

# **Changes in the transition to adulthood in Europe**

**An empirical analysis of changes among cohorts born between in the 1950's and 1960's  
in Europe and among Dutch cohorts born between 1900 and 1982**

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## 1. Introduction

In most modern societies, fertility has decreased quite dramatically during the last four decades. At least two related aspects of this drop in fertility can be distinguished. First, entry into parenthood has been postponed (Bosveld, 1996; Sobotka, 2004). For instance, Sobotka (2004) shows that both in (West-)Germany and the Netherlands, the mean age at first childbirth has increased by four years between 1972 and 1999. Such postponement is evident across Europe, although both the timing of the onset of the postponement and the speed of postponement varies strongly between countries. Second, the quantum of fertility has decreased; women do not only get their children at a later age, but they also get fewer children. This implies a rise in the proportion of women who remain childless and a decrease in the proportion of women who have relatively many children. Again, Sobotka (2004) shows that childlessness has increased rapidly across Europe. In West-Germany, for instance, 13 percent of all women born in 1945 remained childless, whereas it is estimated that between 23 and 25 percent of women born in 1965 will remain childless.

General changes in the transition phase between youth and adulthood could be an important driving force behind the process of postponement of parenthood. Demographers and sociologists studying the transition to adulthood have observed major changes in this life phase during the last forty years. First of all, many important events have been postponed — or even foregone completely. With regard to events in the family life domain, this is most evident for entry into first marriage and entry into parenthood. For instance, Corijn and Klijzing (2001) show a strong increase in the timing of first marriage and the timing of first birth in a large number of countries across Western Europe. During the same period, work-related transitions such as the completion of full-time education and the entry into a first job have also been postponed. However, the degree of postponement is not uniform across life transitions. Corijn and Klijzing (2001), for example, generally report small delays in the median age at leaving the parental home and entry into a union.

The life courses of young adults also show increasing diversity. This is evident in a number of ways. First, marriage and parenthood have not just been postponed, but an increasing proportion of young adults seem to be foregoing marriage and parenthood altogether. In other words, a growing category of young adults will no longer make transitions that have long been viewed as ‘normal’ status passages on the road to adulthood. Second, ‘new’ major

transitions have emerged or gained importance. The rapid growth of unmarried cohabitation forms the best illustration, but there have been rises in other household types such as living alone, and single parenting as well. Third, the variation in the timing of life transitions has increased. Whereas most members of cohorts who moved into adulthood during the 1960's made the transitions of leaving home, marriage and parenthood at about the same time, the variation in the timing has been much larger among more recent cohorts. A fourth sign of the growing diversification of life courses is their less strict patterning. A fifth and final change in the transition to adulthood is that the linkages between events are weakening. In earlier days, some events in young adulthood occurred closely spaced together, but many of these have become less intricately related. This is most marked for the link between leaving home and entry into a first union, but is also evident for the relationship between marriage and first childbirth.

The main goal of this report is to examine the changes in the transition from youth to adulthood. This will be done in two different, but mutually reinforcing ways. First, attention will be paid to the historical trends in the transition to adulthood. Information on these trends is often limited for two reasons: a lack of data on important aspects of the transition to adulthood and a relatively short historical time window. Often, comparisons do not get back any further than the 1960's or 1970's. Unique retrospective data from the Netherlands will be used to answer the following questions: To what extent does the trend towards postponement as observed for cohorts born in the 1950's en 1960's differ from those of earlier and later birth cohorts? Is the trend towards postponement and destandardisation simply the continuation of trends that started earlier or does it constitute a break with earlier patterns of entering adulthood? Have the trend observed among cohorts in the 1950's and 1960's continued among younger cohorts or is the process of entering adulthood changing once again?

Secondly, attention will be paid to cross-national variation in the transition to adulthood. To what extent is the patterning of this transition as observed in Western-European countries like Germany and the Netherlands also evident in other parts of Europe? Comparative data on cohorts that were born during the 1950's and early 1960's can be used to sketch a picture of the regional variation in the transition to adulthood within Europe. This part of the analysis will provide an answer to the following questions: To what extent is the same trend towards postponement and destandardisation apparent throughout Europe? Is it occurring at the same

time and with the same intensity across the whole of Europe, or do clear differences between countries or European regions exist?

The structure of this report is as follows. Before embarking on the empirical analyses that are central to this report, a brief overview will be given of a number of important explanations for both temporal and regional variation in the transition to adulthood. This will be the topic of section 2. In section 3, the trend in the transition to adulthood in the Netherlands will be discussed. The attention is mainly focussed on a description of the changes in the timing of a number of important events in the young adult life course. These events are leaving the educational system, entry into the labour force, leaving home, entry into a co-residential union, marriage and entry into parenthood. In addition, a brief overview of important institutional arrangements that might have an impact on the decisions of current cohorts of young adults will be provided. In section 4, the focus shifts to Europe and the transition to adulthood in a large number of European countries is described. In this part of the report, the emphasis is on the life courses of young adults born in the 1950's and early 1960's. Although it would be interesting to describe the transition for younger cohorts as well, data limitations do not make that a feasible option. In section 5, some main conclusions will be drawn and some possible implications of the findings will be discussed.

## **2. An overview of explanations for changes in the transition to adulthood**

In this section I will discuss four types of theories and perspectives that have been or can be used to explain trends in the transition to adulthood and differences between countries and regions in this transition. A first class of perspectives has been developed with the explicit aim of enhancing our understanding of changes in the transition into adulthood. They put forward a theoretical ‘discourse’ aimed at explaining transitions in both the family- and the career-domain or in the family-domain only. A second class of explanations does not pay specific attention to young adulthood, but discusses a much broader set of phenomena. However, decisions made by young adults constitute an important subset of the phenomena addressed by these theories. A third class of explanations emphasizes the role of policies and other institutional arrangements. A final set of explanations focus on the explanation of a subset of behaviours that are part of the family-domain, like union formation and fertility. However, the potential scope of these theories is so broad, that these theories have important implications for our understanding of the transition from youth to adulthood.

In discussing these theories, I will pay particular attention to the kind of behavioural mechanisms they assume to be the ‘driving force’ behind change and differences in the transition into adulthood. To this end, I make use of a simple behavioural model to explain choices by young adults, in which the actual choices made by young adults are seen as the outcome of the interplay between two broad classes of factors, namely preferences and constraints (cf. Featherman et al., 1984; Goldscheider & Waite, 1991; Hill & Yeung, 1999; Marini, 1985). Preferences is the term I use to subsume a number of concepts that relate to the subjective appreciation of alternative choices, like value, attitude, and taste. Constraint is the term I use to denote factors external to the actor that may impinge on the realization of preference. This includes both factors that enable the realization of preferences, like resources and opportunities, and factors that hinder this realization, like restrictions. In particular, I will focus on three types of constraints, viz. social (or normative), economic, and institutional constraints. Using such a simple scheme, differences between countries or between cohorts in the transition to adulthood can be attributed to (a) differences in preferences between young adults in both countries/cohorts, (b) differences in constraints between young adults in both countries/cohorts, or (c) a combination of differences in preferences and constraints.

### *2.1. Theories with an explicit focus on the transition to adulthood*

The two theories that focus explicitly on changes in behaviour in young adulthood are Lesthaeghe's and Van de Kaa's Second Demographic Transition theory and Buchmann's destandardization of the life course thesis. Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa (1986; Lesthaeghe, 1995; Van de Kaa, 1987, 2001) develop their Second Demographic Transition thesis in order to interpret the changes in union formation and fertility patterns that occurred in many European countries since the 1960's. They interpret the decline in fertility, the delay in marriage and parenthood and the rising popularity of unmarried cohabitation as signifying the weakening of the institution of the family. This process results from changes in the economic structure that turned the individual into the primary unit of economic production and consumption and of cultural trends, in particular the process of secularization and the rise of the ideology of self-development (e.g. Inglehart, 1977). Because the new values of self-actualization are not accepted in all countries at the same time, the SDT occurs earlier in some countries than in others.

What are the main behavioral mechanisms that can explain variation in time and space in the transition into adulthood according to the SDT? In my opinion, two interrelated aspects are of primary importance. First, the SDT thesis stresses a decline in the social constraints facing young adults' behaviour. The process of secularization and the weakening dependence on the family resulting from the spread of the welfare state, lessen the strength of normative prescriptions and broaden the latitude of choice for young adults. Second, the preferences of young adults themselves have shifted. In line with the ideology of self-actualization, young adults put both more value on other life-domains than the family, and (within the family) they put more value on the quality of relationships. As I mentioned above, this shift in preferences is made possible both by economic and cultural changes.

Buchmann (1989), in a study on the changing entry into adulthood, argues that two twin processes are particularly important to understand change in the entry into adulthood, viz. the processes of individualization and institutionalization. She argues that economic and political developments since the late 18th century have fuelled the process of individualization. At the same time, the state has a need of regulation the lives of individuals. It is this dynamic that is at the heart of understanding the entry into adulthood. As Buchmann (1989, p. 18) argues:

“Life comes to be less constrained by traditions and customs and thus more susceptible to individualized action orientations, but it has to be fitted into the standardized and bureaucratized life patterns defined by the state. Individuals *can* make life course-related choices, but they also *must* make them in correspondence with the requirements of the standardized life course. (italics in the original).”

In her view, society influences the life course by (a) regulating the timing of entry into roles by age-related prescriptions and (b) by infusing people with an ideology of individualism. Individuals are expected to create biographical strategies that orient their actions. These biographical strategies, however, do not have to be invented by individuals from scratch, but are strongly influenced by the scripts that are available in the cultural realm. In this way, people are provided with a set of scripts that facilitate the construction of a biographical strategy. In this sense, individuals are making choices among “structurally given alternatives” (Buchmann, 1989, p.42). Until the 1960’s entry into roles was strongly age-graded and there was one dominant cultural script. The growth of the welfare state and the diversification of educational and occupational pathways into adulthood has further individualized young adults’ life courses and thus contributed to a partial destandardisation of this life phase.

In my view, the main behavioural mechanisms to explain differences in time and space in this theory are, again, twofold. First, preferences are changing and the range of options from which young adults can choose is growing. Second, the institutional constraints that young adults are faced with, are important. Buchmann emphasizes in particular the role of age-constraints that are part and parcel of all kinds of government regulations, but also pays attention to the impact of (changing) institutional arrangements in general.

## 2.2. *General theories of social change with clear implications for the transition into adulthood*

Next, I turn my attention to a number of theories that are not constructed with the explicit aim of understanding the changing entry into adulthood, but that, nevertheless have very clear implications for this process.

In his larger project on the modernization of society, Giddens (1991, 1992) also pays attention to the consequences of the modernization process for intimate relationships and for the self. A



key concept in his work on modern society is the term 'reflexivity'. Long-term economic and cultural change has made it important for competent actors to constantly reflect on their behaviour (Giddens, 1976). In modern society life-planning, being part of this reflective monitoring of conduct, constitutes a general feature of life. Even more, it is necessary to uphold one's self-identity: "In a world of alternative life-style options, strategic *life-planning* becomes of special importance. (...) Life-planning is a means of preparing a course of future actions mobilised in terms of the self's biography (Giddens, 1991, p.85, italics in original)." This implies that young adults are expected to be reflecting on their life-course and try to make sense out of it, both retro- and prospectively. From a substantive point of view, Giddens points to the emergence of a new relationship ideal, that he terms the 'pure relationship'. He summarizes its content as follows (Giddens, 1992, p. 58):

"It refers to a situation where a social relation is entered for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it."

The emergence of the 'pure relationship' has made all types of relationships, but marriage in particular, more fragile (Mills, 2000). If it does not deliver 'enough satisfactions' to either of the spouses it will be dissolved.

Although the work of Giddens is very much concerned with the economic and structural transformations that allowed changes in the intimate realm to occur, his theory mainly stresses the importance of preferences in understanding changes in the transition to adulthood. Two aspects are central. First, the growing importance of self-planning makes it increasingly important for young adults to be actively involved in creating their life-course, thus emphasizing the importance of choice and agency. Second, the concept of the pure relationship implies that young adults will have higher expectations about partner relationships. This may mean that they will postpone entering them until they are more certain whether these expectations are met. It could also imply, and this is the more likely outcome, that they will be less reluctant to dissolve a relationship if it does not live up to expectations.

A key feature of the work of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 1996) is their emphasis on the consequences of risk for contemporary relationships. As a result of large scale social

processes, like globalization and individualization, individuals are faced with an ideology to decide for themselves, whereas at the same time it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996) state:

“Opportunities, dangers, biographical uncertainties that were earlier predefined within the family association, the village community, or by recourse to the rules of social estates or classes, must now be perceived, interpreted, decided and processed by individuals themselves. The consequences – opportunities and burdens alike – are shifted on to individuals who, naturally, in face of the complexity of social interconnections, are often unable to take the necessary decisions in a properly founded way, by considering interests, morality and consequences.”

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim point out that people – and young adults in particular – are faced with risky decisions, for example with regard to the combination of a family and a career or with regard to moving house. This often leads to a fear of commitment – in view of the possible consequences – and thus to the postponement of decisions on marriage and parenthood. At the same time, they make it clear that the things people – and women in particular – want out of relationships is changing. Women want a family and a career and they want a much more equal division of labour.

In my opinion, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim emphasize two things. Like other theorists (e.g. Lesthaeghe, Van de Kaa and Giddens) they point to a change in preferences with regard to relationships. But in addition, they stress that uncertainty is an important constraint in the decision making process. This uncertainty can take many different veils. It can refer to economic uncertainties, but to uncertainties about the suitability of the prospective partner as well. These constraints are expected to lead to postponement of entry into marriage and parenthood until uncertainties are smaller and it is easier to take the proper decisions.

Blossfeld (Blossfeld et al., 2005) focusses on the role of globalization processes on the transition to adulthood. He starts from a broad conception of globalization, including four different aspects: (i) economic globalization, (ii) network globalization, (iii) globalization as a discourse, and (iv) political globalization. For the current discussion, in particular the first two elements of globalization are important. Network globalization refers to the rapid and global

spread of information made possible by recent technological developments. This aspect of globalization is important in the sense that it allows for the rapid transfer of new behavioral models. In that sense, globalization speeds up the diffusion of preferences, ideas and values of relevance to the entry into adulthood. However, much more importance is attached to the process of economic globalization. Economic globalization refers to the fact that the economy (markets, production, consumption) is becoming increasingly global, creating new opportunities, but also new threats to national economies. In a comparison of the impact of globalization on the young adult life course, Blossfeld and his co-workers (Blossfeld et al., 2005) suggest that economic globalization has increased the uncertainties among young adults in many countries, leading to a deterioration of the employment position of young adults and to a delay in the entry into marriage and parenthood. What is also of interest, however, is the emphasis put on the buffering role of national institutions. Effects of globalization are found to be path-dependent. How strongly globalization impinges on the life-course depends on the institutional arrangements in a country. In some countries these institutional arrangements are able to largely absorb the economic uncertainties introduced by globalization, whereas in other countries they are much more likely to strengthen the tendencies introduced by globalization.

In my view, the globalization thesis proposed by Blossfeld suggests two things. First, network globalization can lead to the rapid diffusion of new preferences, resulting in a broader set of options to choose from and in changed preferences. Economic globalization raises uncertainty about the future, resulting in an increase of the economic constraints facing young adults as they make their transition into adulthood.

### *2.3. Theories on institutional arrangements*

A third set of theories that I will briefly discuss do not address young adulthood, but focus on a specific type of factors that can have an impact on the transition to adulthood, viz. national policies. I will first pay attention to the general typology of welfare state of Esping-Andersen and next turn to the much more specific discussion of family policies by Gauthier.

Esping-Andersen (1990) suggests that three types of welfare state regimes can be distinguished. These three types all have their internal logic and have a strong impact on the behaviour of citizens of these welfare states. The three regimes distinguished by Esping-

Andersen are the liberal, conservative, and social-democratic welfare state. A liberal welfare state only extends limited social benefits and, if so, only to those who are mostly in need (e.g. only means-tested benefits). A conservative welfare state offers more generous support, but often ties this support to specific positions. For instance, preferential treatment is often given to one-breadwinner families by special tax-regulations. In social-democratic welfare states, finally, support is generous and not restricted to specific positions. This typology has triggered a whole debate on the number of welfare states that can be meaningfully distinguished. Gelissen (2001) gives an overview of this debate. An important issue concerns whether there exists a separate Southern European or Mediterranean type of welfare state. In addition, Esping-Andersen (1990) focussed on capitalist countries and did not pay attention to Eastern Europe, but this is no longer warranted today.

Although Esping-Andersen did not apply his typology to issues relating to the transition to adulthood, it has large and evident relevance to it (Breen & Buchmann, 2002). I see at least two aspects that are worth mentioning. First, in societies with relatively generous social benefits young adults will face less uncertainty about their economic future and have more spending power to start a family. This would suggest that family formation is facilitated in such a welfare regime. In addition, the type of welfare state will probably interact with other constraining factors in influencing the behaviour of young adults. One case in point is the potentially buffering effect of the welfare state with regard to the impact of globalization. If the state offers generous social benefits to young adults, globalization will probably have less impact than if the state offers only minimal support. Another example concerns the impact of changing preferences. In a society with generous benefits, it is easier for young adults to opt for new behavioural models than in societies with few benefits. The reason is that they are less dependent on their family of origin in the former case, thus facilitating them to exhibit behaviour that may be at odds with the preferences of their parents.

Gauthier (1996) also focuses on state policies, but restricts herself to policies in the family realm. She distinguishes four types of family policy models: pro-family / pro-natalistic (e.g. France), pro-traditional (e.g. West-Germany), pro-egalitarian (e.g. Sweden), and pro-family but non-interventionist (e.g. Britain). This typology is somewhat more specific than that of Esping-Andersen, but shows clear parallels as well. Fux (2002) also presents an inventory of regimes and makes a threefold distinction that basically parallels the one by Esping-Andersen but focuses on family policies only. The same remarks made earlier about the behavioural

mechanism underlying the theory of Esping-Andersen apply to this perspective as well. A potential advantage of a focus on family-related policies (if these policies are not defined too narrowly) is that it is easier to derive testable hypotheses from this more restricted perspective.

#### *2.4. Demographic theories with implications for the transition into adulthood as a whole*

The final class of theories that I will discuss includes theories that have been developed to explain a subset of the phenomena that constitute the transition into adulthood in the family domain. However, these theories have broad implications for the transition into adulthood as a whole. In this class I will pay brief attention to Becker's New Home Economics approach and to Easterlin's work on the impact of cohort size on the life chances of cohorts.

Becker's (1981) New Home Economics is developed to explain the drop in marriage and fertility rates and the increase of divorce. Although there are more phenomena that are part of the transition to adulthood in the family domain, these three aspects clearly constitute a significant part of it. Becker suggests that the gains from marriage and parenthood have been reduced as a result of women's increased educational attainment. As women invest more heavily in their education, their opportunity costs will increase if they withdraw from the labor market after marriage or after childbirth. As a result, higher educated women will become more reluctant to leave the labour market and enter into marriage and motherhood. Evidently, this reasoning is based on a traditional, sex-specific division of labour and on the lack of institutional arrangements to facilitate the combination of family care and employment (Liefbroer & Corijn, 1999). Still, to the extent that a traditional division of labour is widespread and institutional arrangements to facilitate the combination of work and family are limited, it may be a relevant explanation for trends and differentials in the transition into adulthood.

The implication of the New Home Economics model for the behavioural mechanisms underlying the transition to adulthood is that a change or differentials in preferences are important. More specifically, it suggests that changing preferences of women, resulting from their increased educational attainment and labour force participation (Bernhardt, 1993), may be the driving force behind much of the change in behaviour that we witness today.

Easterlin (1980) tries to explain why large cohorts often postpone transitions into adulthood. He suggests that behaviour is motivated by economic aspirations that are based on the level of prosperity experienced during childhood and youth. If the economic situation facing young adults makes it difficult to realize these aspirations, a delay in marriage and parenthood will result. People who are part of a large cohort will often face poorer labour market opportunities than people who are part of a small cohort. Therefore, the former are less likely to realize their economic aspirations early in adulthood and will have to postpone marriage and parenthood until they have done so. The behavioural mechanism underlying Easterlin's model is relatively simple. Economic constraints lead to either an acceleration or postponement of marriage and parenthood.

## 2.5. *Conclusion*

Separately or in combination, the theories discussed in this section form the core of most scientific explanations of the changes that have occurred in the transition to adulthood in recent decades and of the differences in that transition across Europe. It is clearly beyond the scope of this report to ascertain the (relative) validity of each of these theoretical approaches. Rather, they have been discussed to give an impression of the kind of factors that are driving changes in young adults' lives. However, in the final section of the report, I will return to these theoretical explanations in order to reflect (a) on the fit between these theoretical orientations and the empirical results of this study and (b) to reflect on the implications of the empirical findings for our understanding of the decrease in fertility occurring in many Western societies.

### **3. Changes in the transition to adulthood in the Netherlands**

In this section, the changes in the transition to adulthood for cohorts born between 1913 and 1977 in the Netherlands will be described. The choice for these sets of cohorts has both a practical and a scientific reason. The practical one is that a twin study on the changes in the transition to adulthood in Germany (Hennig, 2005) also focuses on cohorts born between 1913 and 1977. Using the same range of cohorts and the same five-year groupings facilitates comparison between the German and the Dutch data. The theoretical reason is that a focus on these cohorts allows for a much broader view on the changes in the transition to adulthood than is usually the case. Most studies (e.g. Corijn & Klijzing, 2001) focus on cohorts born after the Second World War and effectively study the changes since the late 1960's and early 1970's only. By doing so, the family of the 1950's and early 1960's, characterised by early and almost universal marriage and parenthood and by a clear sex-specific division of labour, is taken as the point of reference. This practice has strengthened the myth of the timeless nature of the 'traditional' family. However, it is an empirical question whether the 'traditional' family of the 1950's really was that timeless. Using a longer time-span to study the transition to adulthood will allow for an opportunity to (partially) answer this question.

First, the data and procedures will be discussed. Next, the results of the empirical analyses will be presented. This section ends with a discussion of the transition to adulthood among the most recent cohorts.

#### *3.1. Data and methods*

To describe the changes in the transition to adulthood one ideally wants information on the occurrence and timing of all important events in the lives of young adults. Such information cannot or only partially be derived from official statistics, because statistical offices do not record the occurrence of many important events (e.g. entry into the labour market, entry into a co-residential union). Therefore, retrospective life-history surveys constitute the main source of information on the transition to adulthood. A retrospective life-history survey is a survey in which information is gathered on both the occurrence and the timing of events in the life of respondents. This information allows for the reconstruction of the transitional phase between youth and adulthood. A drawback of retrospective life-history studies is that the sample size is often too restricted to use relatively small cohort-groupings. Therefore, one often gets a

Table 1 An overview of surveys used in this study

<b>Name</b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Cohorts</b>	<b>N males</b>	<b>N females</b>
Nestor-LSN	(Broese van Groenou, Van Tilburg, De Leeuw, and Liefbroer 1995)	Vrije Universiteit NIDI	1992	1903-37	2000	2000
Family Survey	(Ultee and Ganzeboom 1995)	Nijmegen University	1992-93	1928-74	900	900
ESR- Telepanel		Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research	1992	1903-75	900	900
FFS88	(Statistics Netherlands 1988)	Statistics Netherlands	1988	1950-69	-	6000
FFS93	(Statistics Netherlands 1994)	Statistics Netherlands	1993	1950-74	3700	4500
FFS98	(Statistics Netherlands 1998)	Statistics Netherlands	1998	1945-79	4717	5450
FFS03	(Statistics Netherlands 2003)	Statistics Netherlands	2003	1940-84	3916	4229
HIN95	(Kalmijn, Bernasco, and Weesie 1996)	Utrecht University	1995	1916-77	1150	1150
PSIN	(Liefbroer and Kalmijn 1997)	Vrije Universiteit Utrecht University NIDI	1987-99	1961-69	850	850
NKPS	(Dykstra, Kalmijn, Knijn, Komter, Liefbroer, Mulder 2005)	NIDI Utrecht University University of Amsterdam Tilburg University	2003	1923-85	3420	4741

relatively imprecise picture of how the transition to adulthood changes across cohorts. To solve this problem, I pooled information from ten different life-history surveys conducted in the Netherlands between 1988 and 2003. By pooling these datasets, information on more than 22,000 men and 30,000 women born between 1903 and 1985 was available. See Table 1 for an overview of the datasets included in this analysis. From this pooled dataset, all respondents born between 1913 and 1977 were included in the analyses presented below.

To study the transition to adulthood, the timing of a number of important events in the lives of young adults were studied. Two events (exit from the educational system and entry into a first job) occur in the educational and work domain, whereas the others (leaving the parental home, entry into a first co-residential union, first marriage, and first childbirth) occur in the family domain. Given the importance of the transition to parenthood for this study, attention is not only paid to the age at which entry into parenthood occurs, but also to the duration between entry into the labour force and entry into a union on the one hand and entry into parenthood on the other. Information on these durations allows one to assess whether young



Table 2 Age at exit from full-time education among Dutch women and men, by birth cohort (in years)

Cohort	Women			Men		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
1913-17	12.3	13.7	15.5	12.8	14.0	16.6
1918-22	13.1	14.1	16.0	13.7	14.5	16.9
1923-27	13.4	14.3	16.3	13.7	15.0	17.3
1928-32	13.8	15.1	16.8	14.3	16.2	18.6
1933-37	13.9	15.5	17.3	14.3	16.0	18.3
1938-42	14.4	15.9	17.2	14.8	16.7	18.8
1943-47	14.8	16.0	17.9	15.1	16.9	19.8
1948-52	15.1	16.8	19.3	15.9	17.7	21.7
1953-57	15.9	17.7	20.6	16.8	19.3	23.0
1958-62	16.9	18.5	21.5	17.5	19.5	23.3
1963-67	17.7	19.3	22.0	18.0	20.5	23.5
1968-72	18.2	19.9	22.6	18.4	21.0	24.3
1973-77						

adults are postponing entry into parenthood to the same extent as they postpone other events or whether parenthood is postponed to a stronger degree than other events in young adulthood.

For each of these events, survival curves were calculated using the Kaplan-Meier method. For each event, gender- and cohort-specific information on the age at which a quarter, half and three-quarter of the young adult population have experienced the event is presented. If less than half or less than three-quarter of the population had experienced an event before the date at which the surveys were held, no estimate is given.

### 3.2. *The timing of the events in the occupational and family domains*

Within the work domain two major changes that occur during young adulthood are leaving school and entry into a first job. Here, attention will be paid to both of these events. In Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2, information is given on the age at which 25, 50 and 75% of men and women in different birth cohorts have left full-time education<sup>1</sup>.

For women, a clear continuous increase in the median age at leaving school can be observed.

<sup>1</sup> The age at leaving school has not been asked in some of the more recent surveys in my datapool. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the timing of this event among the 1973-77 birth cohort.

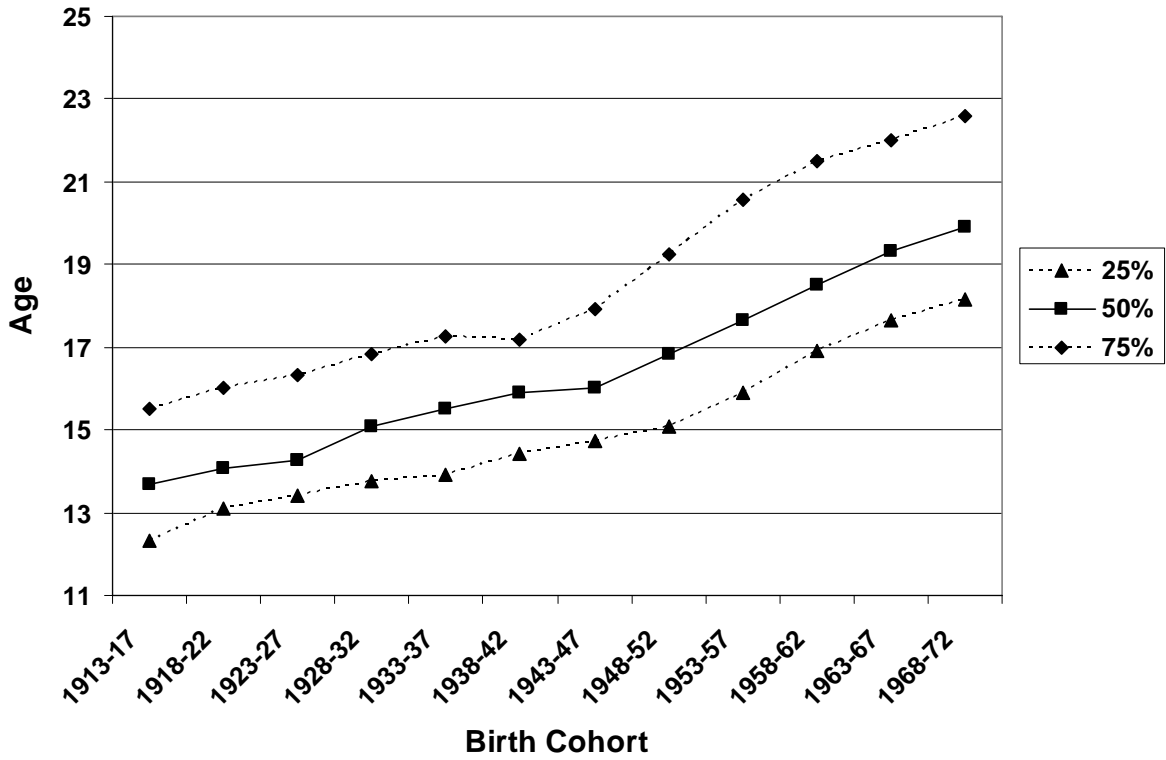


Figure 1 Age at exit from full-time education among Dutch women, by birth cohort (in years)

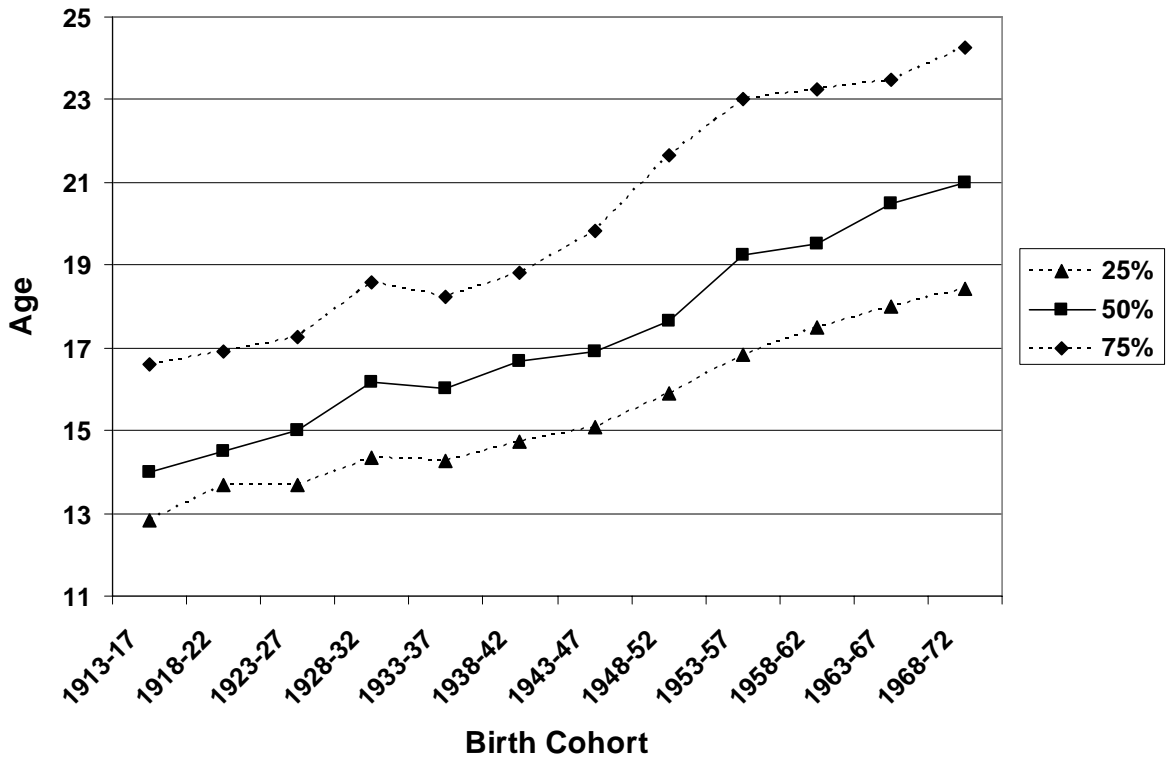


Figure 2 Age at exit from full-time education among Dutch men, by birth cohort (in years)

Half of the women born between 1913 and 1917 had left school before they turned 14. The median age increased to almost 20 years for women born between 1968 and 1972. Among men, the same trend can be observed. The median age at leaving the educational system was 14 for men born in 1913-17 and rose to 21 for men born between 1968 and 1972. It is interesting to note that, although men in recent birth cohorts leave school a year later than women do, the educational attainment of men is not higher (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). This implies that, on average, it takes men somewhat longer to complete the same level of education as women.

Table 3 Age at entry into a first job<sup>1</sup> among Dutch women and men, by birth cohort (in years)

Cohort	Women			Men		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
1913-17	14.9	16.7	19.5	14.7	15.9	18.9
1918-22	14.8	17.2	22.6	14.8	16.8	21.6
1923-27	16.2	18.1	23.1	15.3	17.3	20.3
1928-32	15.5	17.5	21.0	15.2	16.8	20.2
1933-37	15.4	17.1	20.3	14.9	16.8	21.5
1938-42	15.4	17.3	20.2	15.6	17.5	21.9
1943-47	15.8	17.8	20.8	16.0	17.9	22.0
1948-52	16.1	17.8	21.0	16.5	19.1	22.7
1953-57	17.2	18.7	21.5	17.3	19.3	22.8
1958-62	18.1	19.9	23.2	18.0	20.7	23.7
1963-67	18.4	20.3	23.6	18.3	21.1	24.5
1968-72	18.6	21.0	23.6	18.4	21.1	24.0
1973-77	18.3	20.8	22.6	18.3	20.6	22.8

<sup>1</sup> Jobs on the side and jobs during holiday spells excluded

The duration between the age at which 25% and the age at which 75% of a population has experienced an event is called the inter-quartile range. This range can be used to assess the amount of variation in the timing of an event. The larger the inter-quartile range, the less standardised is an event. For both men and women an increase in the inter-quartile range across cohorts can be observed. Among women, the inter-quartile range increased from 3.2 years among the 1913-17 cohort to 4.4. for the 1968-72 cohort. Among men, the increase is somewhat larger: from 3.8 among the 1913-17 cohort to 5.9 among the 168-72 cohort. Across time, exit from the educational system has become somewhat less standardised.

Entry into a first job constitutes the second major event in the occupational domain for young adults. Information on the timing of this event for women and men is presented in Table 3 and

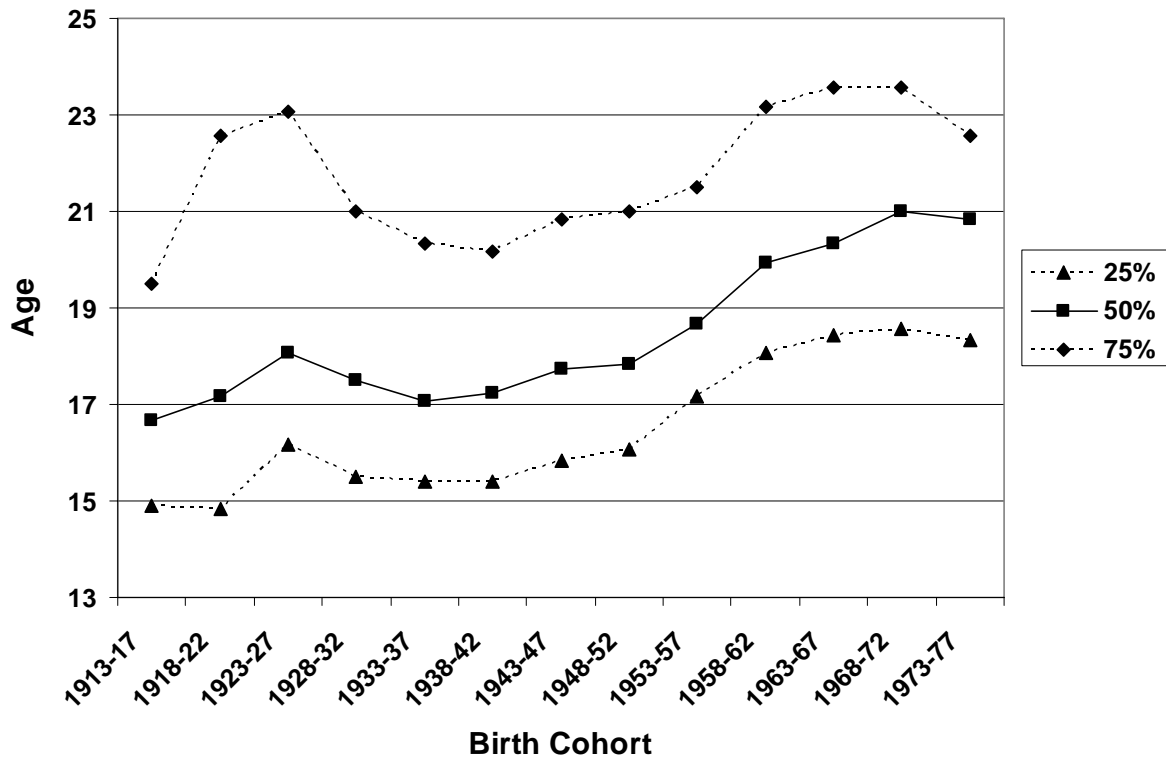


Figure 3 Age at entry into a first job among Dutch women, by birth cohort (in years)

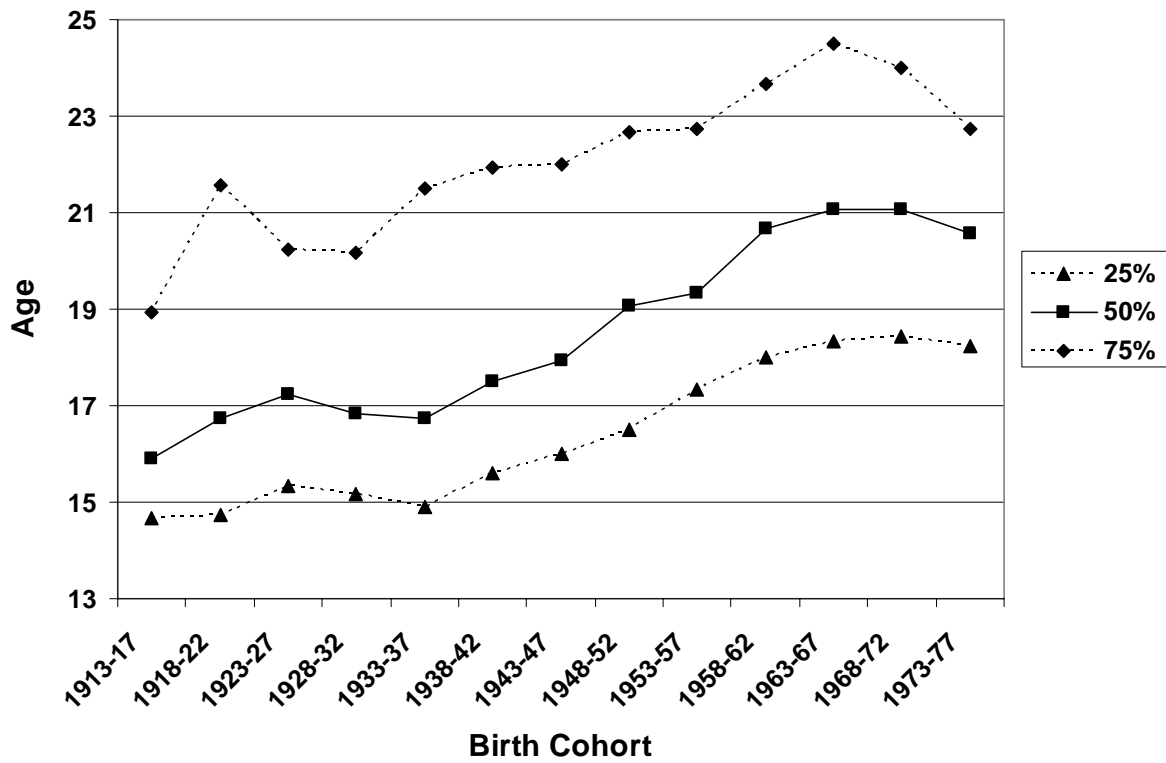


Figure 4 Age at entry into a first job among Dutch men, by birth cohort (in years)

in Figures 3 and 4. As for exit of the educational system, the general trend is clearly towards a later age at entry into a first job. However, the picture is somewhat less clear-cut than for leaving school. Among women born between 1913 and 1952 a small increase in the median age at entry into a first job from just below 17 to just below 18 years of age can be observed. From the 1953-57 birth cohort onwards a much steeper rise in the median age at entry into a first job can be found: it rises from 18.7 for birth cohort 1953-57 to 21 years for birth cohort 1968-72. Among the youngest birth cohort (1973-77) a stabilisation of the timing of entry into a first job seems to have occurred. For men, more or less the same picture emerges from the data, although the rise in the median age is somewhat more regular than for women. It rises from 15.9 years for the 1913-17 birth cohort to 21.1 years for the 1968-72 birth cohort. Among the youngest cohort, the median age at entry into a first job has decreased slightly to 20.6 years. Finally, although the inter-quartile range varies from cohort to cohort, no clear trend in the variation in the timing of entry into a first job can be observed.

Table 4 Age at leaving home among Dutch women and men, by birth cohort (in years)

Cohort	Women			Men		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
1913-17	20.4	23.8	26.5	22.0	25.2	28.8
1918-22	20.3	23.2	26.0	20.7	24.0	28.2
1923-27	20.5	23.5	26.3	19.3	23.6	28.1
1928-32	20.8	23.3	25.5	20.3	24.6	27.4
1933-37	20.6	22.8	25.1	21.5	24.8	27.8
1938-42	20.1	22.3	24.8	21.6	24.1	26.2
1943-47	19.5	21.4	23.3	21.0	23.3	25.3
1948-52	18.8	20.6	22.3	20.5	22.8	25.2
1953-57	18.3	20.1	22.0	20.2	22.5	24.9
1958-62	18.5	20.3	22.3	20.0	22.5	25.1
1963-67	18.9	20.8	23.1	20.4	22.8	25.4
1968-72	19.2	20.9	23.2	20.1	22.8	25.7
1973-77	19.1	20.8	22.8	20.2	22.9	25.6

Young adults do not only experience transition in the occupational domain, but also experience numerous events in the family domain. Usually, leaving the parental home constitutes the first of these events. Table 4 and Figures 5 and 6 present data on the change in the timing of this event. These results show that the timing of leaving home followed a completely different pattern compared to leaving the educational system and entry into the labour market.

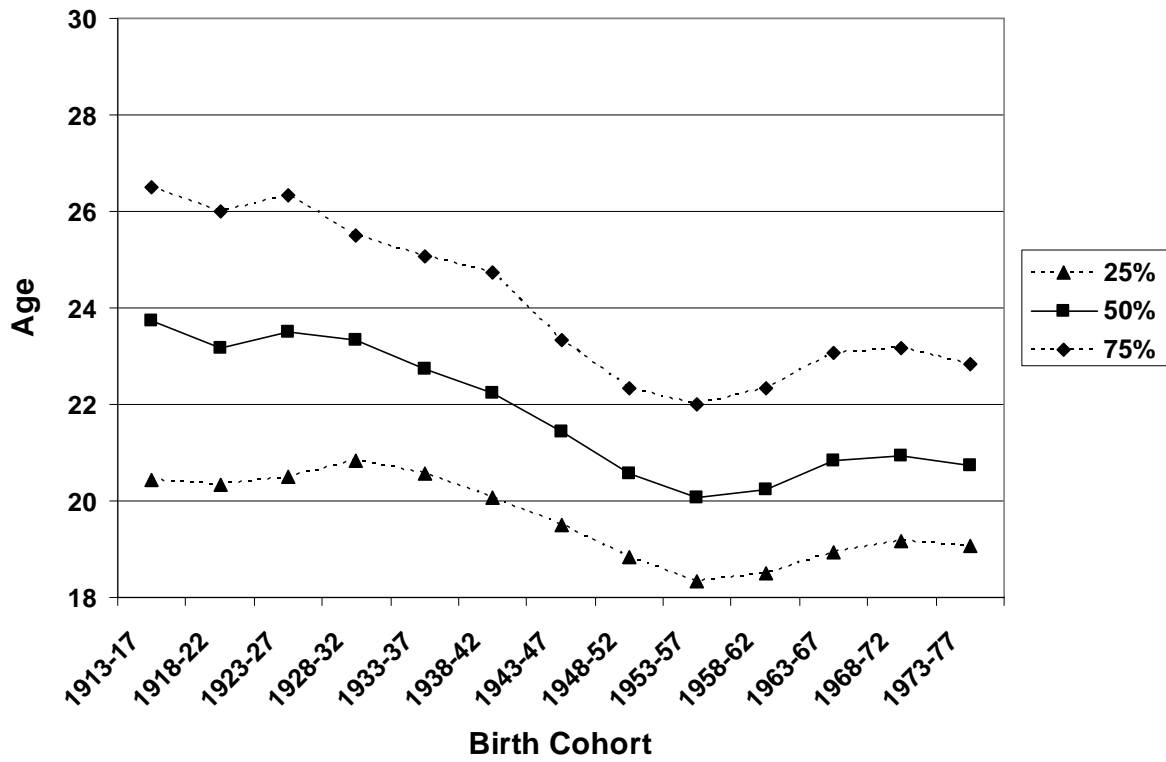


Figure 5 Age at leaving home among Dutch women, by birth cohort (in years)

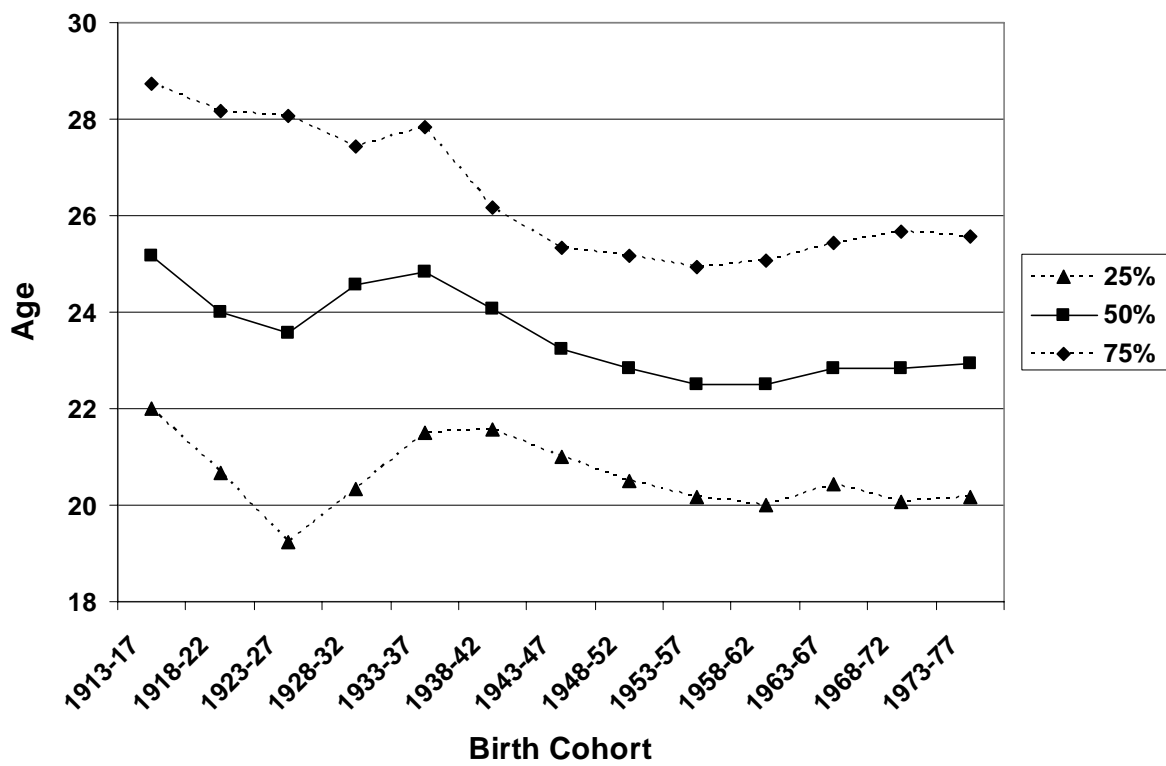


Figure 6 Age at leaving home among Dutch men, by birth cohort (in years)

Among women, a clear decrease in the median age at leaving home can be observed from cohort 1913-17 to cohort 1953-57. Whereas the median age at leaving home was almost 24 years for women born between 1913 and 1917, it was just slightly above 20 for women born between 1953 and 1957. Among more recent cohorts, a slight increase in the median age at leaving home can be observed, stabilising at just under 21 years of age. Among men, the same tendencies can be observed, although the patterns among older cohorts are somewhat more aberrant. Among more recent cohorts of young adult men, the median age at leaving home is just below 23. Men, on average, leave the parental home some two years later than women do. An additional interesting feature is that the inter-quartile range becomes smaller among cohorts born before the early 1950's, signalling a standardisation of the life course, but do not show much signs of destandardisation among more recent cohorts. Basically, the interquartile range stays relatively stable at about four years for women and five years for men. This gender difference suggests that there is more variation in men's timing of leaving home than in women's timing.

Table 5 Age at entry into a first union among Dutch women and men, by birth cohort (in years)

Cohort	Women			Men		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
1913-17	22.9	25.8	30.4	25.5	27.8	32.0
1918-22	22.9	25.6	28.9	25.6	28.0	30.9
1923-27	22.3	24.7	27.6	25.5	27.6	30.7
1928-32	22.8	24.7	27.3	25.0	26.8	30.3
1933-37	22.2	24.2	26.7	24.3	26.4	29.3
1938-42	21.7	23.7	25.8	23.6	25.3	27.9
1943-47	21.2	22.8	24.8	22.9	24.6	26.9
1948-52	20.4	21.9	23.8	22.3	24.1	27.2
1953-57	20.0	21.6	24.0	22.3	24.4	27.4
1958-62	20.3	22.0	25.0	22.4	24.6	28.5
1963-67	20.7	22.7	25.9	22.8	25.3	29.3
1968-72	21.0	23.2	26.0	23.1	25.5	28.9
1973-77	21.1	23.3	26.6	23.4	25.7	

The next important event in the family domain is often the start of a co-residential union. Until the 1960's this usually meant marriage, but since then unmarried cohabitation has become widely popular. Here, a distinction is made between entry into a union (irrespective

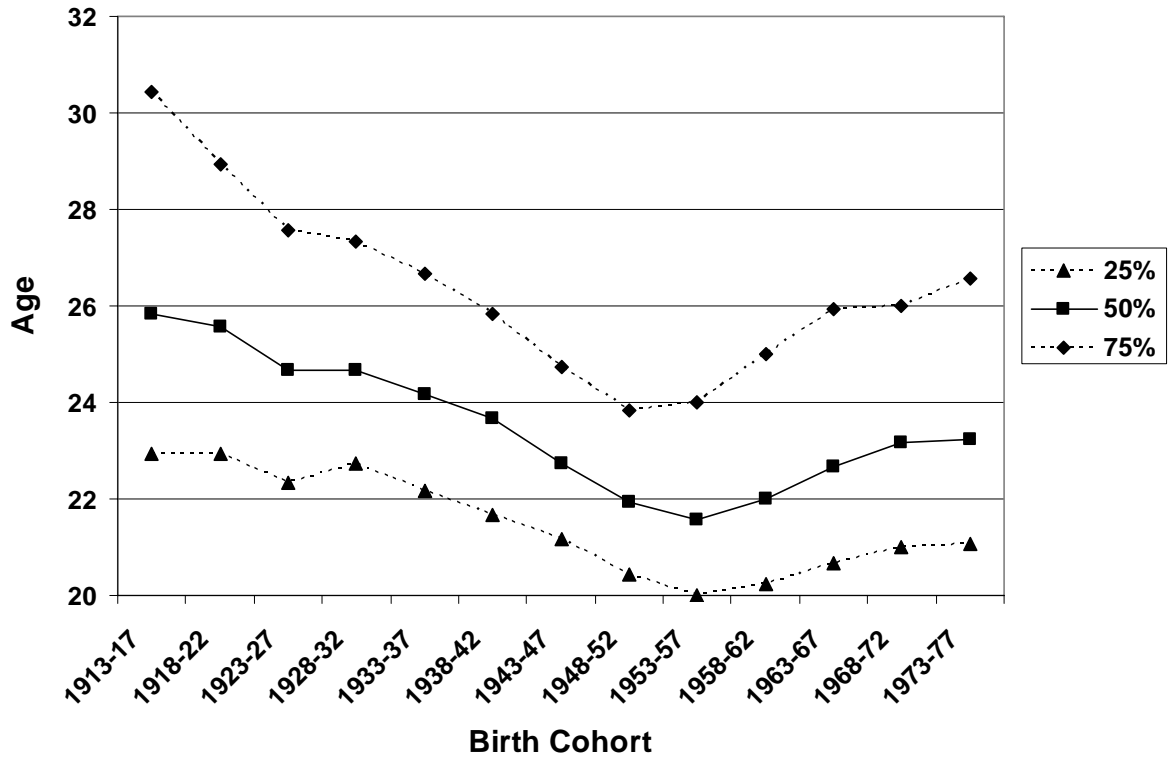


Figure 7 Age at entry into a first union among Dutch women, by birth cohort (in years)

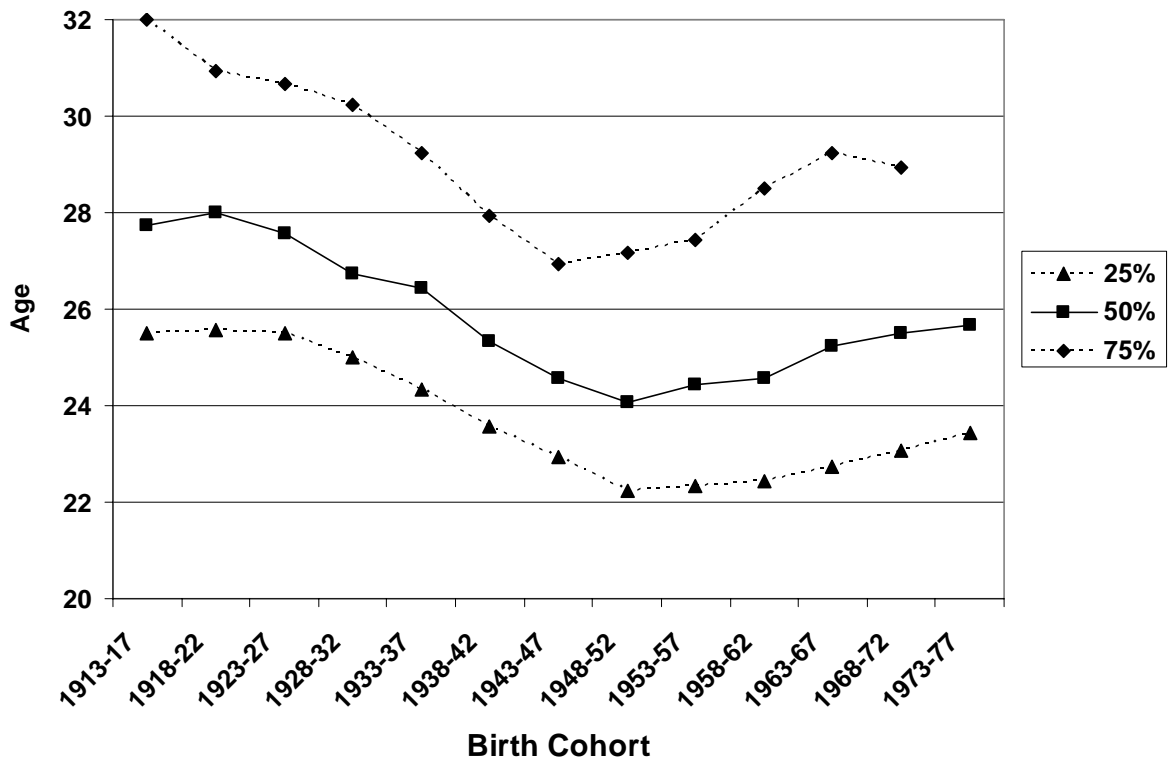


Figure 8 Age at entry into a first union among Dutch men, by birth cohort (in years)



Table 6 Age at entry into a first marriage among Dutch women and men, by birth cohort (in years)

Cohort	Women			Men		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
1913-17	23.0	25.8	30.4	25.6	27.8	32.1
1918-22	22.9	25.6	28.9	25.7	28.1	31.0
1923-27	22.4	24.7	27.7	25.7	27.8	30.8
1928-32	22.8	24.8	27.3	25.0	27.0	30.3
1933-37	22.3	24.3	26.8	24.5	26.5	29.5
1938-42	21.7	23.6	25.9	23.7	25.4	28.0
1943-47	21.3	22.9	25.3	23.0	24.8	27.7
1948-52	20.6	22.2	25.1	22.8	24.8	29.8
1953-57	20.5	22.5	27.6	23.3	26.0	35.7
1958-62	21.4	24.7	34.8	24.5	28.8	39.3
1963-67	22.9	26.8	36.3	25.8	30.7	
1968-72	24.3	29.0		26.9	32.0	
1973-77	26.2			28.7		

of whether this was by unmarried cohabitation or by marriage) and entry into marriage. Information on entry into a first co-residential union is presented in Table 5 and in Figures 7 and 8.

Among both men and women the same general trends can be observed: a clear drop in the timing of entry into a union is followed by a slight upturn among more recent cohorts. Among women born between 1913 and 1917, the median age at entry into a union was just below age 26. Among women born between 1953 and 1958 the median age had fallen to 21.6 years. Younger cohorts show a slight increase to a median age of 23.3 years for women born between 1973 and 1977. Among men, the median age dropped from almost 28 among the 1913-17 birth cohort to just above 24 for the 1948-52 cohort and rose again to just below 26 for the 1973-77 cohort. That the rise in age at entry into a union occurred already among men born between 1948 and 1952, whereas it only started among the 1953-57 cohort among women, results from the fact that men are on average about two years older than their female counterparts at entry into a union (e.g. Van Poppel et al., 2001). The variation in the timing of entry into a union decreased among older cohorts, and increased again among younger ones. The inter-quartile range was 7.5 years for women born between 1913 and 1917. It decreased to 3.4 years among the 1948-52 cohort and then rose again to 5.5 years among the 1973-77

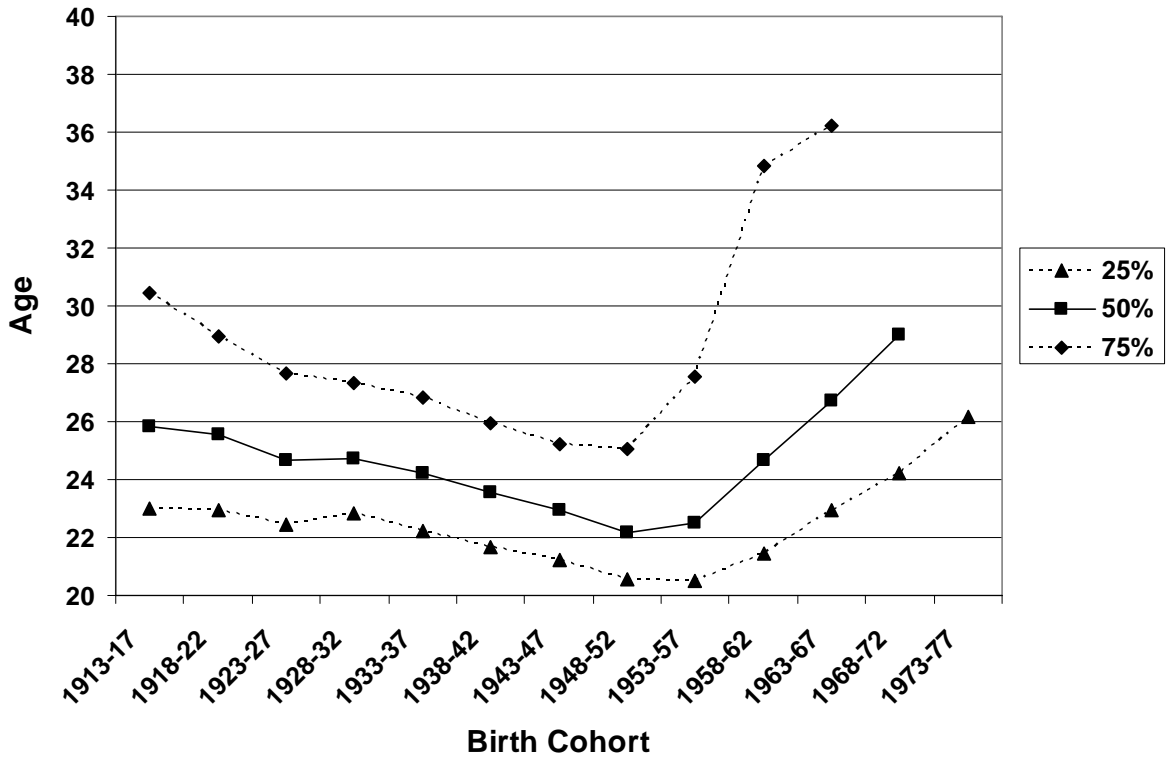


Figure 9 Age at entry into a first marriage among Dutch women, by birth cohort (in years)

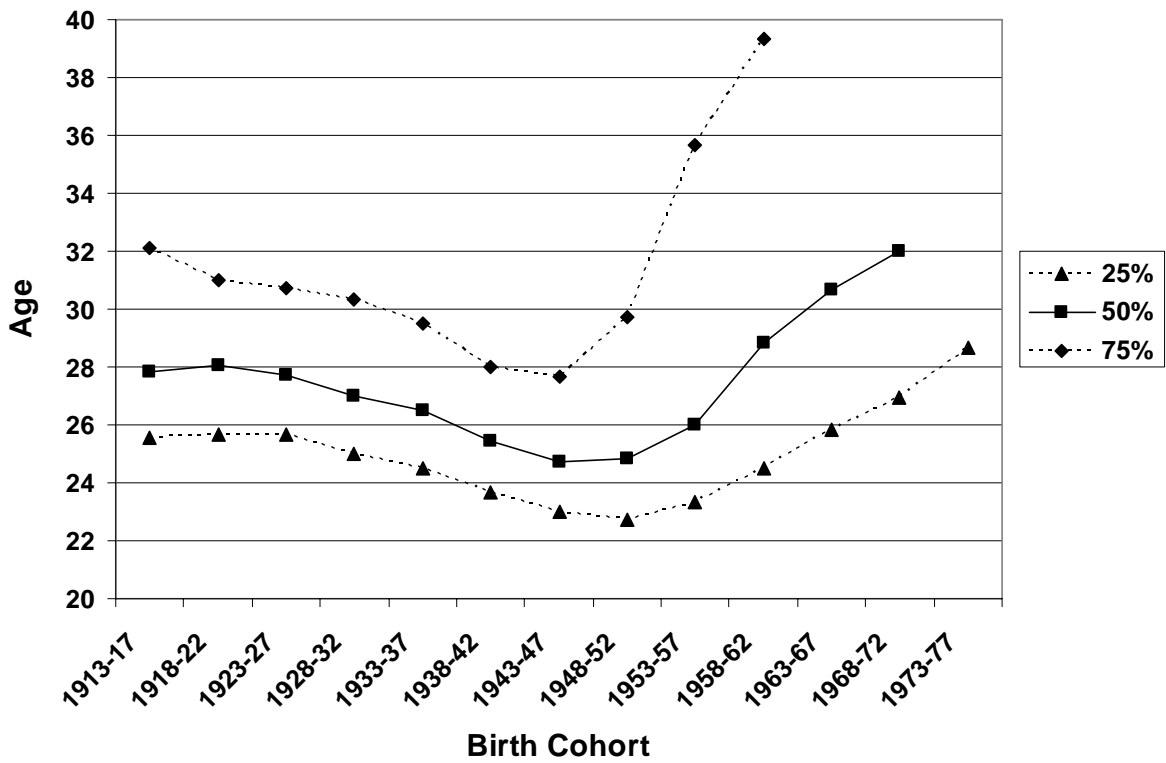


Figure 10 Age at entry into a first marriage among Dutch men, by birth cohort (in years)

cohort. The same kind of tendency of a process of standardisation followed by destandardisation can be observed for men. The only difference is that birth cohort 1943-47 already experienced the end of the standardisation phase.

Changes in the timing of entry into a first marriage are presented in Table 6 and Figures 9 and 10. Just like with entry into a first union, a drop in the age at entry into marriage is followed by a subsequent rise. However, the magnitude of the rise is much more substantial for marriage. The median age at entry into marriage for women born between 1913 and 1917 was almost 26 years of age. This exactly the same age at that for entry into a first union, confirming the fact that almost all women born at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century entered their first union by marriage, and that unmarried cohabitation was very uncommon among these cohorts. Median age at entry into marriage subsequently dropped to a low of 22.2 years for women born between 1948 and 1952. Among more recent cohorts, however, the median age has risen quite dramatically to 29 years for women born between 1968 and 1972. For the youngest cohort (1973-77) the median age is not yet known, but the high age at which one quarter of this cohort has married (26.2 years) suggests that the median age for this cohort will be substantially above that of the 1968-72 cohort. The median age at first marriage for the most recent cohorts is almost six years later than the median age at entry into a first union, suggesting that a large proportion of young adults is postponing or even abstaining from marriage. A final observation is that, as for entry into a first union, a process of standardisation is followed by a process of destandardisation. The inter-quartile range was smallest (4.5 years) for the 1943-47 birth cohort and was considerable higher for the 1913-17 (7.4 years) and the 1963-67 cohort (13.4 years). For more recent cohorts, it can even be doubted that 75% of all women will ever enter into a marriage.

Men are, on average, two to three years older than women at entry into first marriage. The trends observed for men are essentially the same as for women. A three year drop in the median age at first marriage from birth cohorts 1913-17 to 1943-47, followed by a seven year rise from cohort 1943-47 to 1968-72. For this last cohort, the median age at entry into first marriage is as high as 32 years. The variation in timing of entry into first marriage also shows the same pattern as for women. The inter-quartile range was 6.5 years for the 1913-17 birth cohort, dropped to 4.3 years for the 1938-42 birth cohort and rose again to 14.8 for the 1958-62 cohort. Destandardisation has clearly substituted standardisation.

Table 7 Age at first childbirth among Dutch women and men, by birth cohort (in years)

Cohort	Women			Men		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
1913-17	24.6	28.0	32.6	27.1	30.5	34.7
1918-22	24.4	27.7	32.3	26.8	29.8	35.0
1923-27	23.6	26.8	31.7	26.8	29.6	33.8
1928-32	24.2	26.6	30.3	26.5	29.1	33.0
1933-37	23.7	26.1	29.3	25.9	28.3	31.9
1938-42	23.3	25.8	28.9	25.3	27.5	31.2
1943-47	22.6	25.3	28.9	24.8	27.7	33.7
1948-52	22.7	25.9	30.8	25.7	29.5	38.4
1953-57	23.8	27.4	33.1	27.0	30.8	38.5
1958-62	24.9	28.8	34.4	28.2	32.4	41.2
1963-67	26.0	29.9	34.8	29.2	33.7	
1968-72	27.0	30.8		29.6	33.2	
1973-77	26.9			29.8		

For many men and women, entry into parenthood constitutes the last transition during young adulthood. Large changes in the timing of this transition have occurred among cohorts born during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Information on these changes are presented in Table 7 and in Figures 11 and 12. Women born between 1913 and 1917 have a median age at entry into motherhood of 28 years. Among subsequent cohorts, this median age drops to 25.3 years among women born between 1943 and 1947 (a drop of 2.7 years between cohorts born forty years apart). From then on, the median age skyrockets to 30.8 years among women born between 1968 and 1972 ( a rise of 5.5 years between cohorts born 25 years apart). However, there are some indications that this spectacular increase may come to an end. The age at which a quarter of all women had a first child for the youngest birth cohort (1973-77) is almost equal to that of the 1968-72 birth cohort, 26.9 and 27.0 years respectively. Again, the same pattern can be observed for men. An decrease in entry into fatherhood is followed by a strong increase. The data for the youngest male cohorts also suggest a levelling off of this trend towards an increased age at entry into parenthood. The median age of the 1968-72 cohort is somewhat lower than that of the 1963-67 cohort and the age at which a quarter of all men have entered into fatherhood seems to be levelling off at about 30 years of age.

The data for entry into parenthood also show evidence for a process of standardisation followed by a process of destandardisation. The inter-quartile range was smallest for men and women born between 1938 and 1942 (5.6 for women and 5.9 for men). For both older and

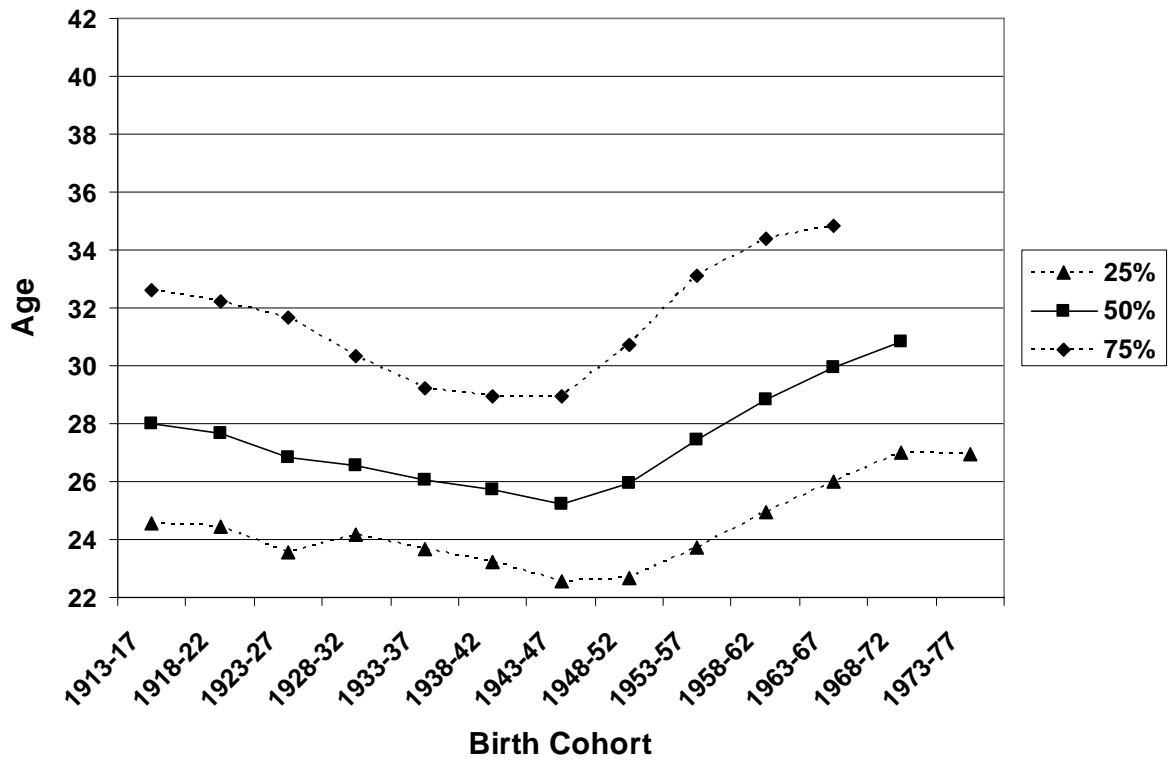


Figure 11 Age at first childbirth among Dutch women, by birth cohort (in years)

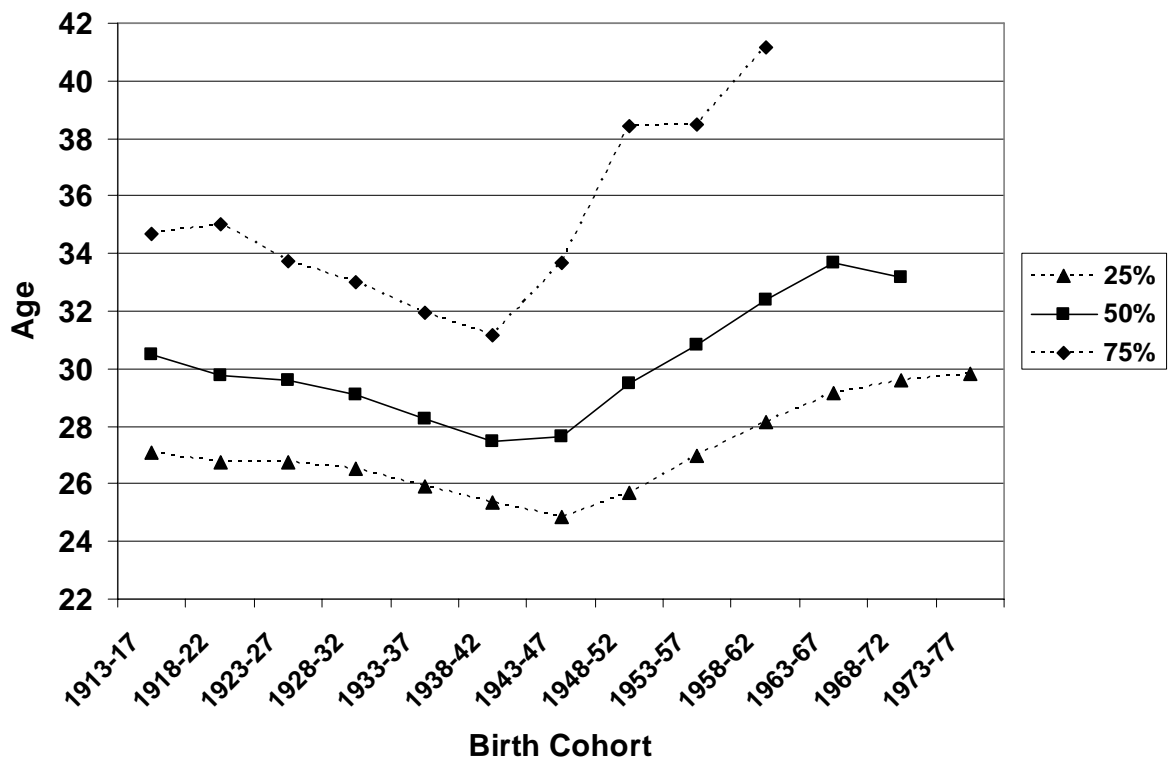


Figure 12 Age at first childbirth among Dutch men, by birth cohort (in years)

younger cohorts the inter-quartile range is larger. What is also interesting is that the increase in the age at entry into parenthood started earlier than the increase in entry into marriage. The median age at entry into parenthood started to rise among women born between 1948 and 1952, whereas the median age at entry into marriage only started to rise among women born between 1953 and 1957. This shows that changes in fertility predated changes in union formation behaviour.

The data on the age at which men and women enter into parenthood show a clear postponement of this important life-event. An additional question is whether parenthood is also postponed relative to other important life-events in young adulthood. To examine this issue the duration of the period between entry into a union and entry into parenthood, and between entry into the labour market and entry into parenthood are estimated. This has been done for those young adults who have made the first transition and have done so before entry into parenthood. Therefore, the relatively few men and women who have got their first child before entry into the labour market and before entry into a union have been dropped from the analysis.

Table 8 Duration between entry into a first union and entry into parenthood among Dutch women and men, by birth cohort (in years)

Cohort	Women			Men		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
1913-17	0.9	1.7	3.3	0.9	1.6	3.8
1918-22	0.8	1.5	3.8	0.8	1.5	3.7
1923-27	0.8	1.3	2.9	0.8	1.5	3.9
1928-32	0.8	1.5	3.0	0.8	1.4	2.7
1933-37	0.8	1.4	2.7	0.8	1.5	2.9
1938-42	0.8	1.7	3.3	0.9	1.8	3.6
1943-47	1.0	1.9	4.0	1.2	2.5	5.8
1948-52	1.4	3.3	6.4	1.8	3.8	9.1
1953-57	2.2	4.3	8.9	2.7	5.1	10.3
1958-62	2.9	5.3	9.8	3.3	6.3	11.3
1963-67	3.2	6.1	11.2	3.9	6.8	12.8
1968-72	3.9	7.3	11.8	3.7	6.8	10.7
1973-77	4.6	8.2		4.4		

In Table 8 and Figures 13 and 15, data are presented on the time spent between entry into a first union and entry into parenthood. The data show that for women born between 1913 and 1947 the median duration between these two events was between 1 and 2 years, with

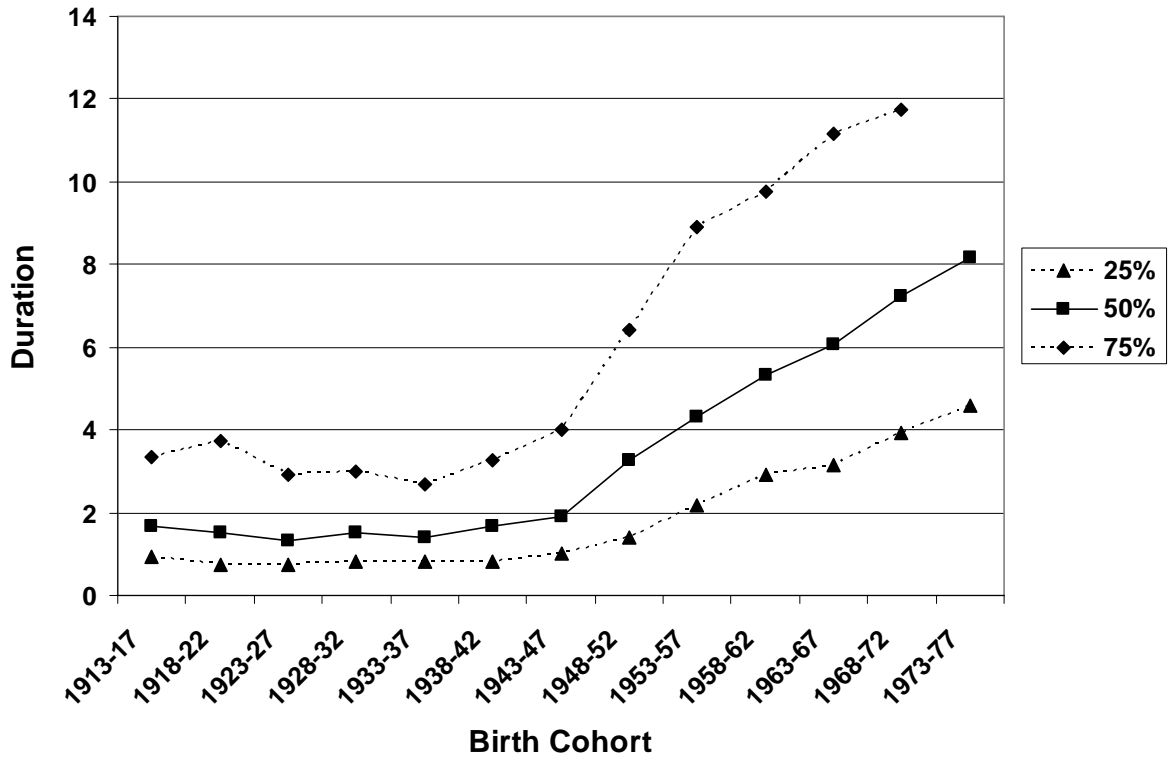


Figure 13 Duration between entry into a first union and entry into parenthood among Dutch women, by birth cohort (in years)

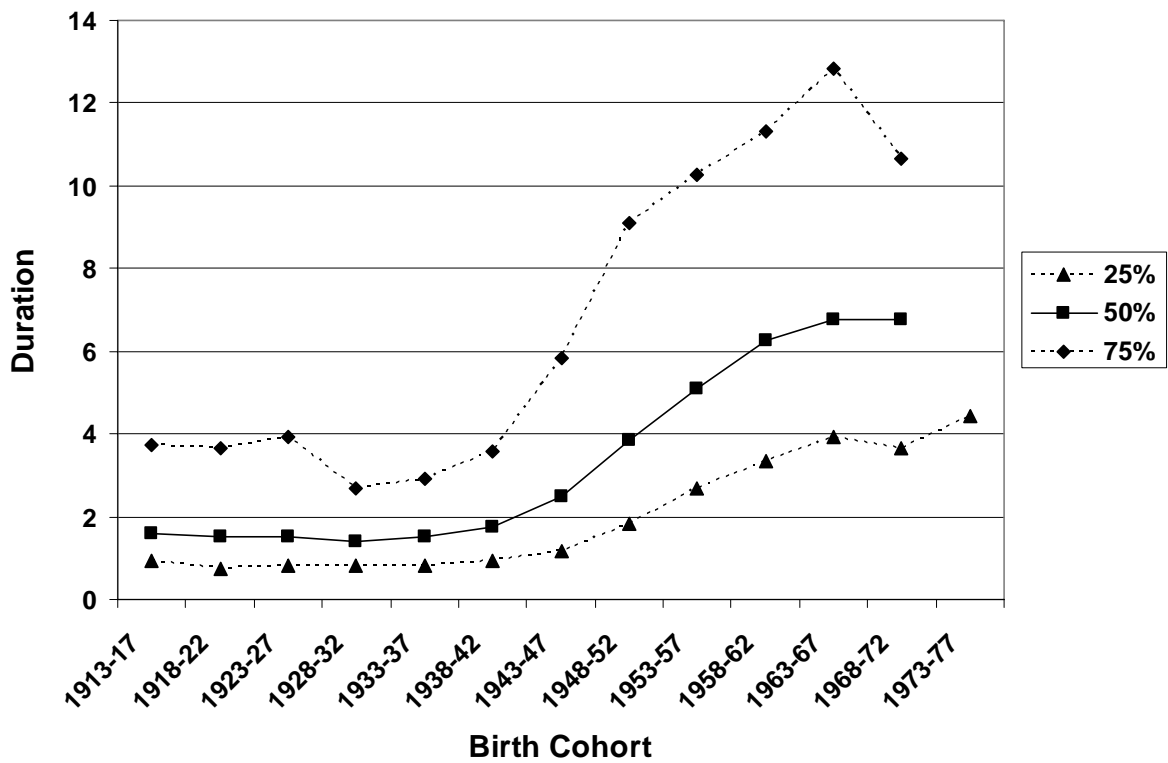


Figure 14 Duration between entry into a first union and entry into parenthood among Dutch men, by birth cohort (in years)

relatively little variation. However, from birth cohort 1948-52 onwards, a rapid increase of this duration can be observed. Women born between 1973 and 1977 spend a median time of more than 8 years between the moment that they first enter into a co-residential union and the moment at which they become a first-time mother. Evidently, union formation and childbirth have become much more weakly connected among recent cohorts compared to cohorts born during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among men, the same trends can be observed. A relative stable median duration of about 1.5 years for cohorts born between 1913 and 1942 and an strong increase afterwards to almost 7 years for cohorts born between 1963 and 1972.

With increasing duration between union formation and parenthood has come increasing variation in the duration between these events, both for women and men. Among cohorts born during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the inter-quartile range varied between two and three years, but it has increased strongly among younger cohorts. It is almost eight years for women born between 1968 and 1972 and seven years for men born between 1968 and 1972.

Table 9 Duration between entry into a first job and entry into parenthood among Dutch women and men, by birth cohort (in years)

Cohort	Women			Men		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
1913-17	8.3	11.8	17.3	10.0	14.0	18.9
1918-22	8.2	11.3	17.0	10.1	13.2	18.1
1923-27	7.2	10.2	15.9	7.6	12.1	17.0
1928-32	6.5	9.3	13.7	7.5	11.6	15.6
1933-37	6.3	9.3	12.8	8.0	11.1	15.1
1938-42	6.5	8.8	12.9	6.9	10.3	14.4
1943-47	5.8	8.3	11.8	6.3	10.0	15.6
1948-52	5.8	8.8	13.3	6.9	10.8	18.4
1953-57	6.4	9.4	14.7	7.3	11.1	17.0
1958-62	6.4	9.7	14.9	7.9	12.1	19.2
1963-67	6.9	10.2	14.7	8.5	13.3	
1968-72	7.2	10.3	14.1	9.8	13.1	
1973-77	6.9	10.8	13.8	9.0		

The duration between entry into a first job and entry into parenthood has changed much less among cohorts. Information on this period is provided in Table 9 and Figures 15 and 16. Among women, the median time that passes between entry into a first job and entry into motherhood was almost 12 years for women born between 1913 and 1917. This median duration slowly dropped to 8.3 years for women born between 1943 and 1947. From then



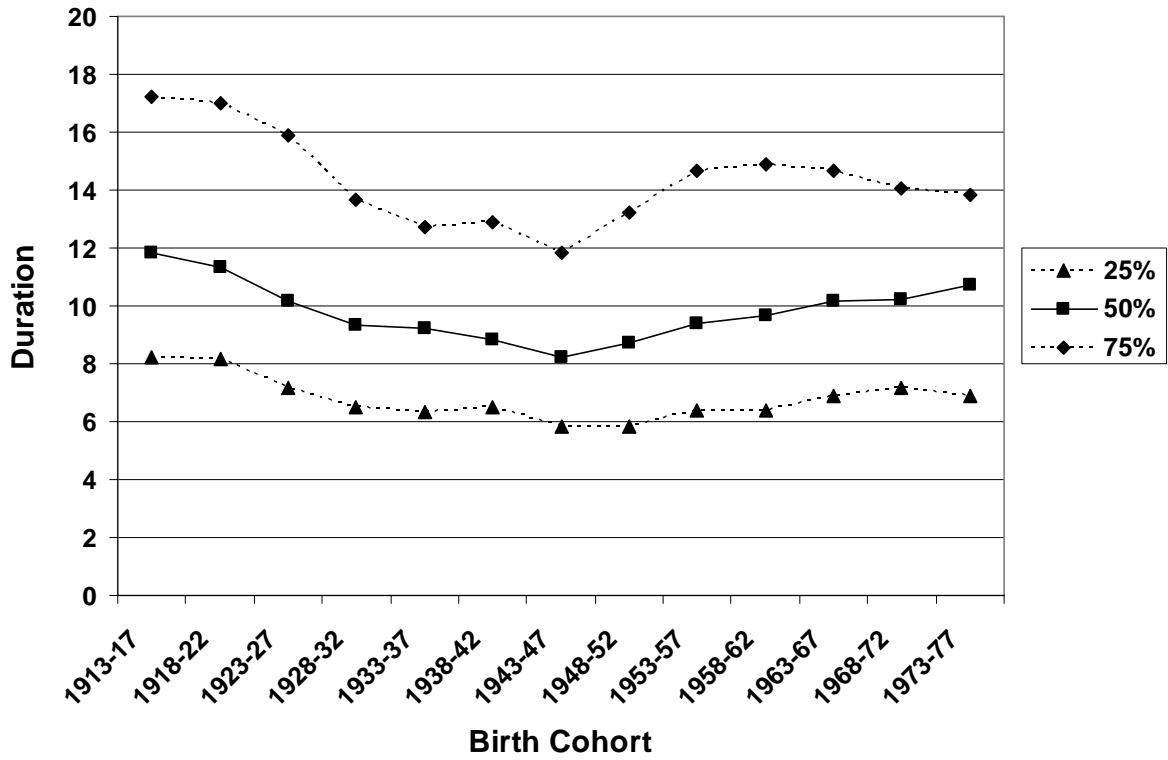


Figure 15 Duration between entry into a first job and entry into parenthood among Dutch women, by birth cohort (in years)

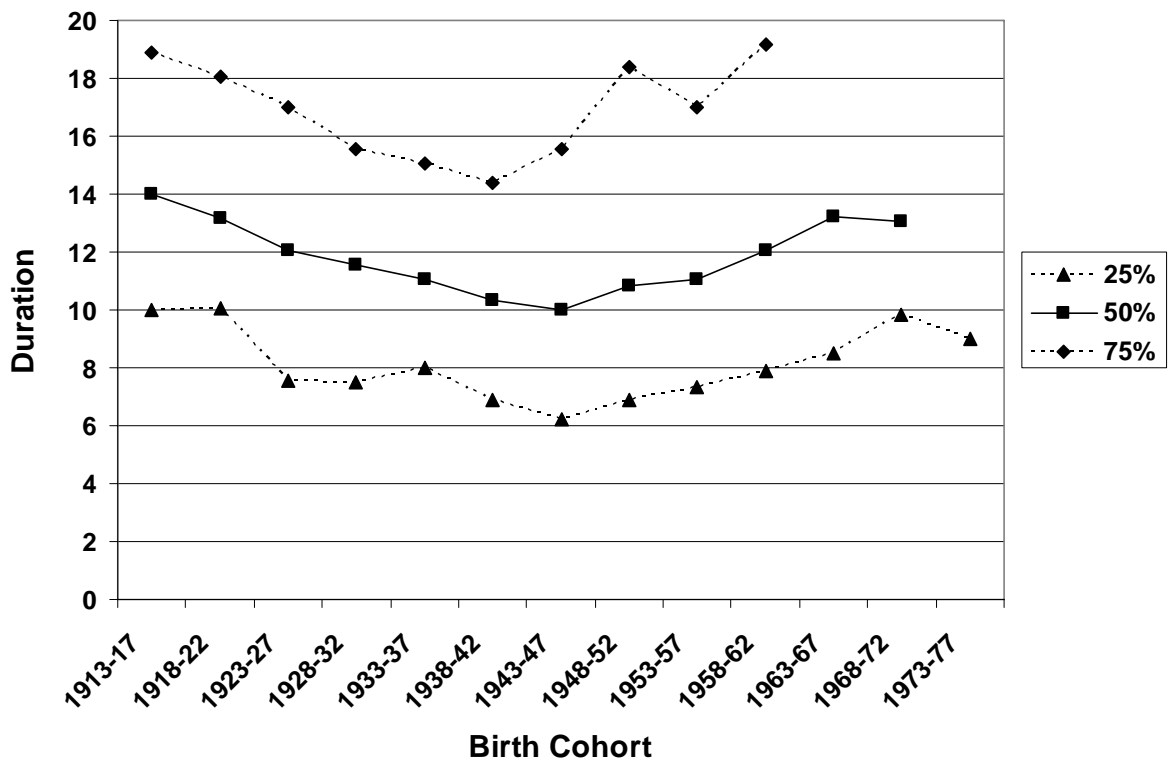


Figure 16 Duration between entry into a first job and entry into parenthood among Dutch men, by birth cohort (in years)

onwards it increased to almost 11 years for women born between 1973 and 1977. The shortening of the spell between these two events for cohorts born before 1947 results both from a postponement of entry into a first job (as a consequence of the educational expansion) and an acceleration of entry into motherhood among these same cohorts. For cohorts born after 1947, postponement of entry into a first job continued, but was accompanied by an even stronger postponement of entry into motherhood, resulting in a lengthening of the spell between these two events. In addition, the variation in the duration of this spell shows no very clear pattern. It decreases from about nine years among the 1913-17 cohort to 6 years for the 1943-47 cohort, then increases again to 8.5 years among the 1958-62 cohort, only to decrease again to somewhat less than 7 years for the 1973-77 cohort.

Again, the patterns among men are quite similar. Median duration between entry into the labour market and entry into fatherhood decreased from 14 years among men born between 1913 and 1917 to 10 years among the 1943-47 birth cohort. Subsequently, the median duration rose again to slightly more than 13 years among cohorts born between 1963 and 1967.

To allow for a more general picture of the changes in the transition to adulthood, Figures 17 and 18 present the median ages for all six events discussed above, separately for women and men. Among women born in the 1910's, exit from the educational system and entry into the labour market occurred at a relatively young age, halfway through the teenage years.<sup>2</sup> The median timing of these events gradually rose to about 20 years of age for young adults born in the 1970's. For most women, these two events were the first to occur, suggesting that the period during which young people do not have to engage themselves into far-reaching commitments has gradually moved to a later age.

Among women born in the 1910's the major events in the family domain occurred about ten years after the events in the occupational domain, with the median age at leaving home being at about 24 years of age and the median age of entry into motherhood at 28 years of age. In other words, leaving home, union formation and parenthood were spaced relatively close

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<sup>2</sup> It may be useful to remind the reader that the concept of a 'teenager' (as well as the concept of 'young adult') did not yet exist when the men and women of the cohorts born in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were between 10 and 20 years old.

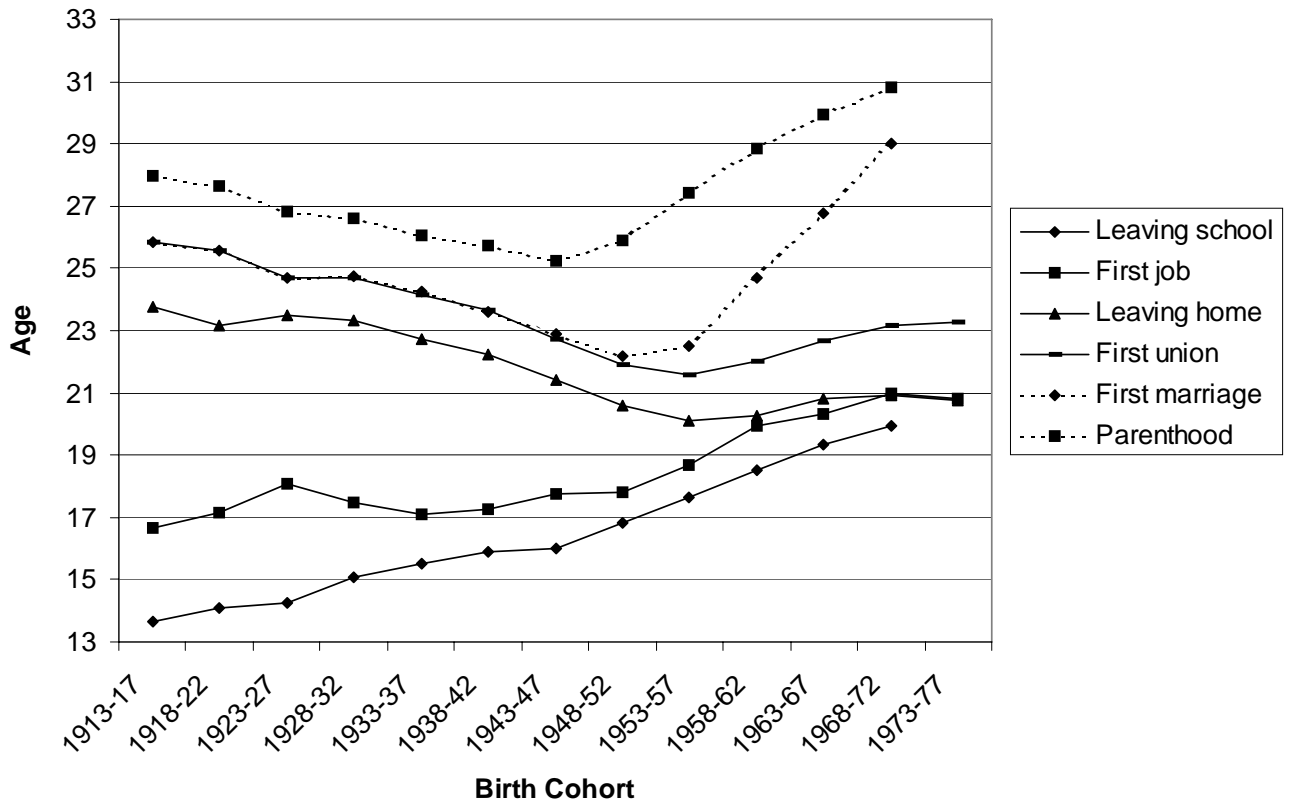


Figure 17 Median age at which Dutch women experience major transitions, by birth cohort

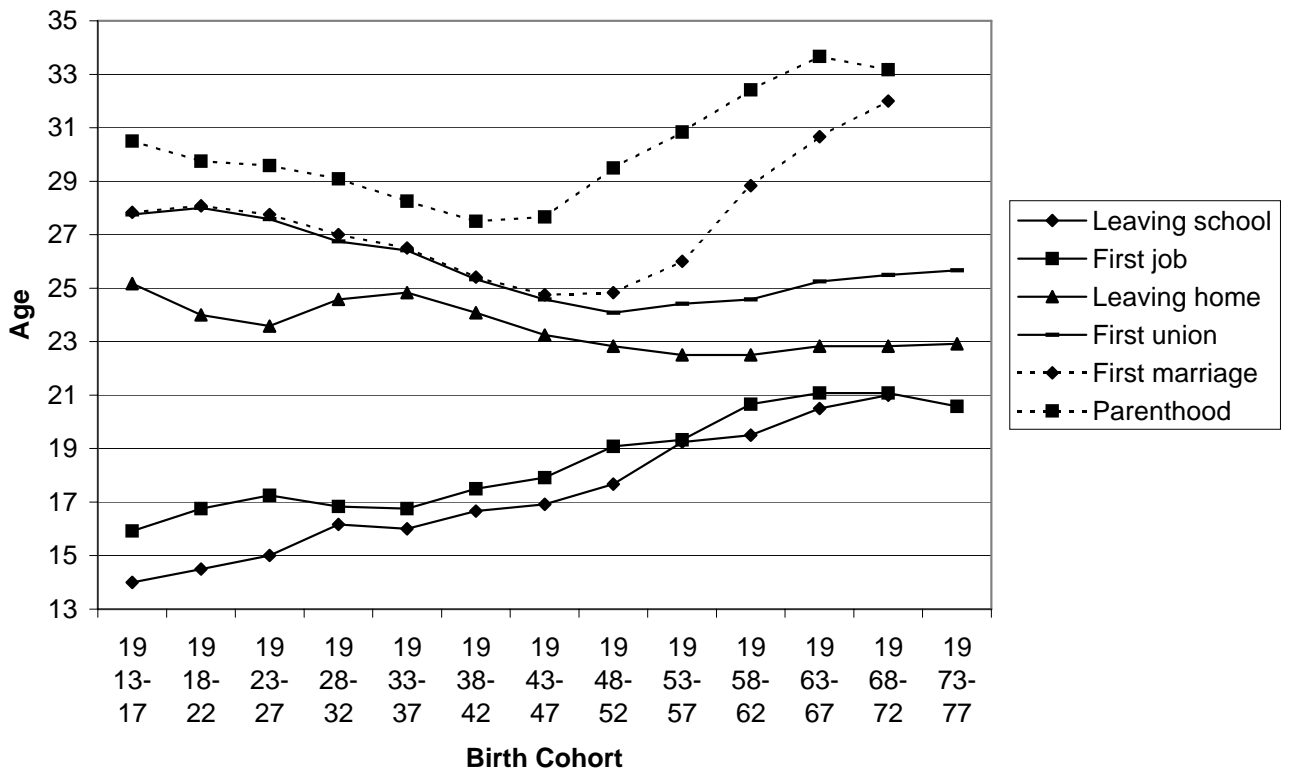


Figure 18 Median age at which Dutch men experience major transitions, by birth cohort

together, but occurred much later than the events that constitute entry into the labour market. For leaving home and entry into a first union, a trend in the opposite direction to that of exit from schooling and entry into a job can be observed. Leaving home and entry into a union occurred at increasingly earlier ages among younger birth cohorts. Among cohorts born since the 1960's, median ages for exit from the educational system, entry into a first job, leaving home and entry into a first union are quite close together. This suggests that women in their early twenties are nowadays faced with a high density of important decision to be made in two different but related life domains.

The median timing of entry into first marriage and entry into motherhood show a quite distinct picture. For women born until the 1940's these events occurred at an increasingly early age, but for cohorts born since the 1950 a rapid postponement of these events can be noticed. This leads to a situation that a clear distinction becomes visible between events (leaving school, entry into a job, leaving home, entry into a union) that usually occur around the late teens and early twenties, and events that occur some ten years later (marriage and motherhood). This evidently leads to a growing period during young adulthood where women focus on employment and a partner relationship, but do not want to commit themselves (as yet) to parenthood.

For men, more or less the same picture emerges. A main difference is that among men, leaving home and entry into a union occur somewhat later than among women, leading to a less close patterning of major occupational role transitions and transitions related to leaving home and starting a household of one's own. As a result, events are somewhat less closely spaced among men, allowing them more time to take subsequent steps in the transition to adulthood.

#### **4. Differences in the transition to adulthood across Europe**

How does the pattern of the transition to adulthood as experienced in Germany and the Netherlands compare to that in the rest of Europe? Are the Netherlands and Germany unique in the timing of and variation in the major events occurring during this life-phase or do they follow the mainstream of Europe in this regard? In this section of the report, a tentative answer to this question will be formulated. Tentative, while recent retrospective life-history data on the transition to adulthood is not available. The last, fairly comparative, effort at collecting this kind of information was the Fertility and Family Surveys project, dating back to the early 1990's. The main drawback of this data source is that it does not allow a comparison of recent trends. Still, comparing European countries using the FFS can still be illuminating, both because of the richness of the data and the breadth of information. First attention will be paid to the data, followed by a presentation of the major results.

##### *4.1. Data*

I use data from the Fertility and Family Surveys Project, coordinated by the Population Activities Unit of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (Population Activities Unit, 1992, 1993). This project consists of a series of surveys, conducted in 24 countries between 1988 and 1999. The main strength of this project is that in most participating countries life-history information on union formation, fertility, living arrangements and employment was collected. However, not all countries implemented all modules suggested by the PAU. In addition, many countries changed details of the questionnaires and some countries used atypical sampling designs. As a result, comparability is far from perfect with regard to many aspects of family life (Festy & Prioux, 2002). Still, the FFS constitutes the best source of information on the transition to adulthood in the family domain available to researchers interesting in comparing this transition across Europe.

In this paper, I use data on 16 countries, categorized into four groups, based on their geographical location: Northern Europe (Sweden and Finland), Western Europe (West-Germany, the Netherlands, Flanders, France and Austria), Southern Europe (Italy and Spain)

and Eastern Europe (East-Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Latvia and Lithuania).<sup>3</sup>

To allow for maximal comparability, I will present results on women and men born between 1953 and 1962 on whom information on their life-course until age 30 is available. Thus, I only focus on that part of the life-course about which information is available for all respondents in all surveys. To make comparisons between countries, I present descriptive information for all female members of these birth cohorts. In order to get a glimpse of cohort changes in life course trajectories, I split the 1953-62 birth cohort into two successive five-year birth cohorts and report changes in the timing and/or occurrence of events between these two cohorts.

A focus on the birth cohorts 1953-62 allows a description of the transition into adulthood experienced by cohorts who made this transition during the 1970's and 1980's. A drawback of using the FFS is that information on the trends during the 1990's and the early years of this century is lacking. This is particularly unfortunate for the countries in Eastern Europe, as the fall of Communism at the end of the 1990's marked the beginning of a period of both major uncertainties and major new opportunities. I will briefly comment on developments during the 1990's in the discussion on the merit of the different theoretical explanations for change and differences in the transition to adulthood.

Men were not included in the FFS in all the participating countries. In particular data on men in the Czech Republic are lacking completely. In addition, information on Swedish and Finnish men was restricted to just one of the two birth cohorts distinguished in this study. For Polish men no information on the age at which they left the parental home and on the age at which they become parents was available.

The FFS contains full life-history data on union formation (both marital and non-marital unions) and dissolution and on parenthood, usually with data on the month and year in which events occurred. In addition, information on the age at leaving home (also by month and year) is available or most (but not all) countries. For most countries the FFS also includes full life-

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<sup>3</sup> West- and East Germany are treated as one country by the UNECE. However, these data were collected early in the 1990's and most of the respondents from these cohorts spent young adulthood in either West- or East-Germany before the 'Wende'. Therefore, it seems appropriate to make a distinction between the life courses of women and men born in West-Germany and those born in East-Germany.

history information on the occupational career. For a few countries, however, information on entry into a first job only is available. This information is used to calculate all of the measures reported below.

#### *4.2. The timing of events in the occupational and family domain*

Attention will be paid to the same events that were presented for the Dutch case, with one major exception. No data on the timing of exit from the educational system will be presented. The estimated data showed several rather unrealistic figures. Given this, and the relatively negative assessment of the quality of these data by Festy and Prioux (2002), I decided to drop information on exit from education from the report, concentrating on entry into a first job as the sole indicator for transitions in the occupational domain.

Information on the age at entry into a first job is presented in Table 10 and Figure 19 for women and in Table 11 and Figure 20 for men. Among Scandinavian women born between 1953 and 1957, the median age at entry into a first job is around 18 years. The same is true for Western European countries, with the exclusion of France, where women from this birth cohort enter the labour market more than a year earlier than in other Western European countries. Women in Spain and Italy enter their first job at a much later age than women in other Western countries. The median age for Spanish women is almost 20 years, and for Italian women it is almost 22 years. The fact that these median ages are much lower than those of Spanish and Italian men suggest that Italian and Spanish women from this birth cohort are much less likely to enter the labour market than men do. This could result from the fact that, in these countries, unemployment is more common among women than among men. A more important reason seems to be that many women born in the 1950's in these countries did not enter the labour market at all (Billari et al., 2002). In Eastern Europe the median age at entry into a first job among women born in the 1950's varied between 18 and 19 year. In Poland and Lithuania, it was a bit higher.

Comparing the results in Figures 19 and 20 shows that in Scandinavian countries the age at entry into the labour market differs little between men and women. In Western European countries (with the exception of France), men usually enter their first job between half a year and a whole year later than women, suggesting that women leave the educational system at a

Table 10 Age at entry into a first job among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden	16.8	18.0	19.5	16.9	18.0	19.1
Finland	15.8	18.2	20.2	16.5	18.6	20.6
Western Europe						
West-Germany	16.0	18.1	23.5	16.5	18.8	23.3
Netherlands	16.2	17.7	19.9	17.1	18.4	20.2
Flanders	16.6	18.5	20.9	17.7	19.1	21.4
France	16.4	16.8	20.1	16.5	16.8	21.5
Austria	16.9	18.6	23.0	16.8	18.7	22.2
Southern Europe						
Italy	17.3	21.8	34.4	18.1	22.3	31.7
Spain	15.7	19.7	24.8	15.9	20.9	25.9
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	16.6	18.3	20.4	16.7	18.3	19.8
Poland	18.3	19.5	21.4	18.1	19.3	21.8
Czech Republic	17.7	18.6	19.7	18.0	19.0	20.0
Hungary	16.2	17.8	18.8	16.8	18.1	18.9
Slovenia	17.3	18.8	20.8	17.8	19.1	21.8
Latvia	17.8	18.8	20.3	18.0	18.8	20.0
Lithuania	18.6	20.3	23.3	18.7	20.4	23.2

Table 11 Age at entry into a first job among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden				16.8	18.2	19.9
Finland	15.9	17.9	19.9			
Western Europe						
West-Germany	16.2	19.0	24.8	16.3	18.6	24.5
Netherlands	16.5	18.8	22.5	17.5	19.4	22.9
Flanders	16.6	19.1	21.9	17.0	19.0	22.2
France	16.3	16.8	18.8	16.3	16.8	18.8
Austria	17.0	19.2	24.3	17.3	19.1	25.5
Southern Europe						
Italy	15.8	19.2	23.5	13.8	19.9	25.5
Spain	15.3	19.8	23.6	16.2	21.0	24.3
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	16.6	18.3	20.9	16.6	17.8	19.4
Poland	17.8	18.4	20.3	17.8	18.4	20.3
Czech Republic						
Hungary	17.1	17.7	18.7	17.2	18.0	19.5
Slovenia	17.6	18.8	22.2	17.7	18.9	21.5
Latvia	17.5	19.2	21.3	17.7	18.9	21.6
Lithuania	18.8	21.1	23.4	18.8	21.4	23.5



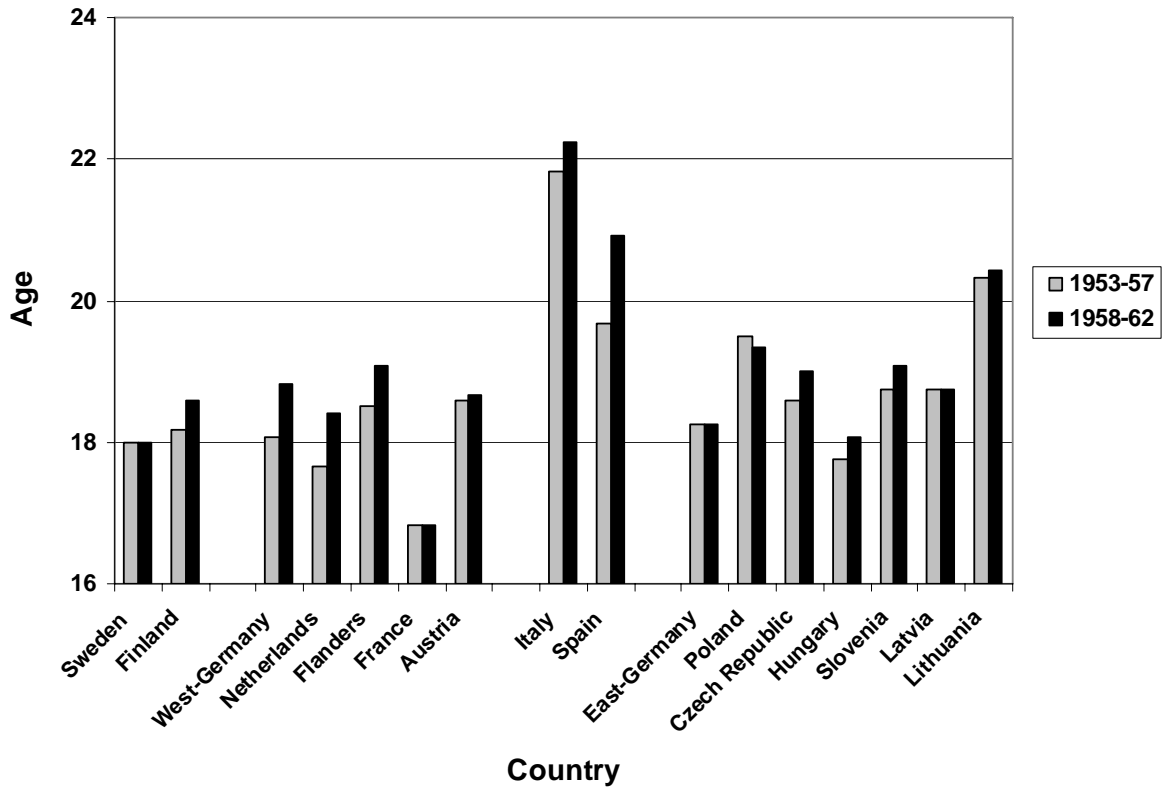


Figure 19 Median age at entry into a first job among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

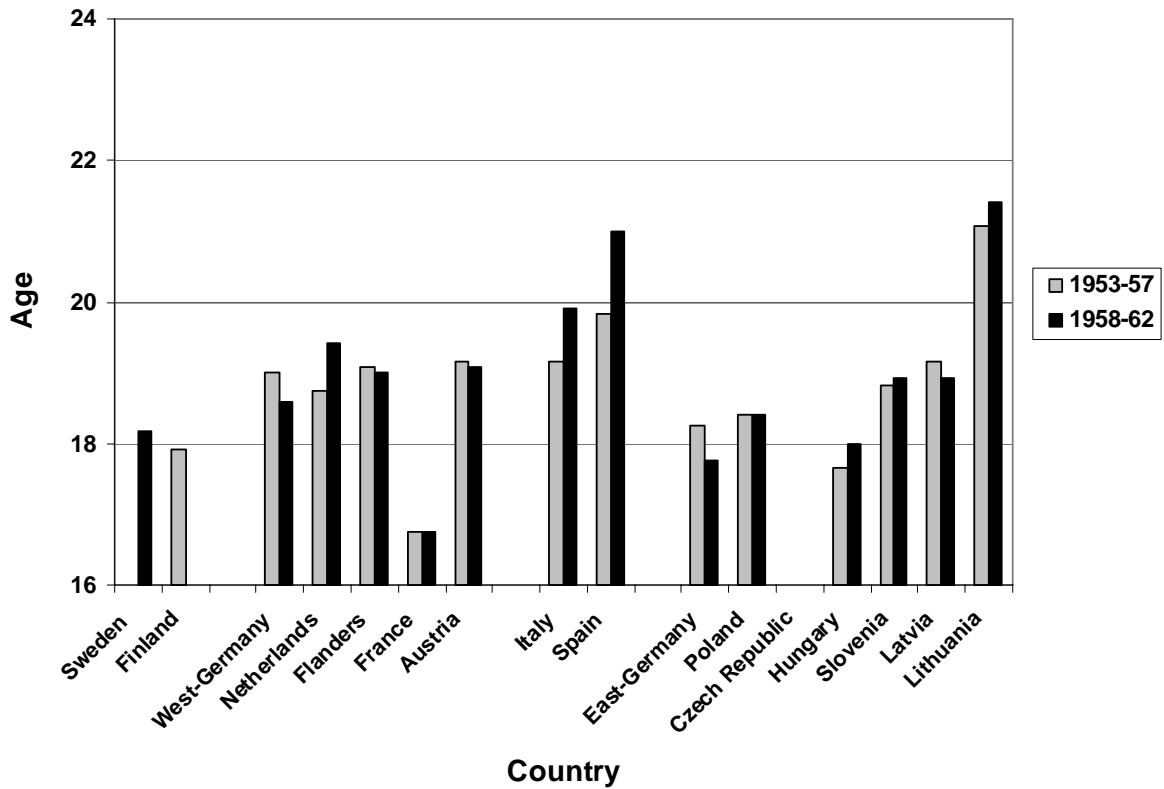


Figure 20 Median age at entry into a first job among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

somewhat earlier age than men do. In Southern Europe, the situation is exactly the opposite, with women entering into a first job at much higher ages than men do. As suggested above, this could result from a tendency of women to stay away from the labour market completely. In Eastern Europe, finally, the differences between men and women in age at entry into a first job are, on average, relatively small.

Across the board, a slight increase in the median age at entry into a first job can be observed between men and women born between 1953 and 1957 and men and women from the 1958-62 birth cohort. This increase is often more pronounced among women than among men, suggesting that women from these birth cohorts might be catching up with their male counterparts in terms of educational attainment. A final interesting point to note is that the differences between West- and East-German women in their timing of entry into a first job are marginal, but that East-German men enter their first job about a year before the West-German counterparts.

Leaving the parental home usually is the first event that young adults experience in the family life domain. Information on this event is presented in Table 12 and Figure 21 for women and in Table 13 and Figure 22 for men. Table 12 shows that the median age at leaving home for women born between 1953 and 1957 varies strongly across Europe from a low of 18.8 years in Sweden to a high of 22.8 years in Italy. The age at leaving home is lowest in Northern Europe. In Western Europe, the median age at leaving home is around 20, with Flanders as a rather late outlier. In Southern Europe, leaving home occurs much later than in Northern and Western Europe. In both Italy and Spain the median age at leaving home is above 22. Eastern Europe, finally, shows a fairly homogeneous picture with median ages around age 21. Lithuania, however, is exceptional within Eastern Europe, with a median age of only 19.

The change in the median age of women at leaving home between birth cohorts 1953-57 and 1958-62 can also be derived from Table 12. Generally speaking, a slight delay in leaving home is visible all across Europe. In most countries, leaving home is delayed by a few months. East-Germany, France and Sweden are the only exceptions to this pattern. In these countries women born between 1958 and 1962 leave home a few months earlier than women born between 1953 and 1958.

Table 12 Age at leaving home among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden	17.4	18.8	20.1	17.1	18.3	19.8
Finland	17.7	19.5	21.4	18.0	19.6	21.5
Western Europe						
West-Germany	18.7	20.3	23.0	18.9	20.8	23.4
Netherlands	17.8	19.9	21.8	18.5	20.3	21.9
Flanders	19.5	21.1	22.8	19.5	21.2	23.3
France	18.7	20.1	22.2	18.3	19.4	22.0
Austria	18.1	19.8	22.6	18.2	19.9	22.7
Southern Europe						
Italy	20.3	22.8	26.8	20.4	23.5	27.7
Spain	20.5	22.5	25.3	20.3	22.9	26.3
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	19.2	20.8	23.4	18.9	20.6	23.4
Poland						
Czech Republic	19.0	20.9	24.3	19.4	21.1	24.3
Hungary	19.1	21.4	26.2	18.9	21.3	25.3
Slovenia	18.4	20.6	24.2	18.6	20.7	24.8
Latvia	18.6	20.7	25.1	18.5	21.1	27.8
Lithuania	18.1	19.1	24.9	18.2	19.5	25.8

Table 13 Age at leaving home among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden				18.4	20.2	22.0
Finland	18.8	21.1	24.4			
Western Europe						
West-Germany	19.8	22.0	25.3	20.1	22.4	26.1
Netherlands	19.7	22.3	24.6	19.6	22.4	24.7
Flanders	20.9	22.6	24.5	21.3	23.0	25.6
France	19.1	21.2	23.8	19.2	21.3	23.8
Austria	19.8	22.3	29.2	19.3	22.3	26.8
Southern Europe						
Italy	22.6	25.7	30.0	22.8	26.6	30.5
Spain	22.5	24.9	28.9	22.6	25.8	30.3
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	19.8	22.3	24.9	19.8	22.5	25.2
Poland						
Czech Republic						
Hungary	21.5	24.5	29.7	22.3	25.0	30.4
Slovenia	18.6	21.3	25.6	18.8	21.6	26.9
Latvia	20.7	23.3	33.2	21.0	23.7	36.8
Lithuania	21.9	23.8	26.1	22.1	23.5	26.1

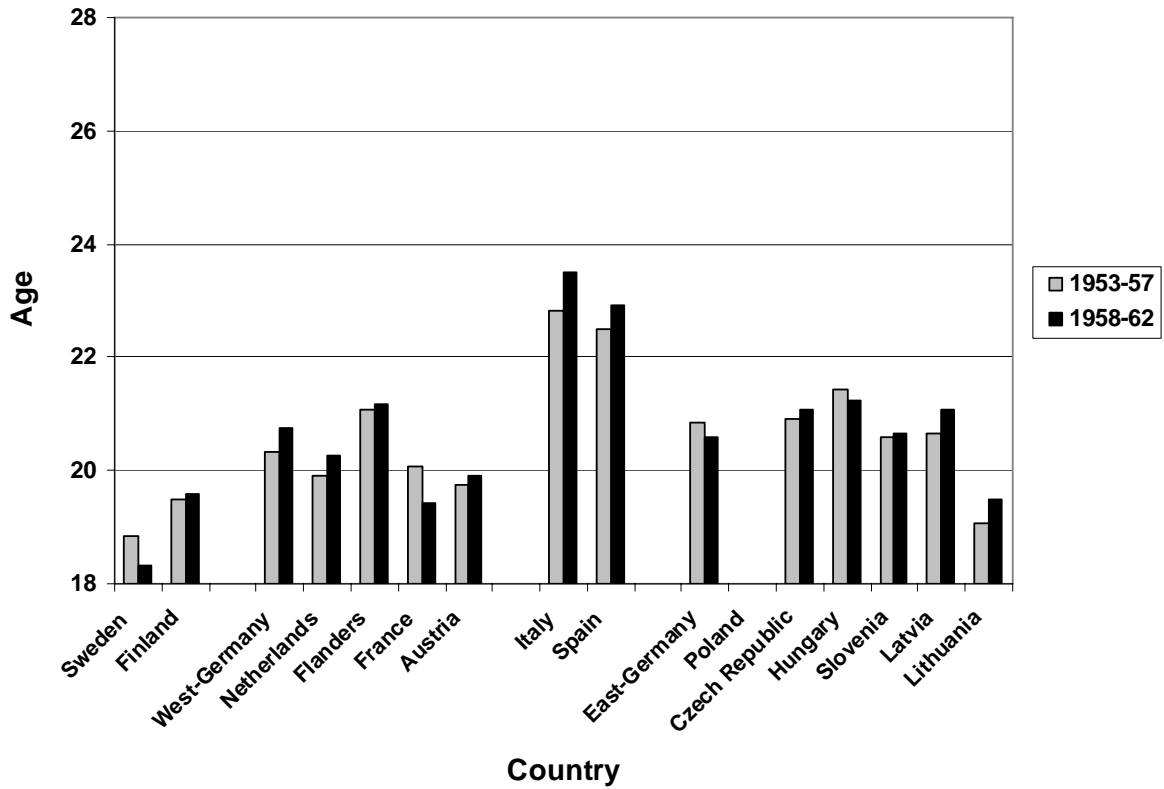


Figure 21 Median age at leaving home among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

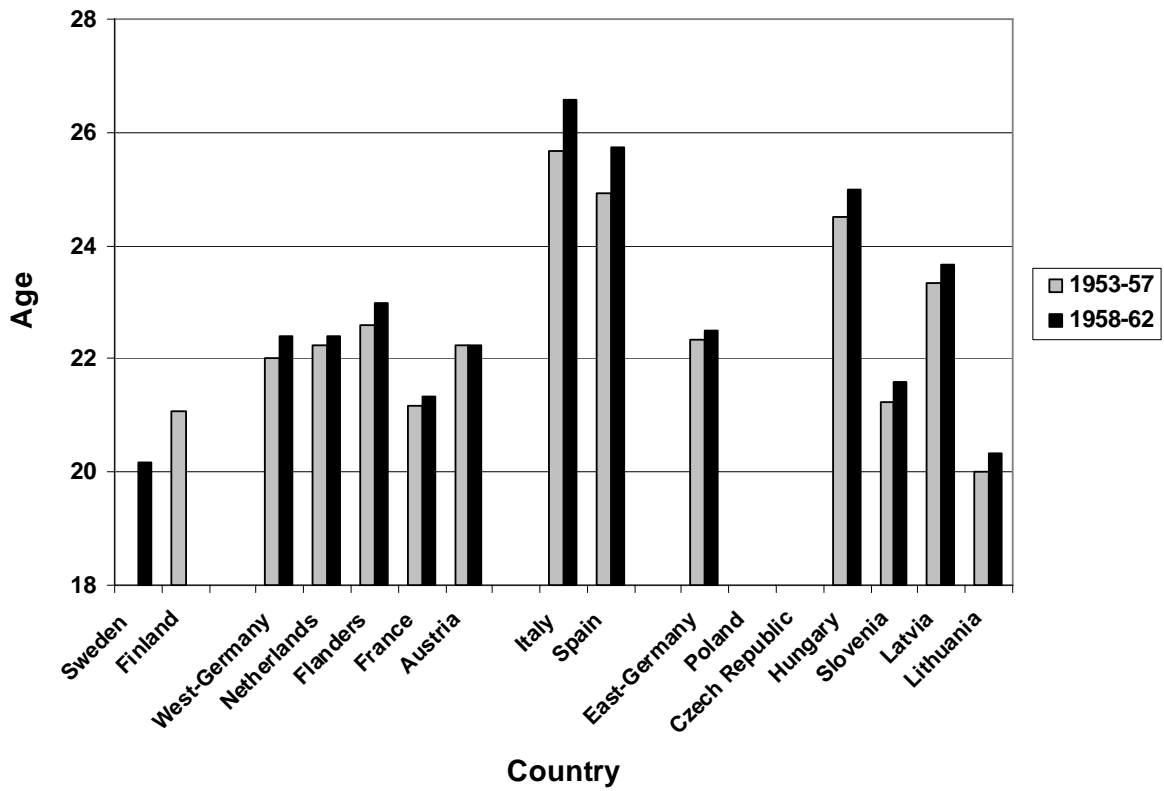


Figure 22 Median age at leaving home among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Comparing the results in Figures 21 and 22 show that in all of Europe men, on average, leave the parental home at a substantial later age than women. The difference usually is between two and three years. At the same time, men seem to experience the same trend towards a slight postponement of leaving home that could also be observed among women.

The difference in the timing of leaving home between West-German men and women on the one hand and East-German men and women on the other are only very small. The median age at leaving home is between 20 and 21 years of age for women in both parts of Germany and between 22 and 23 years of age for men in both parts.

The results on the median age at entry into a first union are presented in Table 14 and Figure 23 for women and in Table 15 and Figure 24 for men. The results for women show that the variation in age at first union across Europe is somewhat smaller than that in age at leaving home. The largest difference in the median age at entry into a first union for women born between 1953 and 1957 is three years, with Hungary having the lowest median age (20.4 years) and Italy again having the highest (23.4 years). For men, the median age entry into a first union is about two to three years later than for women.

The results on entry into a first union do not show any clear geographical pattern, with one exception. The median age at entry into a first union is much higher in Southern Europe than in other parts of Europe. In Italy and Spain, the median age at entry into a union for women is around 23, whereas the median age is generally somewhere between 20 and 22 in other countries. What is remarkable, is that the median age at first union is lower than the median age at leaving home in the Czech Republic and in Hungary. This suggests that relatively many young women born in the 1950's and early 1960's in these countries entered their first union while still living in the parental home.

Results on changes in the median age at entry into a first union present a mixed picture. Generally speaking, the median age at first union formation does not change very much between cohorts 1953-57 and 1958-62. There are no countries in which the median age drops with half a year or more and just a few countries in which the median age for women increases with half a year or more. Relatively large postponement of entry into a union is only visible in Southern Europe (Italy and Spain).

Table 14 Age at entry into a first union among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden	18.9	20.6	23.3	18.3	20.3	23.7
Finland	19.5	21.6	24.4	19.5	21.4	23.8
Western Europe						
West-Germany	19.6	22.1	25.8	19.8	22.1	26.4
Netherlands	19.9	21.5	23.6	20.1	21.8	23.8
Flanders	19.9	21.3	23.3	19.9	21.7	23.8
France	19.7	21.3	23.6	18.9	20.9	23.8
Austria	19.0	20.8	24.2	18.8	20.8	24.6
Southern Europe						
Italy	20.4	22.9	26.3	20.8	24.1	28.3
Spain	20.9	22.8	25.4	20.5	23.3	26.3
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	19.8	21.3	23.7	19.8	21.2	23.8
Poland	20.3	22.1	25.3	20.2	22.1	25.8
Czech Republic	18.9	20.3	22.6	19.1	20.5	22.5
Hungary	18.8	20.4	22.8	18.6	20.2	22.5
Slovenia	19.3	21.1	23.3	19.3	21.1	23.8
Latvia	19.8	21.3	24.0	19.8	21.3	23.8
Lithuania	20.4	22.5	24.9	20.4	22.5	24.8

Table 15 Age at entry into a first union among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden				20.7	23.1	27.3
Finland	21.5	24.3	28.9			
Western Europe						
West-Germany	21.7	24.5	31.1	22.3	25.6	
Netherlands	22.3	24.3	26.7	22.2	24.3	28.3
Flanders	21.5	23.2	25.5	21.7	23.4	26.3
France	21.2	23.4	26.8	21.3	23.2	26.8
Austria	20.7	23.0	26.8	20.9	23.8	28.1
Southern Europe						
Italy	23.8	26.1	30.1	24.6	27.9	33.1
Spain	23.4	25.8	29.0	23.1	25.8	29.5
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	21.8	23.4	26.3	21.5	23.7	26.6
Poland	22.7	24.4	28.3	23.1	25.6	32.8
Czech Republic						
Hungary	21.5	23.6	26.6	21.9	24.3	27.0
Slovenia	22.3	24.0	26.9	22.2	24.2	26.8
Latvia	21.5	22.8	25.4	21.2	22.8	24.6
Lithuania	21.9	23.8	26.1	22.1	23.5	26.1

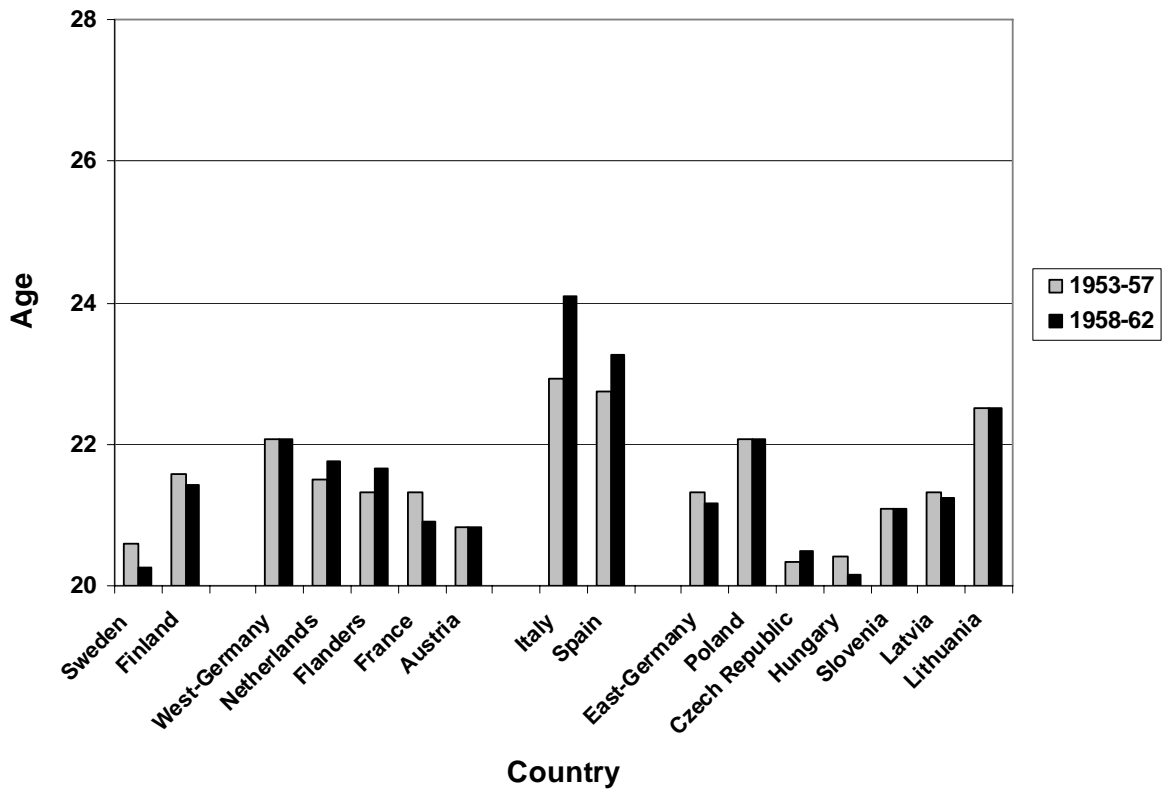


Figure 23 Median age at entry into a first union among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

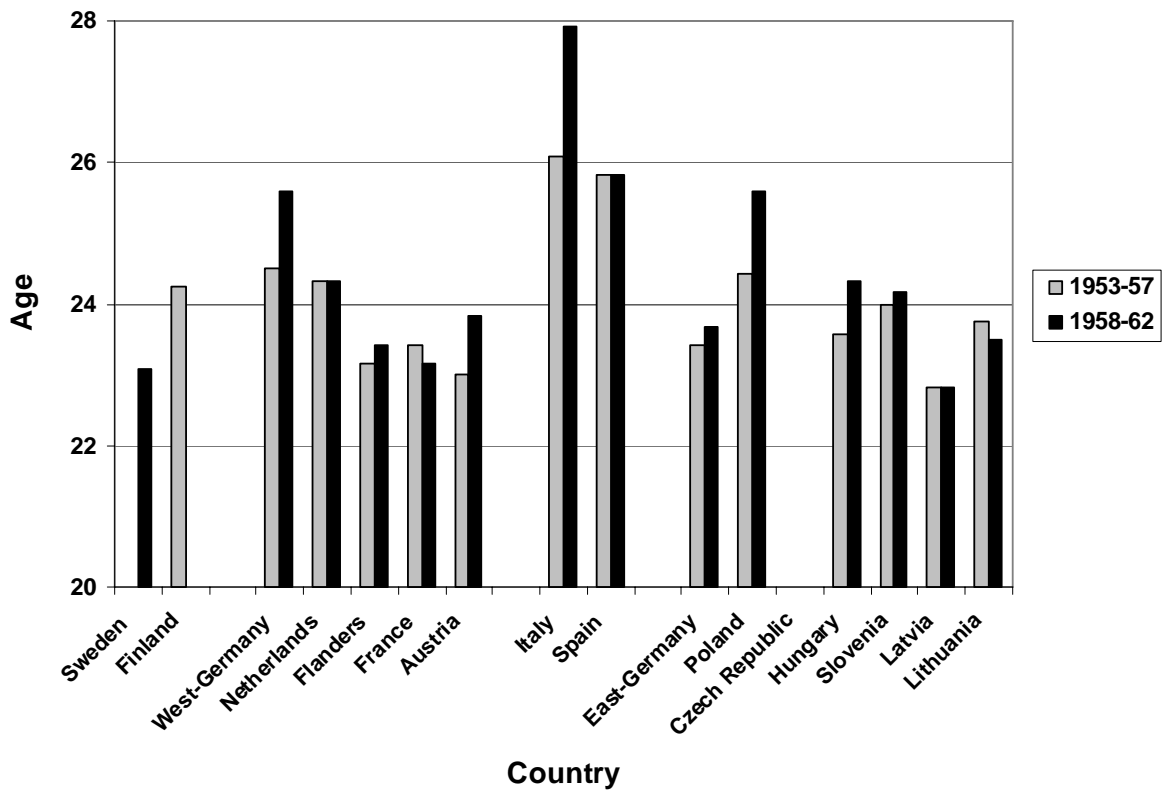


Figure 24 Median age at entry into a first union among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Finally, a comparison between West-Germany and East-Germany shows that the median age at entry into a first union is about one year earlier for East-German men and women than for West-German men and women.

Data on the age at which young adults born between 1953 and 1962 entered into marriage are presented in Table 16 and Figure 25 for women and in Table 17 and Figure 26 for men. These data show that the age at first marriage varies markedly across Europe. In some countries in Eastern Europe, like the Czech Republic and Hungary, half of all women of this birth cohort married before the age of 21, whereas in Sweden half of all women have not even married at the age of 30.

The geographical pattern in age at first marriage, both among men and women, is less clear-cut than with regard to leaving home and entry into first union. Age at first marriage does not vary much between countries in Western Europe (with the exception of Flanders that has a relatively early age) and Southern Europe. Age at first marriage is generally about two years earlier in Eastern European countries.

The results in Figures 25 and 26 also show that the median age at first marriage is clearly rising for both men and women all across Western and Southern Europe, and to a lesser extent also among males in Eastern Europe. Between cohorts born in 1953-57 and cohorts born in 1958-62 a particularly marked postponement of marriage by more than a year is visible in West-Germany, the Netherlands, France, Austria and Italy.

East-German men and women enter earlier into a first marriage than West-German men and women. This difference is particularly pronounced for men. The difference between West- and East-Germans is larger than for entry into a first union. This suggests that, among young adults born between 1953 and 1962, entry into a first union and entry into marriage were more closely linked for East-German young adults than for West-German ones.

Entry into parenthood constitutes the last event about which data will be presented. In Table 18 and Figure 27 information on the timing of motherhood is presented. In Table 19 and Figure 28 information on entry into fatherhood is shown. The variation in age at first childbirth among both men and women is, again, very marked. Among women born between



Table 16 Age at entry into first marriage among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden	23.1	30.9		25.7		
Finland	20.9	24.2	31.7	21.4	24.8	
Western Europe						
West-Germany	20.1	23.3		21.2	24.5	
Netherlands	20.5	22.6	27.4	21.4	24.1	30.3
Flanders	19.9	21.5	23.7	20.0	22.0	24.8
France	20.0	22.3	26.9	20.2	23.7	
Austria	19.8	22.3	28.1	20.2	24.0	
Southern Europe						
Italy	20.5	23.0	26.9	20.9	24.3	29.2
Spain	20.9	22.8	25.7	20.8	23.6	27.0
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	19.8	21.3	24.6	19.9	21.8	27.2
Poland	20.3	22.2	25.4	20.3	22.3	26.1
Czech Republic	19.2	20.8	22.8	19.3	20.7	22.9
Hungary	18.9	20.5	23.1	18.8	20.4	23.2
Slovenia	19.5	21.3	24.3	19.8	22.1	26.1
Latvia	20.2	21.6	24.6	20.1	21.5	24.3
Lithuania	20.5	22.6	25.3	20.4	22.5	24.9

Table 17 Age at entry into first marriage among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden				28.8		
Finland	24.1	28.7				
Western Europe						
West-Germany	23.4	27.9		24.3	30.0	
Netherlands	23.3	25.8	37.9	24.5	28.8	
Flanders	21.6	23.3	26.3	21.8	23.9	27.6
France	22.2	25.7		23.2	27.3	
Austria	22.2	25.1	31.2	23.4	26.8	
Southern Europe						
Italy	24.1	26.5	30.8	25.0	28.3	35.5
Spain	23.6	26.3	30.2	24.0	27.0	33.7
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	21.8	23.8	30.3	22.4	24.8	
Poland	22.7	24.5	28.6	23.2	25.7	33.1
Czech Republic						
Hungary	21.6	24.0	27.6	22.3	24.8	30.3
Slovenia	22.5	24.6	28.7	23.2	26.1	31.5
Latvia	21.8	23.2	26.4	21.8	23.3	25.7
Lithuania	22.0	23.8	26.3	22.1	23.7	26.2

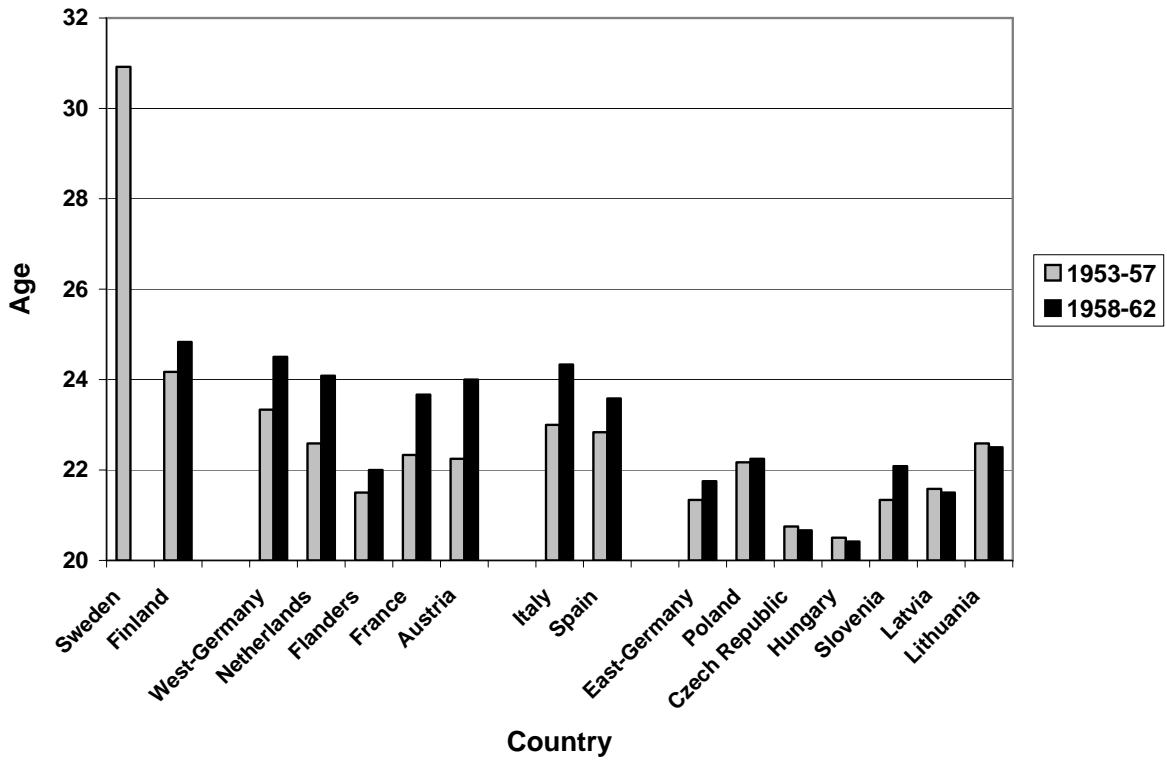


Figure 25 Median age at entry into first marriage among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

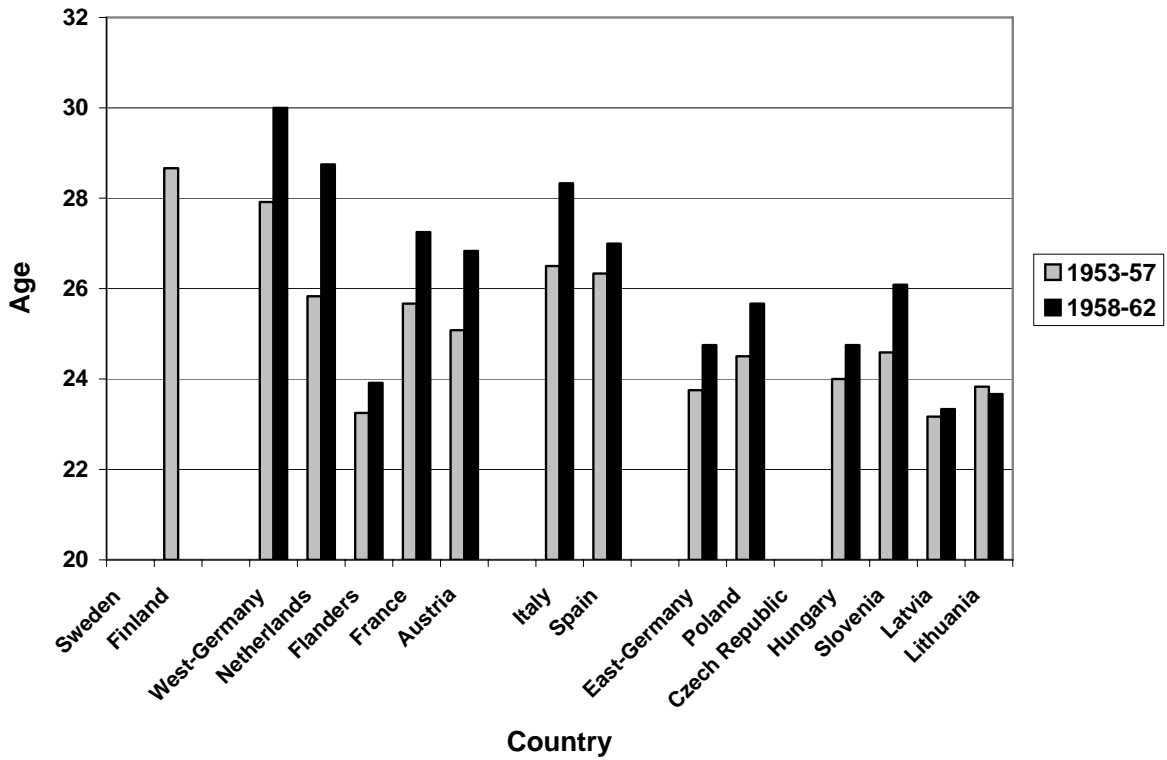


Figure 26 Median age at entry into first marriage among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Table 18 Age at first childbirth among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden	21.8	25.2	30.6	22.5	26.7	30.9
Finland	22.2	25.7	31.1	22.7	26.1	
Western Europe						
West-Germany	21.6	26.1	32.3	22.8	26.6	32.8
Netherlands	23.4	27.0	31.7	24.5	28.4	32.3
Flanders	22.0	24.5	28.0	22.8	25.5	29.1
France	21.5	24.3	28.6	21.3	25.3	31.4
Austria	20.3	23.4	28.1	21.0	24.5	29.5
Southern Europe						
Italy	21.6	25.2	30.0	22.4	27.0	32.4
Spain	22.5	24.8	28.5	22.0	25.6	29.8
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	20.4	22.3	24.9	19.9	21.7	24.8
Poland	21.2	23.3	26.3	21.0	23.2	26.8
Czech Republic	19.9	21.8	25.0	20.0	21.6	24.3
Hungary	20.2	22.1	25.5	19.8	22.1	25.6
Slovenia	19.9	21.8	24.3	20.0	22.1	25.2
Latvia	21.1	22.7	25.7	21.1	22.8	25.5
Lithuania	21.8	24.0	26.6	21.6	24.0	26.6

Table 19 Age at first childbirth among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden				25.5	29.7	
Finland	25.2	29.3	37.9			
Western Europe						
West-Germany	24.8	29.9		26.0	30.3	
Netherlands	27.1	31.3	38.4	28.2	32.3	
Flanders	24.1	27.1	32.0	24.9	27.5	32.2
France	24.7	28.0	35.9	25.0	28.1	33.9
Austria	23.1	27.1	34.2	24.0	28.1	35.8
Southern Europe						
Italy	25.4	29.6	34.1	27.6	31.3	
Spain	25.0	28.4	32.4	26.3	29.5	35.0
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	22.6	24.9	29.4	22.5	25.3	29.8
Poland						
Czech Republic						
Hungary	23.5	26.2	31.1	23.9	26.6	32.9
Slovenia	23.3	25.5	29.2	23.4	26.3	29.2
Latvia	22.8	24.8	28.2	22.8	24.7	27.5
Lithuania	23.5	25.8	29.7	23.1	24.8	28.3

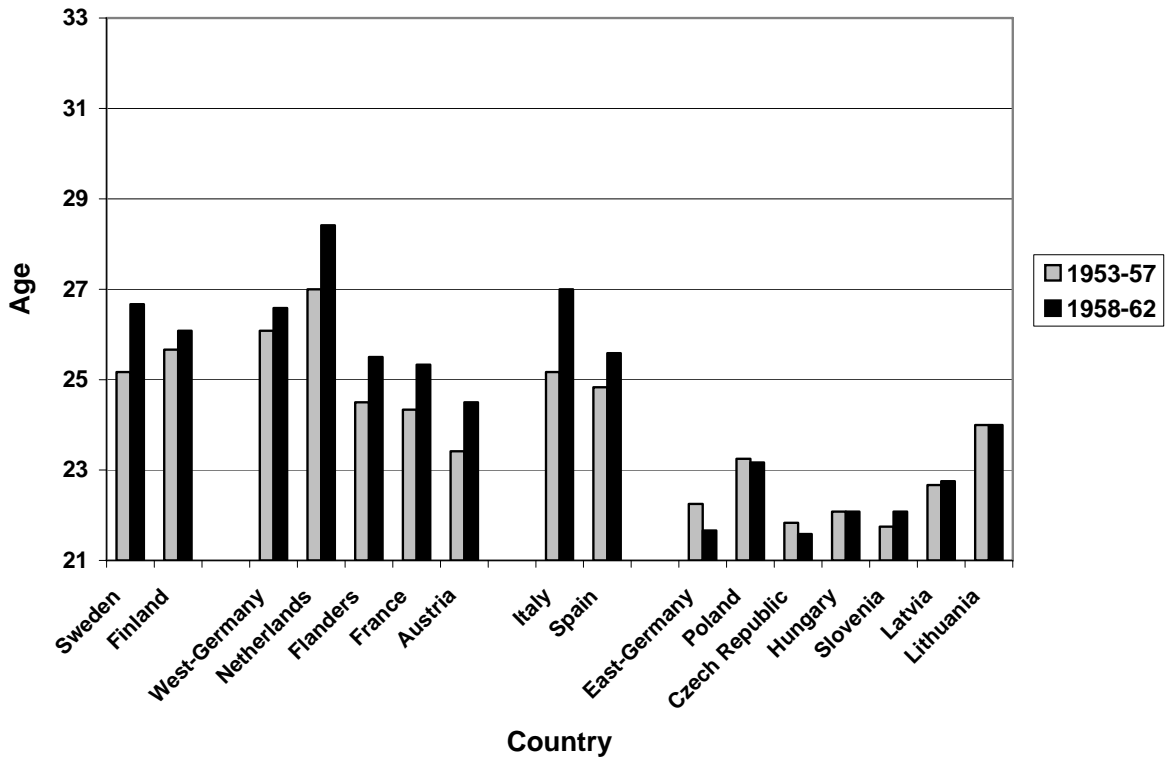


Figure 27 Median age at first childbirth among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

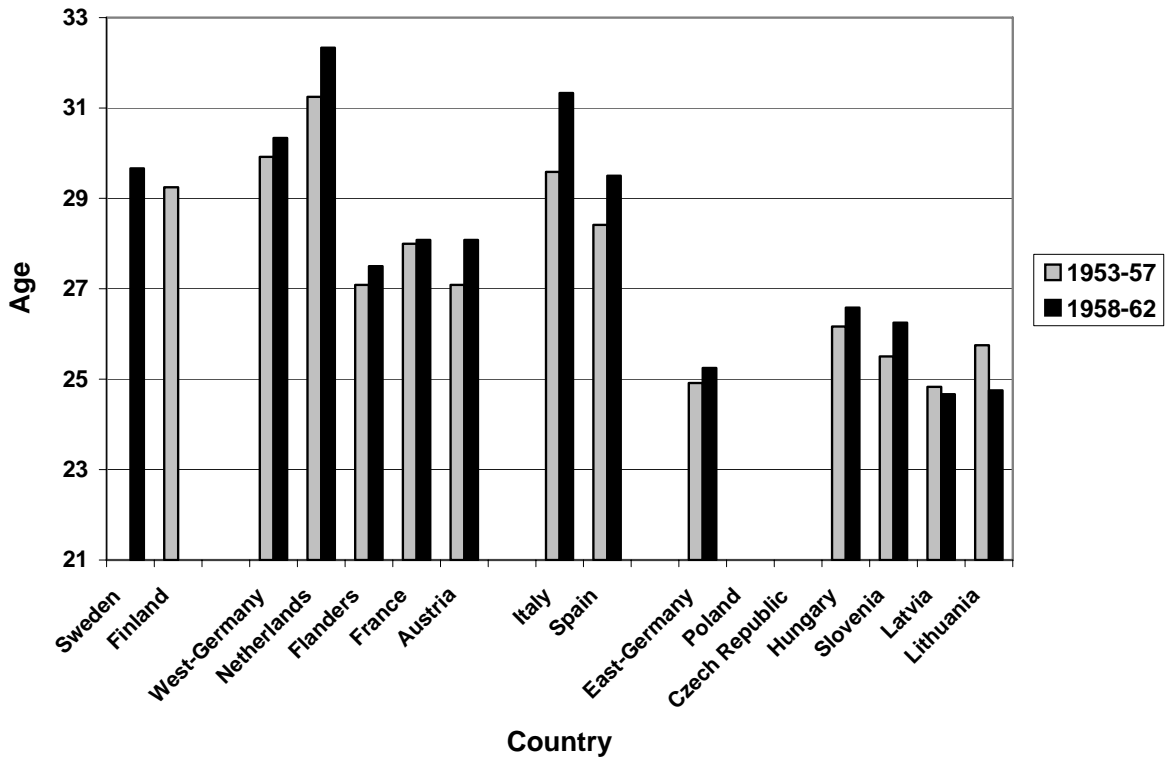


Figure 28 Median age at first childbirth among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

1953 and 1958 the highest median age is recorded for the Netherlands (27.0 years) and the lowest for the Czech Republic and Slovenia (21.8 years), implying more than a five year difference in the age at which 50% of all women have had their first child. The geographical pattern is relatively simple: Eastern Europe versus all the other countries. In Eastern Europe, the median age at first childbirth varies between 21.8 and 23.3, with Lithuania being relatively late with 24.0 years. In all other parts of Europe the median age at first childbirth is around 25. Most variation is apparent in Western Europe, where Austria has a relatively early median age of 23.4 and the Netherlands has a late one with 27.0.

Data on the change in the median at first childbirth show the same pattern as reported above with regard to age at first marriage: a clear postponement of motherhood all across Europe, with the exception of Eastern Europe. The postponement is strongest in Italy, with a rise in the median age at entry into motherhood with almost two years. In Eastern Europe hardly any change in the age at entry into motherhood is visible. Entry into motherhood accelerated by about half a year in East-Germany, whereas it was postponed by about half a year in Slovenia.

Men have their first child about three to four years later than women. Within Western Europe, the Netherlands and West-Germany stand out with a relatively high (and rising) median age at entry into fatherhood. East-German men and women have their first child much earlier than West-German men and women. The difference in the median age at entry into parenthood is approximately four years.

How long does it take young adults to move from entry into a union to parenthood? To answer this question, the length of the period between entry into a union and entry into parenthood was calculated. Results are presented in Tables 20 and 21 and Figures 29 and 30. These Tables show that in all Eastern European the transition from a union to parenthood took less than two years. In other words, the main ingredients of the process of family formation were spaced very closely together. The same can be said about the situation in Southern Europe, though a slight lengthening of the period between entry into a union and parenthood can be observed for men in both Italy and Spain. In Western and Northern Europe the period between union formation and parenthood is clearly longer. In Sweden, West-Germany and the Netherlands the median duration of this period lies between 4 and 6 years. The results also show a clear increase of the length of this period from cohort 1953-57 to cohort 1958-62 in all

Table 20 Duration between entry into a first union and first childbirth among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden	1,6	3,8	7,6	2,2	4,9	8,8
Finland	1,2	3,0	6,4	1,4	3,3	7,8
Western Europe						
West-Germany	1,4	3,7	8,7	1,5	3,8	7,7
Netherlands	2,1	4,3	8,9	3,1	5,7	9,4
Flanders	1,0	2,2	4,2	1,5	2,9	5,4
France	0,9	1,9	4,5	1,3	3,4	7,0
Austria	0,9	2,4	5,3	1,2	3,1	7,2
Southern Europe						
Italy	0,8	1,3	2,9	0,9	1,8	3,7
Spain	0,8	1,4	2,7	0,8	1,5	3,1
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	0,7	1,7	3,9	0,6	1,3	3,0
Poland	0,5	0,9	1,7	0,5	0,9	1,7
Czech Republic	0,5	1,0	2,3	0,4	0,8	1,9
Hungary	0,8	1,3	2,6	0,7	1,3	2,9
Slovenia	0,4	0,8	1,8	0,4	0,8	2,0
Latvia	0,7	1,0	2,0	0,7	1,1	2,1
Lithuania	0,7	1,3	2,3	0,6	1,0	2,2

Table 21 Duration between entry into a first union and first childbirth among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden				2,4	5,2	9,4
Finland	1,7	3,7	7,5			
Western Europe						
West-Germany	1,6	4,4	12,8	1,9	4,3	9,2
Netherlands	2,8	5,2	10,4	3,5	6,3	13,2
Flanders	1,3	2,9	6,0	1,6	3,1	5,5
France	1,5	3,3	7,1	1,7	3,6	6,3
Austria	1,3	2,7	7,8	1,6	3,8	11,9
Southern Europe						
Italy	0,9	1,4	4,3	1,2	2,5	5,0
Spain	0,8	1,5	3,2	1,0	2,3	5,2
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	0,7	1,8	5,0	0,8	2,0	5,1
Hungary	0,8	1,5	3,3	0,8	1,7	3,7
Slovenia	0,4	1,0	2,5	0,3	1,1	3,5
Latvia	0,7	1,1	2,7	0,8	1,3	3,1
Lithuania	0,8	1,3	2,9	0,7	1,1	2,0

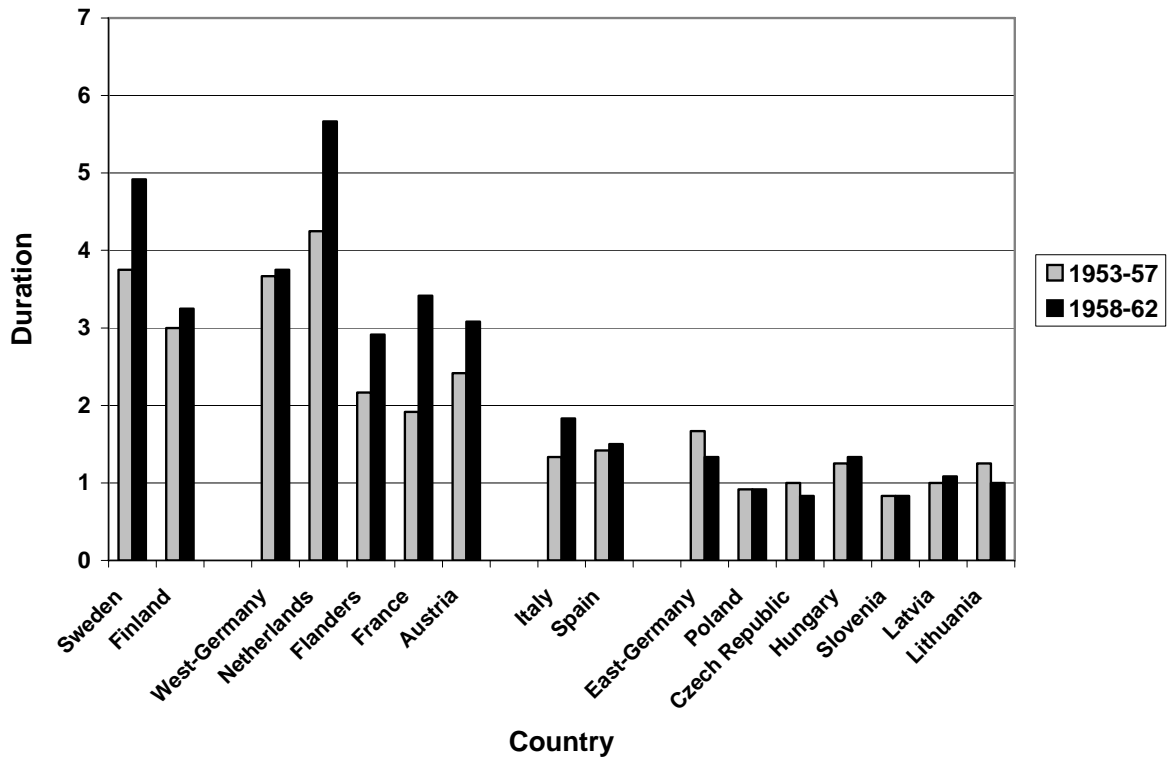


Figure 29 Median duration between entry into a first union and first childbirth among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

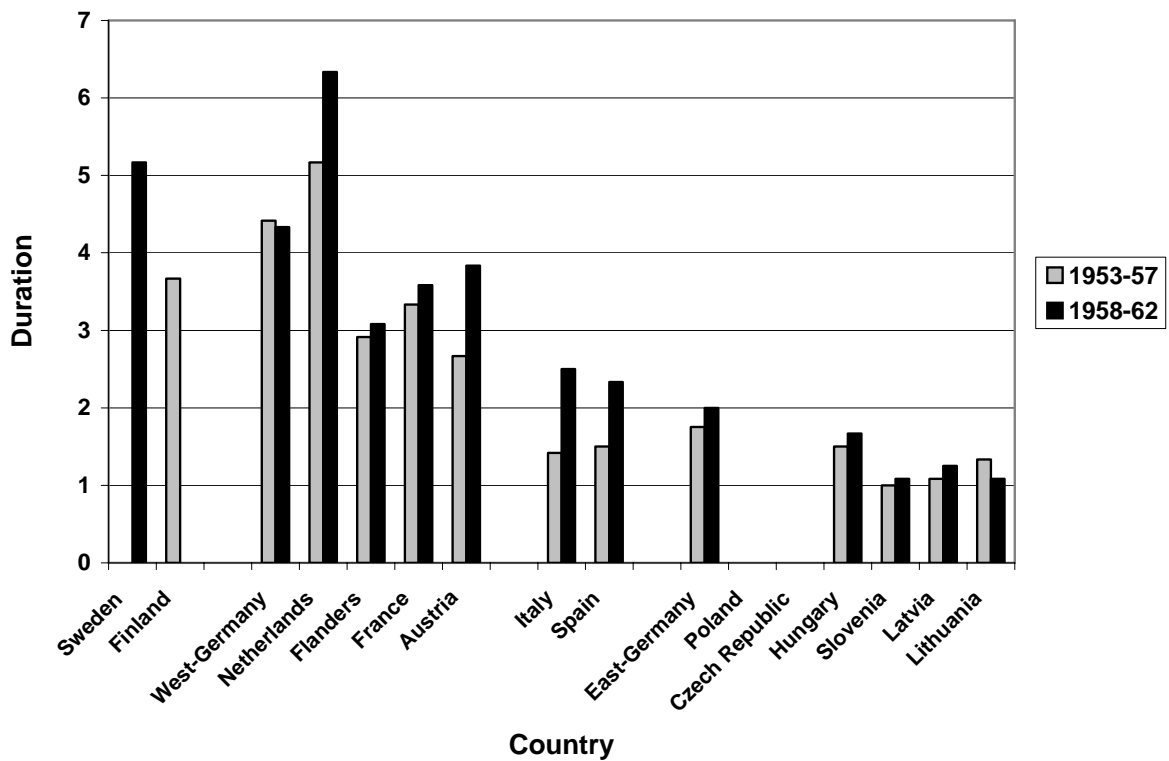


Figure 30 Median duration between entry into a first union and first childbirth among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Table 22 Duration between entry into a first job and first childbirth among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden	4,3	7,3	12,1	5,0	8,4	12,8
Finland	4,4	7,6	12,6	4,3	7,7	13,3
Western Europe						
West-Germany	4,9	8,7	13,9	5,1	8,8	13,5
Netherlands	6,3	9,3	13,7	6,3	9,3	13,6
Flanders	3,8	5,9	9,3	4,0	6,2	10,2
France	4,5	6,8	10,8	4,4	7,7	13,8
Austria	3,0	5,9	10,3	3,8	6,8	12,0
Southern Europe						
Italy	4,5	7,8	12,7	5,0	8,8	13,3
Spain	4,8	7,7	12,4	4,4	8,0	12,0
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	2,4	4,5	7,6	2,3	4,1	6,7
Poland	2,3	4,3	7,2	2,3	4,3	7,8
Czech Republic	1,9	3,4	6,4	1,7	3,3	5,6
Hungary	2,9	4,9	8,0	2,5	4,4	7,5
Slovenia	2,1	3,7	5,9	2,2	3,5	6,1
Latvia	2,2	4,3	7,2	2,2	3,9	6,7
Lithuania	2,3	4,2	7,4	2,3	4,2	7,4

Table 23 Duration between entry into a first job and first childbirth among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

Country	1953-1957			1958-62		
	25%	50%	75%	25%	50%	75%
Northern Europe						
Sweden				7,1	10,9	0,0
Finland	6,8	10,8	20,7			
Western Europe						
West-Germany	6,5	11,3		7,3	11,6	
Netherlands	7,5	11,5	18,8	8,0	12,3	18,5
Flanders	5,0	8,4	12,8	5,3	8,6	13,3
France	6,3	10,3	16,8	7,3	10,0	15,8
Austria	5,1	9,2	15,8	5,5	10,4	17,9
Southern Europe						
Italy	6,3	10,0	17,8	8,3	12,2	17,7
Spain	6,3	9,6	15,3	5,9	10,7	15,7
Eastern Europe						
East-Germany	4,2	6,8	10,8	4,4	7,4	12,2
Poland						
Czech Republic						
Hungary	5,2	8,2	12,8	4,8	8,0	12,9
Slovenia	4,5	6,3	10,7	4,3	6,8	10,3
Latvia	3,8	6,0	9,8	3,5	5,5	8,9
Lithuania	3,2	5,9	10,5	2,5	4,8	8,1



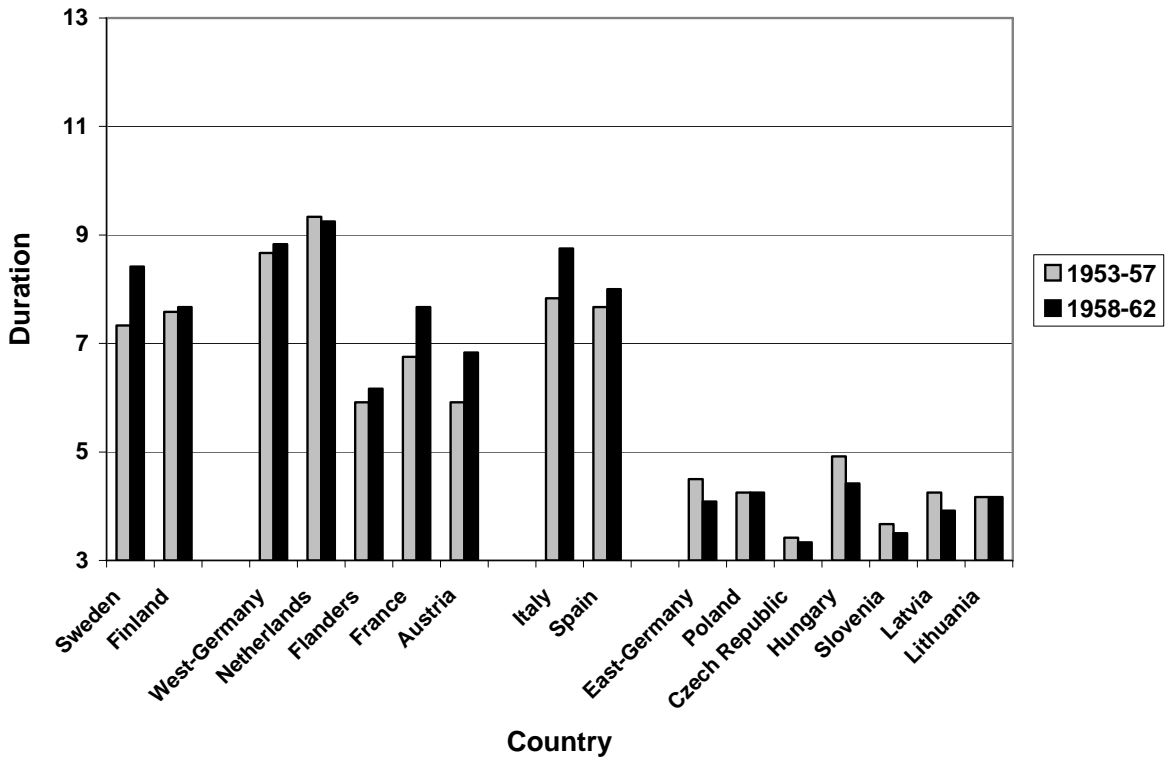


Figure 31 Median duration between entry into a first job and first childbirth among women, by country and birth cohort (in years)

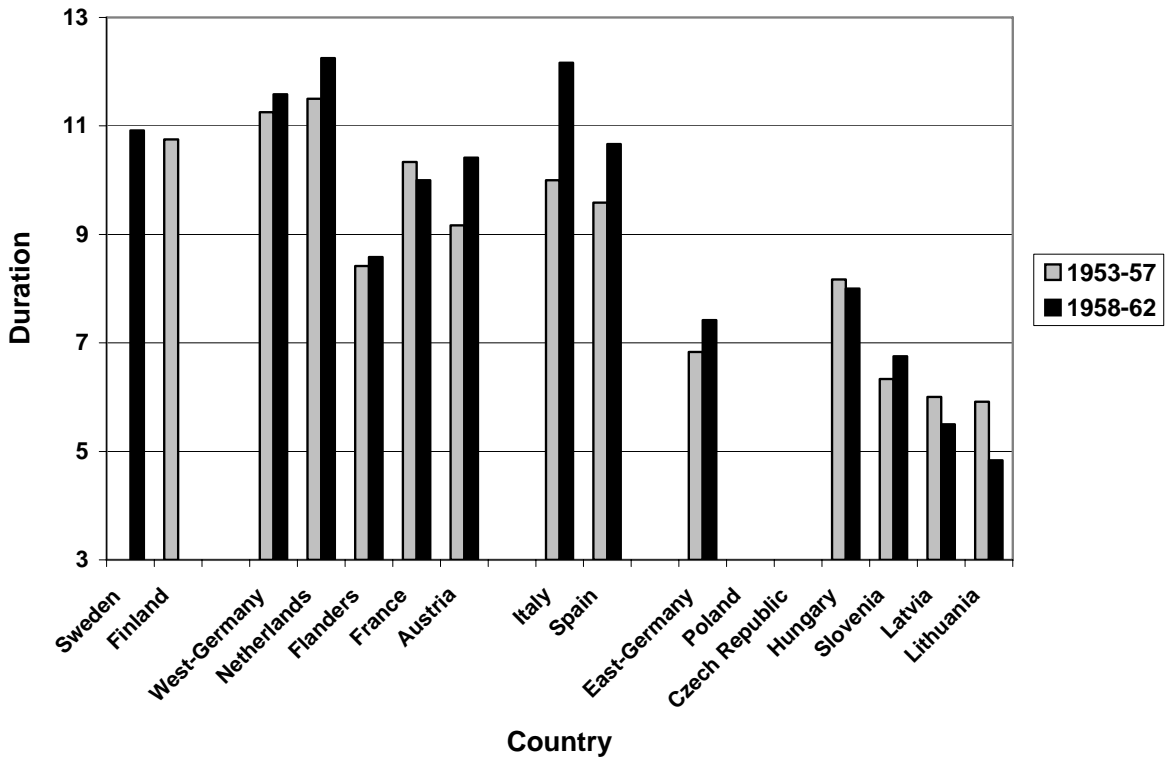


Figure 32 Median duration between entry into a first job and first childbirth among men, by country and birth cohort (in years)

parts of Europe, except in Eastern Europe. Finally, these data show that the move from the start of a partner relationship to the start of parenthood takes much longer among East-German men and women than among West-German ones.

A final indicator that is informative about the relative timing of childbearing is the duration of the spell between entry into a first job and entry into parenthood. This information is presented in Tables 22 and 23 and in Figures 31 and 32. Again, the main difference is between Eastern Europe on the one hand and the rest of Europe on the other. Young adults in Eastern Europe move faster from entry into a job to parenthood. This holds true both for women and men, although on average it takes longer for men than for women. Across cohorts, things do not change rapidly, with the exception of the situation in Italy and Spain. As a result of the large postponement of parenthood in these countries, the length of the spell between entry on the labour market and entry into parenthood becomes considerably longer for cohorts born between 1958 and 1962.

## 5. Summary and conclusions

In this report, information the transition to adulthood has been studied. This has been done in two ways. First, a trend analysis has been performed on changes in the transition to adulthood in the Netherlands. To that end, information on the timing of a number of important events during young adulthood from Dutch men and women born between 1913 and 1977 has been analysed. Per five-year birth cohort, the timing of six important events has been calculated. These events were (a) leaving full-time education, (b) entry into a first job, (c) leaving the parental home, (d) entry into a first co-residential union, (e) entry into first marriage, and (f) entry into parenthood. In addition, the length of the period between entry into a union and entry into parenthood and between entry into a first job and entry into parenthood has been studied. For each of these events and spells, the age (or duration) at which a quarter, half, and three quarters of all men and women had experienced the event were presented.

Second, a comparative analysis of differences within Europe in the process of entry into adulthood has been performed. To that end, information on the timing of major life-events among men and women born between 1953 and 1962 in sixteen European countries spread all across Europe has been analysed. The same events and spells were analysed as in the Dutch case, with one exception. Information on the age at which young adults leave full-time education was deemed to be too unreliable to be presented. As in the Dutch case, for each of these events and spells, the age (or duration) at which 25%, 50%, and 75% of men and women had experienced the event were presented.

In this final section, the main results of these analyses will be summarised. In addition, some of the implications of the major findings will be discussed. In this discussion, the focus will be on the findings regarding the timing of parenthood in the transition to adulthood.

### 5.1 *Summary of results on the transition to adulthood in the Netherlands*

The transition to adulthood has changed very markedly among the birth cohorts considered in this study. The main aspects of this change can be summarised in five main points. First, the trends for many events show quite *distinct* patterns. Events in the occupational and educational life domain show a continuous pattern of *postponement*. They occur much later among cohorts born in the 1970's than they did among cohorts born in the 1910's. The median

age at leaving school among women born between 1913 and 1917 was 13.7 years. Among women born between 1968 and 1972, this median age had increased to 19.9 years. The same trend can be observed for the closely linked event of entry into a first job. The median age increased from 16.7 years for women born between 1913 and 1917 to 20.8 years for women born between 1973 and 1977. Events in the family life domain show a *curvilinear* pattern in which a drop in the timing of events is followed by a subsequent rise. This curvilinear trend, however, is not as prominent for all events. It is weakest for leaving home. For cohorts born before the end of the 1950's a drop in the median age at leaving the parental home can be observed. For women, this median age decreased from 23.8 years for the 1913-17 birth cohort to 20.1 years for the 1953-57 birth cohort. Since then, a slight increase in the median age at leaving home has occurred. Among women born in the 1960's and 1970 the median age at leaving home has stabilised at just below 21 years of age. The curvilinearity in the trend is somewhat stronger for entry into a first union. The median age at entry into a first union was 25.8 years for women born between 1913 and 1917, dropped to 21.6 years for women born between 1953 and 1957 and subsequently rose again to 23.3 years for women born between 1973 and 1977. This pattern of a downturn in the age at which events occur followed by an upturn is clearest for entry into first marriage and entry into parenthood. The median age at first marriage was 25.8 years for women born between 1913 and 1917, dropped to 22.2 among women born between 1948 and 1952 and subsequently steeply rose again to 29.0 years among women born between 1968 and 1972. The pattern for entry into motherhood is quite similar: a median age of 28.0 for women from the 1913-17 birth cohort, a drop to 25.3 among women from the 1943-47 cohort and a rise to 30.8 among women born between 1968 and 1972.

Secondly, as a consequence of these dissimilar developments in the occupational life domain and the family life domain, the events of leaving school, entry into a first job, leaving the parental home and entry into a first union now all occur within a relatively short time period. Among women born between 1973 and 1977, median ages for exit from the educational system, entry into a first job, leaving home and entry into a first union all lie within a four year time frame, whereas this time frame was about twelve years for women born between 1913 and 1917. This suggests that women in their early twenties are nowadays faced with a high density of important decisions in both the occupational and family life domains.

Thirdly, an opposite trend towards a larger time interval between events can be observed for events in the family life domain. Among women born between 1913 and 1917 the median duration between leaving home and entry into motherhood was just four years, whereas this was about ten years for women born between 1968 and 1972. In other words, events in the family life domain are nowadays much less closely spaced together than they were seventy years ago. In particular, young adults postpone events that ask for a strong, long-term commitment.

Fourthly, a comparison of data on the timing of events during young adulthood for women and men shows that men experience events in the occupational life domain at about the same age as women, whereas the former experience events in the family life domain a few years later than the latter. As a result, with respect to making decisions concerning one's future life, the early twenties are a more dense period in women's lives than in the lives of men.

Fifthly, events in the family life domain have been characterised by a process of standardisation followed by a process of destandardisation. The variation in the timing of family life events was particularly large among cohorts born in the 1940's. Both among cohorts born earlier and cohorts born later, much more variation in the timing of important life events existed. In that sense, it is not so much the current situation with late family formation and much variation in the timing of family formation that is peculiar, but rather the early and widely standardised pattern of family formation that existed in the 1950's and early 1960's.

## 5.2 *Summary of results on the transition to adulthood in Europe*

The comparison on differences in the transition to adulthood across Europe concentrated on cohorts born between 1953 and 1962. The advantage of this selection of cohorts is that all of them had more or less experienced most of the major events during this life phase. The disadvantage is that more recent developments could not be taken into account. The main results of the analyses can be summarised in four points.

Firstly, relatively small differences were found for entry into a first job, suggesting that the timing of entry into the labour market occurs at more or less the same age (end teens and early twenties) for most young adults across Europe. Women from Italy and Spain constituted the

main deviation from this pattern. Women from these countries had a much higher median age at entry into the labour market, suggesting that many women from these cohorts either never entered the labour market at all or suffered from high rates of unemployment.

Secondly, family transitions were spaced much more closely together in Eastern Europe than in other parts of Europe. In most Eastern European countries, the median length of the period between entry into a union and entry into motherhood was around one year, whereas this was between two and six years among women in countries in Western and Northern Europe. However, it is important to note that these data focus on cohorts in Eastern Europe that experienced these events before the fall of the Communist regimes. Since then, postponement of parenthood has been quite impressive in this part of Europe as well (Macura et al., 2002; Sobotka, 2004).

Thirdly, Southern Europe (represented by Italy and Spain) differs from Western and Northern Europe in the combination of two aspects. Family events occur at a relatively late age, but are spaced closely together. The median age at which women leave the parental home is two to three years later than that of women in Western and Northern Europe. At the same time, the median duration of the spell between union formation and parenthood is much shorter. In other words, Italian and Spanish young adults start family formation at a relatively late age, but move quickly from one family-related event to the other.

Fourthly, patterns in Western and Northern Europe show quite strong variation. Both West-Germany and the Netherlands stand out with a relatively high age at entry into parenthood. Northern European countries show a high age at entry into marriage, suggesting that marriage was not very central any longer to the lives of women and men born in the 1950's. Flanders, on the other hand, and to a lesser extent France and Austria, show a more traditional profile with relatively early marriage and childbearing.

### 5.3 *Implications*

This study has provided a large amount of information on the transition to adulthood, both in a longitudinal and comparative perspective. In this final section, no attempt will be made to present a full-fledged discussion of all the implications of these findings. Instead, the focus will be on the implications of these changes and differences in the transition to adulthood for

decisions of young adults about entry into parenthood. In this respect, the major finding is the strong postponement of first childbirth among recent cohorts of young adults and the fact that the age at entry into parenthood showed relatively strong cross-national variation among cohorts born in the 1950's. More recent data (e.g. Sobotka, 2004) has shown that this regional variation still exists, although the relative position of countries has changed. Among recent birth cohorts, postponement of entry into parenthood has been particularly strong among Italian and Spanish women.

In section 2, a brief overview of important explanations of the changes in the transition to adulthood has been presented. Most explanations are based on a mix of cultural, economic and institutional factors. It seems very likely that the strong postponement of parenthood results from a mix of all three factors, rather than from a predominance of one of them. Several arguments for this thesis can be brought forward.

In a recent panel study (Liefbroer, forthcoming) I examined whether young adults' expectations about the consequences of having children influences the actual timing of entry into parenthood. I found that each of the three major type of factors played a role. Young adults postpone entry into parenthood if they feel that this reduces their spending power (economic consideration), their career opportunities (largely a institutional consideration) and their individual autonomy (a cultural consideration). Each of these three types of factors will be briefly considered.

Several aspects may result in a reduction in spending power among families with children. Children's allowances may not fully compensate for the financial costs of children. In addition, women (and men) may either reduce their working hours (and have less income as a result) or have to pay for child care (with the same drop in income as a result). Given that young adults take the consequences for their spending power into account in timing their entry into parenthood, a rise in children's allowances and a drop in the costs of child care may increase their willingness to enter parenthood at an earlier age.

Young adults also postpone parenthood if they think that becoming a parent will hamper their career opportunities. Again, there are several reasons why such an effect on their career is likely (particularly among women). Combining parenthood and a career is time-consuming and might lead to a (temporary) reduction in working hours and productivity. In addition, if a

woman opts for a child, this may be interpreted by her employer as a sign that she is not fully committed to her career, with a concomitant reduction in career chances as a result. Such considerations may be particularly important in the current economic crisis. Women (and men) do not want to put their job (and their financial future) at risk. Several types of measures can be envisaged to counter these possibly negative consequences. First, wide availability of child care may decrease the negative consequences for one's career as this increases women's opportunities to combine parenthood and labour market activity. In addition, the possibility of part-time work and of parental leave arrangements allow for a better combination of parenthood and employment. However, these kind of considerations will only be effective if women (and men) who opt for part-time work and for parental leave are not stigmatised by their employers as not being sufficiently career-oriented. If the latter is the case, this will still force women and men to opt for either parenthood or career rather than to pursue both.

Finally, young adults (and women in particular) postpone entry into parenthood if they feel that having a child will interfere with their autonomy. This can mainly be considered to be an expression of a shift in the cultural orientation of our society: individual autonomy is valued much stronger than in the past. In a sense, it cannot be helped that having a child decreases one's autonomy. However, it is probably true as well that good facilities to combine parenthood and other important life goals (including employment) may lead to a lesser sense that having a child will truly reduce one's autonomy.

The panel data alluded to above suggest that cultural, economic and institutional factors often interact. However, the relative importance of each type of factor may differ from situation to situation. For instance, the changes in demographic behaviour occurring in Eastern Europe during the 1990's are an issue in which cultural and economic explanations are often being juxtaposed. After the collapse of Communism family formation has been postponed and both the total fertility and the total first marriage rates have dropped (Macura et al., 2002). One interpretation for this finding is that the postponement of family formation is a result of 'economic shock', whereas another interpretation is that it results from the fact that Eastern Europeans had already been exposed to 'modern' Western values, but had not been able to act upon these values given the restrictions of Communist society. Since the economic transformation these barriers to the adoption of Western values and behavioural patterns have been levelled, resulting in a rapid change in demographic behaviour. It seems likely that both processes are at work (and institutional changes as well), but the lack of survey data on the



life histories of Eastern Europeans during the 1990's is a major obstacle to testing hypotheses on this issue.

Family decisions concerning the timing and quantum of fertility always result from this interplay between individual (or family) preferences and societal conditions. It is hard to envisage how governments can influence individual preferences (in particular at relatively short notice). However, attempts at changing the societal conditions is part and parcel of the political agenda of most governments. From this perspective, all policy measures that facilitate the combination of parenthood and career and decrease the insecurity with which families are faced in deciding on having children may have a stimulating effect on the fertility decisions made by families.

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