, we describe and discuss timing patterns of leaving home for men and women. Section 6 analyses the temporal relationship between leaving home, the end of formal education, and union formation. A discussion is presented in Section 7.

2. FRAMEWORK: A KEY EVENT?

Leaving home is considered to be one of the crucial nodes of the life course and a crucial event in the transition to adulthood. It generally implies not only household

independence but also greater social autonomy for young people, at least when one considers present Western societies. The adoption of a life course approach in the study of leaving home gives a fruitful perspective (see e.g. Liefbroer, 1999). The focus of such an approach is on the individual experience of events as depicted using individuals grouped in cohorts. A central issue is the timing of leaving home within a cohort studied by means of survival functions and their synthetic measures such as median ages or values at specific points in time (age). These measures can be used for cross-cohort and cross-gender comparison or, as we shall do in this paper, for cross-country comparison of men and women belonging to (approximately) the same group of birth-cohorts. Besides the timing dimension (which includes the traditional demographic distinction between tempo and quantum), other measures help us to see how leaving home is interconnected with other transitions and trajectories of young adults' lives (see e.g. Corijn, 1996). The order of events in the transition to adulthood is a key issue (Hogan, 1978; Marini, 1984).

It is useful to describe the sequencing of leaving home and the end of formal education in order to show how many people continue their education after leaving home (or leave home to pursue further education, which is probably the most typical case). The sequencing of leaving home and the end of education can be a consequence of individual and parental resources, normative expectations in a society or societal group and, especially, institutional configurations that favour the independent living of students enrolled in higher education. To explore the normative and institutional dimensions and their dynamic interplay, comparative research provides unique insights. In some countries, universities are geographically dispersed. This means that they are close to many potential students, which gives many young people access to higher education without them having to leave the parental home. At the same time, this has

provided policy-makers with a justification for not building more student accommodations. It would, however, be difficult to establish a causal direction among these factors. For instance, universities may be deliberately geographically dispersed across a country because it is considered 'normal' for university students to live with their parents during their studies. The causal link would then be from the cultural framework to the policymaking, which would mean that cultural differences explain a substantial part of the differences in family (Pfau-Effinger, 1999) and social policies. On the other hand, the policy of building universities across a country may ease the decision of co-residence with the parents and influence the attitudes of parents and children. Although higher education may concern only a minority of young people (though this is not the case in most of the countries we examined), the way it is organised reflects some important relationships between policies and family behaviour. State support of young people's autonomy and welfare differs dramatically among European countries (Sgritta, 1995), in issues such as housing market policies, labour market policies, and direct transfers or taxation. In those countries where state support for young people is weaker family support is of particular importance (Baizán, in print). Residential autonomy and partnership behaviour have always been strongly connected, and there are substantive conceptual gains in studying them together (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1993). This is particularly true in some European countries where a high – and in some cases increasing – share of people leave home when they enter marriage or a consensual union (for Italy and Spain see Billari et al., 2000). Sequencing and synchronisation between events (Mulder and Wagner, 1993) are substantive issues that warrant specific attention. In some societies, for instance, leaving home is not experienced by everybody and there might be expectations that one or more children remain with their parents for their whole lifetime without ever entering into a

partnership. In other societies, leaving home is strictly associated with marriage. On the other hand, there are societies in which the vast majority of young people experience some period outside the parental family before forming their own family. The prevalence of cohabitation is also quite heterogeneously distributed (Kiernan, 1999). The emergence of “new” living arrangements in the life of young adults has been taken as one of the marks of the process of individualisation which is used to depict the evolution of Western European and North American societies (Buchmann, 1989). Starting from a fairly standardised “script” in which events during young adulthood are rather predictable in their timing and sequencing (or synchronisation), there is a general societal trend toward heterogeneous experiences in individual life courses. A parallel and fecund idea, which has almost become a paradigm for the interpretation of demographic change in Western societies, is the notion of the Second Demographic Transition (van de Kaa, 1987). In this view, a series of cultural shifts triggers an individualisation in demographic behaviour and in the life paths followed by different people; this implies flexibility in life courses and longer periods spent in states such as single person or unmarried cohabitation. According to some scholars (Bessin, 1996), in post-industrial societies one expects a trend towards a diminishing normative regulation of schedules. If this is the only case, leaving the parental home should constitute no exception to a de-normisation process, and should be more evident in the countries which have proceeded farthest in the individualisation/Second Demographic Transition. Nevertheless, it is not necessarily straightforward to transfer dynamic processes such as individualisation and de-normisation to cross-national comparison. This is problematic because we include life courses that unfolded within societies of the former Socialist block. It is a general problem of comparative research on life courses. One can see transition processes as fairly regular. Different societies can be found in different

moments of a transition process, but the transition can be strongly affected by rigidity in institutional arrangements (in some cases determined by marginal events) and historical path dependencies which are hardly reversible in the era of globalised culture (Mayer, 1999). This yields a multiplicity of equilibria in social behaviour, and may be consistent with the making of a Europe united “in diversity”, (a term used at the 1996 European Population Conference) Diversity should “not come as a surprise” (Lesthaeghe, 2000). As Mayer (1999, p. 11) states “it is reasonable to assume that in the current period, national characteristics will have a greater impact on life course regimes than in the sixties and early seventies. We would, therefore, expect a growing divergence between countries as well as a growing heterogeneity and inequality within countries”.

In the specific case of leaving home behaviour, at the societal level we may think that both institutional arrangements and social norms (which have a clear interplay) are key factors affecting the transition out of the parental home (Jones, 1995; Holdsworth, 2000). Consequently, it could be that macro institutional settings and path dependencies contribute to inhibit some events. At the same time other behaviours related to the individualisation process during young adulthood and the remainder of the life course could be observed. Institutional settings would then interplay with social norms in shaping the transition out of the parental home, just as our example of educational institutions shows in the case of leaving home to continue education. Paradoxically, as we shall show, a higher degree of homogeneity may be found in those societies where, according to individualisation theories, a higher degree of heterogeneity would be expected. In general, the extent to which one can consider leaving home as a key event is a cultural matter, which also depends on the degree of institutionalisation.

3. LEAVING HOME IN EUROPE: HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW SO FAR?

Before we move to the empirical evidence, it is useful to briefly review some studies which have given a comparative glance at patterns of leaving home or living arrangements of young adults in Europe.

Kiernan (1986) asserts that little information is available on the timing of the leaving home process and on the factors influencing leaving home. In her study using cross-sectional surveys on living arrangements for six Western European countries in 1982, she found that Denmark was the country with the earliest home-leaving, followed by West Germany, France, the Netherlands, Ireland and the UK. Kiernan argues that living alone is in general more common where unmarried cohabitation is less widespread.

After this study others also addressed the issue. More than ten years later Goldscheider (1997) called for comparative research on the issue arguing that no comprehensive comparative study on leaving home in industrial societies had been carried out.

Fernández Cordón (1997), using labour force surveys, examined the living arrangements of young adults in Spain, Greece, Italy, France, Germany and the UK between 1986 and 1994 from a repeated cross-sectional viewpoint. Among those countries, Italy has the highest share of young people co-residing with their parents while the UK has the smallest share. National differences are rather stable during the period of observation. He noted that “in a time of increasing convergence among the European Union member countries, it is hard to find differences in social indicators as important as the one just described and, what is more significant, with a clear tendency to their widening”. Emphasising the role of labour market conditions, Fernández Cordón outlined the peculiarity of Southern European countries as an interesting case to study.

Basing her research primarily on FFS data, Corijn (1999) analysed the results of a broad cross-country comparative project on the transition to adulthood in Austria, Flanders,

France, Germany (East and West), Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Spain (The full study is in the monograph edited by Corijn and Klijzing, in print). Her study is the most interesting starting point for us because she uses the same life course (longitudinal) approach, and she partially uses the same data for approximately the same cohort. Corijn found that in most countries the cohort born around 1950 and around 1960 were postponing the transition out of the parental home. However, she found a huge variation across countries. Italy, Spain and Poland are the “late-leaver” countries, while Austria and the Netherlands are the “early-leavers”. Corijn underlines the importance of religion both at the individual and at the societal level. This is particularly important in terms of leaving home and marriage in countries with a high prevalence of Catholics.

To sum up, a large-scale comparative study is still lacking, and, with the exception of Poland, comparative analyses have not addressed Central and Eastern European countries up to now. As we know, the latter countries underwent huge societal changes after the fall of the Iron Curtain. We have to be aware that in order to grasp the impact of such changes we would have to wait some time. However, it is essential to compare the situation before the transition between Eastern and Western Europe.

Before moving to this data, it would be beneficial to refer to some studies based on a historical perspective. The well-known chapter of Hajnal (1965) traces an east-west divide in historical family systems in Europe: Hajnal’s line runs along an imaginary line connecting Trieste and St. Petersburg. To the west of the line the family formation pattern leans towards a neo-local nuclear family with relatively late marriage and a significant proportion of people who never married. Of those not marrying, most of the people leave the parental home anyway. To the east of the line, marriage is supposed to be early and universal, and the family is often extended. However, this last feature has

an ambivalent impact. Early and generalised leaving home occurs for those who marry early without staying with their parents. Those who marry and stay with their parents could reside in the parental home their whole lives.

The relatively clear-cut division by Hajnal seems too simplistic when one moves to transitions in living arrangements. On the one hand, when analysing family formation such as extra-marital childbearing between Eastern and Southern Europe after World War II, some similar patterns emerge (Monnier and Rychtarikova, 1992). On the other hand, a great heterogeneity has been shown by studies focusing to the west of the Trieste-St. Petersburg line. Not much is known about what used to happen (and sometimes of what just happened and is happening) about leaving home in the East.

Pre-industrial patterns within the West show that early home leaving prior to marriage was common in many areas (Laslett, 1983; Wall, 1989; Mitterauer, 1992). In the central and north-western parts of the continent, a significant percentage of young people spent a more or less prolonged period of time outside their parents' household, normally involved as rural servants or as urban workers. As a consequence, young people often left the parental household long before marriage. The same was not true in other areas of south-western Europe where time spent as servants was normally short-lived and only involved a small percentage of the population (see i.e. Reher, 1997 on Spain).

Nevertheless, the existing picture on historical co-residential patterns is far from complete, and it shows considerable geographical and historical variance. Specific demographic, economic, and cultural factors determined family and household systems (just as they do today), including considerable regional variations on attributes such as the welfare capability of the family, the functioning of the household as a working unit, the role and status of women, marriage patterns, and co-residence of kin, among others (Wall, 1995).

Several one-country studies focusing on trends during the twentieth century show a declining age of leaving the parental home from the 1920's until around 1970-80, when a reversal is recorded in many western countries (Blossfeld and Nuthmann, 1991; Toulemon, 1994; Liefbroer and de Jong Gierveld, 1994; Baizán, 1998). In a comparative effort, Cavalli and Galland (1996) distinguish three broad, geographically based patterns in the transition to adulthood in contemporary Western European countries: a *Mediterranean pattern*, whose main characteristics are the prolonged stay at the parental home and the synchronisation between leaving home and marriage; a *French and Northern European pattern*, where household formation precedes family formation and time spent living as a single is prolonged; a *British pattern*, with early transitions from school to work and delayed (but clustered) household and family formation (see also Kerckhoff, 1990).

The paper by Reher (1998) systematically and comprehensively compares historical and current family patterns in Europe, west of the Trieste-St. Petersburg line. Reher emphasises the Southern European pattern of household formation, relating a cleavage between two patterns to the times of the late Roman Empire and the early Middle Ages. In Southern Europe, the influence of Muslims raised the importance of kinship and vertical relationships between generations so that the prolonged stay of children in their parent's home and the caring work of children towards their parents are two faces of the same coin, a "strong" family. In the North, Germanic tradition and the Reformation contributed to the development of a "weak" family. The "two Western Europes" started differently, are far from convergence, and they might fluctuate around different equilibria, to recall a notion we discussed before. On the other hand, within the two Europes regional differences are impressive and several sub-patterns emerge, especially in the South (Holdsworth, 1998; Micheli, 2000).

4. DATA AND METHODS

We use data from the series of Fertility and Family Surveys (FFS) that was carried out mainly in the Nineties with the co-operation of the Population Activities Unit of the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations. In particular, we use the data of the so-called "standard recode files" that were available to us at the time of preparation of this paper, and we select only those countries for which information on the timing of leaving the parental home is available. We have at our disposal the micro-data of representative samples of men and women for 16 European countries. (In one case, Belgium, the sample is limited to the Flemish-speaking population). We supplement FFS micro-level data with the aggregate data (only on timing) available for the Netherlands and Switzerland from the so-called FFS Standard Country Reports (Latten and de Graaf, 1997; Gabadinho and Wanner, 1999)¹, and data on Great Britain from Berrington (in print). We will not be able to analyse all European countries, but for the sake of simplicity we will speak of "Europe" when referring to the set of countries we analyse. Table 1 reports a summary of the data set we use.

We explicitly adopt a life course perspective. In order to refrain from being lost in the complexity of comparing different cohorts for different countries, we opted for selecting only one cohort for the analyses. In particular, we chose 1960 as an anchor year, and we deal separately with men and women. This assures that people are old enough at the time of the survey to allow us to depict their leaving home behaviour in a fairly complete way. Depending on the sampling design of a country, this implies different choices on the width of a cohort. (In most of the cases, we use people born between 1956 and 1965). The choice of birth cohorts has a specific consequence that we should

keep in mind in interpreting our data: all Central and Eastern European data refer to the period before the transition. Thus, we differentiate (as it was done in the original design of the survey) Germany between the former German Democratic Republic (from now on “East Germany” for the sake of simplicity) and the former territories of the Federal Republic of Germany (“West Germany”). We also want to account for gender differentials, so we make use of the advantages of the FFS and give separate analyses for men and women.

We use the retrospective event histories given by respondents, in particular questions on the first time they left the parental home, the first time they started living in a consensual or marital union with a partner and the first time they married. The first union is thus defined as the earliest event between first marriage and first co-residential consensual union. If a month is not provided in the answers we assign a random month for leaving home, union formation and first marriage, and June for the end of education. If a year is not provided, the case is dropped from that particular analysis². We use weights for those countries for which weights are available³.

When we study the sequencing and synchronisation of events, we use months as the basic time unit because we want to emphasise the differences and to show explicitly that there is some “real” synchronisation between events. We are aware that this does not imply the synchronisation of decision-making (Courgeau and Lelièvre, 1992), but we would like to fully exploit the richness of monthly data to grasp significant shares of simultaneous events. We also use the information on people who experienced only one of two events at the time of the survey. That is, if a respondent has left the parental

¹ For the Netherlands, the data are referred to the 1958-63 cohort, and the median age was computed by linear interpolation from the cumulative distribution. For Switzerland, the data are simple averages of the figures published for the 1955-59 and 1960-64 cohorts.

² The number of dropped cases was usually very small with the exception of Western and Eastern Germany, where respectively 4 and 7 per cent of the cases had to be dropped.

home but he or she has not yet entered a union, we consider that leaving home happened before union (independent of whether or not a union will ever be experienced).

[Table 1 about here]

5. PATTERNS OF LEAVING HOME: TIMING

In this section, we analyse the timing of leaving the parental home. We use synthetic measures derived from Kaplan-Meier estimates of the survivor functions to draw a picture of the European situation. In Table 2 we report the estimated median ages at leaving home, in Table 3, the estimated value of the survivor functions at the ages of 20, 25, 30 and 35, and in Table 4, the estimated inter-quartile differences.

It is immediately apparent that there are marked cross-national differences. We pick up some of these aspects by looking at the data from different angles.

Let us start with the *timing* of leaving home. If one chooses the median age of leaving home as an indicator of the general timing of the process (Table 2, of which a graphical representation is given in Figure 1), Italy has the highest age both for men and for women, 26.7 years for men and 23.6 for women. Sweden lies at the opposite side of the ranking with 20.2 years for men and 18.6 for women. The spread of the differences is very substantial. It has been noted that the Southern European countries are the ones with later home-leavers in Europe though to varying degrees among the countries here examined. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that some Central and Eastern European countries follow the pattern of Southern European countries. Poland and Spain have median ages immediately following Italy. Hungary, the Czech Republic and Latvia show figures which are very distant from the other countries, around 24 years or older for men. Belgium occupies a position between the groups. Western European countries

³ These countries are: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

together with East Germany display the lowest figures. In general, Nordic countries and the UK are among the early leavers, although Lithuania also belongs to this group.

Slovenia's men are early leavers, but this is less so for women.

To sum up, using median age as an indicator, a Southern European pattern of late home-leaving emerges clearly, Western European countries have earlier home-leavers, and the situation for Eastern Europe is relatively mixed with late home-leaving for the largest countries with the exception of East Germany.

Let us now examine *early home-leaving*. If we consider the percentage of people who leave before the age of 20 (Table 3), we immediately notice the peculiarities of Lithuania, Slovenia and Switzerland which are similar to the Nordic countries. (About 40% or more men and 50% or more women have left home before the age of 20.) Other Western European countries follow. Southern Europe and other Central and Eastern European countries have percentages of less than 20% for men and 35% for women having left home before the age of 20. We might say that the typical early home-leaver in Europe is a woman, and that she is likely to come from Scandinavia. The analysis of early home-leaving also shows us that the historical classifications drawn for marriage patterns such as the one set forth by Hajnal do not automatically transfer to patterns of leaving home. For instance, the Eastern European tradition of early marriage does not result in early home-leaving in contemporary times. Economic constraints and institutional settings may help explain this.

Another dimension of the phenomenon is the *late home-staying*. This is connected with the so-called “quantum” of the event of leaving home (Figure 2). For the sake of simplicity and for comparison we consider the proportion still living in the parental home at the age of 30 as an indicator. Poland, with 30% of the men, and Lithuania, with 21% of the women living at home at 35, are the countries where the highest percentage

of people continue to stay with the parents. This level is shared with all Central and Eastern European countries (with the notable exception of East Germany) and with Southern European countries. In these countries it is more likely that some people will never leave the parental home during their whole life. By contrast, almost all women have left home in Western European countries, Scandinavia and East Germany by the age of 30. 12% represents the highest percentage of men who stay at home until age 35 in Western Europe, and this is in Austria.

Another point of view connects early and late-leaving. This is related to the *variability* of the distribution of ages at leaving home (Table 4). Such variability can be measured by estimating the inter-quartile difference⁴ of the distribution. This can be used as a measure of the extent of de-standardisation which young adults of a given society face in leaving home timing (Corijn, 1997). This allows us to see how leaving home can be placed in the framework of individualisation versus standardisation of young adults' life courses. We find that the country where leaving home behaviour is most homogeneous is Sweden where leaving home is concentrated in a three-year interval. The other Nordic countries are also homogeneous, together with France, Belgium, East and West Germany. On the other hand, Latvia, Poland, Portugal and Italy are the countries where the timing of leaving home is less homogeneous.

With some necessary simplification we can summarise with a few key-words the patterns of the timing of leaving home in contemporary Europe when we consider cohorts born around 1960. In Southern Europe (Italy, Portugal and Spain), leaving home is late and non-generalised. In Central Eastern Europe (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Poland) it is late and non-generalised. Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia seem to be exceptions and show rather polarised behaviours, early leavers but also long-term

⁴ That is, the number of years which pass from when 25% of the people have left home to when 75% have left home.

stayers). In Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden and Finland) leaving home is early, generalised and standardised by age. In Western Europe (Austria, Switzerland, Belgium with some peculiarity, France, West Germany and the UK) and East Germany leaving home is relatively early and generalised. Of course, other meaningful geographical divisions can be superimposed, as in a more general way when speaking of the demography of Europe (see for instance van de Kaa, 1999).

[Tables 2 - 4 about here]

[Figures 1 - 2 about here]

6. SYNCHRONISATION AND SEQUENCING WITH OTHER EVENTS IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

6.1 Relationships with educational career

The sequencing and/or synchronisation between leaving home and the end of education is reported in Table 5. Leaving home before the end of education is customary for a significant proportion of the people in countries where a significant share of people enter higher education (OECD, 1999) and one of the following conditions holds: i) It is common to move out of the parental home when starting a new course in higher education or during the study period because universities are not territorially dispersed or students are supposed to live independently; or ii) The pattern of educational enrolment of individuals is not continuous, i.e., it is often interrupted by periods of employment. On the other hand, even where institutions of higher education are spread across a country leaving home before the end of education may be less common because most of the people live with their parents while they attend university.

Let us focus on leaving home before the end of education (figure 3). The geographical pattern partially parallels and therefore partially explains the distribution of the timing of leaving home. Poland, Hungary, Spain, the Czech Republic and Italy are the countries where young people leave home less frequently before the end of education, with percentages between about 10 and 15% of the total. Belgium is a notable exception in Western Europe with respect to timing. France follows Belgium closely, a peculiarity in that country's pattern. On the other hand, as expected, we find Sweden with 55% men and 72% women leaving home before the end of education. Other Nordic countries and Lithuania follow closely.

We can thus conclude that when observing the time relationship between leaving home and the end of formal education there is a wide variability in European patterns. It is worth noting that some countries, probably for specific policy or cultural reasons, resemble other countries that were not similar in any timing aspect.

[Table 4 about here]

[Figure 3 about here]

6.2 Relationship with the formation of a first union

The sequencing and/or synchronisation between leaving home and the first union is reported in Table 6, while leaving home and the first marriage is reported in Table 7.

Let us first consider leaving home before entering a union, independent of whether that union is marital or consensual. This aspect reflects the share of people who leave the parental home to live as a single person or for any other reason without first starting a new family for a period of time. Central and Southern European countries (Figure 4) have the lowest percentages, along with Belgium. They are mostly below 20% for women in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Spain and Belgium. Nordic countries are

once again at the other side of the spectre. In Norway, 72% of the men and 68% of the women leave home before union formation. This is, to different degrees, the case in most Western European countries, including the United Kingdom⁵.

We can make a further distinction between Southern and Central/Eastern Europe. In Central and Eastern Europe, many young people enter the first union while still in the parental home, that is, they start cohabiting together in their parents' dwelling (Figure 5). This accounts for 50% of Latvian men and 40% of Latvian women, a very high percentage when one considers that one of the two partners has to leave home in order to form a union. This is clearly a distinguishing feature for Central and Eastern Europe. It is interesting to note that among Western countries Austria and Norway have particularly high figures, both with one fifth or more young people starting a cohabiting union within the parental home. If the housing situation is of special relevance in explaining the general behaviour in former socialist countries, cultural factors seem to play a major role in Western countries, as has been noted in the literature (Corijn, 1999). When looking at the time relationship between leaving home and first marriage we put a major emphasis on the exact synchronisation (figure 6). That is, we focus our comments on the share of people who experience leaving home and first marriage exactly in the same month. In this particular case, rather than a problem of measurement, we may think that simultaneity really implies that the two events are the *same* event. Around 70% of Belgian, Spanish and Italian women leave home when they get married. The percentage is decreasing in Portugal and Central and Eastern European countries, where a significant share leave home after marriage. The percentage is generally lower for men, but the same general pattern holds true. As one might expect, leaving home at the

⁵ Berrington (in print) shows that, in the United Kingdom, 39% of young males and 36% of young females leave home at least six months before the first union, and that around 10% of young Britons leave home more than six months after entering the first union. Differently from our specification, Berrington

moment of marriage seems almost non-existent in Finland, Norway and Sweden. Other Western European countries fall somewhere in between⁶.

Therefore, when one analyses leaving home with first union formation the picture of Europe is again very heterogeneous. Here the commonalities between Southern and Central/Eastern countries are less marked. Nordic countries have the lowest connection between events, especially if one considers marriage. Southern Europe and Belgium have the strongest connection, with a majority of people leaving home at marriage. In other Western countries the situation is rather heterogeneous, and sometimes, like in Austria and Norway, a significant share of people start unions while staying with their parents, a behaviour that strongly conflicts with the high value of privacy in these countries, supposed by the individualisation hypothesis. Central and Eastern European countries (though East Germany has some peculiarities) have a very low percentage of people leaving home before unions, and it is much more common to start a union, even a marriage, while living with one's parents. Again, housing allocation practices may help to explain their situation.

[Tables 5 and 6 about here]

[Figures 4, 5 and 6 about here]

7. SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS

We showed that young Europeans of the cohorts born around 1960 have experienced leaving home in a considerably heterogeneous way. Besides some similarities for specific cluster of countries, it is very difficult to attempt reaching a meaningful classification with respect to this behaviour. The extent of the differentials we observe is

uses as the universe for calculation in the sequencing of events individuals who have experienced both events. This might change some results but probably not to a great extent.

⁶ In the United Kingdom (Berrington, in print), 50% of males and 42% of females leave home six months before marriage, while 6% of males and 8% of females leave home six months after marriage.

undoubtedly challenging since such differentials are hardly found for other family and household behaviours.

In some societies where the individualisation process of young adults and the more general process of the Second Demographic Transition are at a very advanced stage (e.g. Sweden), these societies display the highest homogeneity in leaving home behaviour. To what extent this is due to institutional effects, to social norms or to rational choice have to be investigated and is beyond the scope of our comparative effort. It is interesting to see that at least from a statistical point of view, Nordic countries are the most age-graded, and there seems to be little space for individual choice in the age at leaving home. On the contrary, in the “more traditional” Southern European countries, leaving home appears much more subject to preferences and constraints. Before the fall of the Iron Curtain availability of housing and employment for men and women in Eastern Europe undoubtedly played a fundamental role. However, some similarities with Southern European countries such as Poland or with the former German Democratic Republic may call for other explanation. In general, leaving home is a prerequisite for being able to make individualised choices rather than of behaviour subject to individualised choice itself.

Differences in the timing and in the social situation surrounding leaving the parental home do have a great significance for the individuals and societies. Spending much of one’s youth outside the parental home may shape intergenerational relationships as much as be a consequence of it. As Reher (1998) pointed out, leaving home may be embedded in a system of intergenerational relationships which includes care giving for the elderly. “Strong family” systems would then see a long permanence into the parental home with more involvement of children in care of their elderly parents. Allowing one’s children to stay at home longer and supporting their educational and labour market

transitions would allow parents to claim care (and to transmit care-oriented values and norms) when they age. This could certainly hold true for Southern and Eastern Europe. As the population in these societies is or will be ageing soon, this aspect is of great importance in adapting to the new situation . On the other hand, “weak family” systems rely on state subsidies, and individuals seem to detach themselves from their parents implying less reliance on children when parents become old. Young adults may be more exposed to poverty and diminishing social status in North-Western Europe than in South-Western Europe, and to a certain extent in Eastern Europe. In Eastern Europe young adults count on the residential support of their parents more often, although this does not imply that household independence results in an absolute lack of support from the parental home.

Certainly, more research is needed on the macro and micro factors which influence national differences (e.g. religion as shaping societies versus individual religious behaviour), including the various reasons for leaving home in different national contexts. In particular, our findings constitute a benchmark to which future situations can be compared in dynamic analyses. This will be especially important for Eastern Europe when sufficient data on cohorts who entered adulthood after the fall of the Iron Curtain will become available, but also for the other countries we considered. The quest is open.

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Tables

Table 1. Birth cohorts analysed and date of the FFS surveys or other sources used.

	<i>Cohorts</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>N. cases used</i> <i>(men)</i>	<i>N. cases used</i> <i>(women)</i>
Austria	1956-65	1995-96	476	1402
Belgium	1956-65	1991-92	1155	1749
Czech Republic	1956-65	1997	293	625
East Germany	1956-65	1992	891	1403
Finland	1956,57,63,64,65 (men)	1992 (men), 1989-90 (women)	474	1465
	1956-65 (women)			
France	1956-65	1994	699	1113
Hungary	1956-65	1993 (men), 1992-93 (women)	724	1487
Italy	1956-65	1995-96	389	1606
Latvia	1956-65	1995	499	925
Lithuania	1956-65	1994-95	652	989
Netherlands	1958-63	1993	**	**
Norway	1960	1988-89	746	1415
Poland	1956-65	1991	1331	1318
Portugal	1956-65	1997	851	1651
Slovenia	1956-65	1994-95	638	1115
Spain	1956-65	1994-95	730	1434
Sweden	1959	1993 (men), 1992-93 (women)	1018	1333
Switzerland	1955-64*	1994-95	**	**
United Kingdom	1958	1991	**	**
West Germany	1956-65	1992	858	1337

Note: * computed as average values between 1955-59 and 1960-64. ** FFS data for the Netherlands are from Latten and de Graaf (1997); for Switzerland they are from Gabadinho and Wanner (1999). For the United Kingdom, data are from Berrington (in print) on the 1958 cohort in Great Britain.

Table 2. Median age at leaving home (cohorts born around 1960).

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Austria	21.8	19.9
Belgium	23.3	21.5
Czech Republic	23.8	21.2
East Germany	22.4	20.6
Finland	21.7	19.8
France	21.5	19.8
Hungary	24.8	21.3
Italy	26.7	23.6
Latvia	24.1	21.3
Lithuania	20.3	19.8
Netherlands	22.5	20.5
Norway	21.4	19.8
Poland	25.8	22.5
Portugal	24.3	21.8
Slovenia	20.9	20.5
Spain	25.7	22.9
Sweden	20.2	18.6
Switzerland	21.5	19.2
United Kingdom	22.4	20.3
West Germany	22.4	20.8

Note: data represent exact ages (with decimal points).

Source: own elaboration of FFS data (Kaplan-Meier estimates). For the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom see table 1.

Table 3. Percentage of individuals having never left home at specific ages (cohorts born around 1960).

	<i>Men</i>				<i>Women</i>			
	<i>Age</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>30</i>
Austria	67	30	16	12	48	15	6	3
Belgium	87	31	11	8	70	13	4	3
Czech Republic	85	36	18	14	67	25	16	15
East Germany	72	23	8	5	58	13	4	3
Finland	68	23	12	11	45	7	2	<1
France	68	20	9	6	47	11	5	3
Hungary	88	49	27	21	63	27	17	15
Italy	87	61	32	17	78	39	20	13
Latvia	84	46	33	29	59	30	22	20
Lithuania	52	27	20	18	49	29	22	21
Netherlands	75	25	5	n.a.	57	10	2	n.a.
Norway	66	19	<1	<1	45	7	<1	<1
Poland	88	55	37	30	73	35	23	18
Portugal	79	44	26	20	63	30	19	15
Slovenia	55	29	15	12	54	23	13	10
Spain	86	54	25	14	76	33	14	10
Sweden	52	7	2	<1	25	2	1	<1
Switzerland	66	20	3	n.a.	38	6	1	n.a.
United Kingdom	73	28	11	n.a.	55	13	5	n.a.
West Germany	76	30	11	7	59	14	4	1

Note: n.a.=not available.

Source: own elaboration of FFS data (Kaplan-Meier estimates). For the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom see table 1.

Table 4. Inter-quartile difference on the age at leaving home (cohorts born around 1960).

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Austria	7.5	4.6
Belgium	4.5	3.7
Czech Republic	6.0	5.6
East Germany	5.2	4.0
Finland	5.2	3.2
France	4.8	3.8
Hungary	9.1	6.7
Italy	9.5	7.7
Latvia	>13.7	9.1
Lithuania	7.5	9.0
Norway	4.6	3.2
Poland	>9.7	8.8
Portugal	9.7	7.6
Slovenia	7.3	6.2
Spain	7.6	6.0
Sweden	3.6	2.8
United Kingdom	5.9	4.1
West Germany	5.8	4.3

Source: own elaboration of FFS data (Kaplan-Meier estimates). For the United Kingdom, see table 1.

Table 5. Percentage of individuals leaving home before, at, and after the end of education (cohorts born around 1960).

	<i>Men</i>			<i>Women</i>		
	<i>Before</i>	<i>At</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>At</i>	<i>After</i>
Austria	37	1	62	46	1	53
Belgium	10	0	90	10	1	89
Czech Republic	15	1	85	21	1	78
East Germany	30	0	69	34	1	65
Finland	57	0	43	67	0	33
France	27	1	72	28	2	69
Hungary	11	0	89	20	1	79
Italy	16	0	84	15	0	85
Latvia	21	0	78	35	3	63
Lithuania	47	0	53	51	1	48
Norway	46	1	53	49	1	50
Poland	10	0	90	17	1	83
Slovenia	34	0	65	30	1	69
Spain	13	0	87	16	0	84
Sweden	55	1	44	72	1	27
West Germany	38	0	62	37	1	62

Note: n.a.=not available. Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.
Source: own elaboration of FFS data.

Table 6. Percentage of individuals leaving home before, at, and after the first union (cohorts born around 1960).

	<i>Men</i>			<i>Women</i>		
	<i>Before</i>	<i>At</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>At</i>	<i>After</i>
Austria	50	22	28	42	38	20
Belgium	20	80	1	16	83	1
Czech Republic	22	48	31	14	51	34
East Germany	43	37	19	33	38	28
Finland	60	31	9	55	40	5
France	51	44	5	41	56	3
Hungary	18	50	32	14	50	35
Italy	30	63	8	15	76	9
Latvia	26	24	50	37	23	40
Lithuania	58	14	28	54	14	32
Norway	72	4	24	68	3	30
Poland	25	48	27	23	49	29
Slovenia	54	22	23	32	41	27
Spain	25	61	13	15	76	9
Sweden	71	23	6	63	31	6
West Germany	55	35	11	45	44	11

Note: n.a.=not available. Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.
Source: own elaboration of FFS data.

Table 7. Percentage of individuals leaving home before, at, and after the first marriage (cohorts born around 1960).

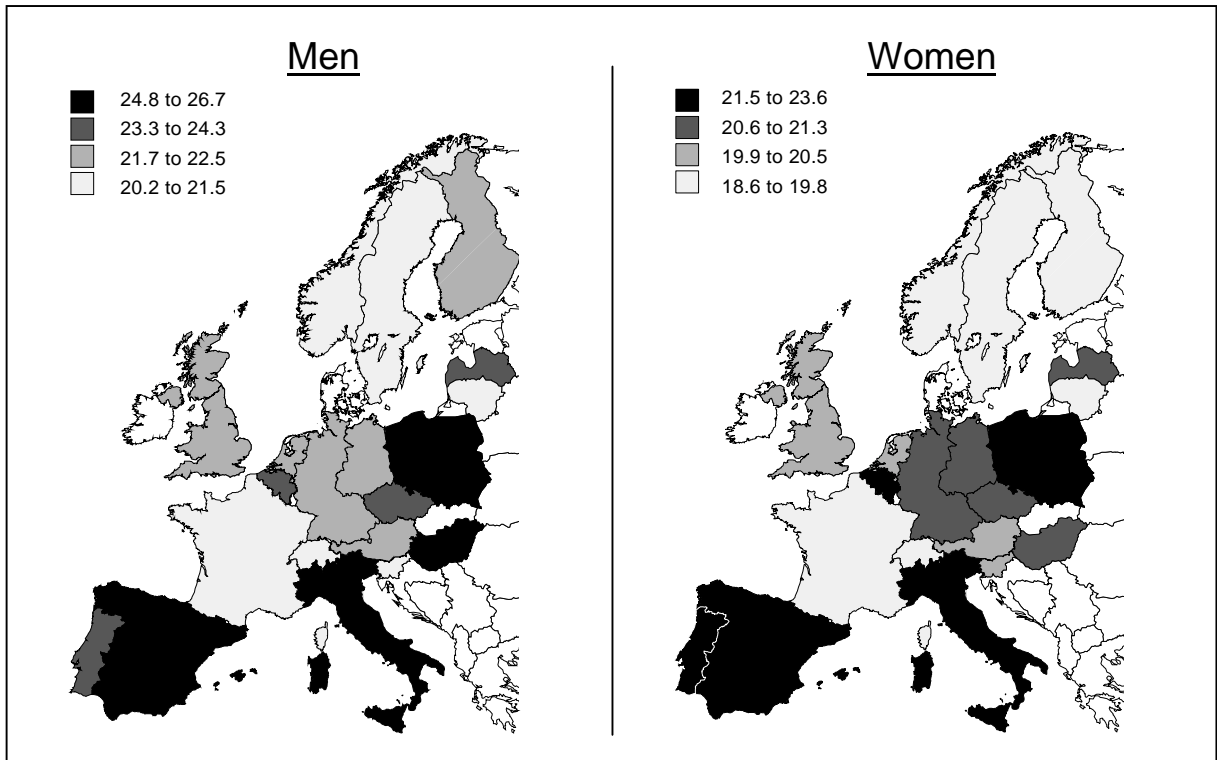
	<i>Men</i>			<i>Women</i>		
	<i>Before</i>	<i>At</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>At</i>	<i>After</i>
Austria	74	6	20	73	14	14
Belgium	35	62	4	27	69	4
Czech Republic	34	39	27	26	44	31
East Germany	70	11	19	51	14	34
Finland	95	1	4	92	5	3
France	81	16	3	67	30	2
Hungary	28	40	32	21	46	33
Italy	35	59	6	19	72	9
Latvia	40	17	43	45	20	35
Lithuania	59	15	26	56	14	31
Norway	92	1	7	91	1	8
Poland	26	48	26	24	49	28
Portugal	41	45	14	31	53	16
Slovenia	70	11	19	48	29	24
Spain	34	58	8	20	73	8
Sweden	98	1	1	96	3	2
West Germany	79	12	9	73	18	9

Note: percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Source: own elaboration of FFS data.

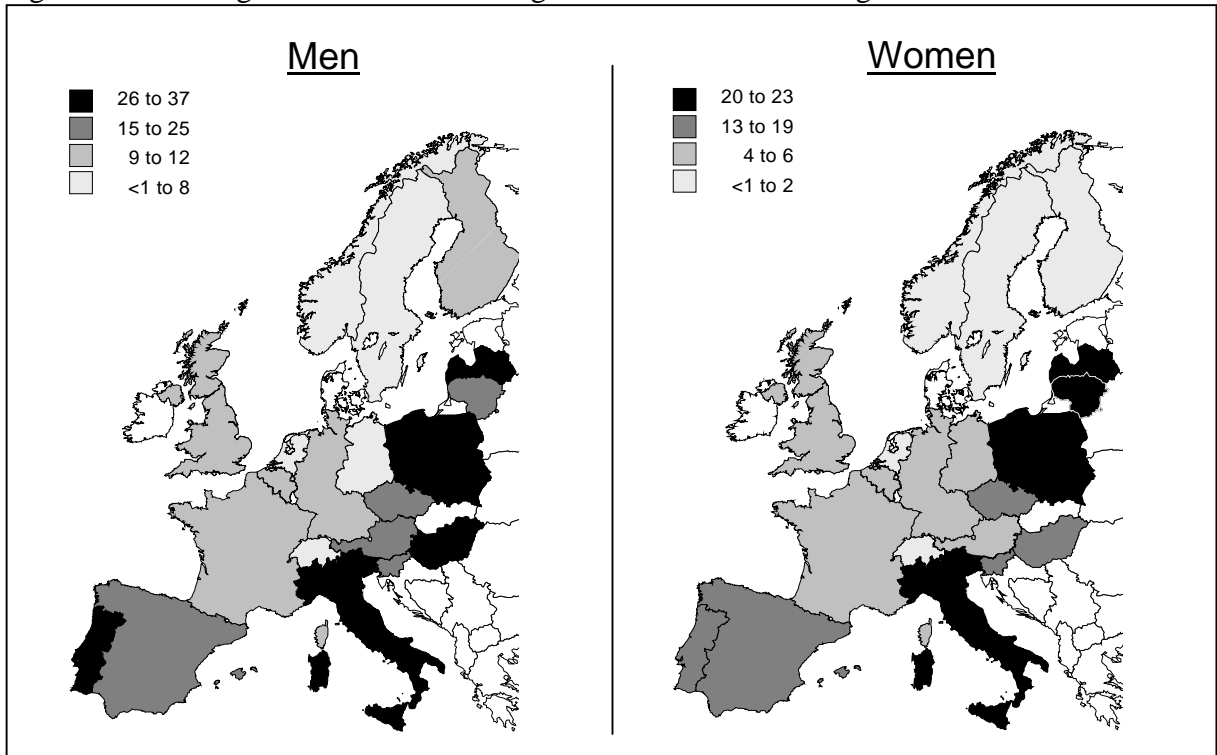
Figures

Figure 1. Median age at leaving home (years).



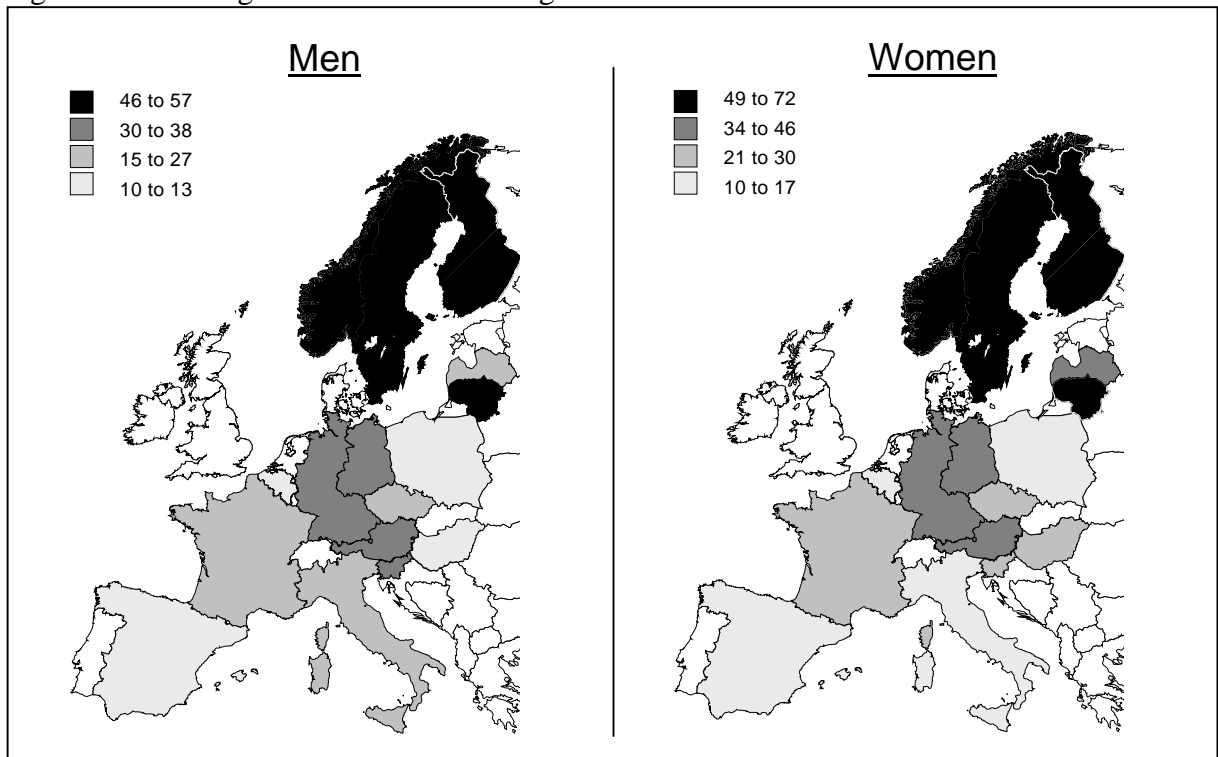
Source: see table 2.

Figure 2. Percentage of individuals having never left home at the age of 30.



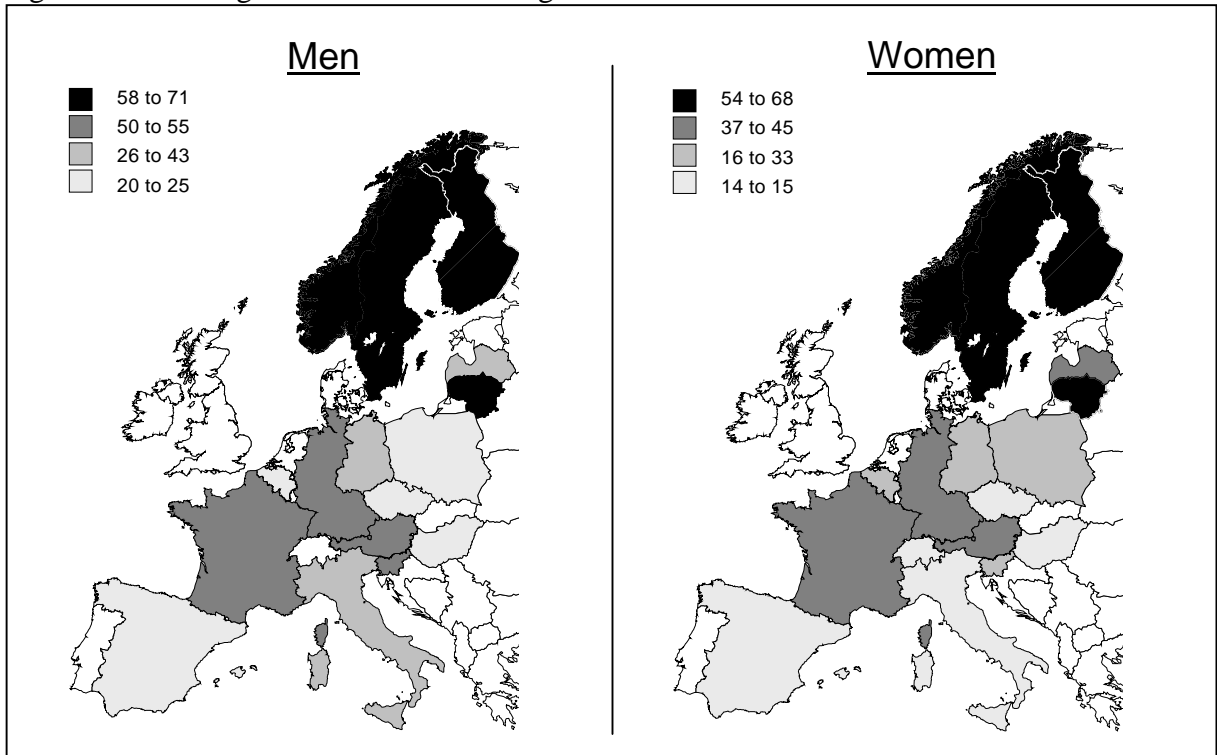
Source: see table 3.

Figure 3. Percentage of individuals leaving home before the end of education.



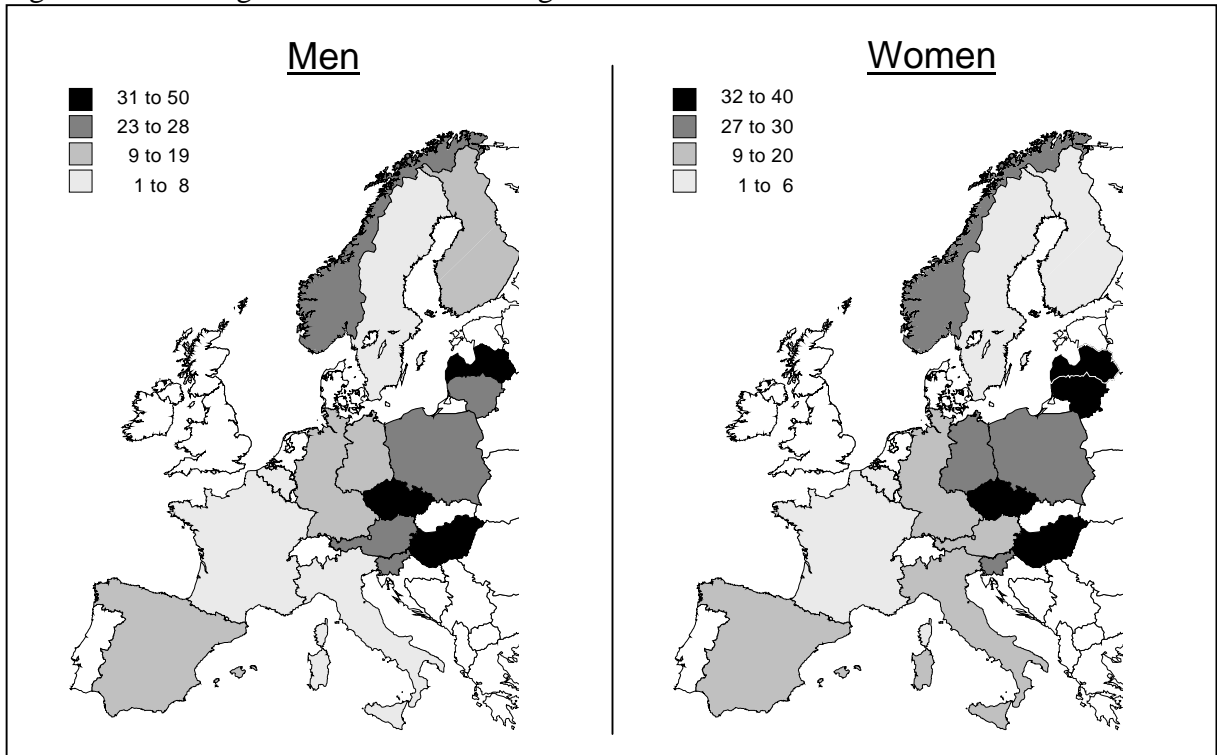
Source: see table 5.

Figure 4. Percentage of individuals leaving home before the first union.



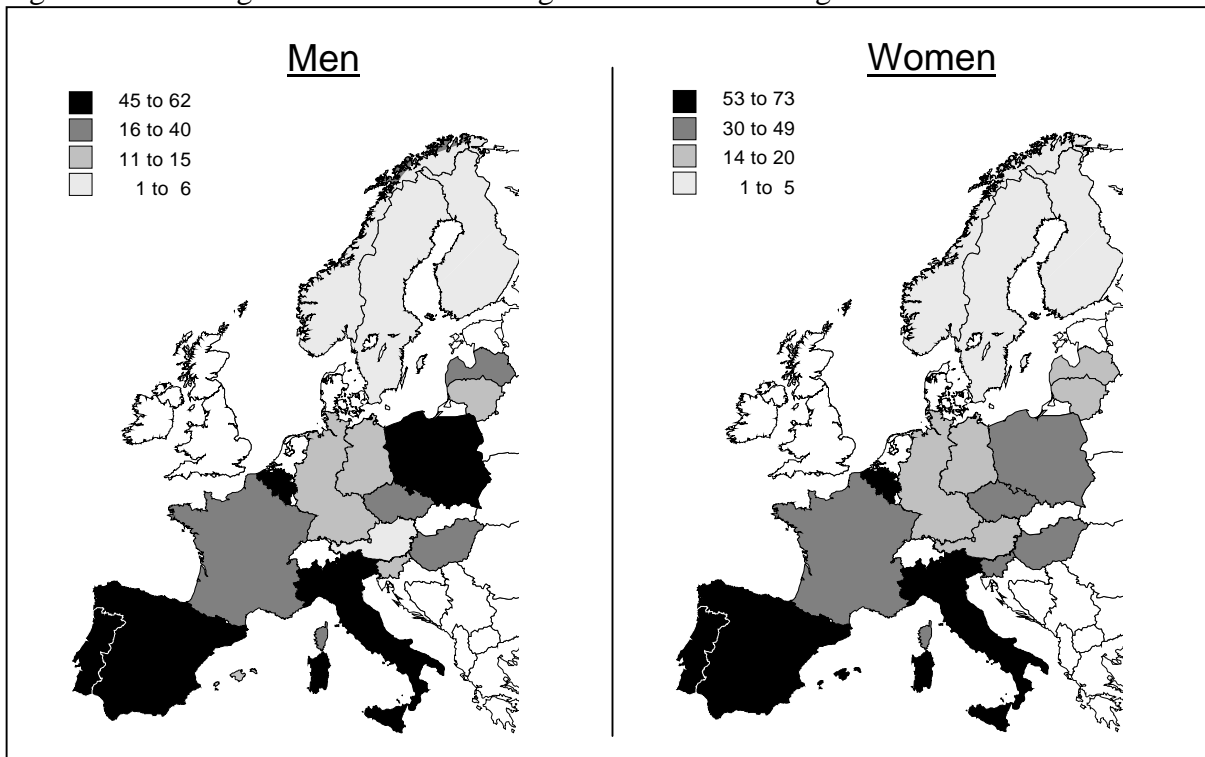
Source: see table 6.

Figure 5. Percentage of individuals leaving home after the first union.



Source: see table 6.

Figure 6. Percentage of individuals leaving home at first marriage.



Source: see table 7.