”The Transition to Adulthood and Pathways Out of the Parental Home across Europe”

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Katrin Schwanitz

Institut National d’Études Démographiques (INED), Paris

University of Groningen

Abstract

Comparative research suggests that there are strong regional patterns in the leaving home behavior of young adults in Europe. This paper uses the second Wave of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) to examine young adults' pathways out of the parental home in eight European countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, and the Netherlands). The analysis is restricted to young adults (aged 18 – 34) and I employ sequence analysis and multinomial logistic regression models on trajectory categories to explore and describe the variety in pathways out of the parental home across Europe. In doing so, I adopt a comparative framework which accounts for both individual and contextual factors that shape young adults' leaving the parental home. The aim of this paper is to provide a holistic picture of young adults' different pathways out of the parental home in contemporary Europe.

Keywords: Transition to Adulthood; Leaving the Parental Home; Sequence Analysis

1 Introduction

Leaving home marks a profound change in the life of young adults and an important step in the transition to adulthood. It is a complex process because it involves several pathways out of the parental home: moving in with a partner, enrolling in higher education, searching for job opportunities, or simply living independently with friends or alone. It is also noteworthy that leaving home may be a recurrent event - for those young adults who return to live with their parents. Although leaving the parental home is thus complex and comprises a series of interdependent events, its analysis has usually been restricted to the occurrence and timing of one event at a time (Giele & Elder 1998). This is largely due to event history techniques, which are best suited for the analysis of one event specifically, being a common approach in life course research. The need to study young adults' leaving the parental home in a more holistic way (i.e. focusing on whole trajectories) has been pointed out by several authors and (comparatively) new techniques, such as sequence analysis, have been proposed to provide a more integral picture of young adults' life courses (Abbott & Hrycak 1990; Billari 2001). Given the complexity of leaving home and interdependency with other events in the transition to adulthood, it is important to study this event jointly with work and family trajectories. Up until now this has only rarely been done in the existing research on sequence analysis of the transition to adulthood (but see Elzinga 2003; Aassve et al. 2007).

It is also important to recognize the strong regional patterns across Europe along a north – south divide, as has been shown by a series of major cross-national studies on the transition to adulthood (see e.g. Corijn & Klijzing 2001; Iacovou 2002). Young adults leave the parental home at different ages, for different destinations (i.e. to start a family, to start an education, to start a job) and via different pathways. Differences in the leaving home behavior of young adults are partly but not fully attributable to individual characteristics, such as sex, income, education, and social class (e.g. Iacovou 2002). What is less well documented in the

empirical literature, however, are the extent to which contextual characteristics (e.g. social policies, welfare arrangements, and labor markets) shape the leaving of the parental home and the transition to adulthood by either expanding or limiting the opportunities of young adults, and the micro–macro linkages associated with them.

The aim of this paper is to identify and examine cross-national differences in family life trajectories and the life courses of young adults in Europe. Although the transition to adulthood includes *several* key life course events and transitions – most importantly leaving the parental home, completing full-time education, starting a full-time job, establishing an intimate relationship, and becoming a parent (e.g. Settersten et al. 2005) – few studies have considered multiple transitions simultaneously and most studies have instead investigated them singly, more or less independent of one another (Settersten et al. 2005) with some exceptions (e.g., Ross et al 2009). It is important to recognize the interrelatedness of life course events (Giele & Elder, 1998) – this paper does so by covering several life course events simultaneously and by applying sequence analysis, a technique in which the whole trajectory serves as the unit of analysis rather than a specific event in the life course.

In this paper, I examine the leaving home behavior of young adults and the different pathways out of the parental home across eight European countries with data from the second Wave of the GGS (Vikat et al. 2007). I use sequence analysis to study a complex set of life-course trajectories for young adults aged 18–34, based on sequences of living arrangements, union formation and dissolution, childbearing, and employment. By (1) adopting a comparative framework of analysis and studying cross-national patterns of leaving the parental home, and by (2) providing a holistic picture of young adults' leaving the parental home this study will add to the comparative literature on the transition to adulthood. Because of the richness of the individual-level data in the GGS, I am also able to account for social differences between young adults across European countries.

2 Theory

The transition to adulthood today consists of a series of interdependent passages, including leaving home, partnership formation, and first parenthood. During the 20th century young adults have become more and more autonomous in making decisions regarding these passages and their own life course. As a consequence, the transition to adulthood is de-standardized and the life courses of young adults have become increasingly dissimilar to one another: Certain life events are experienced by smaller and smaller shares of the population, occurring at more diverse ages and for durations that vary more widely (Brückner & Mayer 2005; Settersten et al. 2005). Empirical research has made an impressive case for the de-standardization of the life course, especially in the realm of the family (e.g., Aassve et al. 2002; Settersten et al., 2005; Berrington et al. 2010; Billari & Liefbroer, 2010), but it is less clear how a de-standardization has occurred in young adults' employment careers (e.g., Widmer & Ritschard 2009) or how a global de-standardization hides differences across gender, class and ethnicity. There is evidence that the extent of the de-standardization of family patterns varies across social groups and impacts men and women to different degrees (Chaloupková 2010; Widmer & Ritschard 2009).

Although pathways to adulthood are changing in the same direction in most parts of Europe, significant differences across Europe still exist and research does not point to a convergence in demographic behavior across Europe with regard to the timing and sequencing family events (Corijn & Klijzing 2001; Blossfeld et al. 2005; Sobotka & Toulemon 2008; Billari & Liefbroer 2010). Some authors have linked regional patterns in the transition to adulthood to historical patterns of family formation and family relations. Hajnal (1965) discerned an East-West divide in marriage patterns running from St. Petersburg to Trieste, with late ages at first marriage, and a high percentage of never-married to the west of this line, and early and universal marriage to the east of it. Reher (1998) showed additional

important North-South European differences: The north of Europe is characterized by weak family ties and an emphasis on individual independence. In the south of Europe, strong family ties exist, and group values and kin solidarity dominate.

Most previous studies on transition into adulthood have usually concentrated separately on specific events (e.g., first union or first birth). Until now, there are only few comparative studies examining the transition to adulthood in a holistic way – as a series of transitions (Gauthier 2007). Only throughout the last years, such studies were made possible by recent methodological developments in sequence analysis, which enables to study entire life course trajectories as a whole (Abbott & Tsay 2000; Aisenbrey & Fasang 2010). Using this method, Elzinga & Liefbroer (2007) showed with FFS data that, rather than being a general and uniform trend, de-standardization of family trajectories proceeds at a distinct pace across the different European countries.

3 Data and Sample Selection

The data for this study come from the second Wave of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), an internationally comparable and harmonized set of survey data (United Nations 2005). Each national survey has a sample size of about 10,000 individuals aged from 18 to 79 years of the non-institutionalized resident population in each participating country. For this paper I selected eight Eastern and Western European countries: Bulgaria (N = 3,805), Czech Republic (N = 1,187), France (N = 2,798), Georgia (N = 3,553), Germany (N = 1,515), Hungary (N = 4,032), Lithuania (N = 921), and the Netherlands (N = 3,018). The eight samples were pooled into one dataset (N = 20,829) to enable statistical comparison between countries. A particular advantage of the GGS data for the purpose of this analysis is that they include a broad range of Western and Eastern European countries which allows studying contemporary Europe and that it contains retrospective histories of the transition out of the

parental home, the partnership and childbearing histories, and the occupational careers of both men and women, making it possible to construct their life course trajectories.

In order to study trajectories that cover most of young adulthood, I selected respondents who were between 35 and 55 years at the date of interview (i.e., 2006 – 2009) and reconstructed the life course between the ages 18 and 34[1]. More specifically, I created a complete *monthly*[2] sequence between the ages of 18 and 34 for each respondent, leading to a trajectory of 204 consecutive statuses, which served as the input for the subsequent sequence analysis[3]. I distinguished between the following states. If a respondent was living in the *parental home* he was classified as ***PH***. When a person was not living in the parental home, he was classified as *single* ***S*** or as *cohabiting* ***C*** in case the respondent was living with a partner[4]. When the respondent had at least one *child* he was classified as ***K*** otherwise as ***noK***. Finally, respondents are classified according to their *activity* status: *studies* ***ST***, *inactivity* ***IN***, *unemployment* ***UN***, and *employment* ***EM***[5]. Each month, a young adult's status is defined by the cross-combination of living in the parental home, partnership sand parental status and activity status (Table 1). Note that (1) distinguishing between more states (e.g. number of children) complicates the analysis as each additional distinction introduces another sequence state and that (2) the GGS does not capture movements in and out of education, which is why including education as a separate sequence is not straightforward.

*** Table 1 about here ***

[1] Note that with these complete histories right-censoring can be (at least partly) avoided
[2] The month of birth of the respondents is not available due to data protection. Therefore, a uniform distributed random variable was used to create this variable.
[3] If respondents could not be unambiguously classified for all 204 months, they were deleted from the sample.
[4] Only co-residential partnerships were included in this analysis.
[5] Note that for simplicity respondents are defined as employed if they are either in part- or full-time employment or in paid self-employment.

3.1 Independent Variables

To study country and social differentials in life course trajectories, I include a number of characteristics: country, sex, and educational level. *Country*. Eight dummy variables were constructed with Bulgaria as the reference category. *Se*x. A dummy variable with women as the reference category. *Educational level*. Education is categorized following the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). I differentiated between three educational levels and created three dummy variables which range between: low (ISCED levels 0, 1 and 2), medium (ISCED 3 and 4) and high (ISCED 5 and 6).

3.2 Analytical Methods

The analytical design of this study includes multiple analytical methods, including: sequence analysis, optimal matching (OM), cluster and multinomial logistic regression analysis. First, young adults' multiple life course trajectories are described via Optimal Matching (OM), a dissimilarity measure adapted to sequence data, and cluster analysis. Dissimilarity between two sequences is defined as the least weighted number of edits that are necessary to make them identical. Each of the three kinds of transformations used in OM (insertion, deletion and substitution) is given a cost and the total minimum cost to match two sequences is used as a measure of their dissimilarity (Abbott & Tsay, 2000). There is no golden rule how to best assign the transformation costs, but several authors have advocated the use of transition rates in order to get to data-driven transformation costs (e.g. Billari & Piccarreta 2005; Aassve et al. 2007). Second, the dissimilarity matrix is further subject to cluster analysis to create the empirical typologies of life course trajectories, based on a validity criterion (ASW). To estimate the sequence analysis, I used the numerous options provided in the TraMineR library of R (Gabadinho et al. 2011) – an open-source, flexible and well-documented statistical package for these types of analyses. Third, the thus identified clusters become outcome variables in multinomial logistic regression models. Significance is assessed by performing Wald tests and examining whether or not the inclusion of a term in the model improves model

fit. In order to inspect inter-country and inter-educational level differences, I estimate a series of models with interaction terms. For the sake of parsimony and readability of results, I only present contrast estimates of marginal effects calculated from predictions of previously fit models at averaged values of all covariates.

4 Preliminary Results

I first show the descriptive results of the sequence analysis in the form of state distribution plots, followed by the cluster analysis results. I then turn to the testing and discussion of the multinomial logistic regression results.

4.1 State Distribution Plots

The aggregated life course trajectories were examined first by plotting the state distributions for each month within the 18–34 age intervals by country (Figure 1). In Figure 1, age is on the horizontal (x) axis with the proportion of individuals belonging to each state at a given month shown on the vertical (y) axis. Hungary and the Czech Republic stand out for their larger portion of young adults who are single with no children and who live with their parents (in various occupational careers). Hungary stands out for its larger variety of different statuses across the life course. By the end of the observation window, it is very typical for the majority of the young adults to live separately from parents with a partner and children and being employed, whereas more than 60 % of Hungarian young adults are living in any other state. Living separately from parents but without a partner and children (and while either being employed or studying) is quite prevalent for French and German young adults in their 20ies, but not in the other countries. Similarly, living separately from parents as a single parent and being employed is a notable state here in the late 20ies. This is also a prominent state in the Czech Republic, with 20.1% of young adults belonging to this group.

*** Figures 1 and 2 about here ***

In addition, I calculated the entropy for the life course trajectories for each month within the 18–34 age intervals by country (Figure 2). If the entropy is close to zero, diversity in life course trajectories is relatively low; if the entropy is close to one, diversity in life course trajectories is high. In Figure 2, we see that across all countries, the diversity is generally highest between the ages 20 – 24 (which is the launching stage of the transition to adulthood and is characterized of fast-paced transitions) and decreases during the late 20s and 30s. We also see that the entropy is higher during the early 20s among the Eastern European countries, indicating that there is more diversity in life course trajectories particularly at younger ages. Germany and Hungary stand out because from age 25 onwards, the entropy is higher than that of other countries.

4.2 Cluster analysis results

Although the descriptive plots are useful in providing a general picture of the proportions of individuals experiencing each family and activity status and the dynamics occurring with these shares across the age span between 18 – 34 years, the main interest is in isolating the typical patterns of trajectories. This involves the clustering of sequences based on dissimilarity measures as computed via OM. I began with a 20 cluster solution to first examine the patterns and avoid the loss of any distinctive group of trajectories. In a next step several cluster solutions will be tested and groups of trajectories, based on summary measures (i.e., average silhouette width) will be specified. The groups of trajectories will then be used as the independent variable in the multinomial regression model.

4.3 Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis Results

(To be completed)

5 Preliminary Conclusions

The goal of this paper was to examine young adults' transition to adulthood and pathways out of the parental home across Europe. This was achieved by studying the variations in young

adults' family life trajectories in relation to eight European countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, and the Netherlands). Pooled data from the Gender and Generations Survey (N = 20,829) were used to engage in sequence, optimal matching (OM), cluster and multinomial logistic regression analysis.

(To be completed)

6 Literature

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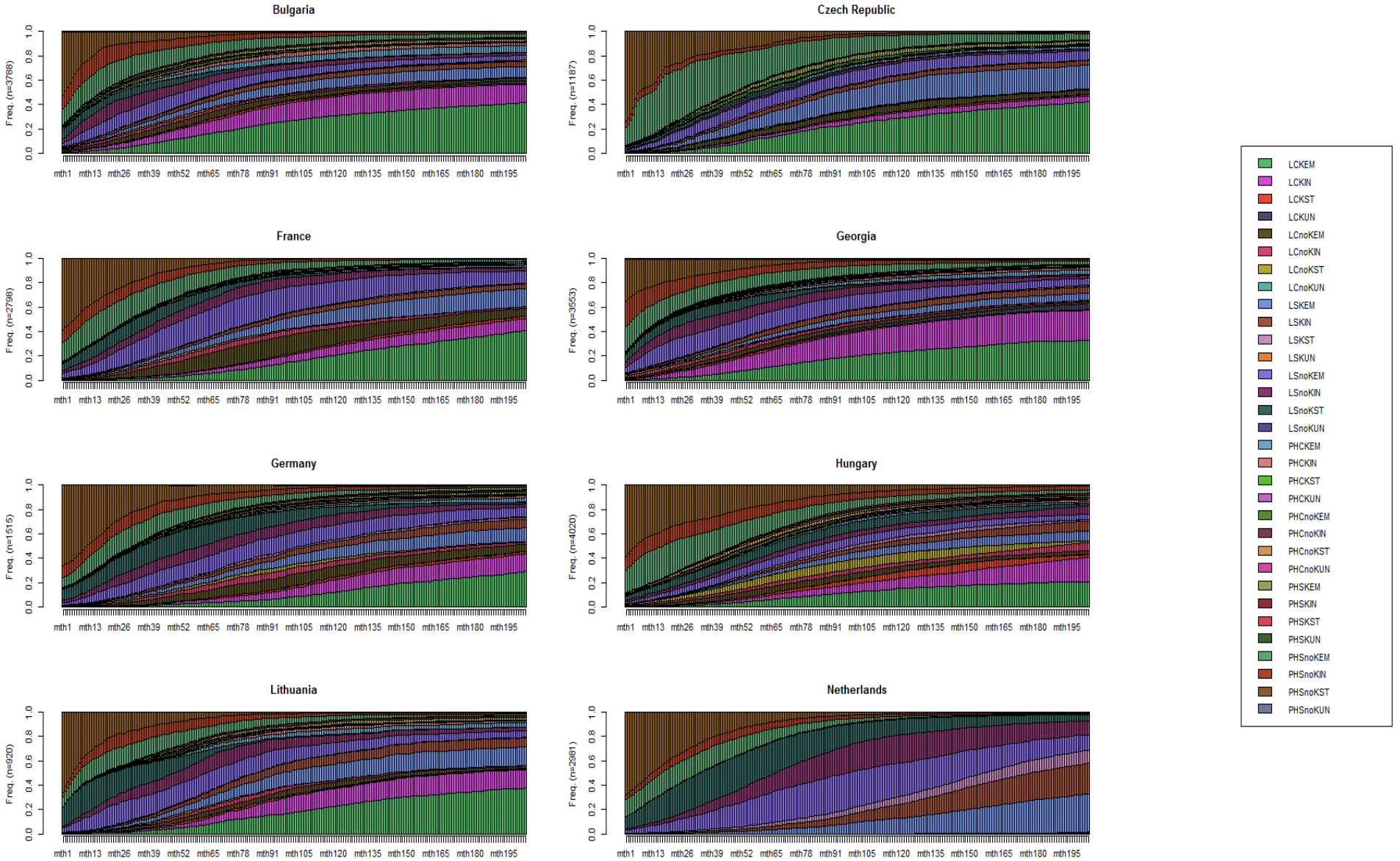
Table 1 Sequence analysis: Life course trajectories and their acronyms

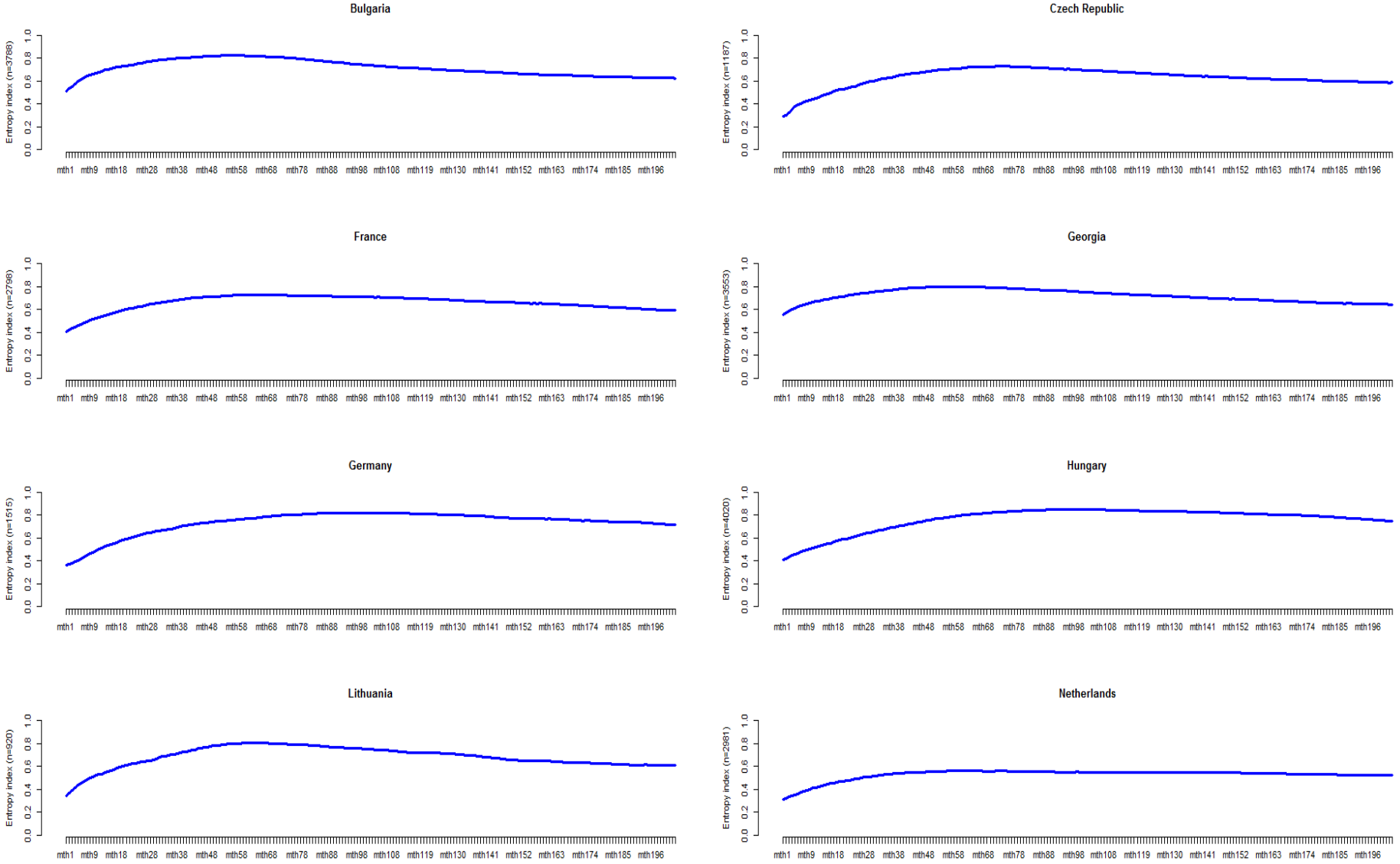
Number	Acronym	Description
1	**LCKEM**	Left the parental home, cohabiting with kids and employed
2	**LCKIN**	Left the parental home, cohabiting with kids and inactive
3	**LCKST**	Left the parental home, cohabiting with kids and studying
4	**LCKUN**	Left the parental home, cohabiting with kids and unemployed
5	**LCnoKEM**	Left the parental home, cohabiting no kids and employed
6	**LCnoKIN**	Left the parental home, cohabiting no kids and inactive
7	**LCnoKST**	Left the parental home, cohabiting no kids and studying
8	**LCnoKUN**	Left the parental home, cohabiting no kids and unemployed
9	**LSKEM**	Left the parental home, single with kids and employed
10	**LSKIN**	Left the parental home, single with kids and inactive
11	**LSKST**	Left the parental home, single with kids and studying
12	**LSKUN**	Left the parental home, single with kids and unemployed
13	**LSnoKEM**	Left the parental home, single no kids and employed
14	**LSnoKIN**	Left the parental home, single no kids and inactive
15	**LSnoKST**	Left the parental home, single no kids and studying
16	**LSnoKUN**	Left the parental home, single no kids and unemployed
17	**PHCKEM**	In the parental home, cohabiting with kids and employed
18	**PHCKIN**	In the parental home, cohabiting with kids and inactive
19	**PHCKST**	In the parental home, cohabiting with kids and studying
20	**PHCKUN**	In the parental home, cohabiting with kids and unemployed
21	**PHCnoKEM**	In the parental home, cohabiting no kids and employed
22	**PHCnoKIN**	In the parental home, cohabiting no kids and inactive
23	**PHCnoKST**	In the parental home, cohabiting no kids and studying
24	**PHCnoKUN**	In the parental home, cohabiting no kids and unemployed
25	**PHSKEM**	In the parental home, single with kids and employed
26	**PHSKIN**	In the parental home, single with kids and inactive
27	**PHSKST**	In the parental home, single with kids and studying
28	**PHSKUN**	In the parental home, single with kids and unemployed
29	**PHSnoKEM**	In the parental home, single no kids and employed
30	**PHSnoKIN**	In the parental home, single no kids and inactive
31	**PHSnoKST**	In the parental home, single no kids and studying
32	**PHSnoKUN**	In the parental home, single no kids and unemployed

Figure 1 Transversal state distribution frequencies by country



Source: GGS data Wave2. Own calculations.

Figure 2 Transversal entropy-index by country



Source: GGS data Wave 2. Own calculations.