

## Labour Market Flexibility and Home-leaving in Different Welfare States: Does Labour Force and Contractual Status Matter?

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### Abstract

This paper examines the impact of the labour market and the employment status on leaving the parental home in France, Germany and Italy. In particular, temporary employment has concentrated disproportionately among young labour market entrants without safe labour market anchorage. One consequence for young adults remaining in unemployment or non-permanent jobs is the postponement of important decisions in their private lives such as home-leaving; whereas the length of postponement depends on the institutional context. Less attention has been paid to the analysis of education-specific patterns in the effects of employment precariousness on individual decision-making. The paper aims to fill this gap by analysing whether and how the employment status (employed/unemployed) as well as the type of contract (fixed-term/permanent) influences the first transition of leaving the parental home, and how this effect varies according to the level of education in three different institutional contexts. To this end, the paper uses a mixed method approach, combining results from a quantitative analysis of data from the European Labour Force Survey 2010 with findings from qualitative research based on interviews and focus groups with people aged 20-45 to highlight the mechanism driving young peoples' decisions.

**Key words:** youth, leaving the parental home, international comparison, mixed methods.

### Introduction

Throughout recent decades, modern labour markets have undergone serious transformations. Driven by the demand to react swiftly to dynamic labour and product markets, employers have increasingly introduced new 'atypical' forms of flexible work, such as fixed-term contracts, part-time work or false self-employment (Reyneri, 2011). However, despite the fact that this rise in atypical work forms has begun to erode the previously dominant model of permanent and continuous full-time employment, it has not done so equally for all labour market groups. Recent comparative research demonstrates that atypical work forms have concentrated disproportionately among vulnerable individuals without safe labour market anchorage (Breen, 1997). Especially the youth have been described as 'losers of globalization', given that among them, the share of atypical work has risen most dramatically (see Blossfeld et al., 2005; 2008). Furthermore, for them, rising labour market uncertainties have contributed to the postponement or even abandonment of long-term binding private decisions such as leaving the parental home, non-marital cohabitation, marriage or childbirth (Aasve et al., 2002; Ahn & Mira, 2001; Baizan et al., 2004; Barbieri & Scherer, 2005, 2009; Nazio & Blossfeld, 2003; Mills & Blossfeld, 2003; Pisati, 2002; Reyneri, 2011; Rizza, 2003). Notably, however, the magnitude of such trends differs notably between countries, suggesting that nation-specific contexts moderate the effects of globalisation on young individuals. Such 'institutional filters' – for example, education systems, labour market regulation or social policies – mediate the impacts of flexibilisation in a specific way, and thus shape the country-specific contextual opportunities and constraints for individual decisions (Blossfeld, 2003; Schizzerotto & Lucchini, 2002).

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Various earlier studies have analysed the interplay between employment flexibility and young people's transitions in private life such as leaving the parental home (e.g. Aasve et al., 2002; Nazio & Blossfeld, 2003), marriage and union formation (Blossfeld et al., 2005) using social survey or register data. Such an approach is highly effective in quantifying such events, i.e. in reconstructing the occurrence and timing of these transitions and its determinants on a representative basis. However, while we gain information about *if* – and if so: *when* – young people decide to leave their parental home, we do know little about the rationales underlying such transitions. In other words: We do not know *why* young people decide to leave their parental household or *why* they alternatively may decide to stay within it. However, an adequate understanding of young people's behaviour and the potential design of targeted and effective policies cannot abstain from a thorough understanding of the mechanisms driving individual behaviour.

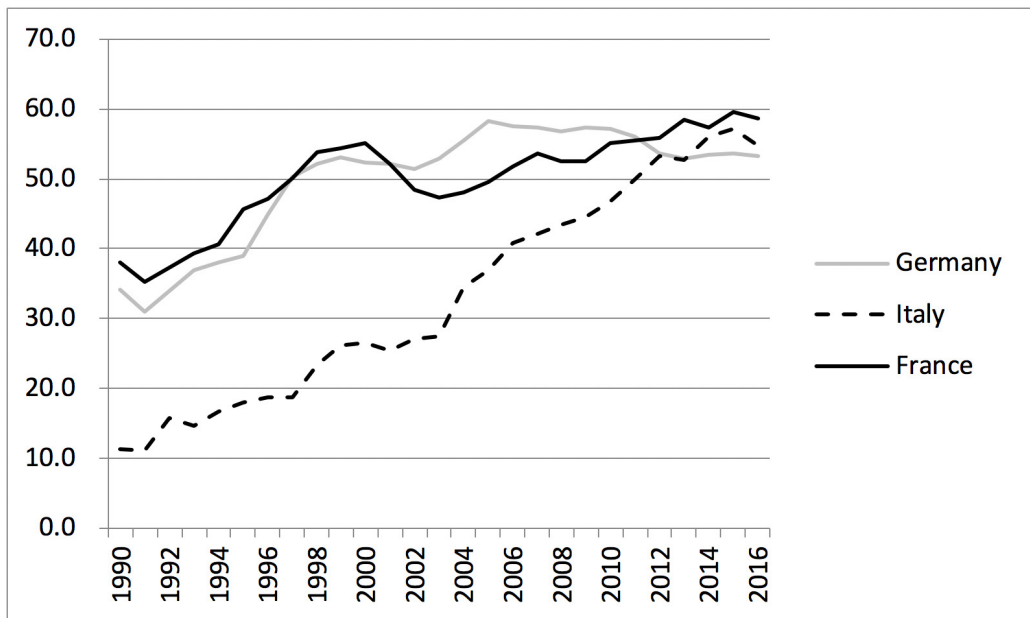
In our paper, we thus aim to go beyond the existing research by combining evidence from representative quantitative data with the results of qualitative interviews to analyse whether and how employment flexibility – indicated by employment status (employed/unemployed) and contractual type (permanent/fixed-term) impact home-leaving as the first major transition to adult life for youth.

Young people's home-leaving decisions, however, are not taken in a “social vacuum”. Young people can be assumed to base their individual decisions on the available opportunities and constraints for their actions (e.g. Coleman, 1990). These may, on the one hand, originate from nation-specific institutions, such as education systems and labour markets, regulating the employment chances of individuals, as well as welfare systems shaping their material and social security (e.g. Blossfeld, 2003; Leisering, 2003; Mayer, 2004). In order to assess the influence of these differential institutional packages, we compare three countries with a similar incidence of labour market flexibilisation, but different welfare, labour market and social systems: Italy, France and Germany. On the other hand, individuals may also be enabled or constrained in their decisions by their degree of human capital and the related employment prospects (e.g. Breen, 1997; Blossfeld et al., 2005). In our analyses, we thus differentiate between young persons with different educational endowment to approximate such effects. In other words, we ask in how far the country-specific consequences of employment flexibility for home-leaving processes differ between educational groups.

To this end, our paper first will provide a stylised overview of major institutional differences between the three countries under study and develop hypotheses about impact of these differences on within- and between-country patterns of leaving the parental home (section 2). We then report results from a comparative analysis of data from the European Labour Force Survey 2010 to explore the probability of living outside the parental home and the variations both between as well as within countries (section 3). This quantitative perspective is subsequently complemented by findings from qualitative research exploring the rationales and motives underlying these decisions (section 4). Taken together, both perspectives allow arriving at a comprehensive picture of decisional processes to live outside the parental home. The main findings arising from this ‘mixed methods’ perspective will then be summarised and critically discussed in a final concluding chapter (section 5).

## **Comparing the institutional backgrounds of youths' home-leaving transitions in Italy, France and Germany**

This paper compares individual home-leaving transitions of youths in Germany, Italy and France. This choice of countries follows a ‘most-similar-case’ design that best allows analysing the influence of specific institutional features on individual decision-making (Mill, 1905). Germany, France and Italy share similarities with respect to the incidence of fixed-term employment as the most crucial form of atypical employment among youths (see Figure 1 below). For youths aged 15 to 24 years, it made up for around half of all employment in 2016. While in France and Germany, this percentage has been largely stable since the turn of the millennium, in Italy, it has steeply risen to such levels from around 10 per cent in the year 1990.



**Figure 1:** Share of fixed-term employment among youth aged 15-24 years as a percentage of total employment in France, Germany and Italy, 1990-2016

Source: OECD 2018.

In all three countries, fixed-term employment thus makes up a widespread work form among young labour market entrants. However, earlier research (see for example Gash, 2008, Scherer, 2004) has highlighted that fixed-term employment may have very different meanings for youth with regard to their future *labour market career*, ranging from being a ‘stepping stone’ into safe employment to an entrapment in precarious work. Both articles trace back to this differential effect of fixed-term employment on institutional differences mediating the consequences of fixed-term employment, including educational systems and labour market regulation. In our paper, we widen the view on the consequences of fixed-term employment to its repercussions in the *private sphere*, looking at home-leaving transitions in particular. We also assume that in order to explain potentially different meanings of fixed-term employment, we will need to focus on a broader array of institutions, including those affecting young people’s financial and material situation. In the following, we discuss such major institutional contexts for youths’ home-leaving transitions (e.g. Mills & Blossfeld, 2005): (i) education and training systems, (ii) labour market policies, (iii) welfare state and family policies as well as (iv) key characteristics of the housing market. We assume that these different types of policies do not impact home-leaving in isolation but together create “institutional packages” (Buchholz et al., 2008) that create situational incentives or disincentives for leaving the parental home. At the end of this section, we thus derive hypotheses about how these institutional contexts impact individual patterns of leaving the parental home.

### *Education and training*

Education and training systems play a major role in leaving the parental home. By equipping individuals with qualifications requested within the labour market, they facilitate a swift entry into employment at an adequate qualification level.

In *Germany*, the so-called ‘dual system’ of vocational training combines elements of centralised school-based training with firm-specific on-the-job training (e.g. Blossfeld & Stockmann, 1999) that makes it easier for youth to swiftly transit into practical work after training. Furthermore,

the distinct signalling value of educational degrees arising from high degrees of standardisation through nationwide certificates ensures that labour market entry often occurs rather smoothly and at an adequate qualification level (Eichhorst, 2015, Groh-Samberg & Wise, 2017). At the same time, however, the high standardisation of educational degrees also implies that education is a key dimension for inequality in labour market placement in Germany.

In *France*, educational standardisation is also high, but vocational training is largely school-based, and firm-specific knowledge needs to be attained through job experience. The ‘democratisation’ of the French education system through inflationary educational expansion – among others reflected in a sharply rising share of tertiary level graduates – has reduced educational cleavages and increased overqualification risks: new employees are nowadays often hired for positions that do not fully reflect their qualification profile (Zdrojewski, 2012). However, the migrant population has remained especially marginalised within the educational system (Kieffer et al., 2005; Zdrojewski, 2011).

In *Italy*, educational degrees do not entail clear ‘signals’, given the weaker link between educational degrees and labour market entry positions (Bernardi & Nazio, 2005). Employers thus frequently recruit individuals in lower-paid and less binding forms of employment in order to better ‘screen’ their qualification levels. Responses to this behaviour differ by education: higher qualified youths tend to postpone their labour market entry to avoid entering the labour market at an ‘underqualified’ (and potentially underpaid) level, while the less qualified more often accept atypical work as a potential stepping stone into employment (Barbieri, 2011; Bertolini, 2011; Fullin, 2005; Migliavacca, 2008; Reyneri, 2007; 2009; Saraceno, 2005).

### *Labour market and employment policies*

Educational systems alone do not guarantee youth a smooth labour market entry, but need to be supplemented by adequate labour market policies. For the three countries considered here, it thus is important to also consider labour market measures aiming to facilitate employment entry for youth. All three countries – initially described as “closed employment relationships” (Regini, 2000) with a centralised negotiation of wages and high levels of employment protection (see Blossfeld et al., 2012) – have recently started a process of employment flexibilisation, albeit with different intensity and timing.

In *France*, labour market flexibilisation started in the 1980s, reflected in a rise of both unemployment and atypical employment, particularly concentrating among youth, the under-qualified or those with a migrant background (Boissonnat, 1995; Kieffer et al., 2005; Zdrojewski, 2011). Despite this rise in labour market uncertainties, public policy engagement to mitigate these changes has also risen: since 2000, France has introduced policies to reduce youth unemployment through a vocational training programme, tax incentives for companies and the promotion of more flexible and lower paid contracts of employment, especially for those with low educational qualifications (Pochard, 1996; Grelet, Vallet & Zdrojewski, 2007; Kieffer et al., 2005).

In *Italy*, flexible forms of employment were introduced only in the late-1990s, yet without adequate ‘buffering’ through welfare state programmes. This resulted in a strong segmentation between labour market ‘insiders’ with permanent contracts, often benefitting from a high level of social protection, and ‘outsiders’ in flexible work with only a low level of social protection (Regini, 2000). In addition, Italy lags behind in the development of active labour market policies. Even though there have been a number of policy reforms recently, such as the Fornero reforms (2012) and the introduction of the Youth Guarantee (2014), these policies have only marginally improved labour market chances for youth. Instead, Italian policies frequently have emphasised the strong role of the family in social and economic protection, especially for those with fixed-term contracts.

*Germany’s* labour market was flexibilised through extended possibilities of using fixed-term contracts, especially for the newly hired, and better options to make them renewable (Kurz et al., 2005). This resulted in a concentration of labour flexibility among young people, while those in

mid-career largely remained protected.

### *Welfare state support*

While education and labour market policies promote successful employment entry, public welfare policies ensure basic financial safety if employment integration is not (fully) achieved. We concentrate on three major programmes that are central for young labour market entrants: (i) the guarantee of a minimum standard of living, (ii) support provided in case of family formation and childbirth and (iii) welfare programmes explicitly targeted at youth.

- *France* and *Germany* represent a conservative welfare state type with universal benefits granted at a modest to high levels (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Benefits paid to individuals are often proportional to previous social security contributions.

- *Italy*, in contrast, represents a typical 'Southern European' welfare regime (Ferrera, 1996), where welfare generosity is significantly lower and the family functions as an 'explicit partner' of the welfare state (Saraceno, 1994), though its protective power has recently weakened (Barbieri, 2011). Benefits are less universal and targeted at political target groups ('clientelism'; Ferrera, 1996); particularly atypical workers and youth are often exempted from public benefits or receive only lower level payments (Barbieri, 2011)

Cross national variations equally exist with regard to *family policies*.

- In *France*, well-developed childcare services give mothers the option to combine paid work and motherhood already at early ages of the child. Moreover, France has implemented a generous financial assistance granted to families in the form of benefits or tax breaks, dependent on the number of children, family income and marital status (Math, 2003).

- In (West) *Germany*, social and family policy was long focused on a strong male-breadwinner model (Lewis & Ostner, 1994), in which maternal care was strongly subsidised, while the childcare infrastructure was neglected (Klammer & Letablier, 2007, p. 674). Recent reforms, in particular after 2005, initiated a gradual departure from this traditional approach. The implementation of shorter parental leave and a notable expansion in early childcare have moved Germany closer towards the French model (Fagnani & Math, 2010), though remnants of the previous familialistic model remain (Leitner, 2017).

- In *Italy*, it is mainly the family that offers social protection via intergenerational cash transfers or via service provision. Family policies are fragmented and only poorly funded (Baglioni et al., 2009), they exhibit low levels of generosity and provide little support for working parents (Gauthier, 2002; Naldini, 2006; González, Jurado & Naldini, 2000).

Cross-national differences can also be observed with regard to *public policies explicitly targeted at youth* promoting their autonomy.

- In *France*, public interventions to empower young people fall within various public policies and not all of them are specifically targeted at youth. The system of public interventions towards young people has obvious loopholes that penalise some of them in terms of their autonomy, and there is no guarantee of resources open to youth under 25 (Chabanet et al., 2007, p. 125). Situations of great insecurity among young people without any means of subsistence, without family support, and far removed from the labour market remain without adequate response, even though they represent only a small number.

- In *Germany*, there is no special measure supporting young people that live alone. However, they may obtain public subsidies if they belong to a specific group of needy persons. Young unemployed persons, who have paid contributions to unemployment

insurance, obtain unemployment benefits, while young unemployed persons under 25, who are not eligible for insurance-based benefits but are in need, are expected to live with their parents (Lahusen & Grimmer, 2009, p. 49). Students without their own income, whose parents are not able to support their education, obtain education subsidies, which reflect a mixture of public transfer payments and an interest-free credit. Those who obtain neither unemployment benefits nor education subsidies may obtain housing subsidies (see below).

- In *Italy*, youth policies remain fragmented and delegated to regions without a national plan of coordination and without integration with other policies (Baglioni et al., 2009; Cordella, 2011). Overall, the provision of welfare is weak and relies exclusively on the role of the family in supporting young people (Iacovou, 2002; Mencarini & Tanturri, 2006).

### *Housing policies*

A final institutional determinant of leaving the parental home is the availability of decent housing. Only if such housing is available at an acceptable price will youth be ready and willing to leave their parental home.

- Social housing in *France* accounts for about 17% of the stock (Ghekiere, 2011) and housing at moderated rents is offered by organisations as specific actors entrusted by the state to fulfil a mission of general interest. Rents are lowered by subsidies and tax incentives. Housing benefits are also available to help the poorest households paying rent. If a household's income increases to the point that it exceeds the income ceiling, rents rise accordingly (Ghekiere, 2011, p. 51).

- In *Germany*, the focus of housing policies is on 'publicly subsidised housing', which represents about 5% of the national housing stock. It entails public subsidy for any kind of housing providers in exchange for the use of a dwelling for social purposes. Local authorities ensure affordable accommodation for those unable to secure adequate housing themselves, while the federal state remains responsible for overall housing allowances and rent regulation (Oener, 2011).

- In *Italy*, social housing is significantly less developed. Existing policies (such as the *National Fund for supporting access to rental dwellings*) are fragmented across regions and depend on the choices of local and regional government (Baldini & Poggio, 2009). Another key characteristic of the Italian context is that about 70% of Italian families own their house, while the share of renters amounts to only about 20%. The high cost of rental housing prevents particularly young and lower income individuals from leaving the parental home (Modena & Rondinelli, 2011, p.1).

### *Synthesis*

Table 1 summarises the key findings from the previous overview of institutional conditions for leaving the parental home in Germany, France and Italy. Taken together and considering the mutual interplay of the different institutions, *Germany* provides most favourable conditions for leaving the parental home early. The German educational system allows for a smooth entry from education into employment at adequate qualification levels. Even in case of delayed labour market entry or unemployment, generous and universal welfare benefits ensure an adequate standard of living, while targeted active labour market policies facilitate labour market (re)entry.

Work-family reconciliation measures that were expanded in recent years increasingly contribute to a 'de-familialisation' of welfare, thus making an exit from the parental home more likely. Finally, it can be assumed that affordable housing equally contributes to early exit from the parental home. All in all, we thus generally expect a pattern of rather early home-leaving. Early exit may be postponed in case of *unemployment*, given that it is assumed to be long-term. Labour market



entry via *temporary* job positions may equally delay labour market entry, given more unpredictable employment prospects. Such positions, however, do not imply a permanent outsider status, but may more often be regarded as intermediate and financially safe ‘stepping stones’ into stable employment, and thus their significance in predicting leaving the parental home will likely be less pronounced. Intra-country cleavages can be expected with regard to *education*, given that the strong standardisation and signalling within the German systems creates clear hierarchies between educational degrees, which disadvantages particularly those with lower education and thus postpones their home-leaving. Furthermore, we expect differences between the *genders*, given the traditional male breadwinner orientation in Germany, which only recently has started to become challenged by de-familialising policies.

**Table 1:** Home-leaving transitions and hypothesised consequences for home-leaving transitions in Germany, France and Italy

	Germany	France	Italy
	<b>Macro-level: Institutional context affecting youth</b>		
Education system	Smooth entry	Delayed entry	Difficult entry
Welfare state support	Universal support	Targeted support	Weak support
Labour market	Regulated flexibility	Insider-outsider	Insider-outsider
Family Policies	System change	De-familialising	Strong familialism
Housing Policies	Flexible housing/ high support	Flexible housing/ high support	Costly housing/ family support
	<b>Micro-level: hypothesised consequences for home-leaving transitions</b>		
Timing of autonomy	Early	Intermediate	Late
Effect of fixed-term	Weak/insignificant	Strongly negative	Strongly negative
Effect of unemployment	Weakly negative	Strongly negative	Strongly negative
Intra-country cleavages	High (education/gender)	High (education)	Modest (education) High (gender)

*Source:* own illustration based on the previous institutional description

In *France*, the universality and generosity of welfare policies is comparable to that of Germany, and public policies provide even better protection for young adults during family formation. The weaker link between the school-based educational system and the French labour market, however, may potentially slow down labour market entry and prolong the process of leaving the parental home. As certificates provide less detailed signals about education system leavers, employers more likely will use temporary contracts to ‘screen’ their potential employees and not necessarily turn them into permanent ones. *The effect of contract type (fixed-term/permanent)* and employment status (*employed/unemployed*) on leaving the parental home thus will likely be more pronounced in France than in Germany. In contrast, due to the recent educational expansion reducing educational cleavages and the increase in active labour market policy for disadvantaged groups, we expect that *education*-based differences will be less pronounced than in Germany. Finally, we also expect smaller *gender* cleavages, given the historically entrenched culture of work-family reconciliation.

In *Italy*, context conditions for leaving the parental home are most critical. A rigid ‘insider-outsider’ structure makes it difficult for youth to establish themselves on the labour market. These difficulties are exacerbated by the rudimentary extent and clientelistic nature of public welfare benefits that provide only little economic security. Largely ‘familialistic’ policies and a closed

housing market prolong the dependency of individuals on their families. We thus expect that home-leaving transitions in Italy occur the latest. Temporary positions imply being at the margins of a highly inflexible labour market and thus become ‘traps’ rather than ‘stepping stones’, often associated with worse job prospects and lower wages. They likely delay exiting a parental home until a job with higher long-term security is reached. At the same time, youth unemployment in Italy is often long-term and not sufficiently compensated through public transfers, so young people will need to rely on informal support from the family. We thus expect a strong effect of *contractual status* and *employment status* on the probability of living outside parental home, which is expected to occur significantly later for the unemployed and those with only a fixed-term contract. Furthermore, the effects of *education* are expected to loom large. While in face of persistent labour market difficulties, the lower-educated will enter the labour market via atypical work forms, higher-educated individuals will tend to accept a longer ‘waiting time’ for a job in exchange for a more adequate job entry, thus delaying their exit from the parental home. Finally, we expect that the familialist culture in Italy promotes strong *gender* cleavages.

### Exploring cross-national trends with quantitative data

In the following, we test the hypotheses developed in the previous section. To that end, we first analyse quantitative data from the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU LFS) 2010 in order to identify typical patterns of living outside the parental home in the three countries under study.<sup>1</sup> The EU LFS is a large cross-sectional household survey conducted quarterly that provides key information on patterns of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity within European countries, allowing for breakdowns by various socio-demographic categories such as age, gender or education (Eurostat, 2013). Due to its large sample size, it allows for conducting detailed investigations on specific social subgroups. For our analysis, we restrict the three national samples to individuals aged 20 to 39 years, representing the main timeframe in which exits from the parental home occur. The comparatively lower age group was chosen in order to also capture early the decision of living outside the parent home shortly after turning of age.<sup>2</sup>

Our dependent variable, *having left the parental home*, is constructed based on the available information about the respondent and his/her residential relationship to both his/her parents and – if applicable – his/her partner. Individuals living in a household with their parents only (or one single parent) are considered to be still inside their parental home, while those living either with their partner or on their own are assumed to have left.<sup>3</sup> As the initial descriptive evidence,

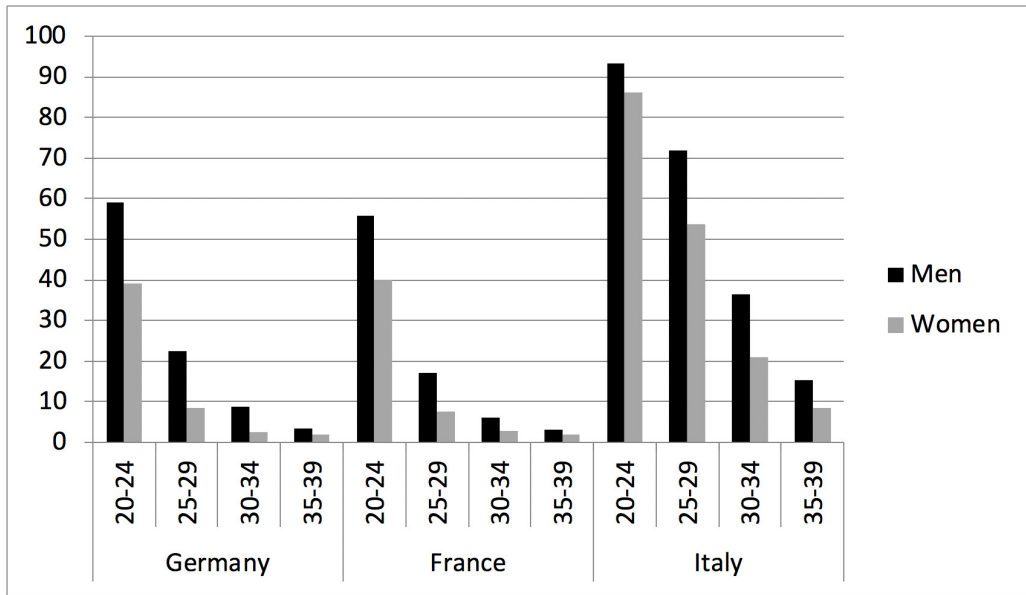
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1 Additional analyses of further waves before and after the financial crisis were also undertaken in order to rule out that results are driven by economic cycle effects. Results remained largely stable over time.

2 More detailed descriptives are not presented here for space reasons, but are available in Autor [2013].

3 Any combinations of the former - e.g. living together with both parents and partner - are considered as ‘other household types’ - and are excluded from the analysis.





**Figure 2:** Percentage of individuals still residing in the parental home, by age group and gender

Source: EU LFS 2010 (own calculations).

Figure 2 provides an overview of the percentages of those living at home across several age groups, countries and genders. To describe differences in the general pattern, 5-year age brackets differentiating between those aged 20-24 years, 25-29 years, 30-34 years and 35-39 years were used.

The descriptive results largely confirm the hypothesised cross-national differences in the timing of leaving the parental home. Exits take place earliest in both Germany and France. While in their early-20s still around half of all German and French individuals still reside in their family home, this proportion drops sharply for the subsequent age-spans. In their late-30s, only very few of them still report living in their parental household. Notably, exits happen earlier for women than for men in both countries. Expectedly, Italy exhibits a pattern of late exit from the parental home. In their early-20s, almost all young people still reside with their parents. This percentage drops moderately to around three quarters for men and respectively slightly more than half for women in the late 20s. The probability of living outside the parental home apparently concentrates in the 30s; however, unlike in Germany and France, even in their late-30s, around 15 per cent of Italian men and slightly less than 10 per cent of Italian women still live with their parents. These findings reconfirm the hypothesised pattern of a protracted exit in Italy, where weak linkages between education and employment and a strong insider-outsider labour market make it difficult for youth to establish themselves on the labour market, while only rudimentary welfare state support hinders young people from leaving their parental home earlier<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> These findings reconfirm and consolidate previous empirical studies dedicated to the same theme. See for example Scherer, 2005; Billari and Liebroer, 2010.

**Table 2:** Descriptive statistics of variable in the model

	GERMANY N= 10699	FRANCE N=115756	ITALY N=143063
Living with parents	21%	22%	47%
Age 20-24	25%	26%	21%
Age 25-29	25%	23%	21%
Age 30-34	24%	24%	26%
Age 35-39	26%	27 %	32%
Men	49%	49 %	49%
Women	51%	51 %	51%
Low educational Level	15%	19 %	31%
Medium educational level	64%	45 %	53%
High educational level	21%	36 %	17%
With citizenship	89%	94	89%
Without citizenship	11%	6%	11%
Permanent contract	58%	54%	44%
Fix term contract	17%	14%	11%
In education	9%	21%	14%
Unemployed	16%	11%	31%

Source: EU LFS 2010 (own calculations)

While these plain cross-country differences are informative at first sight, they merely represent country averages, but provide little information on how these processes differ across groups within countries. In order to investigate this in more detail, we thus split our analysis by the current *employment status* as well as the *type of contract*; i.e. we differentiate between those in education, the unemployed, permanent employees and those in a temporary job. Inactive persons who were not in education were excluded from the sample. For comparing results across *educational* groups, we use available ISCED categorisations identifying those with either no education, pre-primary education or lower secondary education (ISCED 0-2), those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 3-4), and those with a first or second stage of tertiary education (ISCED 5-6) (see Table 2).

To assess the effect of these characteristics on living outside the parental home, we run separate logistic regressions for each country using the likelihood of having left the parental home in the year of the interview as the dichotomous dependent variable (see Table 3). We introduce dummies for *gender* and *citizenship* as control variables to rule out compositional differences between the samples. As a key explanatory variable, we then introduce both *labour force* as well as *employment status* followed by *educational status*. In order to consider the general age-specific nature of the decision to live outside of the parental home, we introduce age dummies into the regression. Final, in order to investigate to what extent there are different age-graded patterns by subgroups, we introduce interactions between age and educational status into a separate final model.

In the following, in order to test our previously developed hypotheses, we report the regression results by country and compare both the direction as well as the significance of the effects of our explanatory variables between the three countries. There has been a vivid debate in social science research about the appropriateness of such comparisons across groups with potentially different sample sizes within a logistic regression framework. Mood (2008) argued that, unlike in linear regression, logistic regression coefficients cannot be compared across groups due to the necessary but rarely fulfilled assumption of equal unobserved heterogeneity across samples, and

suggested to estimate average marginal effects instead. This view has been challenged in some recent contributions, arguing that the variable effect of unobserved heterogeneity on regression estimates is actually a desirable characteristic of logistic regression (Buis, 2017) and that estimates “can be compared between groups [...] as long as they are correctly estimated” (Kuha & Mills, 2017, p. 25). Following the latter line of argument, we thus present and compare estimates from different country samples. Additional analyses estimating marginal means instead (not shown here but available from authors upon request) were also conducted, however, they substantially confirmed the results in Table 3.

Results in Table 3 point to both commonalities as well as notable differences in the influence of education and contractual status for having left the parental home. As expected, lack of access to the labour market delays exits from the parental home in both *France* and *Italy*. In both countries, being in unemployment represents a major obstacle for individual material and financial independence, reflected in the persistently lower likelihood of the unemployed to establish their own household. Similarly, negative effects, though at a somewhat lower level, are observed for those in temporary employment contracts.

Findings for *Germany* reveal a different picture. Temporary employment appears to delay home-leaving somewhat, but effects for unemployment are insignificant. These findings indeed seem to indicate that under the ‘smooth transition’ regime of Germany, exclusion from the labour market or the lack of access to a permanent job indeed are rather temporary phenomena, not questioning future employment perspectives in a more general sense. The probability of living outside the parental home is thus only weakly affected by employment or contractual status. In contrast, in both France and Italy, where unemployment or the lacking access to a permanent job is more critical, living outside the parental home seems to be more strongly dependent on the attainment of a safe position within the labour market.

**Table 3:** Probability of living outside the parental home in France, Germany and Italy; Logistic regressions, 2010

	<b>Germany</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>Italy</b>
Fixed-term employment (ref: permanent employed)	-0,372***	-0,690***	-0,476***
Unemployed (ref: permanent employed)	0,104	-0,948***	-0,409***
In education (ref: permanent employed)	-0,751***	-1,289***	-1,729***
Medium education (ref.: low)	0,354***	0,265***	-0,350***
High education (ref.: low)	0,757***	0,452***	-0,697***
Non-native	0,244*	1,340***	2,371***
Age 25-29 (ref.: age 20-24)	1,537***	1,486***	1,591***
Age 30-34 (ref.: age 20-24)	2,734***	2,521***	2,935***
Age 35-39 (ref.: age 20-24)	3,319***	2,981***	3,754***
Female (ref.: male)	0,786***	0,794***	0,968***
Constant	-0,737***	-0,270***	-2,321***
N	<b>107368</b>	<b>9777</b>	<b>123533</b>

Source: EU LFS 2010 (own calculations)

Cross-national differences can also be observed with regard to educational attainment. In both *France* and *Germany*, youth with high education leave home earlier, while those with lower qualifications are more likely to stay at home longer. Under conditions of increasing labour market flexibilisation, it is first and foremost those with higher education, who achieve enough labour market security, allowing them to make the transition out of the parental households, while those with intermediate educational attainment occasionally have to accept longer ‘waiting times’

until this level of security is reached. Notably, findings for Italy appear to point in the opposite direction, when higher education effectively *delays* exits from the parental home<sup>5</sup>. This confirms our expectation of protracted waiting periods among the higher-educated in face of difficulties to find an adequate job within the rigid Italian labour market.

More detailed analyses of age-graded patterns of educational degrees indicate that the delaying effect of higher education among Italian and French youth is particularly pronounced in the 20s (Table 4). When reaching the mid-30s, this pattern appears to even out, as probabilities among educational groups become more similar.

**Table 4:** Probability of living outside the parental home in France, Germany and Italy; Logistic regressions, 2010

	Germany	France	Italy
Fixed-term employment (ref: permanent employed)	-0,371***	-0,670***	-0,453***
Unemployed (ref: permanent employed)	0,106	-0,938***	-0,396***
In education (ref: permanent employed)	-0,752***	-1,257***	-1,666***
Male (Ref: female)	0,789***	0,796***	0,973***
Age 25_29	1,255***	0,661***	0,537***
Age 30_34	2,624***	2,014***	2,148***
Age 35_39	3,148***	2,467***	3,288***
Upper educational level	,555**	0,438***	-0,008
University educational level	1,010***	1,075***	-0,152***
Age 20-24*medium education	-,190	-0,305***	-0,707***
Age 20-24*high education	-,327	-0,817***	-0,663***
Age 25-29*low education	,286	0,773***	1,081***
Age 25-29*medium education	,093	0,572***	0,452***
Age 30-34*low education	,268	,165*	0,552***
Age 30-34*medium education	-,165	,191**	0,252***
Non-native	0,243*	1,337***	2,326***
Constant	-0,743***	-0,163***	-2,114***
N	107368	9777	123533

Source: EU LFS 2010 (own calculations)

In order to analyse the interaction effects of the educational level and the contract type on the propensity to leave the parental household, we have replicated the analysis on the three sub-samples of youth with different educational degrees. Table 5 presents the findings concerning the effect of the type of contract for lower, upper and university level education. Findings show a similar path for France and Italy: in all sub-samples, unemployment and temporary contracts diminish the propensity to leave the parental home. The relationship remains even among those with high educational degrees<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Another possible explanation is that the negative coefficient on education in Italy may be associated with a higher parental socio-economic status. On these issues for Italy, see Manacorda and Moretti, 2006. In this paper, the authors try to address one of the forces behind such a high rate of cohabitation by focusing on the effect of parental resources on youth choices on living arrangements in Italy. Findings seem consistent with the authors' hypothesis that youth indirectly benefit from a rise in their parents' income and trade some of their independence in exchange for higher consumption.

<sup>6</sup> For these analyses, we divided the sample of each country into three sub-samples using the level of education (low, Upper, University). The regression model was then estimated in each sub-sample.

**Table 5:** Probability of living outside the parental home in France, Germany and Italy; Logistic regressions, 2010

	France (low)	Germany (low)	Italy (low)
Temporary Employment	-0,319***	-0,667***	-0,234***
Unemployment	-0,774***	0,398*	-0,292***
Education	-1,391***	-1,336***	-2,075***
Constant	2,251***	2,212***	1,080***
R2 (Cox & Snell)	0,256	0,356	0,296
R2 (Nagelkerke)	0,380	0,495	0,407
	France (medium)	Germany (medium)	Italy (medium)
Temporary Employment	-0,684***	-0,308**	-0,448***
Unemployment	-0,839***	-0,116	-0,295***
Education	-1,207***	-0,651***	-1,623***
Constant	2,910***	3,036***	1,142***
R2 (Cox & Snell)	0,284	0,239	0,430
R2 (Nagelkerke)	0,415	0,361	0,575
	France (high)	Germany (high)	Italy (high)
Temporary Employment	-0,826***	-0,152	-0,780
Unemployment	-1,398***	-0,038	-1,102
Education	-1,377***	-1,077**	-1,753
Constant	3,769***	3,350***	1,320
R2 (Cox & Snell)	0,244	0,115	0,379
R2 (Nagelkerke)	0,417	0,256	0,506
Total N			

**Note:** controlled for age, gender and citizenship.

*Source:* EU LFS 2010 (own calculations)

In Germany, however, this relationship is significant only for those with a low educational level. For young people with an average educational degree, neither to be unemployed nor to have a temporary contract have significant effect on the exit from the parental home as having a temporary contract. None of these elements negatively affect the decision to leave home among those with a high educational degree.

## Exploring micro mechanisms: The results of qualitative studies

Our findings from quantitative data point to differential home-leaving behaviours among youth in Italy, France and Germany. In order to reconstruct in more detail, the mechanisms underlying this differential behaviour, we now turn to additional evidence from qualitative research that investigates the reasons and motives of youth in the three countries. With the qualitative data, we want to investigate if these results are the outcome of (group-)specific strategies of young individuals (O'Higgins, 2008) and what are the mechanisms underlying them. In particular, we are interested in how young people decide to live outside parental home in relation to their job situation in specific institutional contexts, and whether we can find specific strategies of different educational groups in the same institutional context. For this reason, we use the results of *qualitative studies*, applying a complementary model (Small, 2011). In Italy, we conducted 50 interviews and 6 focus groups with young men and women working in temporary positions, with

different levels of education, younger than 30 years of age or between 30 and 40, who were working in temporary positions in 2007, and who have experienced at least one unemployment period in the last two years. The sample was selected using the list of the Employment Center of the Turin area (North Italy) and Naples (South Italy). The interviews retrospectively reconstruct the work, family and economic career of the participants and ask about how they made decisions in their lives. We additionally used focus groups to ask about expectations, processes of identity formation and aspirations. In Germany and France in 2010, we used the same guidelines for conducting 16 interviews with a group of women and 20 interviews both with males and females in France. The sample had been selected in Berlin and Marseille using a snowball method, looking for young employed in temporary positions that have the same characteristics of the Italian sample.

The *quantitative data* highlights the differential effects of employment relationships in the three countries: in France, especially in Italy, and in Germany, the effects of both unemployment and fixed-term contracts are clearly less pronounced and less consistently negative. We also found differential effects of education. In Italy, highly educated youth delay their exit from the parental home, increasing the effect of job precariousness. In France and Germany, the effect is the opposite: youth with a high level of education leave home earlier, while those with lower qualifications are more likely to stay at home longer.

In *Italy*, exit from the labour market apparently follows a so-called “latest-late” model of leaving the parental home (Billari, 2004). According to this pattern, young people leave the family home very late. The situation has been exacerbated by the flexibility of the labour market. As the quantitative analyses show, the lack of a safe anchorage in employment delays the exit from the parental home. The segmented labor market promotes long and unstable periods before becoming permanent. At the same time – because passive labour market measures are low and targeted at those with a permanent position – they are excluded from social protection. Contractual discontinuity thus coincides with income discontinuity. We also showed that it is actually the higher-educated who remain home the longest, while the lower-educated leave home the earliest.

Qualitative analyses confirm the picture of high insecurity within the Italian institutional context. All our interviewees in non-permanent employment feel insecure, and as they cannot plan their working career, they also tend to postpone other familial decisions. The strategy to cope with uncertainty varies according to the level of education, explaining the differential observed in the quantitative analyses. Educational differences seem to be related primarily to the overall significance that individuals attribute to work, and the extent to which work contributes to defining their identity. For youth with lower levels of educational attainment, work is primarily an *economic necessity*. They do not have specific career goals, and their main concern is to find some form of income. Because the lack or bad implementation of active labor market policies, their career paths typically lack a clear direction. They often move from job to job in totally unrelated fields and to positions that require only a low to middle range of skills. Some of these youths are passive in their efforts to seek employment; they expect others to help them or find jobs for them, and complain that employment agencies or social workers have failed to provide them with opportunities for stable work. Contractual instability is perceived as yet another obstacle. After finally finding employment, they still have to deal with the problem of precariousness: once their contract has expired, they have to start looking for a job again:

*“I like working, but the problem is the kind of jobs available nowadays, they say, ‘Sorry, but your contract is up.’” (Nicole, 29)*

In these cases, precarious employment can be a part of a vicious cycle increasing social vulnerability. It is much less likely today for individuals to be able to ‘settle down’ into a career based on a permanent job, which was the traditional channel not just for economic but also social integration.

For these groups, families do not represent a resource of possible protection. In most cases, if they live with their family of origin, their parents frequently lack the resources to adequately support them.

*"You cannot live alone, you cannot go live with the boy, unless the boy or girl has a permanent contract. You cannot rent, you cannot buy furniture. As long as you live with yours it's okay, but then atypical work does not allow you to have a normal life."*  
(Miriam, 22)

For women living with a partner, the partner is often also employed in a non-stable job or has a fixed-term contract, and hardly ever earns enough to pay for all the couple's living expenses. Young people under thirty with low levels of educational attainment – paradoxically, the people who need it the most are the least likely to be able to rely on family protection. For these youths, the transition to adult life, therefore, is seen as leaving the family of origin and forming a new family, which logically translates into leaving home at a younger age than their peers with higher levels of education, pointing to different education-specific values and norms concerning the timing of transitions. Many of the lower-educated youths choose to leave home no matter what form of contract they have. Even if they feel insecure because of unstable jobs, and they cannot rely on welfare or family, they cannot delay their transition anymore. The strategy adopted thus may be described as one of "jumping anyway". Often, they use a mechanism to reduce uncertainty through familial transition (Friedman et al., 1994), such as marriage or co-habitation.

Italian youths with high educational attainment have quite different objectives. Most would like to find employment in a particular field, usually one related to their studies and matching their career aspirations. For them, work acts as an important element for the construction of their identities. However, since finding such a job is often not easy, young people with high levels of education often face an arduous career path, and alternate between periods of work and study. In Italy, the level of education does not guarantee that fixed-term contracts act as a bridge toward stable employment. They sometimes work in two different jobs, one that is badly paid but is in their field of interest, and another one that allows them to earn some money.

Most highly-educated youths prefer permanent forms of work, but are in principle willing to accept fixed-term contracts if they offer some measure of continuity and access to credit. However, they often cannot access traditional forms of credit, which are based on guarantees such as a regular salary. Since they are locked out of such forms of financing, unstable employees resort to one of two strategies: either they save as much as they can, or they rely on financial assistance from their family of origin to support them through periods of low income or unemployment. This second strategy for most young workers, and especially for flexible workers, is considered as being absolutely normal.

For higher-educated young people, the family serves as a form of protection for practicing a "waiting strategy" (Fullin, 2005; Reyneri, 2009; 2011): to accept low-paid and unstable jobs, which are in their areas of interest, while waiting for the ideal stable job that will allow their exit from the family of origin, and therefore a standard of living similar to that of their parents. The mechanism is in that case an *affordability norm*, in which the elementary condition to the transition is having access to sufficient economic resources (Jansen, 2011). This strategy reduces the risk of poverty, but sacrifices individual emancipation (Ayllon, 2015).

*"I live with my parents and, in the meantime, I put aside the money to leave the house. I like my job a lot but it's insecure it does not allow me to go out now."* (Maria, 29)

Notably, as also shown in the quantitative analyses, the timing considered appropriate for going through the transition is different for women with a low level of education, around 30 years of age: women in atypical jobs sometimes rely on support from their husbands, who might have good, permanent jobs. For some women, having a partner with a stable job allows them greater choice in terms of career and work. Married women explicitly mention this protective function (Chiuri & Del Boca, 2010).

France is a country in which young people leave home earlier than Italy, but as quantitative analyses show, those without a stable job tend to postpone the decision of living outside the parental home. The effect of education apparently is opposite compared to Italy, since those with higher education leave home earlier. Which are the specific strategies of educational groups among the youth in France?



For the young French with low qualifications, their exits from home coincide with the beginning of their professional lives and the most common exit mode is marriage. More often they justify the protraction of living with their family of origin with economic reasons. Cohabitation continues until they have found a good job and reached economic independence. Furthermore, many of them highlight that they have never considered the problem of leaving home. The strategy applied is one of “waiting” and the mechanism is the *affordability norm*, as in the case of highly educated Italian youths. The attitude of those with higher educational attainment, however, clearly differs from this pattern. The exit from the parental home is often linked to a specific desire for independence even during the period of education. An example in the qualitative analyses is Julie, 24 years old, who left the parental home eight years ago while she was studying. She lives in a popular house, but lost her job:

*Q: “Now you will go back to your parent’s home or live with friends?”*

*A: “No I’m fine as I’m. If I would like living with someone, it could be my boyfriend. I have the right age. I want to build my life.” (Julie, 24)*

Highly educated French youths leave the family early even if they do not have a steady job, supported partly by their job, but also by using subsidies and renting policies specifically meant for youths. In this way, they experience a new adolescence and experiment in the labor market. Job instability thus can have a “suspensive” or “creative” effect (Galland, 2001) for the higher-educated. These young people remain partially supported by their family of origin until they are older, which coincides with the definitive access to their profession and then, marriage. The strategy seems one of “jump and see”, similar to that of the lower-educated Italian, but using the better welfare state and family protection in France to exit in a more flexible way. Under better contextual conditions, their precariousness is managed actively and is seen as an opportunity for taking chances, more like a sort of exposed navigation than the obstinate attempt at social inclusion, typical of the children of the lower classes, who assign greater importance to job security.

For young people with a low level of education, often children of working classes, only job security is the true condition of independence, because their families are not able to sustain them. They have less opportunities in terms of careers, and since they are in situations of precarious employment, it is as if the whole process were delayed, creating a *suspensive effect*.

In Germany, the reference model is the earliest-early pattern, i.e. all young people leave the family home around age 20, in various forms such as living with friends or acquaintances or proving themselves by living alone (Billari, 2004).

In the *German* study, young people with a high and low level of education prefer permanent jobs, but are more willing to accept fixed-term contracts. They declare to have accepted and appreciated the usefulness of atypical contracts during the period of training and integration into the labor market.

*“These short-term contracts still haven’t discouraged me, maybe because after all, I have always found what I wanted.” (Marie, 24)*

*“I’m pretty calm about work, all things considered, because even if I’ve done everything from working at the post office to construction sites, I’ve always found something.” (Saskia, 29)*

The reasons why flexibility seems more acceptable to those interviewed is that those interviewed feel protected, because they know that in the event of unemployment after a year of work, they can receive a universal and generous subsidy provided through the more generous welfare state arrangements.

What, however, differentiates German employees from those in France is that fixed-term employment is seen more as a stepping stone into more favorable labor market conditions. Tenure track models, for example, offer career opportunities, while also working with atypical contracts. The people interviewed, even if precarious, have improved their professional status and earnings in the course of time and even if they haven't always performed skilled jobs they have never been unemployed:

*“I never in my life imagined to earn so much.”* (Saskia, 29)

*“What I earn now is okay because here in Berlin, rents are low and so is the cost of living, so I can save up.”* (Nora, 22)

This model has not been challenged by the rise in fixed-term contracts thanks to generous unemployment benefits, but also the low cost of rents in Berlin and the support of public policies for housing.

**Table 6:** Mechanisms and strategies for living outside the parental home in Italy, Germany and

	Italy	France	Germany
Effect of precariousness	High feeling of uncertainty	High feeling of uncertainty	No feeling of uncertainty
<i>Low educated</i>			
Strategy	Jump anyway	Waiting	Jump and see
Mechanisms	Reducing uncertainty through familial transition	Affordability norm	Reducing uncertainty through institution
<i>High educated</i>			
Strategy	Waiting	Jump and see	Jump and see
Mechanism	Affordability norm	Surfing flexibility	Reducing uncertainty through institution

Source: Own illustration

Some of those interviewed left the family very young, thanks to government intervention to support housing autonomy. Interviewees have resorted to unemployment benefits, which mature after a year of work, but not to the universal subsidy for job seekers or those who have not attained the requirements, which is believed to be negatively stigmatising for employers. Resorting to family help is restricted to a very short period right after their departure from home. In this phase, parents act as direct or indirect guarantors in the signing of a lease or a home loan. However, none of those interviewed had to resort permanently to the help of their permanent family.

Financial support from the (male) partner is another form of protection very common among German interviewees, given the continuous persistence of the male breadwinner model in Germany (Blossfeld, 2006). Taken together, for both high and low educated German youth, the strategy is one of “jump and see”, whereas the mechanism is reduction of uncertainty through institutional support.

## Conclusions

Young people in Europe are currently faced with rising labour market uncertainties, reflected in high risks of unemployment and increasing labour market flexibilisation. Previous studies show that this has led to the postponement of important decisions in private lives. As shown in this paper, the length of postponement depends on the institutional context, as ‘institutional filters’

can mediate individual risks arising from rising employment flexibility. In our previous analyses, we highlighted that these filtering effects come not necessarily through single institutions, but through institutional packages, i.e. the interplay of various different factors, including the labour market, welfare state and educational system arrangements – all these shape the opportunities and constraints of young people. Within our three-country sample, the most favorable results arise for Germany, where the interplay of a smooth transition from education to work and generous welfare state support reduces early career uncertainty and, thus, promotes early exit from the parental home. Similar results are reported for France, yet only for those in a stable permanent job, given the marginality of fixed-term employment. The latest transitions out of the parental home were found for Italy, where an education system with low signaling coupled with little welfare state support and a strong reliance on the family promotes late exits.

As we demonstrated, institutional differences not only shape the incidence and timing of leaving the parental home, but also influence the choice of specific strategies of particular social groups, thus shaping the structure of nation-specific social inequalities. The effect of unemployment on leaving the parental home is unanimously negative, though weaker in Germany, where it often does mean a state of only temporary social exclusion, which moreover is comparatively sheltered through rather generous welfare transfers. In both Italy and France, the interplay between more rigid labor markets and less effective education systems promotes longer spells of unemployment. Particularly in Italy, where welfare support is only residual, the postponing effects is particularly pronounced. The effect of fixed-term employment, in contrast, is more ambiguous and depends on its country-specific regulation – while it is a mechanism of exclusion in professional and private life in both France and Italy, it more often acts as a ‘stepping stone’ into safe employment in Germany. Gender differences are observed everywhere with women leaving home later, pointing to persistent role stereotypes. Educational cleavages are also universally observed, yet their direction differs between national contexts. While high education promotes early exit in Germany and France, it decelerates the process in Italy.

Our qualitative analyses shed more light on the mechanisms behind these patterns. While in Italy, highly educated youth use the strategy of waiting, in France and Germany they apply a strategy of “jump and see”, due to a different cultural orientation but also to a different combination of structural contexts, such as informal (family) and formal (institutional) social support in these countries. The qualitative analyses show that higher educated youth in all three countries have similar goals, such as looking for ideal jobs after the university, having an income to afford an adequate style of life and leaving the parental home. However, depending on the institutional context, they accomplish these goals using different strategies and with very different outcomes. Italian youths are less ready to take risks than their French and German counterparts; they spend more time under the protection of the family, which is a rational strategy under uncertain institutional context conditions. Institutional support in Germany, in contrast, promotes an early transition. Due to these differences, the consequences in terms of social inequality and orientation towards autonomy are important, even if all will achieve a safe job.

A number of policy conclusions may arise from these findings. Our results suggest that a multidimensional approach will be needed, which not only focuses on single policy dimensions, but their mutual interplay. Based on our results, it seems wise to

- reduce labor market boundaries by *education systems* with high signaling and active labor market policy support for youth,
- increase *the social security* of youth in various fields (general security, family policy, housing policy) even when not (yet) in stable employment,
- reduce educational cleavages by specific support programs for youth with lower human capital.

Only through a simultaneous investment into these different policies will it be possible to create a context in which youth find it easier to leave their parental home and gain autonomy earlier in their life course.

Naturally, our results also have some important limitations. It may be questionable, for example, how the state of living outside or inside the parental home can be sharply distinguished (e.g. in cases of co-residence in the same home, but in different apartments). Furthermore, even the fact of living outside the parental home may imply only little independence, e.g. when parents still strongly support young people through financial transfers. Young individuals may also report their residential status differently, based on culture-specific normative conceptions about family values or individual autonomy. The cross-sectional nature of the quantitative data also inhibits a thorough analysis of the dynamics of home-leaving and its determinants. Returns to the parental home after having initially left it, for example, cannot be considered. Furthermore, we cannot safely establish explicit causality but can rather only report on correlations and make the direction of the effect plausible, among others by referring to the more detailed information from the qualitative part. In both respects, further analyses using longitudinal data would be required to substantiate the findings reported here.

Despite these limitations, our findings still vividly demonstrate how quantitative evidence on the actual patterns of transitions can be fruitfully combined with a qualitative perspective on related backgrounds and motives. In order to understand youth's perceptions of employment uncertainties and to design effective policies that mediate their consequences, more mixed-methods approaches alongside these lines will be required in future research.

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