

New abstract for Conference on Population Heterogeneities in Vienna

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Title: Marginalization of women with low educational attainment on the partner market across Europe

In most European countries, highly educated women have been more likely to remain childless or postpone the birth of their first child. Nevertheless, there are signs that the negative educational gradient of fertility has shifted in some countries. Partnerships, which are considered a prerequisite for having children, might become less frequent or stable among lower-educated women – especially in contexts of high labour market participation of women, where similar or higher-educated women are the more desired partners. Difficulty to find a partner or to start cohabiting with them could be responsible for increasing childlessness among women and men with low educational attainment. This paper, therefore, investigates how women's and men's likelihood of entering a cohabiting partnership is influenced by educational level and whether this association changes across cohorts. We explore these relations by applying both logistic regression and discrete-time event history analysis to recent European Social Survey data from 2002 to 2022 from 27 countries. We include women and men born between 1960 to 2004 from four regions in Europe. We find that lower-educated women in Western and Southern Europe have significantly decreasing probabilities of ever entering a cohabiting union (married and unmarried) by ages 35 to 45 compared to women with longer education in those regions. For the Nordic and Eastern European regions, we find that the likelihood of entering a cohabiting union also decreases more strongly for lower compared to higher-educated women, but the results are statistically not significant. While lower-educated men exhibit lower or similar chances of union formation compared to higher-educated men during the entire period under study, our results, therefore, indicate that the likelihood of lower-educated women to enter cohabitation reversed in more recent cohorts.