

## Young adult occupational transition regimes in Europe: does gender matter?

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There have been many studies on patterns of entry for young people into the labour market and on the early stages of their employment careers (Breen, 2005; Gangl, 2003; Barbieri and Scherer, 2005; Brzinski-Fay, 2007; Blossfeld et al., 2008). What often emerges from these studies is that growing work career insecurity particularly affects the younger age groups, which appear to have been more affected than other cohorts of workers by the labour market de-regulation and social safety net reductions that began in 1980s and 1990s (Esping-Andersen and Regini 2000). Notably, a growing body of scientific literature shows that over the last 10 years the growing difficulties for young people in entering the labour market and the problematic search for greater stability over time, is not limited to the very early stages of the employment career, but also extends to a subsequent period, disadvantaging so-called young adults (Furlong 2009; Heinz 2009).

The objective of this paper is to achieve a greater understanding of the transitions young adults have experienced into and out of the labour market (i.e. from unemployment into employment and vice versa, or from inactivity into work and vice versa). Within the framework of these objectives, the influence that gender differences and being a couple have on employment careers will be analysed. The paper expands on previous research on the knowledge of risky occupational transitions that affect young people by focusing on young adults and evidences the prolongation, during the life course, of precarious occupational conditions. On the second hand, in acknowledging the importance of family dynamics on work careers, this paper also analyses the differentiated influence on occupational transitions for men and women as a result of their being part of a couple.

The paper focus on young people in the 25-34 age groups in four European countries – Italy, Netherlands, United Kingdom and Norway – between 2006-12. This time period is considered as composed of an initial one up to 2008, representative of the pre-crisis situation, and a second one marking the beginning of the crisis phase. We will begin with the assumption that variations in the transitions that will be observed depend on the specific institutional context of the four countries. In particular, reference will be made to the young adult employment transition regimes (Walther 2006) specific to each of the four countries. Account will also be taken of what we consider are other crucial variables that influence these transition regimes from a gender perspective: i.e. being in a pair, the level of education, and the type of contract provided on entry into the labour market. The comparison between the two different periods will enable us to assess whether and to what extent the employment transition regimes of young adults are influenced by changes in economic conditions and at the same time observe the way in which the institutional framework influence these changes.

This article shows how different transition structures foster divergent outcomes (into and out of the labour market) for young adults who are likely to be more affected than adults by temporary work and who experience higher risks of unemployment and inactivity during their early life-course. Nevertheless, the filter exercised by the national institutions on the changes taking place during their life-course tends to have a selective impact on young adults themselves, giving rise to what we have defined as young adult occupational transition regimes. Specifically the paper tries to assess the magnitude of a country effect and of a cohort effect by considering the pre- and post-economic crisis period, and the presence of a female disadvantage. Family-related variables have a positive association in Italy where the transition to inactivity is mainly driven by gender and partnership, with educational level not having any relevant mediating effect. In Italy, we observe a disadvantage for both single women and women in a partnership, with temporary contracts exerting a strong influence, and a small protection effect from education that is only significant for higher graduates.

On the basis of these findings, the paper focus on work-life balance policies and on patterns of institutionally regulated downward (towards children) and upward (towards the old) intergenerational obligations with regard to care and financial support, emphasizing their role in expanding or reducing gender inequalities. In this respect the Italian model - familialism by default - (Sareceno, Keck 2010) will

be discussed in more detail and related to young adult female labor market participation and the characteristics of their occupational transitions. In particular, as regards responsibilities towards children, the paper focus on care services and financial support provided to children of preschool age and on parental leave. Three aspects of parental leave are relevant for the analysis: duration, level of income replacement, and whether fathers are entitled to it and in what form. With regard to care policy towards the elderly, three important dimensions will be considered: whether support is income tested or universal; the threshold of dependency above which one is entitled to receive support; how much of the individual need is covered.