A century of transitions to adulthood in Europe: a comparative analysis

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Abstract

This paper explores how the process of the transition to adulthood has changed during the twentieth century in Europe. Through data collected in the European Social Survey (2006), individuals born between 1926 and 1985 in 23 European countries are analyzed: the median age at which major events of the transition to adulthood take place and the order in which they occur are taken into account. The comparative perspective facilitates additional knowledge on recent trends in life course trajectories and to understand to which extent the transition takes a longer time to occur for recent birth cohorts. Moreover, this study examines how the macro-contexts influence the organization of the life course. This is done using a multilevel model, clustering individuals within countries, to answer the question on how much of the variability in individuals' decisions is attributable to country level factors and how much to individual level factors.

Keywords: transition to adulthood, European social survey, leaving parental home

1. INTRODUCTION

When we try to give a definition of concepts such as youth or adulthood, it is clear that they have no univocal and worldwide accepted meaning. The "young" represent a group of individuals, between childhood and adulthood, which cannot be clearly identified as "children" or the "elderly" might be. Many attempts have been done also during recent decades to set up age ranges where to locate youth, like that of the United Nations (15-24 years of age) or of the British Office for National Statistics (16-24). However, a definition of "youth" which ends at the mid-twenties fails to include large numbers of people who have not yet completed many events leading to adulthood.
Given the degree of arbitrariness in these age-based definitions, it may be useful to think instead to a process of transition - or better, multiple transitions - from youth to adulthood. Some key life events that can be seen as markers of the transition include ending full time education, starting full time job, leaving the parental home, forming a union (cohabitation or marriage) and having a child (Modell et al, 1976).
Transition to adulthood in Europe has not followed a regular trend. Many studies show that between the nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries it became more organized and more predictable. Nevertheless, in the last decades of the twentieth century life course and transition to adulthood turned out to be in many European countries increasingly complicated and prolonged. With rising levels of participation in higher education, young people are longer dependent on the state or on families for financial support because they miss their own earned income (Aassve et al, 2006); changes in labor markets over the recent decades raised the risk for young people to spend significant time without a job or in low-waged and precarious employment (Hammer, 2003; Russell and O'Connell, 2001).
Moreover, in most modern societies, fertility has decreased a lot in the last fifty years and one of the main reason is the postponement of parenthood (other than the postponement of marriage), which is considered as the last event marking the transition into adulthood (Bosveld, 1996; Sobotka, 2004).
Not only we can see a general trend of postponement, but also a higher degree of diversity in the life course of each individual: many young adults prefer to cohabit with a partner for the whole life, rather than marrying, or to remain childless, foregoing completely a phase of the transition. In addition, diversity may be observed also in extremely heterogeneous patterns according to which transitions are experienced over the life course: it has been often assumed that individuals leave full-time schooling before entering the adult roles of worker, spouse and parent, and that, particularly for males, both exit from school and entry into labor force occur prior to entry into adult family roles. However, the analysis of the ordering of role changes indicates that through historical time there is considerable increasing variation in the temporal sequencing of events (Marini, 1984).

The aim of this work is to analyze how transition to adulthood changed during the twentieth century in Europe, to which extent patterns are standardized or an individualization process is at work. I will use a comparative perspective, taking into account cross-national differences throughout Europe in order to understand where postponement and destandardisation are more apparent and which are the main determinants of disparities among countries.
This will be done looking at seven cohorts, born between 1926 and 1985 in 23 European countries, through data collected in the European Social Survey (third edition, 2006). First, I can observe historical trends in the order of events along the transition to adulthood, and compare them with results provided by other studies. Secondly, attention will be paid to youngest cohorts, which face transition in the 1990's and 2000's, and to Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and

Ukraine) for which information about trends during the 1990's, after the fall of Communism, was previously lacking.
Finally, I will try to examine how macro-contexts influence the organization of the life course, in particular which is the impact of housing market conditions and gender disparities on the decision to leave parental home before starting a union (cohabitation or marriage) and if they may explain some of the differences in transition trends across countries.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In order to explain the trajectories in the evolution of the transition to adulthood during the century and why there exist differences across Europe many factors have to be taken into account, each of which plays a crucial role in determining trends and overlaps with other elements in shaping the current situation. How do the members of complex modern societies come to take demographic decisions?
the first refers to the Second Demographic Transition theory by Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa (Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa, 1986; Lesthaeghe, 1995; Van de Kaa, 1987, 2001), which interprets the process of individualization and destandardization taking place in many European Countries since the 1960's. The second class of explanations is related to institutional factors, which shape life trajectories through welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Mayer, 2001) and lead to persistent divergence among countries with different social and economic institutions.
The third perspective looks at long-term cultural differences among countries that might be at the basis of the distance between North-western and South-western Europe, as the strength of inter-generational ties between societies (Reher, 1998).
In the last decades of the twentieth centuries transition to adulthood became in many European countries increasingly complicated and prolonged: since the 1960's we observe a decrease in fertility rates and a postponement in family formation (delay in marriage and parenthood). This process results from a general trend toward heterogeneous experiences in individual life courses; changes in the economic structure and cultural shifts trigger individualization in the demographic behavior, which implies flexibility in life trajectories and longer periods spent in states such as single person or unmarried cohabitation (Billari, Philipov, Baizàn, 2001).
Authors such as Kohli (1986) and Buchmann (1989) argue that modernization has promoted both standardization and individualization in the transition to adulthood. Standardization appears in the increasing "compactness" in the ages of school completion, beginning one's career, marriage and parenthood, whereas individualization is found in increasingly diverse sequence of these markers. Furthermore, these trends have been complicated by short-term economic fluctuation and historical events. Hence, we would expect all countries to converge in their demographic behavior and so more homogeneity in national experiences, but more diverse sequence patterns, with familial and non familial transition markers increasingly overlapping (Shanahan, 2000).
The reason why we still observe so much heterogeneity across Europe is that countries can be found in different stages of the transition process. However, according to this theory, differences across European countries should be only temporary (Billari and Wilson, 2001).

2.2 INSTITUTIONS CANNOT BE DISREGARDED

The lack of clear evidence concerning convergence in life course patterns in Europe may be due to the existence of different welfare regimes and so to the diverse underlying institutional structures.

Esping-Andersen identifies three types of welfare states regimes, which cannot but have a strong impact on the behavior of individuals, especially on their "demographic" decisions. The three regimes include 1) Social Democratic welfare state, characterized by high levels of state support and a focus on the individuals (e.g. Scandinavian countries); 2) Conservative welfare state, providing generous support for the family rather than the individual (e.g. France, Germany and Belgium); 3) Liberal welfare state, with a modest level of provisions based on means-tested benefits and oriented to individuals (e.g. UK and Ireland).
Another category of welfare regime has been proposed to include the Southern European countries (e.g. Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece), where we observe a reliance on the family as the locus of support (Ferrera, 1996; Trifiletti, 1999; Mayer, 2001).
According to this classification, each welfare state is associated to a different behavior in the transition to adulthood: in Social Democratic countries, for instance, labor market entry and leaving parental home should take place at young ages; this is due to generous social benefits, enabling young individuals to have more certainty about their future economic conditions and consequently more possibilities to create their own family. In contrast, Southern European countries should show late exit from parental home, late marriage and childbearing, given the lower level of benefits and so the stronger dependence on the family of origin.
The collection of new data throughout the years brings about another important issue related to Eastern Europe. It is possible to add a fifth category of welfare regime including Eastern countries. Attention has to be paid to the new era began with the fall of Communism at the end of twentieth century, characterized by many new opportunities for young adults even though with more uncertainty about the future.
Within the wide framework of welfare states it is possible to identify social and economic policies contingent to a specific time period. It may be difficult to distinguish the effects of such policies (e.g. housing and labor market policies, family provisions) from those of the institutional setting, changing much more slowly. Unquestionably such policies play an important role in young adults' decisions about the pattern towards adulthood and modify the scenario they face during their early adult years. It is necessary, however, to understand "whether they belong to the welfare state *per se* or whether they belong to political choices that are continuously subject to revision" (Billari, 2004).

2.3 THE POWER OF CULTURE AND HISTORICAL ROOTS

A weakness may be identified in the explanation of life courses through institutional arguments, that is the impossibility to take welfare regimes as purely exogenous in the long-run. For instance, whether a society encourages young adults to attend higher education at universities with on-campus accommodation, as opposed to having local universities where young adults and their parents can co-reside for a longer period, depends on the prevailing views of intergenerational relationships (Mayer, 2001). In this case the cultural factors shape institutional arrangements, meaning that to understand deeply dynamics underlying transitions to adulthood we have necessarily to look at long-term cultural differences among European countries.
According to Reher, the initial conditions from which modern European societies have developed are fundamental for the present differences in behavior. In his work the author stresses the fact that, in Southern Europe, the influence of Islam raised the importance of kinship and vertical relationship between generations, so that the prolonged stay of children in their parent's home and the caring work of children towards their parents are two faces of the same coin, a "strong" family. In the North, Germanic tradition and the Reformation contributed to the development of a "weak" family (Reher, 1998). Empirical evidence shows that in fact the share of young adults who affirm to be dependent, for income, on parents and

family members is much larger in Southern Europe rather than in Social Democratic countries, where intergenerational ties are weaker (Billari, 2004).
Giuliano in her work explores the hypothesis that the large differences in living arrangements across Europe, which deepened in the last 30 years, could have been caused by differences across cultures in the intergenerational bond between parents and children accompanied by an external shock, such as the sexual revolution (Giuliano, 2007). The shock of the sexual revolution (the advent of female contraception for unmarried women and the legalization of abortion in the 1980s) affected "strong" and "weak" family systems differently. In Northern Europe, where family ties are weak, children live, as before, by choice out of their parents' home. The shock had a negligible impact. The same shock, in contrast, had a major impact in Southern Europe, where family ties are strong and children by choice now live at home.
The cultural inheritance model (as the welfare regimes explanation) predicts that convergence will not take place at national level: factors which lead to homogenization of behaviors throughout the world, like those implied by modernization and economic globalization, cannot have the same impact on societies with different cultural and historical origins, and lead to multiple and divergent equilibria.

3. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ACROSS EUROPE: DATA AND METHODS

Many statistical studies have been carried out to assess patterns, and possible convergence, of measures concerning fertility, mortality and life expectancy among developed countries. Evolution of the markers of transition to adulthood was not so deeply analyzed, at least from a comparative point of view.
To describe changes in the transition to adulthood information on timing and sequencing of events occurring in the early adult years has to be recovered, and it may result difficult to get them with the same ease with which total fertility rate, for instance, could be found. For this reason, existing comparative studies rely on retrospective surveys, through which it is possible to recreate the past experiences of single individuals and discover the occurrence and timing of markers such as leaving parental home or entry into full-time labor force.
Both the work by Billari and Wilson (2001) and that by Liefbroer (2005) exploit the Fertility and Family Surveys (FFS) carried out in 24 European countries between 1988 and 1999. The main problem with this dataset is that it contains no information concerning the period before 1965 and does not enable a comparison for most recent developments.
The emergence of a new retrospective survey, the European Social Survey (third edition, 2006), has opened new opportunities for a cross-country analysis in the European area.

3.1 THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY

The European Social Survey (ESS, hereinafter) has been developed to pursue a comparison between countries of the Eurasian region. The ESS organizes a round every two years: 22 countries in Round 1 (2002), 26 in Round 2 (2004), and 25 in Round 3 (2006) agreed to produce the necessary funding. Its main aim is to outline the attitudes of the different regions towards religion, politics, and moral issues, while also depicting their social habits and how they are changing over time.
Since this study was conceived to draw a long term picture about social and cultural changes, many issues have been addressed through the questionnaire. Three domains can be identified: the first one pertains to people's value and ideological orientations; the second deals with people's cultural/national orientations; finally, the third main area concerns the underlying social structure of society. Given that values and social change are mainly driven by the social

composition, e.g. by the level of education and the employment status, indentifying these factors is essential to draw the correct picture of the social climate of a population.
These issues have been translated into the so-called Core Module, which stays unchanged over the surveys and that is composed by 12 main topics concerning trust in institutions, national, ethnic and religious identity, political engagement, well-being, health and security, socio-political values, demographic composition, moral and social values, education and occupation, social capital, financial circumstances, social exclusion and household circumstances. The questionnaire includes also a second part that varies over time to cope with the main up-to-date issues of the period in which the survey takes place (the so-called Rotating Module).
I will focus on the third and most recent round of the survey, released on April 2008.

3.2 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis is carried out considering 23 countries, grouped according to their welfare regime and geographical position: *Social Democratic* (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden); *Conservative* (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland); *Liberal* (Great Britain and Ireland); *Southern Europe* (Portugal and Spain); *Eastern Europe* (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine).
I look at the evolution in transition to adulthood paths for seven cohorts, born between 1926 and 1985. The presence of individuals whose age ranges between 21 and 80 provides a broader and more complete understanding of changes in adulthood transition in twentieth century. This overcomes the drawbacks of the FFS previously used in this kind of research: first, cohorts born before the Second World War and their demographic behavior allow for evidence concerning the hypothesis of regular and predictable life course trajectories until late 1950's; second, the youngest cohorts in the analysis offer a description of the transition experienced by those who made it during the 1990's and 2000's.
Our sample contains more than 38,000 individuals, 54% of which are women. In order to have enough observations in each cohort (considering also the fact that the analysis is conducted for men and women separately), I looked at two ten-years cohorts, 1926-1935 and 1936-1945, and at five eight-years cohorts, from 1946 to 1985. In this way I obtain cohorts with a number of individuals ranging from 4000 (for the 1926-35 birth cohort, approximately 10% of the entire sample) to 6,150 (for the 1962-69 birth cohort).

The study of transition to adulthood requires data concerning several important interrelated events representing movement from economic dependence and participation in the family of origin to economic independence and establishment of a family of procreation. These events are ending full time education, starting full-time job, leaving the parental home, forming a union (cohabitation or marriage) and having a child. The ESS dataset contains information about all the markers just mentioned (with the years in which events occurred), except for the exit from the educational system, as the only variable it provides is the number of years of full-time education completed. Computing the age at which individuals leave full-time education means assuming a common age at which children start studying, without considering the peculiar characteristics of school system in each country. Therefore I decided to leave out from the analysis this first marker, beginning from the entry into first job.
I focused on timing of events, computing the median age for each event, by country, by cohort and by gender. Survival curves have been calculated, applying the Kaplan-Meier estimation method (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 2001). Moreover, I also examined the sequence in which events occur with the aim to evaluate the degree of diversity in processes leading to adulthood across Europe.

4. TIMING OF THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

In this section I will present results of the life course analysis concerning the markers of the transition. The graphs report the median age at which events take place for the seven birth cohorts. Countries are grouped into the welfare regime categories in order to make the comprehension clearer.

4.1 AGE AT ENTRY IN THE LABOR MARKET

Given the lack of information concerning the age at leaving full-time education, the first event considered is entry into the first job. In Figure 1 and 2 results are presented for women, while Figure 3 and 4 refers to men.
Among Scandinavian women it is possible to observe an increasing trend in the median age at entry in the labor market, due mainly to the spreading of higher education. Half of the women belonging to the oldest cohort began to work before 18; the lowest value is recorded in Denmark, with a median age of 16.5 years. Instead, when we look at data for the two youngest cohorts the median age is always above 18, and reaches 20.17 in Norway for the cohort which starts working in the 1990's. It is important to notice that among Social Democratic countries Norway shows the highest median age at the first approach to full-time employment. The same increasing trend is true for Scandinavian men, but comparing men to women the median age at entry into the first job is either half a year or a year lower for men, especially for Denmark and oldest cohorts.

A very similar outcome to that described for Northern countries is found in Great Britain, while Ireland, even if belongs to the same liberal welfare regime, shows a completely different trend. Irish men and women born between 1946 and 1953 enter the labor market almost one year later with respect to those born between 1970 and 1977.
As far as Conservative countries are concerned the pattern of entry into first job is a bit different and less clear-cut. Except for Germany, which still presents a continuously increasing trend, in all Western Europe women born between 1936 and 1945 show a decrease in the median age with respect to the previous birth cohort.
This is evident especially for Austria and France, where the gap is almost two years. From the 1954-61 birth cohort onward, however, the median age begins to increase again even though with different pace. The picture is even less straightforward for men: the increasing trend of the age at entry in the labor market that is observed for women after the 1970's is interrupted in the case of men for at least one cohort in the following period.
For countries in Southern and Eastern Europe the median age is usually higher for both men and women relative to the other countries. The highest values are recorded in Estonia, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia, where half of the women belonging to the oldest cohort entered the labor market when they were more than 24 years old. Moreover, in Romania and Slovenia half of the men of the 1926-35 birth cohort starts working after 21 years of age. When we look at younger cohorts we still observe later entry into first job compared to the rest of Europe, with median age higher than 20: for example in Bulgaria (only for men), Estonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia for the two youngest cohorts. The path showed by these countries, however, is less regular and standardized, meaning that the way in which people decide when to enter their first job is more diverse and complicated here than in Western and Northern Europe. This could be due to the less generous social benefits, which increase uncertainty in young individuals' future.

Figure 1 Age at entry into a first job among women, by birth cohorts (in years): Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

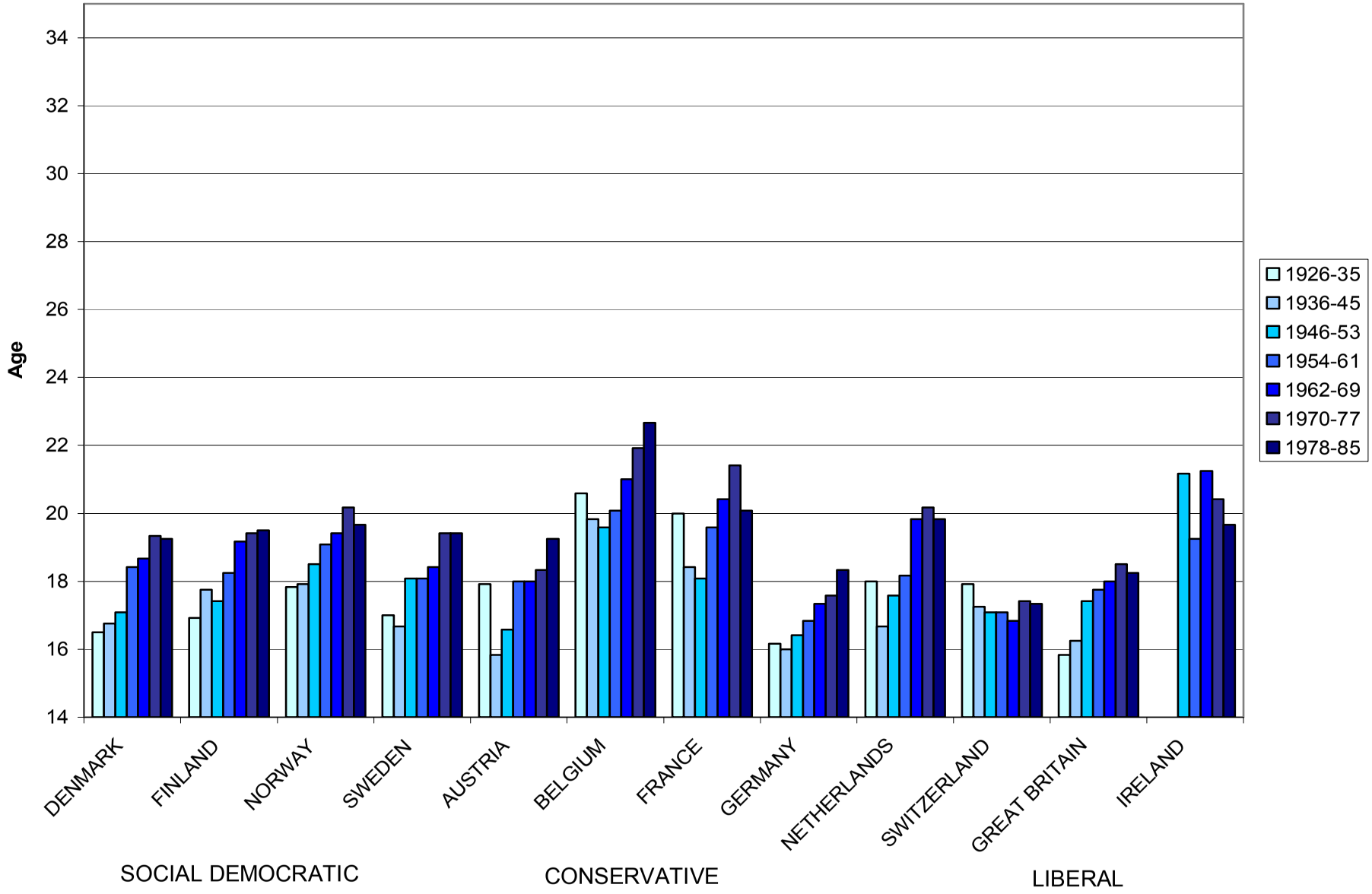


Figure 2 Age at entry into a first job among women, by birth cohorts (in years): Southern and Eastern European countries

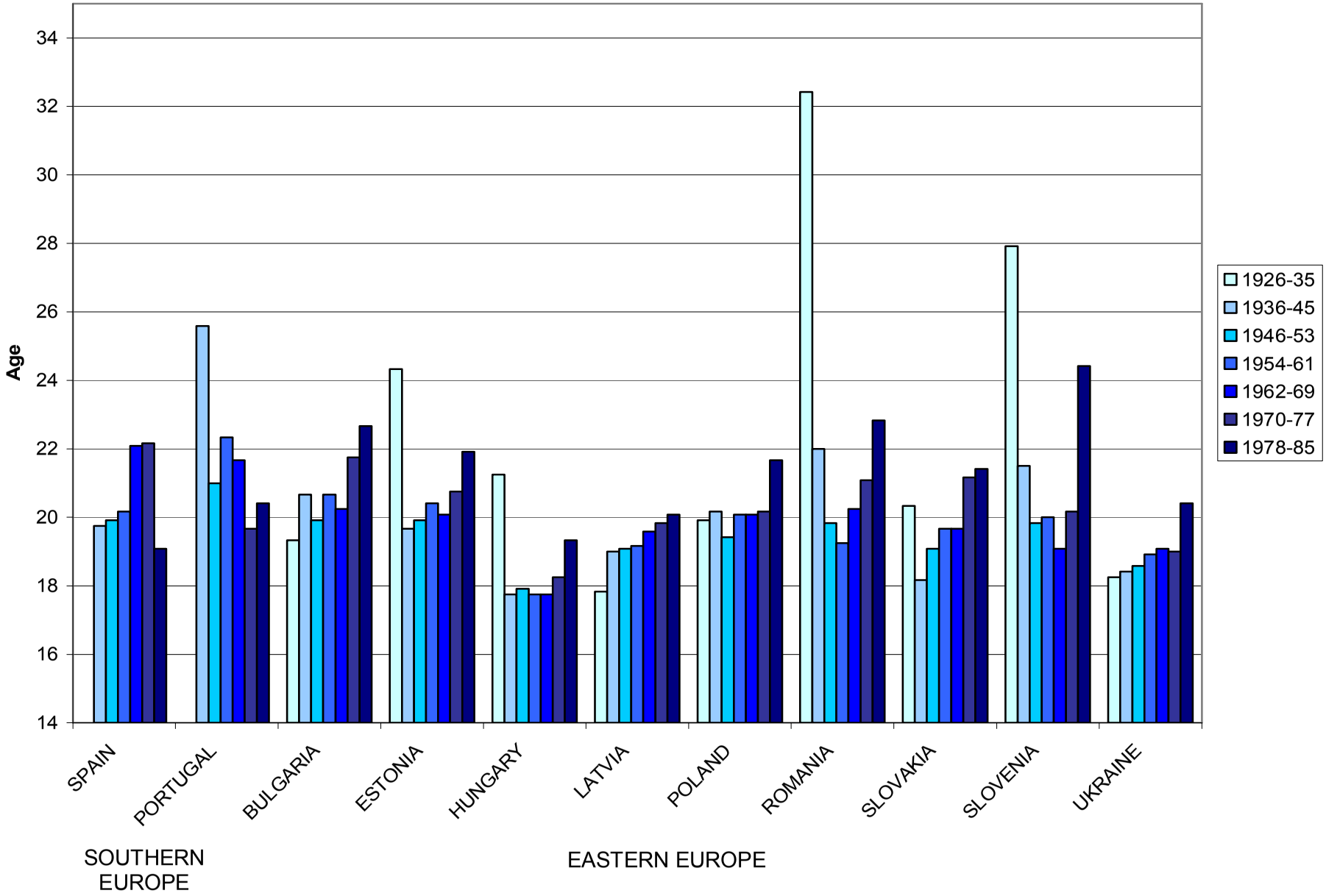


Figure 3 Age at entry into a first job among men, by birth cohorts (in years): Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

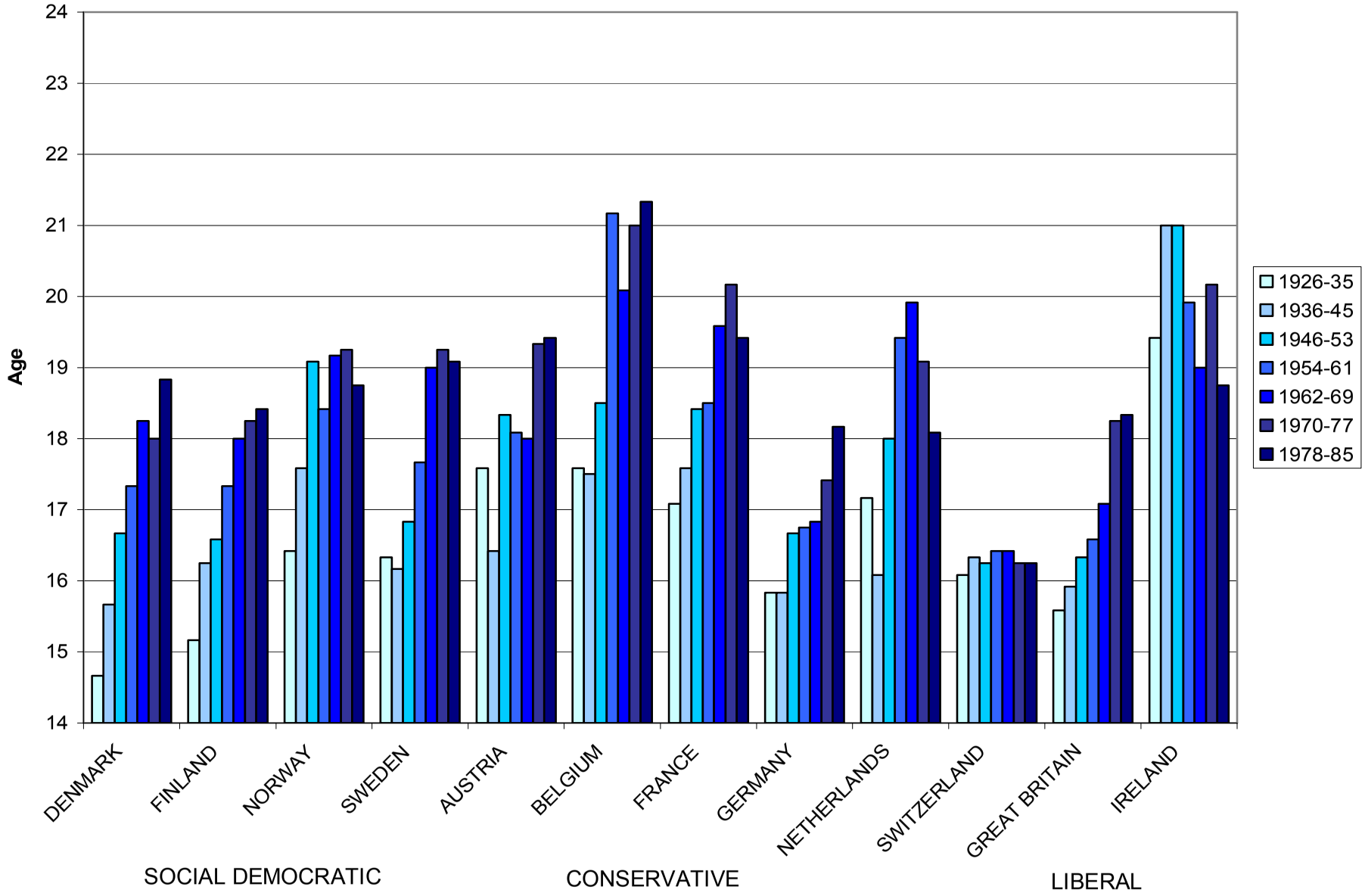
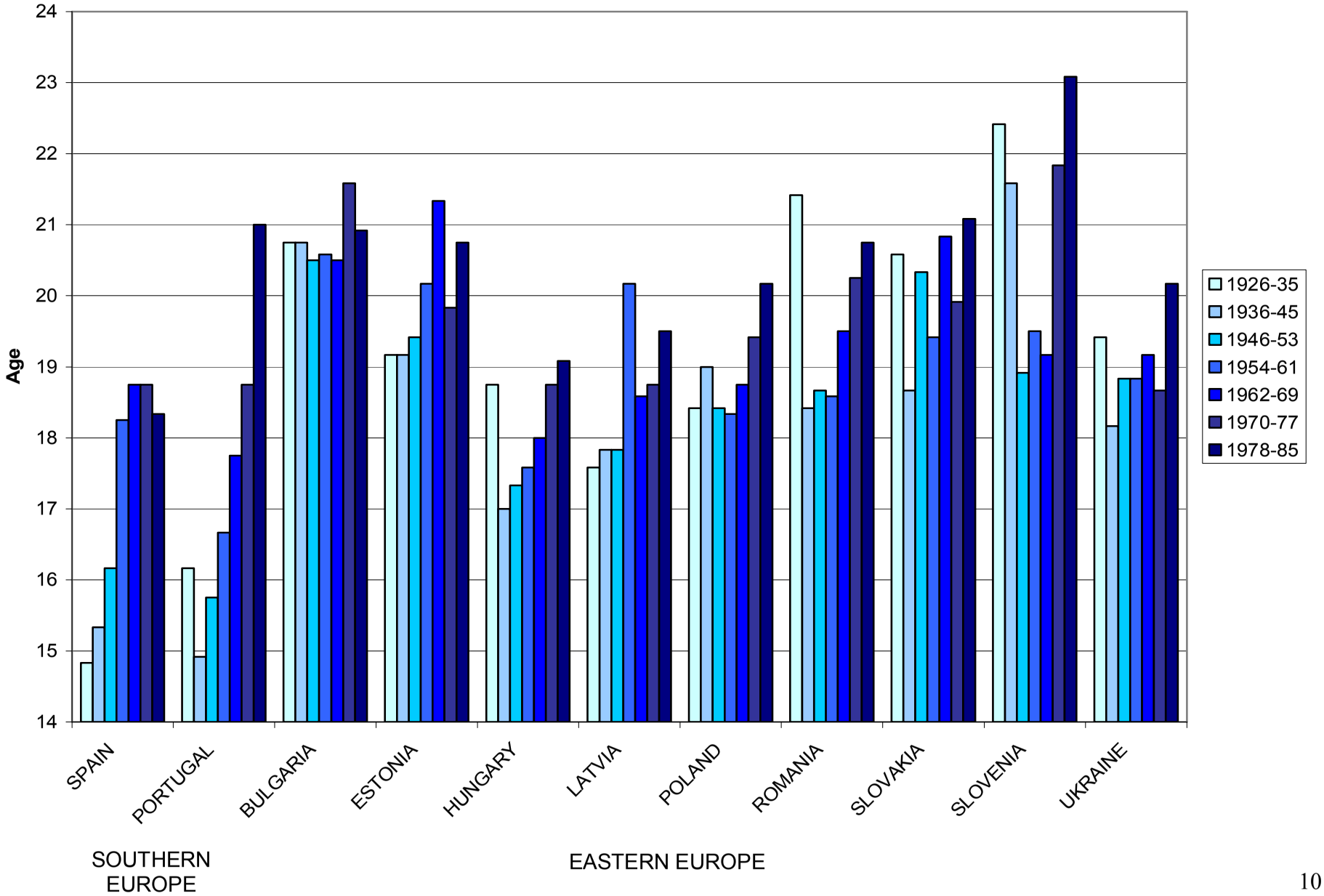


Figure 4 Age at entry into a first job among men, by birth cohorts (in years): Southern and Eastern European countries



It is important to notice that in many Eastern countries, like Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine, women's median ages are lower than those of men (especially for oldest cohorts), suggesting that men leave the educational system at later age than women do. The same is true for Austria and for some Dutch birth cohorts (1946-53, 1954-61 and 1962-68). The opposite situation can be found in Southern Europe, where median ages for Spanish and Portuguese women are much higher than those of men. Differences are in some cases very significant, reaching also a 5 years gap. This could result from the fact that women are less likely to enter the labor market, also because unemployment is more widespread among females.

4.2 THE FIRST EVENT IN THE FAMILY DOMAIN: LEAVING THE PARENTAL HOME

Leaving the parental home, together with the entry into the labor market, is the first step towards independence from the family of origin. Information on this event among European individuals is given in Figures 5 and 6 for women and in Figures 7 and 8 for men.
During the twentieth century the median age at leaving home varies substantially both across countries and over time. The lowest median age is recorded in Social Democratic countries, where it stays always below or around 19 for females and around 20 for males. In Denmark we observe an increasing trend for women (from 18.2 to 19.2), while the pattern is more stable for Danish men, whose median age at leaving home ranges between 19 and 20. Apart from Denmark, in the other Northern European countries women belonging to 1954-61, 1962-69 and 1970-77 show a rise in the median age, but for the youngest cohort there is a slight decrease. As far as men in Social Democratic countries are concerned the picture is somehow different: in Finland and Sweden we register a decrease in the median age at leaving home, respectively from 21 to 19.7 and from 21.3 to 19.9.
In Conservative countries median age is much higher with respect to Northern Europe. The gap reduced over time, but still young adults leave their parents at least half a year later. A clear decreasing trend is visible for women in France, Germany and Netherlands. The age at leaving home in the latter goes from 22.5 to 19.5. Austrian and Swiss females reveal an irregular pattern, but the comparison between the oldest and the youngest cohorts shows an increase in the median age.
A peculiar trend concerning age at leaving home is presented by Belgian women, since we observe a U-shaped pattern with its minimum (20.8) for 1954-61 birth cohort. Men in Western Europe show similar trends to those of women, but with less pronounced changes from one cohort to the other. For instance, in France the median age decreases from 21 to 20.6 in 60 years for males, while from 21.3 to 19.5 for females. Among German men, who experience a continuous decline in the median age throughout time, we notice a trend change for the last cohort with a median age above 22 years.
Great Britain and Ireland present in general the same decreasing trend of many Western European countries. What is important to notice is that median age at leaving home is lower, for both men and women, in Great Britain relative to Ireland and, in the former, most recent cohorts resemble behavior of Social Democratic countries (the two youngest birth cohorts have a median age below 19).
If in Northern Europe the median age ranges from 18 to 19 and in Western Europe from 20 to 22, in Southern Europe the situation is fairly different: median age is higher than 22 years in both Portugal and Spain. The highest values are recorded in Spain for individuals belonging to the 1970-77 birth cohort (25.7 for women and 26.8 for men). The picture described so far is consistent with the welfare state classification, given that more generous regimes enhance independence of young adults and consequently in Northern countries leaving parental home takes place earlier than in Southern Europe. Moreover, predictions based on culture and

historical roots find support in these results, provided that Spain and Portugal are characterized by intergenerational ties much stronger than Scandinavian countries, where a "weak family" standard prevails.
In Eastern Europe the picture is extremely heterogeneous. Estonia, Latvia, Romani and Ukraine present a median age at leaving home ranging between 19 and 21. These values are lower with respect to the other Eastern countries, where for women it ranges between 21 and 23, while for men between 22 and 24.
Bulgaria has a particular situation, in the sense that half of the women leave parental home around 20 years of age, whereas median age for men is higher than 23 years in all cohorts taken into account.
Also the development of the transition over time varies strongly across countries: some show a U-shaped pattern, like Romania and Ukraine, and some an increasing trend, e.g. Slovakia.
Comparing the results in Figures 5 and 6 with those in Figures 7 and 8, we observe that in all Europe men, on average, leave parental home between 1 and 2 years later than women. If we expect females to leave their family of origin in order to start a union or even to marry, men's delay might be due to the lower median age of women at marriage and cohabitation, also because before to leave parental home males, more frequently, try to achieve economic independence.

Figure 5 Age at leaving parental home among women, by birth cohorts (in years): Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

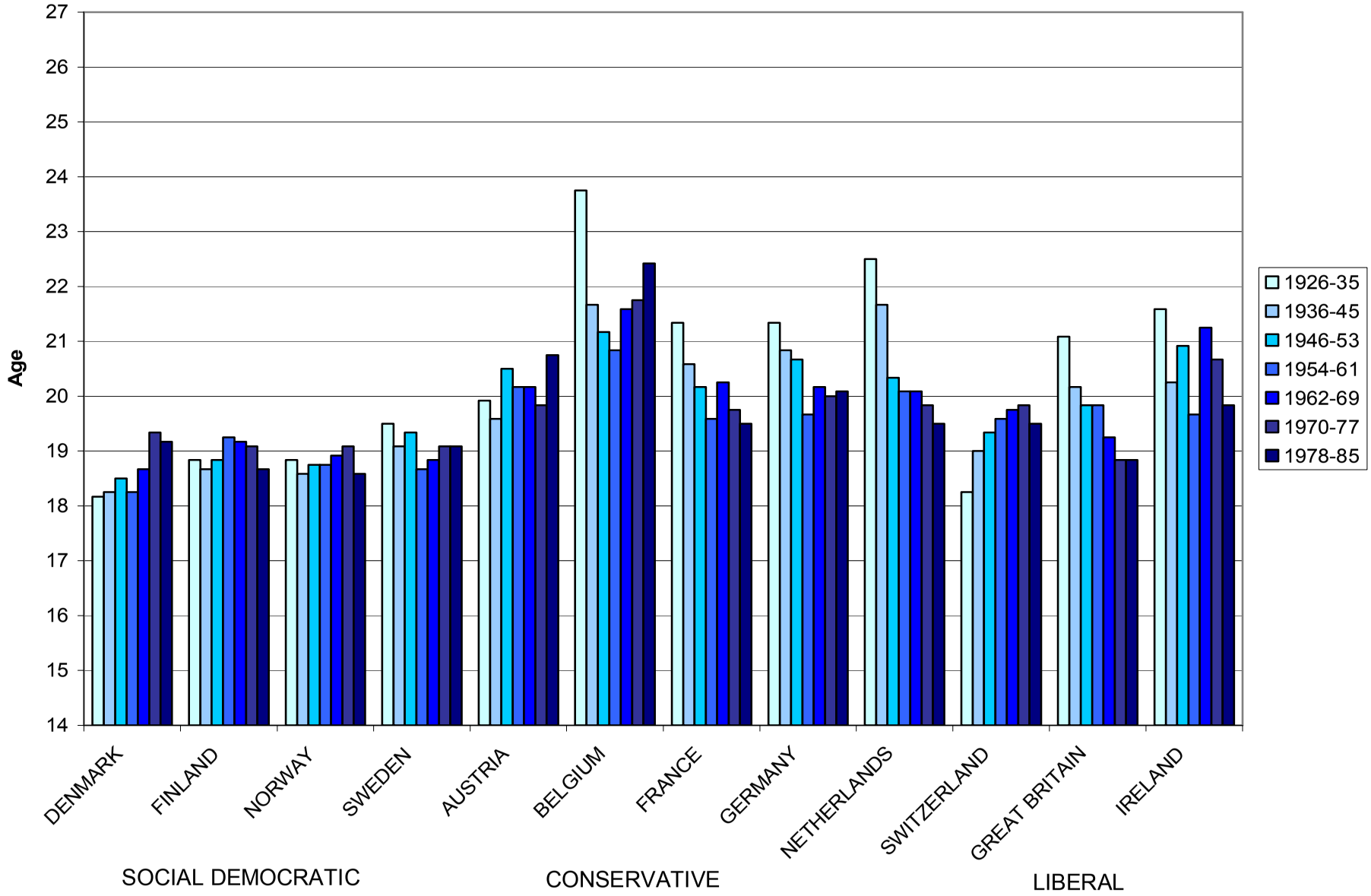


Figure 6 Age at leaving parental home among women, by birth cohorts (in years): Southern and Eastern European countries

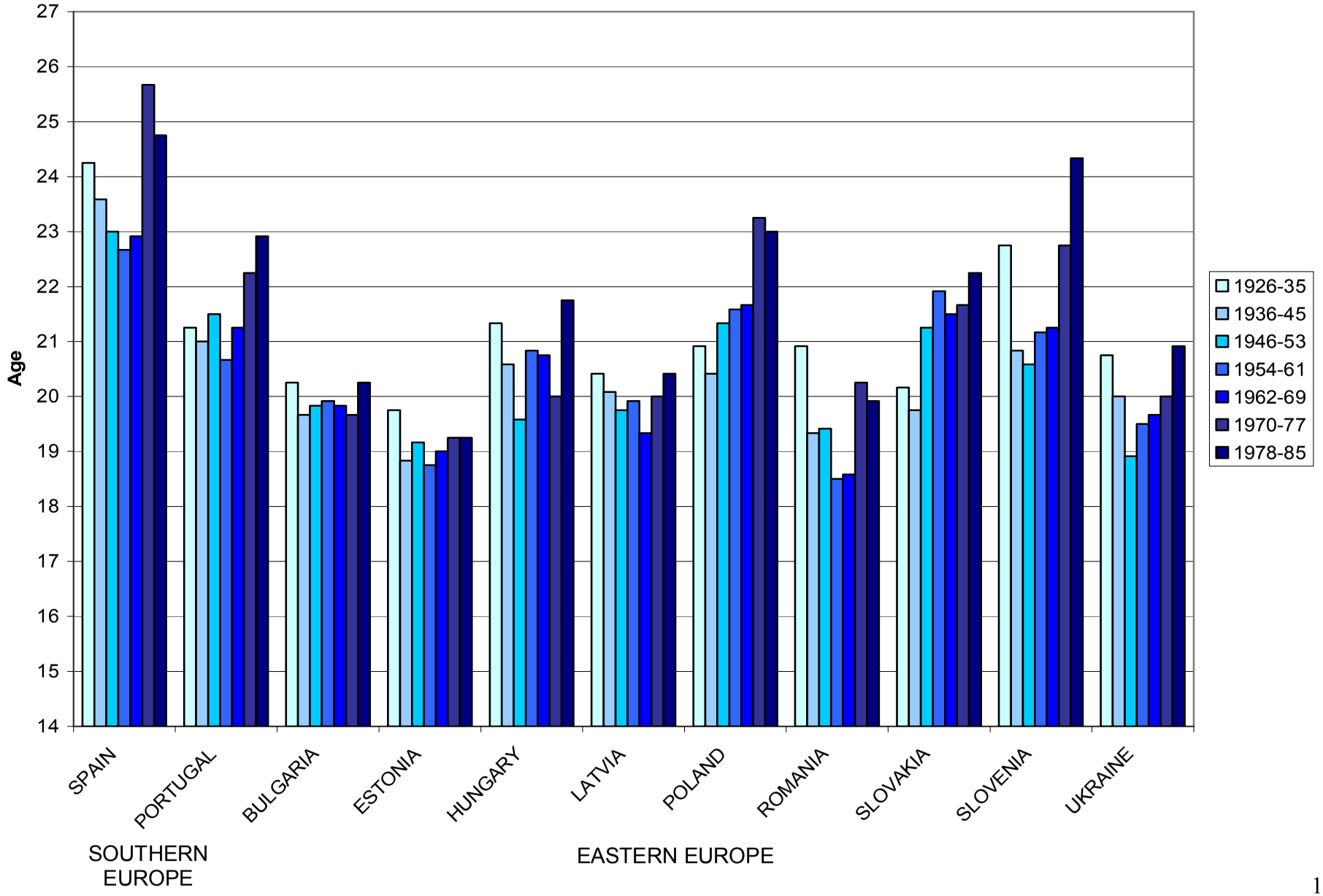


Figure 7 Age at leaving parental home among men, by birth cohorts (in years): Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

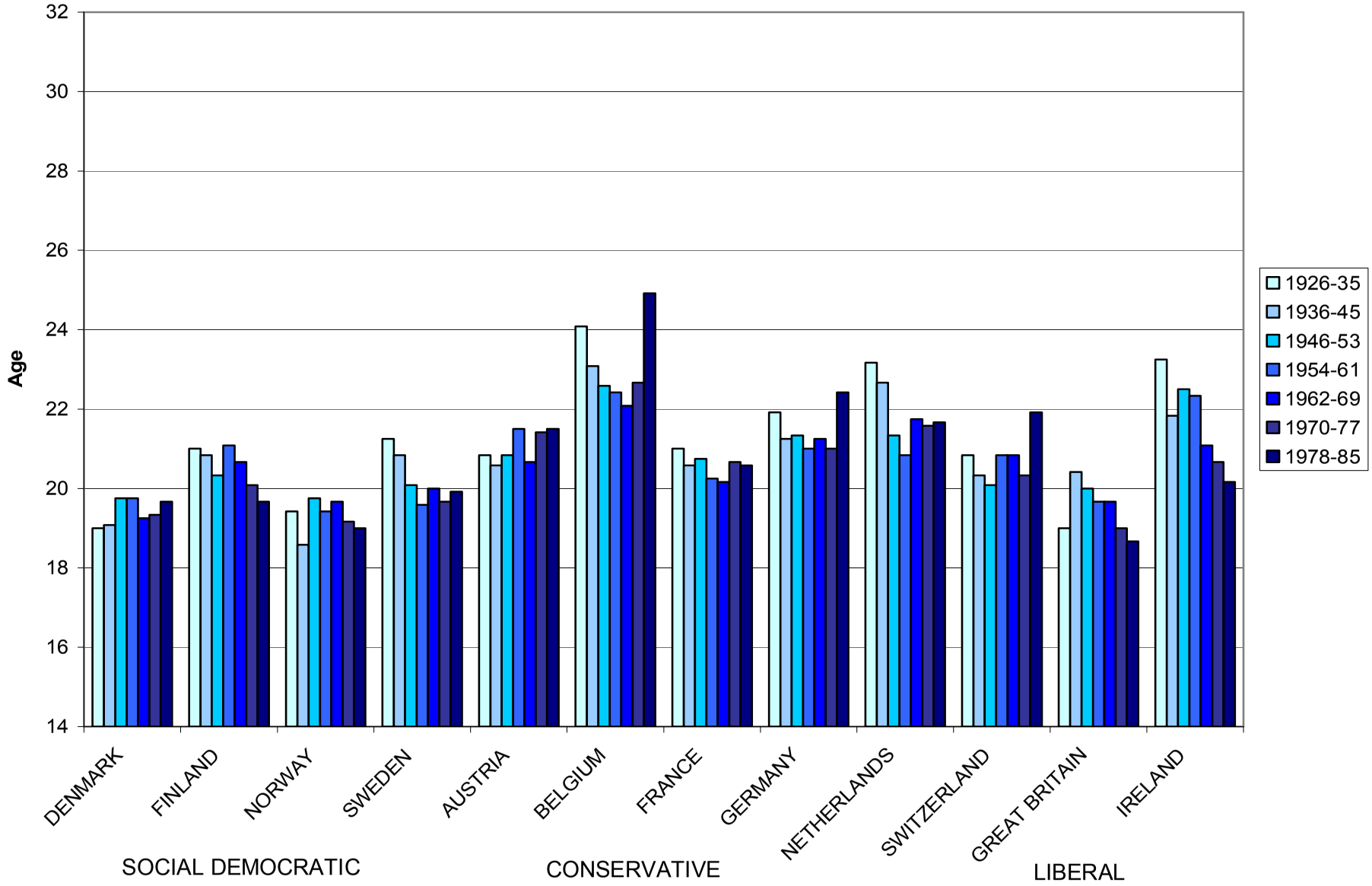
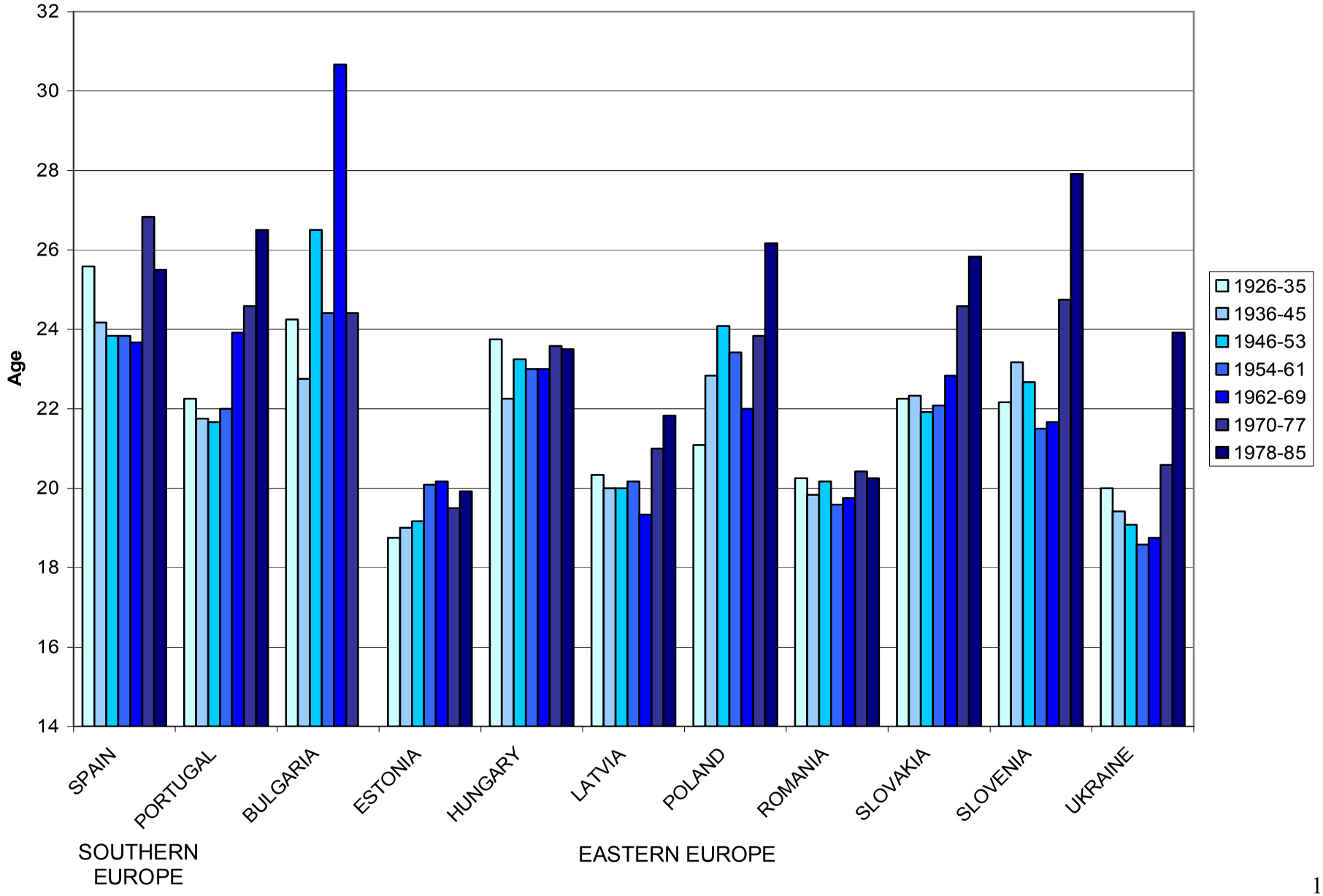


Figure 8 Age at leaving parental home among men, by birth cohorts (in years): Southern and Eastern European countries



4.3 MEDIAN AGE AT ENTRY INTO A CO-RESIDENTIAL UNION

The concept of co-residential union employed here includes not only marriage, but also cohabitation with the partner. Since the late 1960's this leaving arrangement became very common in many European countries. Hence, I will first analyze the median age at entry into a union (unmarried cohabitation and marriage) and in the next section I will focus only on entry into marriage.

Results are presented in Figures 9 and 10 for women and in Figures 11 and 12 for men. Starting from Social Democratic countries we observe a median age at entry into a union between 22 and 23 years for Danish, Finnish and Swedish women belonging to the first two cohorts (1926-35 and 1936-45). Afterwards there is a decline in the median age of almost 1 year in each country. In Norway, however, this 1 year drop takes place earlier and it is already visible for the 1936-45 birth cohort. The decreasing trend is stable in Finland and Sweden, which present only a slight increase in the median age of individuals belonging to the youngest cohort (around 21). Norway and Denmark, after the initial drop, record an oscillating pattern and females of the youngest cohort are 22.5 years old in Norway and almost 21 years old in Denmark when they enter their first union.

The picture is very similar for males of Scandinavian countries, even if they enter into a union 2-3 years later than women. It is important to notice the very high median age, 24.5 years, registered in Denmark and Norway for the last men's cohort.

The main characteristics relative to Conservative countries' trend is the decline in the median age, among both men and women, for the 1946-53 birth cohort relative to the oldest cohort. The entity of the decrease varies across countries, having its maximum in Switzerland (4 years for women and 3.5 for men) and Netherlands (3.5 for men).

After this common change, the subsequent path in the median age at entry into a union followed by Western European countries varies strongly: it increases constantly in Belgium, Germany and in Austria (only for females); it continues to decreases for Dutch women, while Swiss and French women belonging to the 1962-69 cohort show an increase in the median age, which afterwards starts to decrease again. Among men, the highest stability is observed in France, with a median age having its maximum at 24.6 (1926-35) and its minimum at 23.6 (1946-53). An important result is the very high median age for males belonging to the youngest cohort: 28 years of age in Austria, 26.8 in Belgium, 27.6 in Germany and 26 in Switzerland.

Great Britain presents a situation very similar for men and women, with a U-shaped trend ranging from 21.5 to 23 and from 23.3 to 25.4, respectively. Ireland, on the contrary, represents a very peculiar case. The oldest cohort shows an extremely high median age, 29.4 for females and 30.4 for males. Then we observe a quite strong decline followed by another equally important increase. The youngest cohort registers a new decrease, with women around 24.3 and men around 26.7.

On average Western Europe presents a median age at entry into first union that is slightly higher than age in Northern Europe, even if France resembles closely the Norwegian situation. When we consider Southern Europe, the median age is particularly high. This is suggested also by the fact that less than half of the men belonging to the youngest cohort experienced the event before the date of the survey.

The most recent data for men (1970-77 cohort) reveal a median age of 25.7 in Portugal and 28.5 in Spain. Women born between 1954 and 1961 record the minimum median age for this event and since then they experience a continuous rise, which leads to a 3 year gap relative to the minimum.

The least clear picture is that of Eastern Europe. Some countries have a very stable median age, like Bulgaria and Hungary (around 20.5 years of age among women), with the only

exception of the last cohort for which age is much higher (22.5). Generally, considering females, we notice that median age of the youngest cohort is higher with respect to that of the others (always above 22 and reaches also 25). This breaks the decreasing trend in Latvia and Estonia. The same is true for men and, in fact, we do not have data for the youngest cohort in Slovakia and Slovenia.

The results on entry into the first union do not reveal any clear geographical pattern or any strong correlation among countries belonging to the same welfare regime. Ireland, a Liberal country in Northern Europe, has a very similar situation to Spain, even though median age continuously increases in the latter while the postponement has stopped in the former. Another striking result is the fact that Bulgaria and Hungary are much closer to Scandinavian countries than to the rest of Eastern Europe.

As expected, median age is higher for men than for women in every country and for every cohort: men, on average, are 2 to 3 years older than their female counterpart when they enter the first union.

Figure 9 Age at entry into first union among women, by birth cohorts (in years): Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

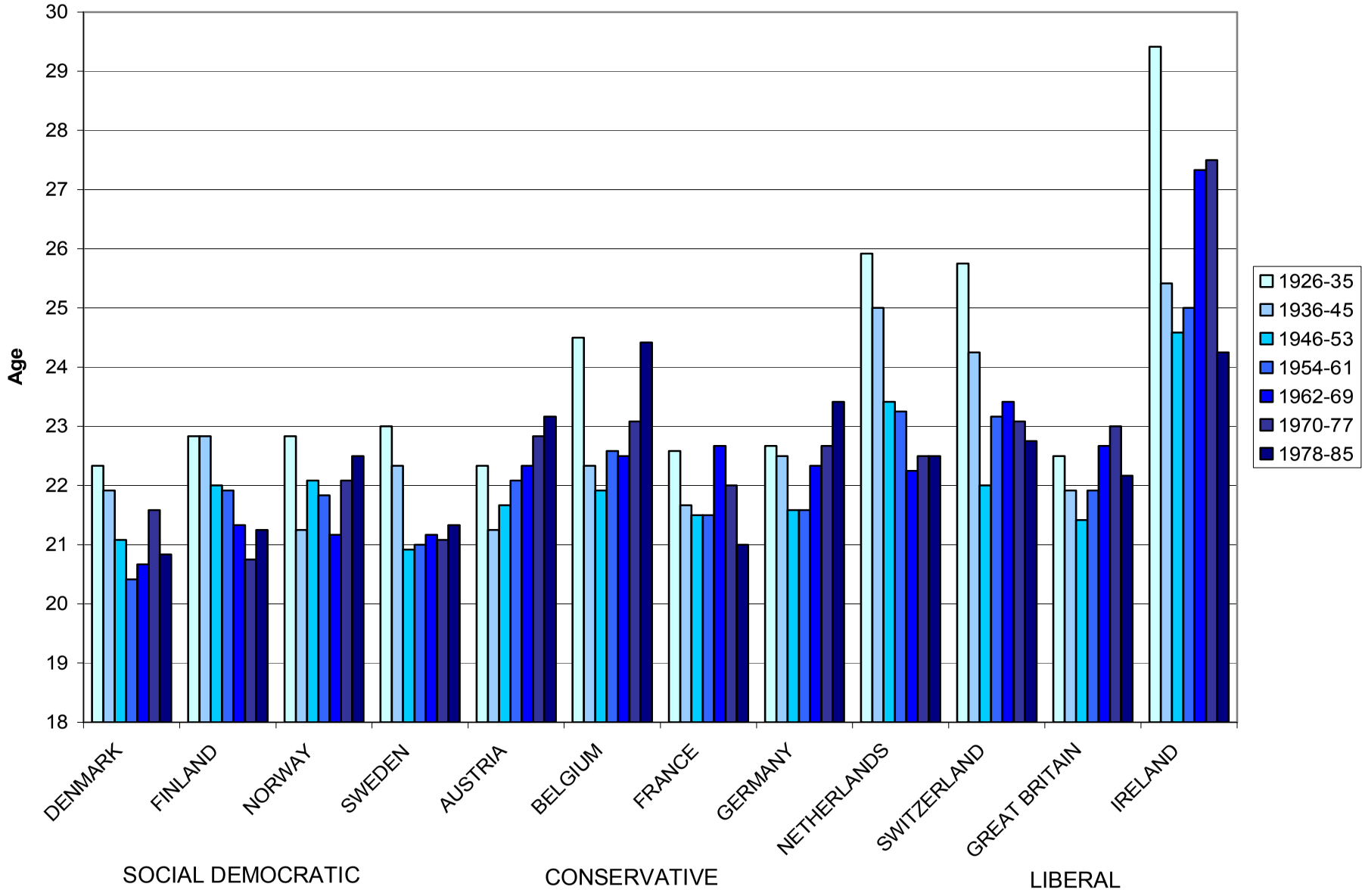


Figure 10 Age at entry into first union among women, by birth cohorts (in years): Southern and Eastern European countries

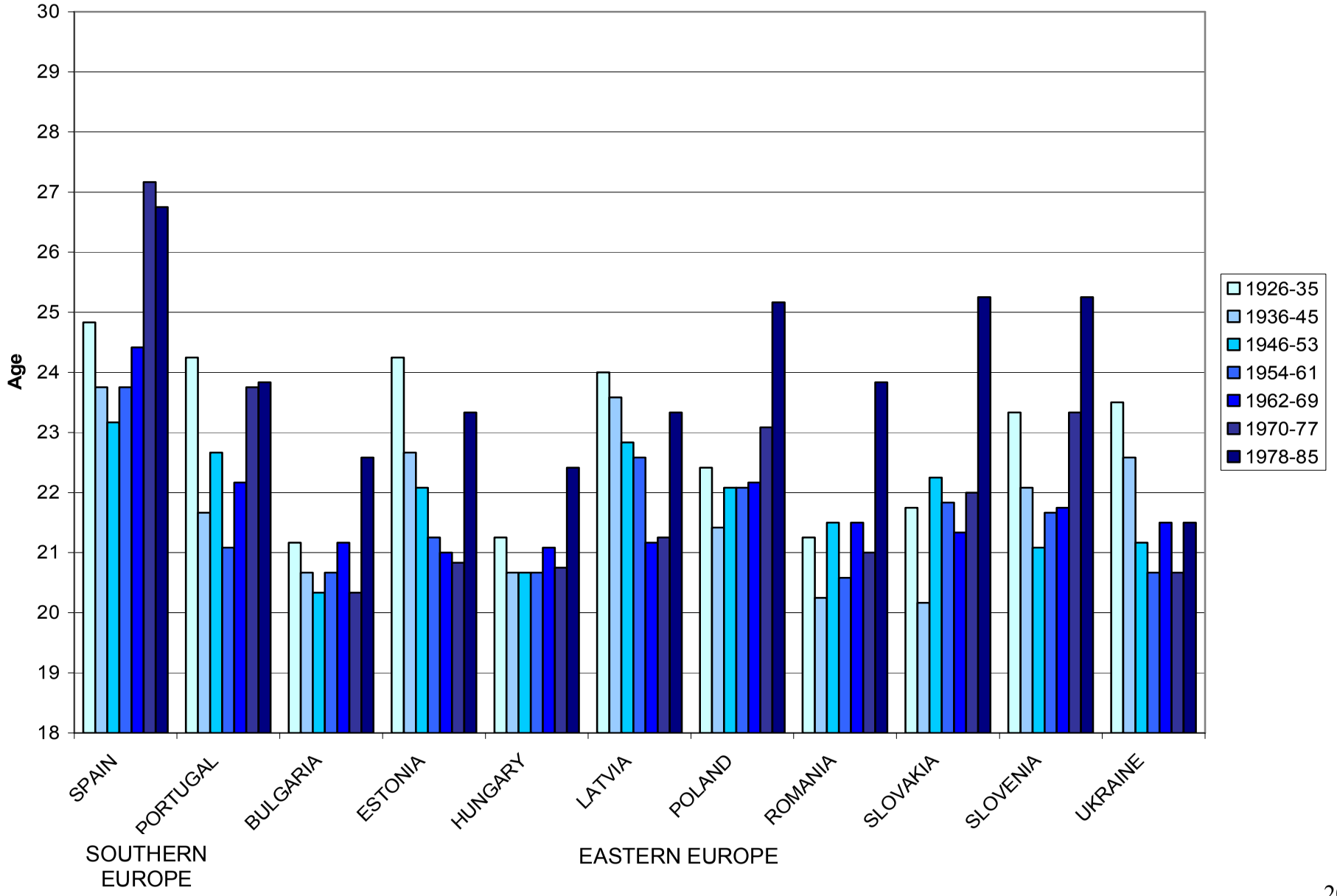


Figure 11 Age at entry into first union among men, by birth cohorts (in years): Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

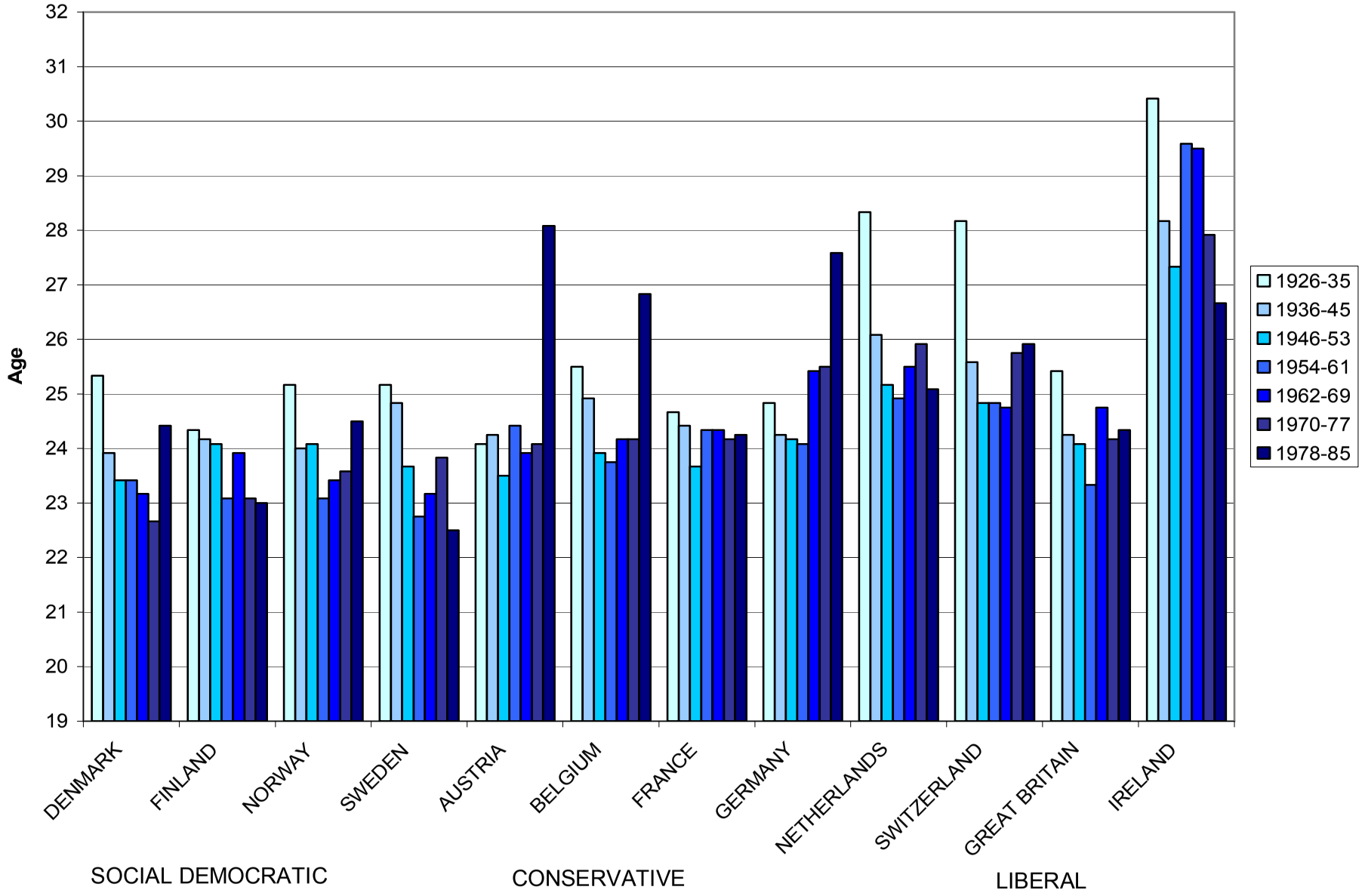
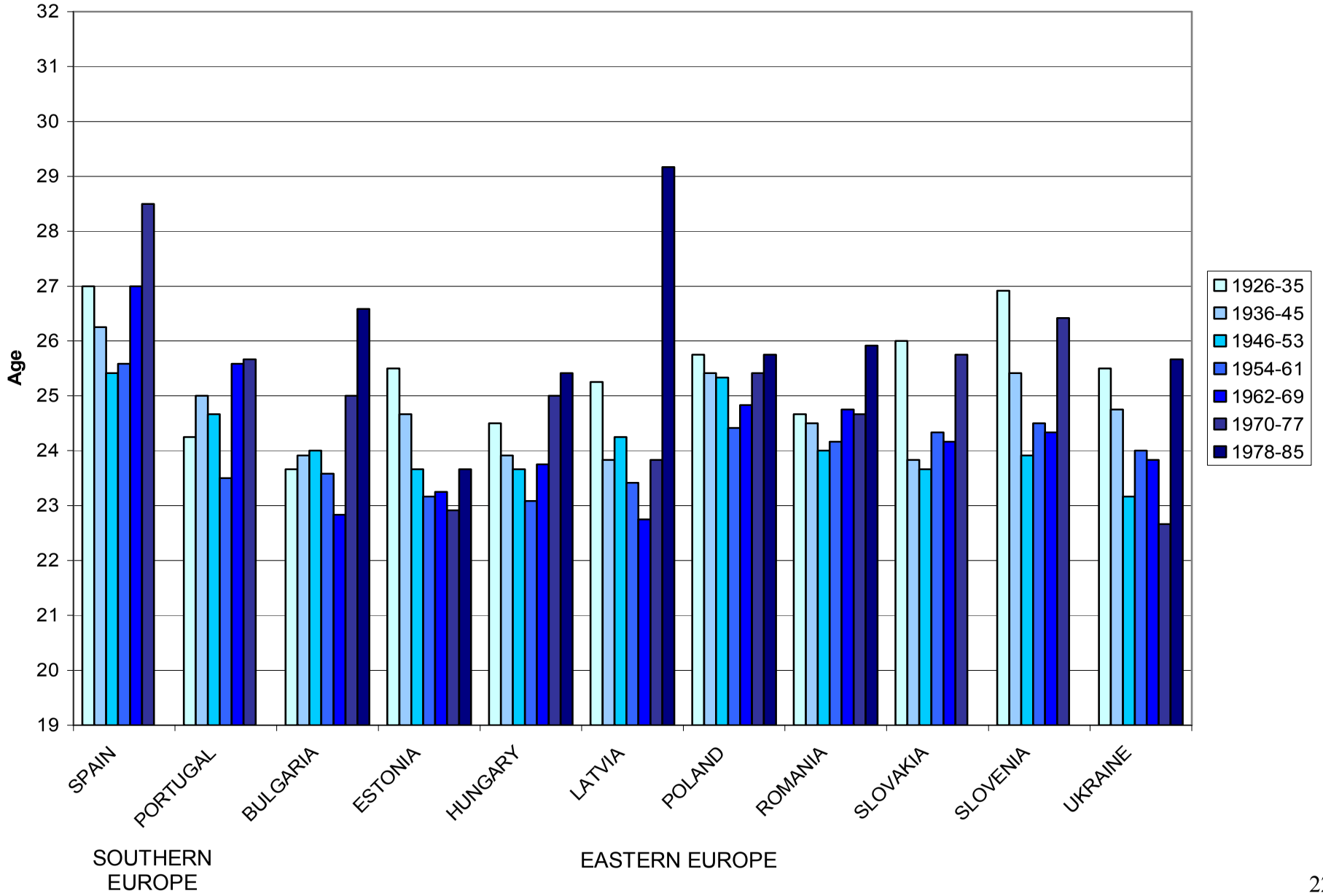


Figure 12 Age at entry into first union among men, by birth cohorts (in years): Southern and Eastern European countries



4.3.1 THE POSTPONEMENT OF MARRIAGE

Changes in the timing of the first marriage are presented in Figures from 13 to 16. It is possible to notice that the median age varies substantially across Europe: there are many countries in which half of all young adults have not even married at the age of 28, while half of all women in Ukraine married before the age of 24. We have data on the median age concerning the youngest cohort (1978-85) only for few countries, most of them belonging to Eastern Europe. This means that a large postponement in the entry into the first marriage is taking place.

The common trend across Europe presents a decrease in the median age followed by a strong increase. What varies markedly is the period in which this upward movement begins: for Northern and Western Europe it happens with the 1946-53 birth cohort, while in Southern and Eastern Europe we have to wait a bit longer, with those born between 1954 and 1961 or between 1962 and 1969.

As far as the oldest cohorts are concerned the median age of the first marriage coincides with the median age at entry into the first union. This is true especially for women, meaning that they entered their first union by marriage.

Looking at Figure 13, we see that in Scandinavian countries, women belonging to the first three cohorts under analysis experience this event between 22 and 23 years of age (Sweden somewhat later, between 23 and 24). Men present the same situation, but with a 2 years delay. For the following cohorts the magnitude of the rise is significant: median age ranges between 25 and 30 (31 in Sweden) and between 26 and 34 (37 in Sweden), for females and males respectively.

The picture is not particularly different in the Conservative Europe, given that postponement is clearly visible in each country although with a lower gap relative to previous cohorts for countries like Belgium and Switzerland (only women). The median age for most recent cohorts is to some extent lower with respect to Social Democratic countries and it is even lower in East Europe.

The median age in Spain and Portugal is higher if we look at old cohorts, but postponement took place more gradually and with a less abrupt increase. Notwithstanding the 1970-77 cohort enters the first marriage at 29.4 and 33.4 years of age in Spain, and at 25.1 and 29.5 in Portugal, for women and men respectively. These values are not so far from those observed in Northern Europe.

The lowest age at entry into marriage in the past and even today can be found in Eastern countries, where individuals marry normally 2 to 3 years earlier than in Southern Europe. For some of them postponement has not yet started, like data for males in Ukraine suggest, or it is perceptible only in median age of the youngest cohort.

As for timing concerning first union, also in this case men are to some extent older than women. What is important is that most recent cohorts show a median age at first marriage on average 6 years higher than that at entry into the first union. This not only means that a postponement is taking place, but also that a large fraction of individuals prefer to cohabit with a partner for the whole life, rather than marrying, foregoing completely a phase of the transition.

Figure 13 Age at entry into first marriage among women, by birth cohorts (in years): Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

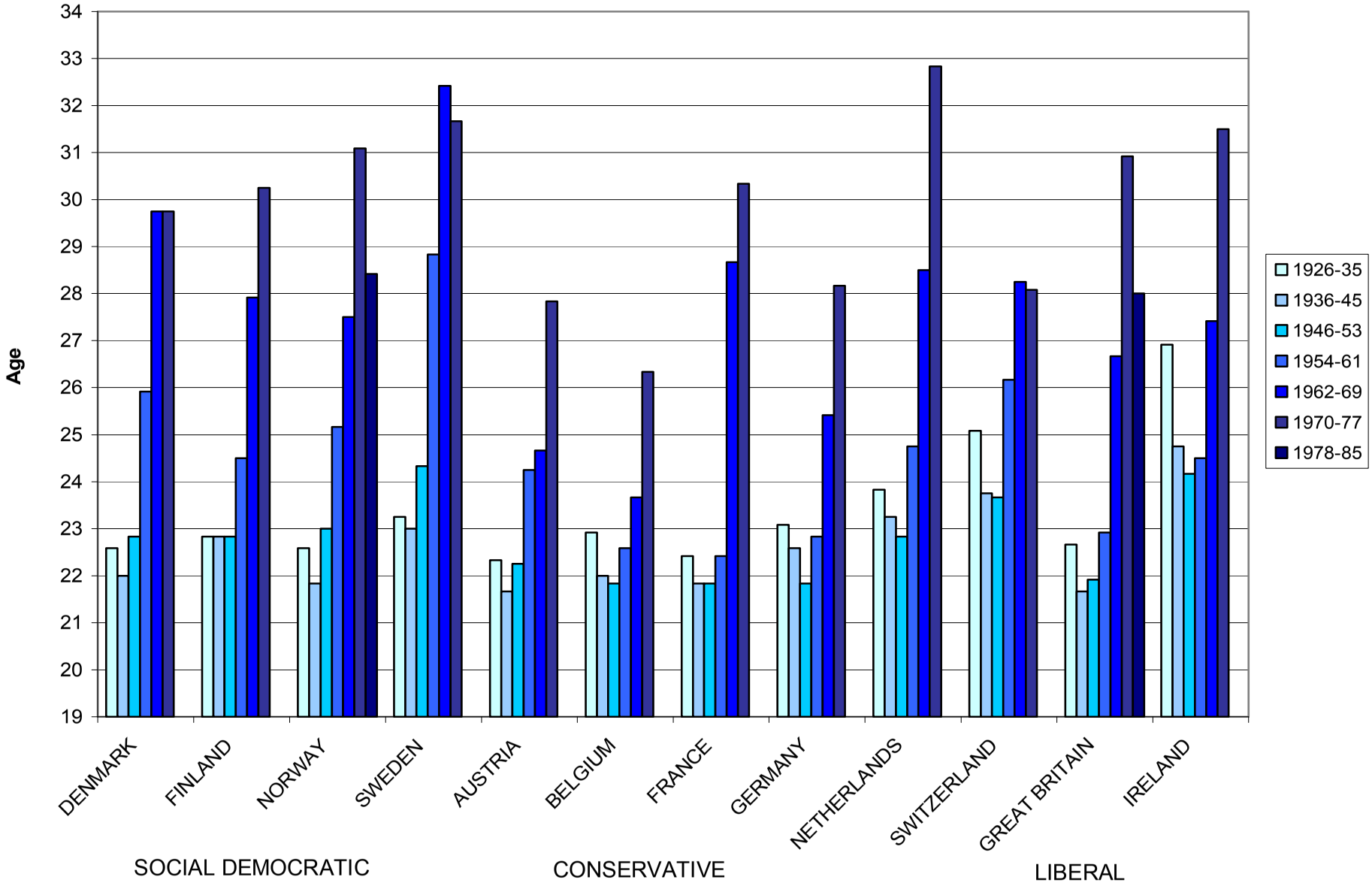


Figure 14 Age at entry into first marriage among women, by birth cohorts (in years): Southern and Eastern European countries

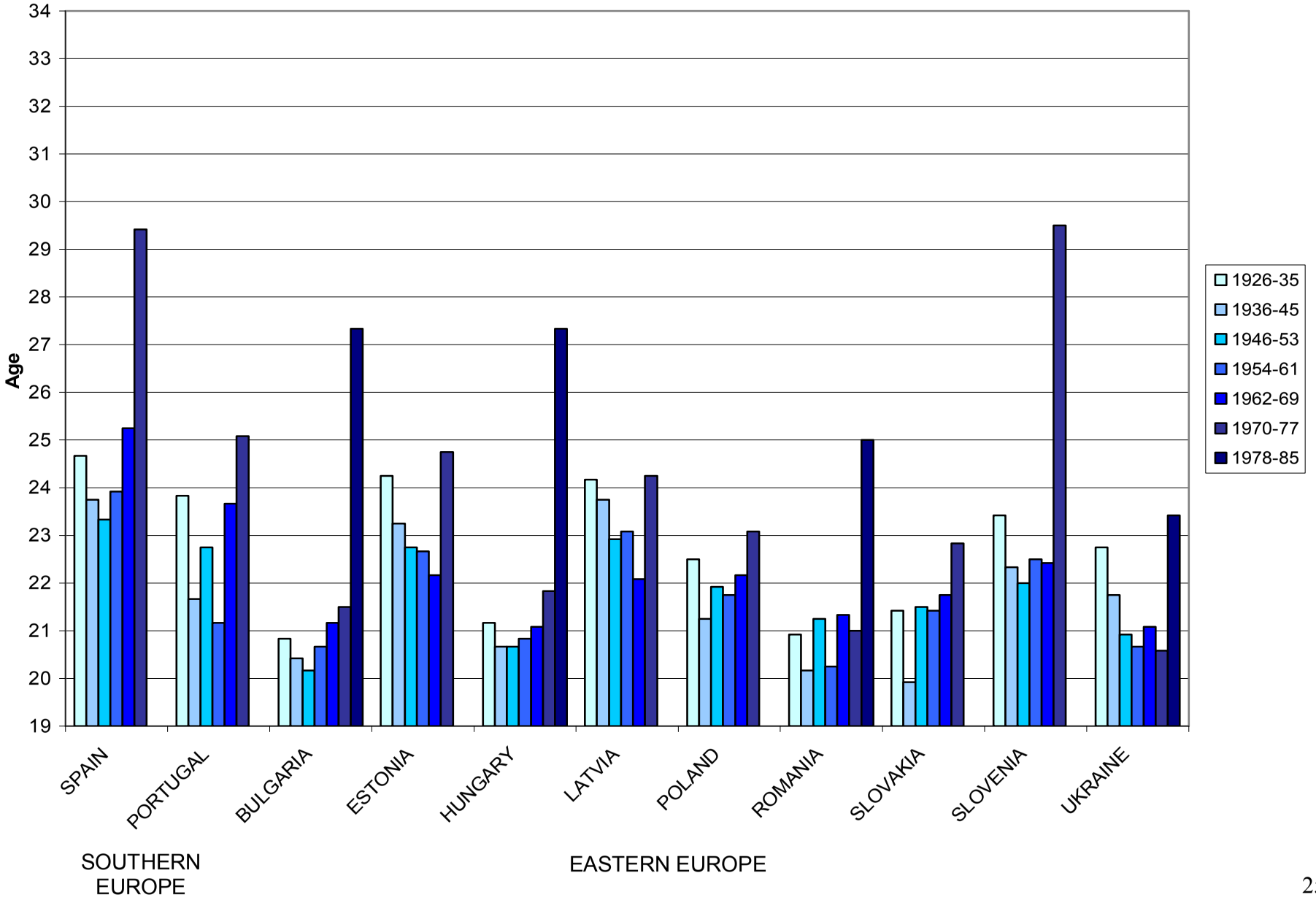


Figure 15 Age at entry into first marriage among men, by birth cohorts (in years): Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

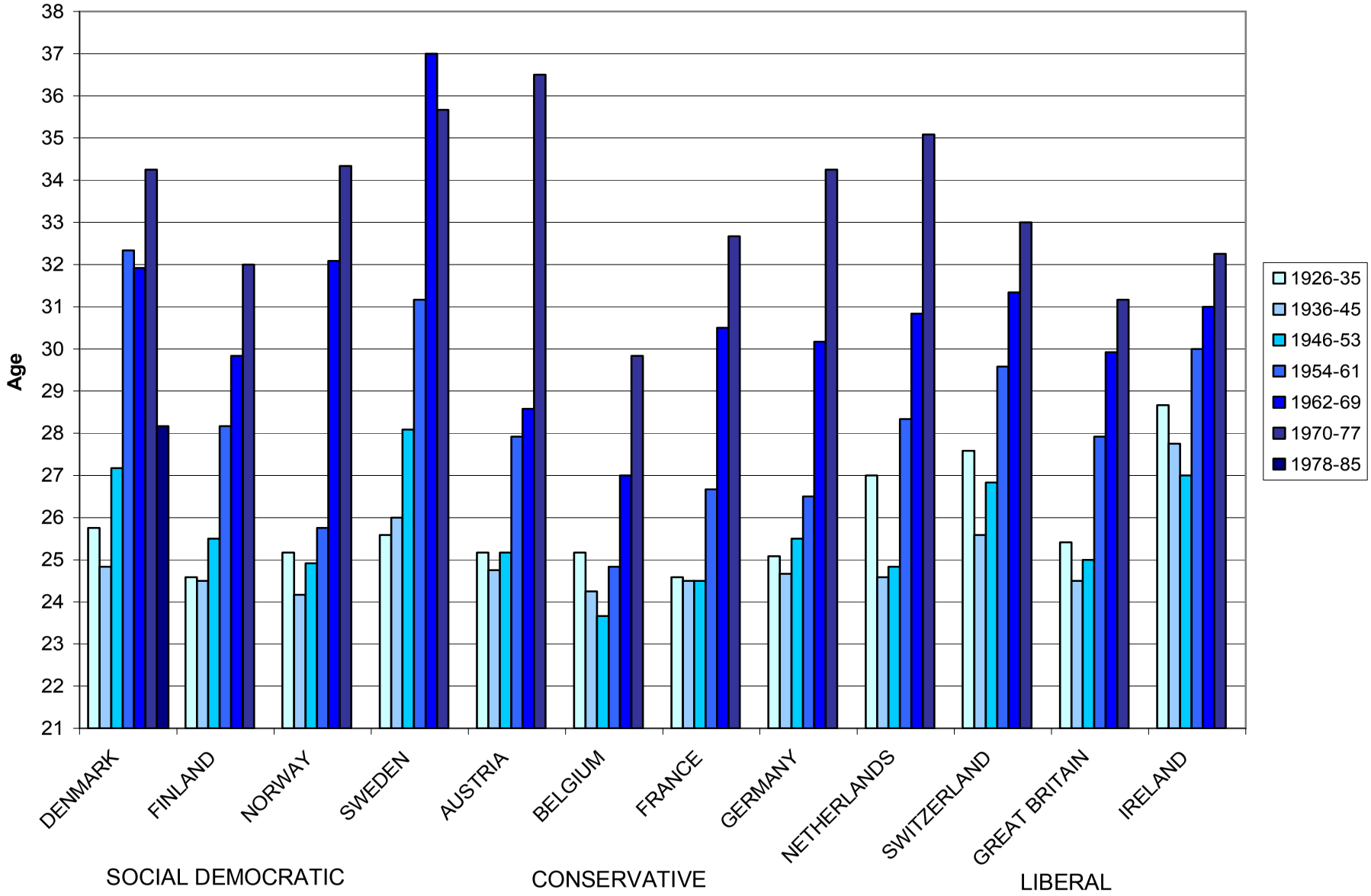
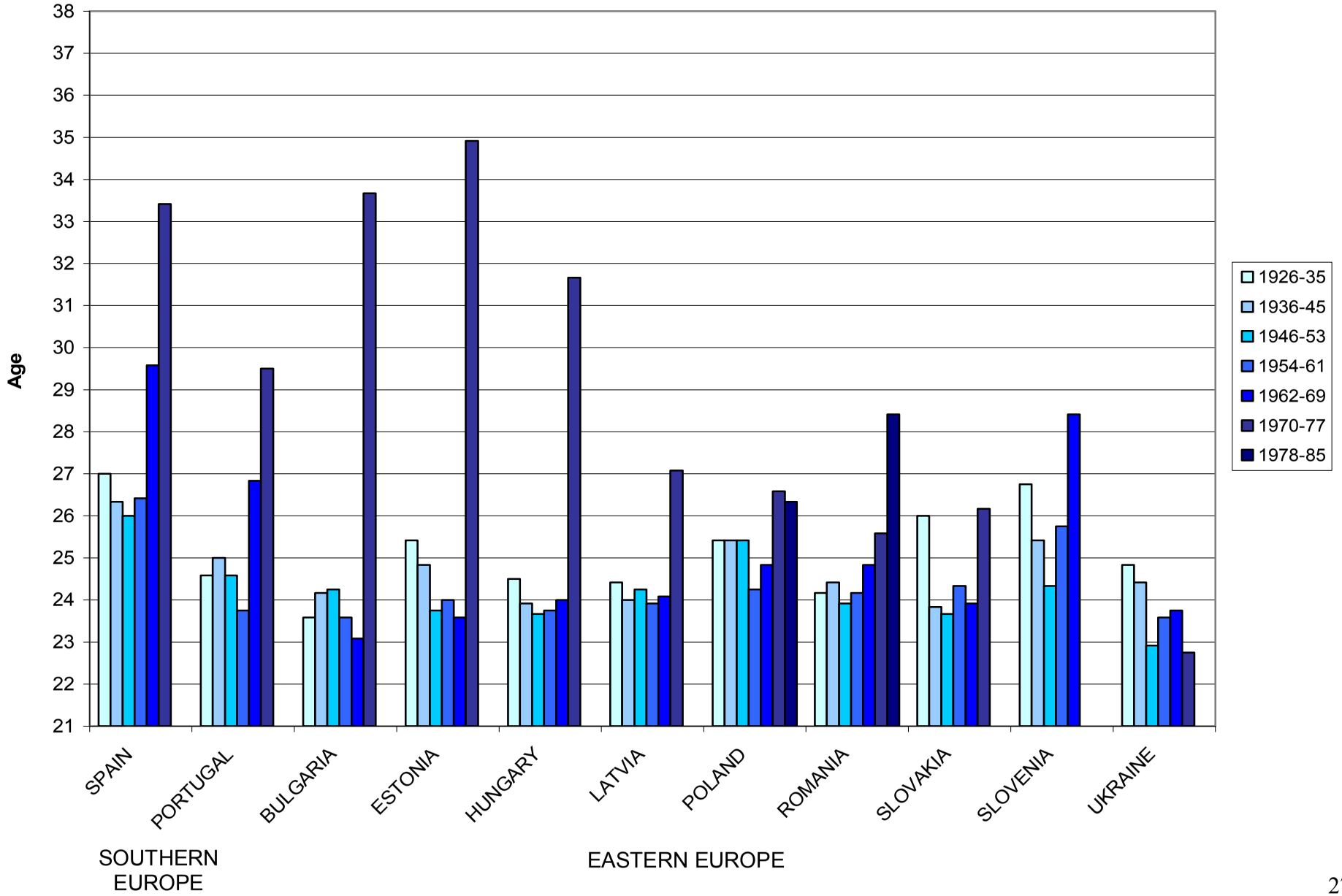


Figure 16 Age at entry into first marriage among men, by birth cohorts (in years): Southern and Eastern European countries



4.4 A LAST TRANSITION TOWARD ADULTHOOD: ENTRY INTO PARENTHOOD

As for entry into first marriage, large changes characterize timing of entry into parenthood in the twentieth century. Information is presented in Figures from 17 to 20. Also in this case we observe a common feature throughout Europe, given that there is an initial decline in the median age, followed by a significant rise.
Among females, we lack data about the youngest cohort in many countries and among males, only in Belgium and Denmark half of them entered into fatherhood at the age of 28.
The large postponement, at its very beginning in Eastern Europe, in most countries takes place simultaneously with the rise of the median age at entry into marriage. This means that changes in fertility behavior occur together with changes in marriage attitudes. Increase in the age at entry into childbearing, however, started earlier relative to the increase in the median age at entry into first union, suggesting that postponement of marriage and parenthood precede postponement of co-residential union.
As far as women are concerned, the geographical pattern is relatively clear. In Social Democratic countries the oldest cohorts show a median age at entry into motherhood between 23 and 24 years. The median age is somewhat higher in Western Europe, where it ranges from 24.3 in Austria to 26.3 in Belgium and Switzerland.
The same is true for recent cohorts, even if the differences between Scandinavian and Conservative countries are narrower: Belgium, France and Germany present a median age at entry into motherhood between 27 and 29, exactly as Northern Europe does. Still in Netherlands and Switzerland women have a higher median age when they become mothers, between 29 and 30.
The maximum age for females among the oldest cohorts is recorded in Ireland, with 29.8. Apart from this, both Liberal countries resemble Western Europe situation and trend. The highest median age at entry into motherhood is found in Southern Europe, where for Spain data on the last cohort are missing and women born between 1970 and 1977 have their first child at 31.7 years of age.
In Eastern Europe, again, we observe a very heterogeneous situation. Median age is on average lower with respect to the rest of Europe, but there exist many differences among countries. In Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia women enter into motherhood between 22 and 23 years and their age stays fairly stable along the period under analysis (except for the last cohort, whit which the postponement begins). In Latvia and Estonia, on the contrary, there is large variation aver time, from the 26 years of age of the 1926-35 birth cohort to the 23 of the 1962-69 cohort.
Transition into fatherhood takes place, as for union and marriage, 2 to 4 years later than entry into motherhood. The situation concerning men, however, is less clear-cut and the geographical pattern is not so evident. Western countries are closer to Northern Europe, especially for old cohorts, but the postponement is more visible and important in the Conservative area. Median age at entry into fatherhood is not very different in Southern Europe, even though for Spanish men we do not have data relative to the 1970-77 birth cohort, meaning that postponement is extremely large.

Figure 17 Age at entry into motherhood, by birth cohorts (in years): Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

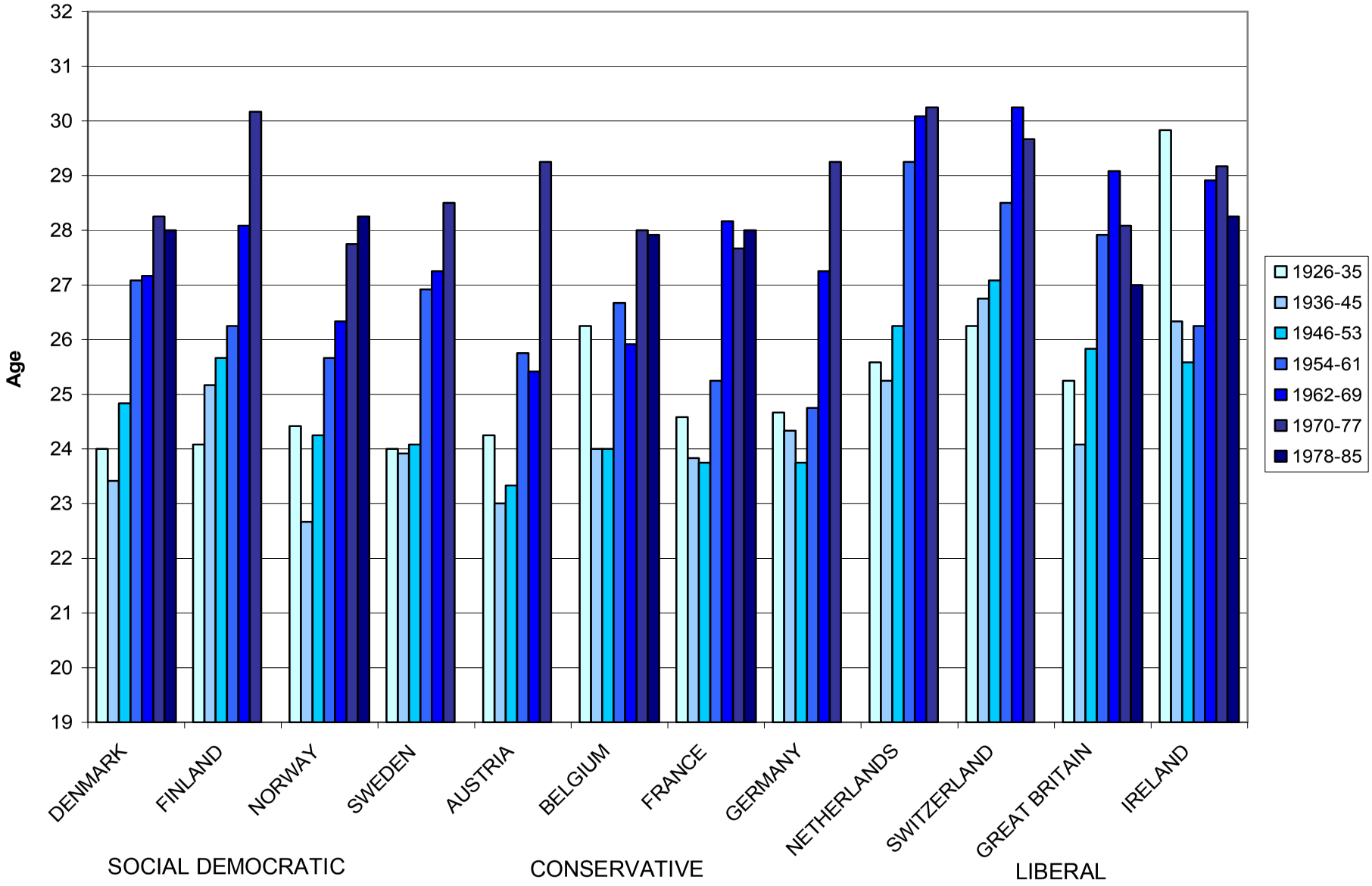


Figure 18 Age at entry into motherhood, by birth cohorts (in years): Southern and Eastern European countries

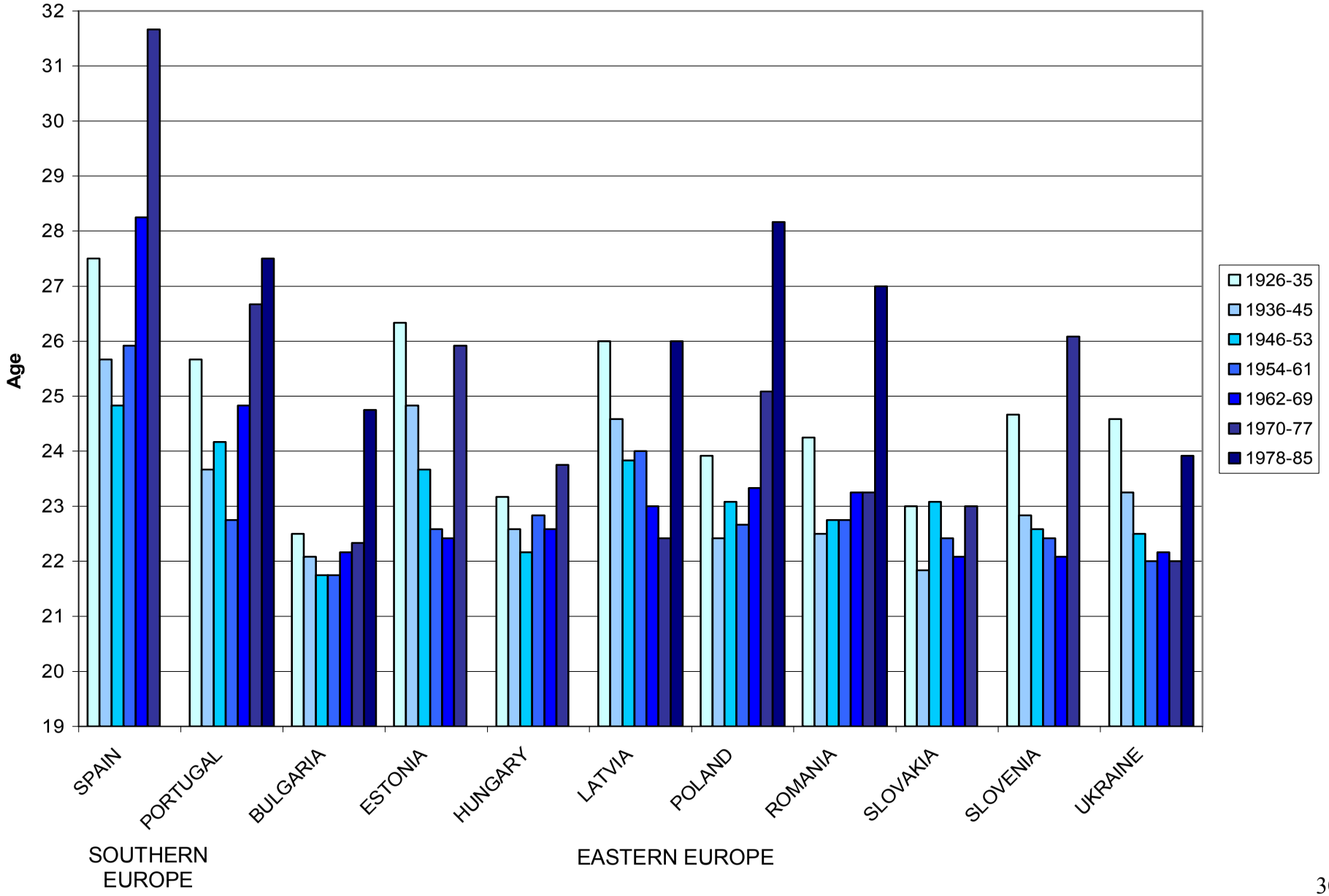


Figure 19 Age at entry into fatherhood, by birth cohorts (in years): Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

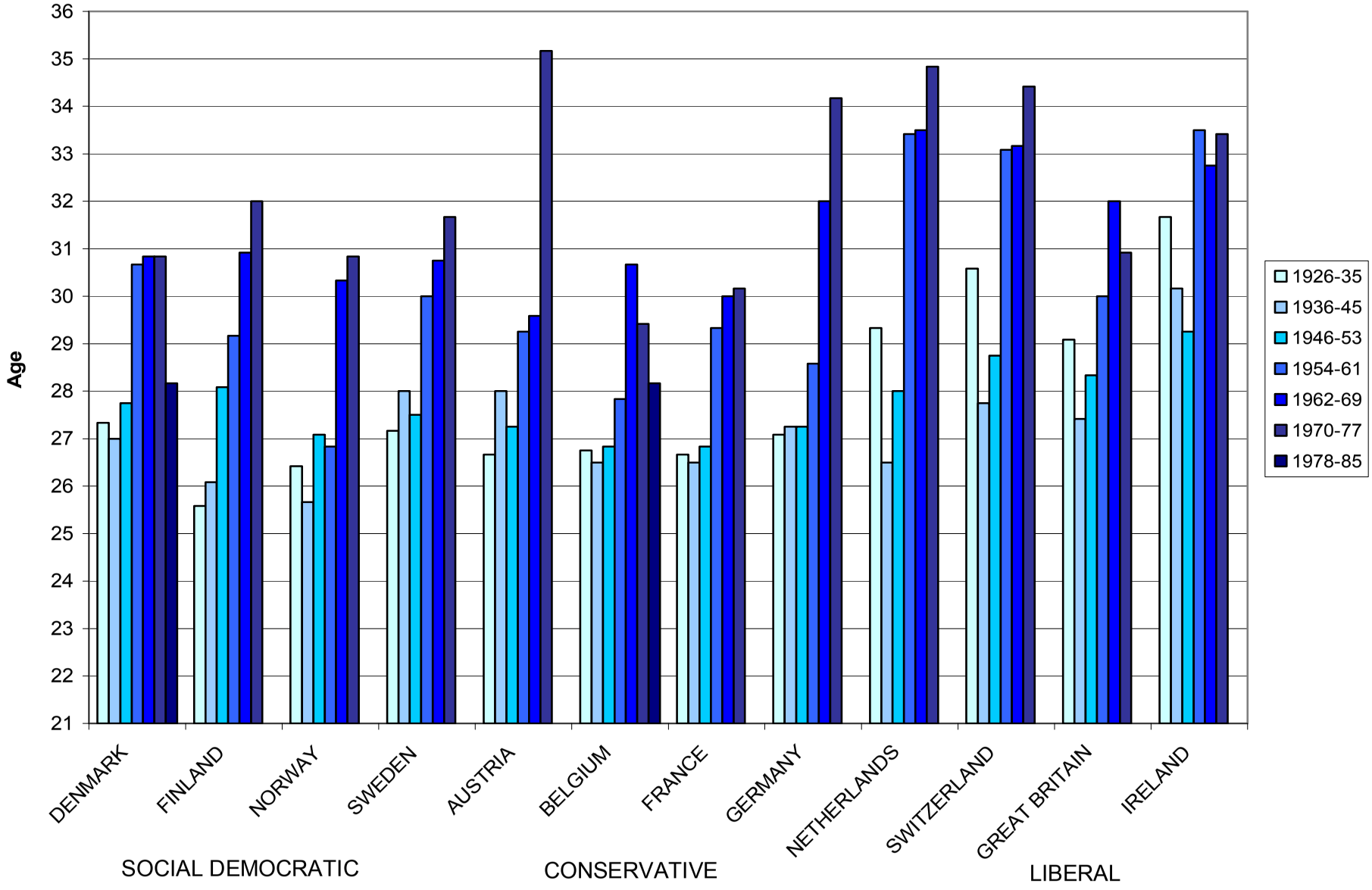
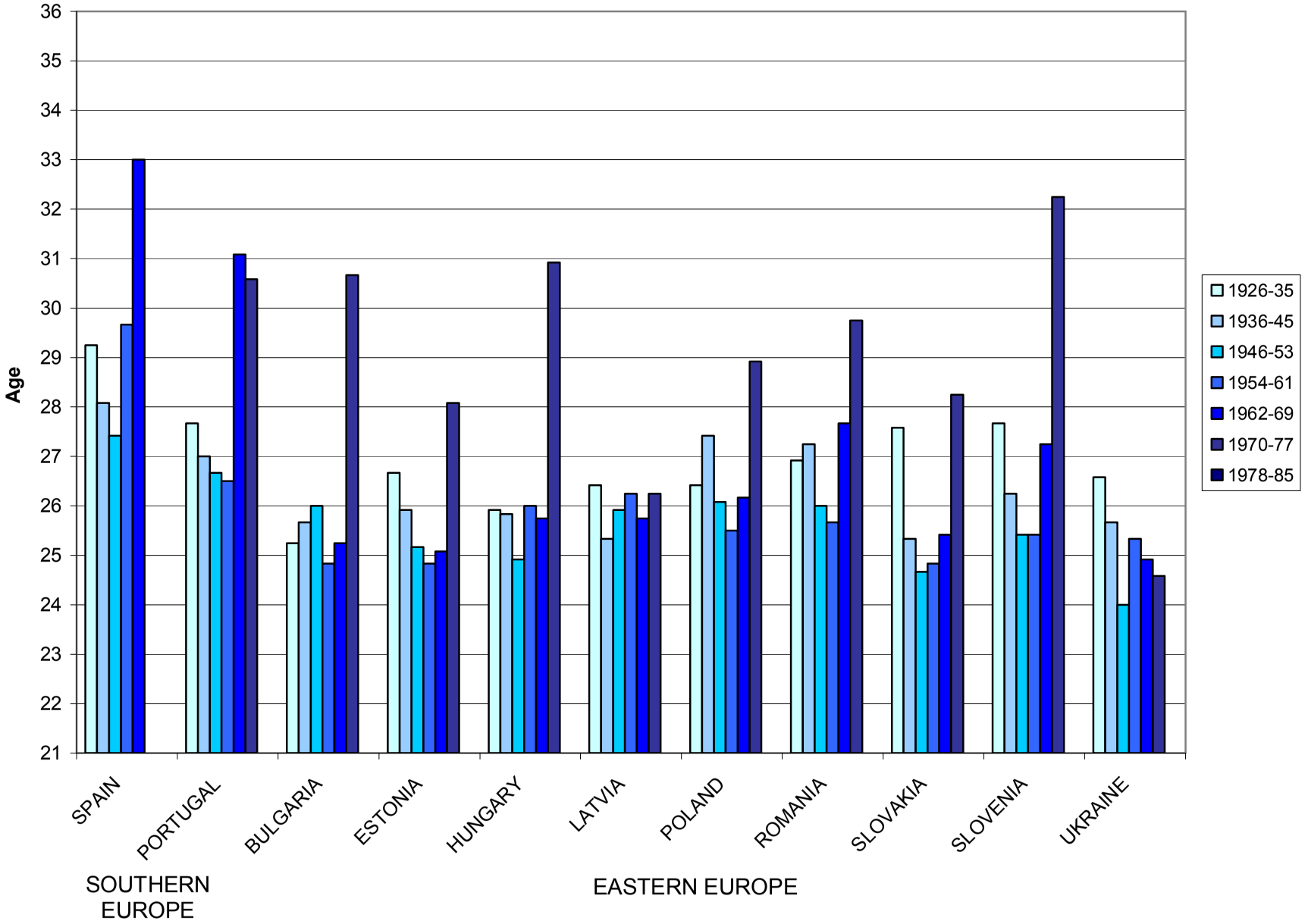


Figure 20 Age at entry into fatherhood, by birth cohorts (in years): Southern and Eastern European countries



Despite of the fact that Eastern Europe shows a huge degree of heterogeneity, we have to notice that here the age at entry into parenthood is the lowest in Europe and in some countries no clear signals of postponement have been recognized (as in Ukraine).
What is also interesting is to look at the duration of the period between entry into the first union and entry into parenthood. What we observe, comparing the available information, is that for the first two cohorts it takes on average 1 to 2 years to become parents after a co-residential union started. Among more recent cohorts the duration increases to 5 years for women and to 6 years for men. This is true for Western and Northern countries, while for Southern and Eastern Europe the period is not longer than 3 years. These results suggest that union formation and childbearing have become less connected throughout the twentieth century.

5. THE ORDER OF EVENTS

In this section I turn to the analysis concerning the sequence of events during the transition. The median age at which the single events take place may change over time and can differ among countries, but it is to some extent constrained into a time interval because of biological and social reasons. Hence, it cannot be a clear indicator of diversity and destandardization, which are assumed to be in place by several theoretical approaches. Temporal sequencing of events is a more accurate proxy of the degree of heterogeneity in patterns according to which the transition is experienced over the life course.
Only the graphs reporting the percentage of individuals who experience an event prior to another one are presented and, again, to facilitate the understanding countries are grouped into the welfare regime categories.

5.1 IS A JOB NECESSARY TO LEAVE PARENTAL HOME?

When individuals choose to leave the family of origin and start living on their own, several reasons can be found behind this decision. It is possible that people continue their education after leaving home and, in this case, the main explanation is leaving home in order to pursue further education. Obviously, this depends on individual and parental resources and mostly on institutional arrangements. We do not have information about exit from full-time education and we cannot assess if it happens before or after leaving parental home. It is possible, however, to have an insight on how and why the process of leaving home takes place looking at sequencing between entry into first job and leaving home.
Independent living, presumably, requires at least some individual resources in order to pay a possible rent or to face the daily expenses. This induces young adults to entry the labor market before to leave home, so as to have their own earned income. To test this hypothesis we look at the order with which the two events under analysis occur: entry into first job and leaving parental home.

Results are presented in Figures 21 and 22 for females and in Figures 23 and 24 for males. Among women of Social Democratic countries, the percentage that start working before to leave parental home drops over time, especially in Sweden (it goes from 60.5% for 1926-35 birth-cohort to 27.5% for 1970-77 cohort). The only exception to the decreasing trend is observed in Denmark, where 48% of women belonging to the youngest cohort entry the labor market before to start independent living. Among men the situation is in some way different, because only in Sweden the percentage decreases continuously since 1936-45 birth cohort, from 74% to 46%. Norway is characterized by alternating upward and downward movements, with the youngest cohort presenting a percentage of those who start working before to leave

10% lower with respect to the oldest cohort. In Denmark the percentage is stable between 57% and 62%, with two lower values for those born between 1962 and 1969 (48%) and between 1978 and 1985 (55%). Also in Finland there is not a great variation, the percentage ranging from 72% to 78% until 1970-77 birth cohort. The last two cohorts, however, show a lower percentage, around 60%.
The declining trend recorded for women and the lower percentage of the most recent cohorts among men suggest an increase in the participation to higher education, which induce young adults to move out from the parents' home and to start independent living also far away from home. This is especially true in Northern Europe, where generous state's support favors young people autonomy.
It is important to notice that the percentage of women who decide to start working before leaving parents is lower relative to men. This is true not only for Social Democratic countries, but also in the rest of Europe as it is observable from the graphs. This can be due to the fact that men may consider more important to have a stable source of income to start leaving away from parents and to the fact that they start their transition toward adulthood in the family domain much later compared to women.
The percentage of females working before leaving home is higher in Western Europe than in Northern countries. Also in this case we observe a declining trend, with the only exception of Switzerland where the percentage increases over time (even though not continuously). In Austria and Germany it reaches very high levels, 75.4% and 76.8% respectively.
Men belonging to Conservative countries show a more complicated situation, given that the percentage is not much higher than in Scandinavian countries and a clear trend cannot be identified. In some countries the percentage decreases (Germany), while in others it increases (Switzerland), but the prevailing trend is an oscillating one. The most recent cohorts, however, show very high values, such as 74.7% in Belgium and 84.2% in Switzerland, possibly due to a lower support of the state and so to the necessity of individual resources to start independent living.
The influence of the welfare regime is not so evident in the Liberal countries, as far as women are concerned: the trend is decreasing in Great Britain (from 65% to 48%), while increasing in Ireland (from 34% to 45%). However, females of the two countries are much more similar today than in the first half of twentieth century. Men in Great Britain still show a decreasing percentage, starting from the 1946-53 birth cohort, while Irish are relatively stable around 54%.
In Southern Europe, there is a significant rise of the percentage of women who decide to start working before to leave their family of origin: in Spain it increases from 36% to 76% and in Portugal from 39% to 64%. Hence, the two countries are reaching very high levels over time, but the less generous benefits characterizing their welfare regime did not cause higher percentages with respect to Conservative countries during the twentieth century. For men, however, percentages are somewhat higher than in the rest of Europe. 81% of Spanish men belonging to the youngest cohort entry the labor market before to leave home. The same happens for 78% of those of the oldest cohort. Variation over time is rather small and only for the 1954-61 and 1962-69 birth cohorts percentage is lower, around 73%-74%.

Figure 21 % of young women who entry first job before to leave parental home, by birth cohorts: Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

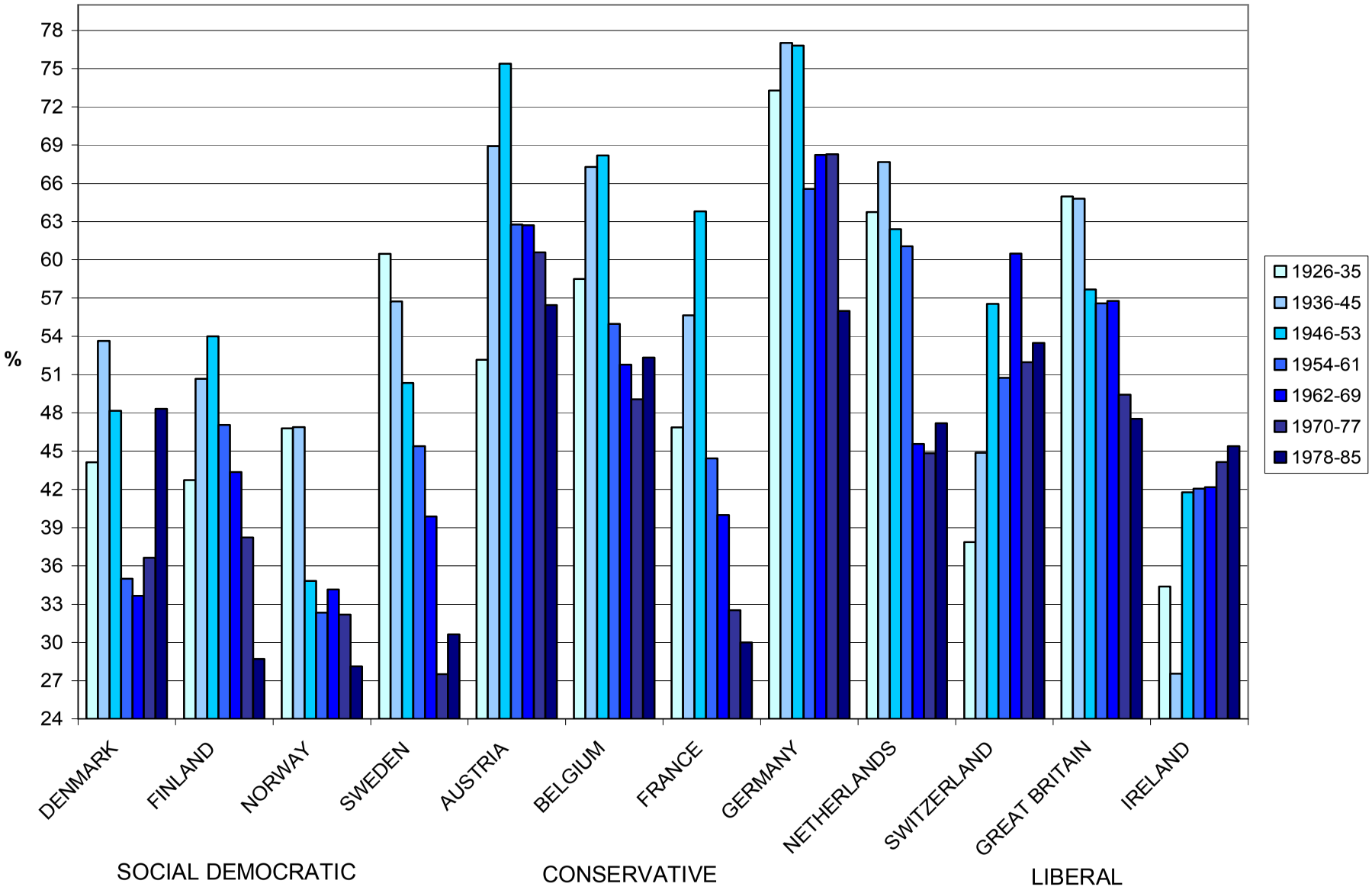


Figure 22 % of young women who entry first job before to leave parental home, by birth cohorts: Southern and Eastern European countries

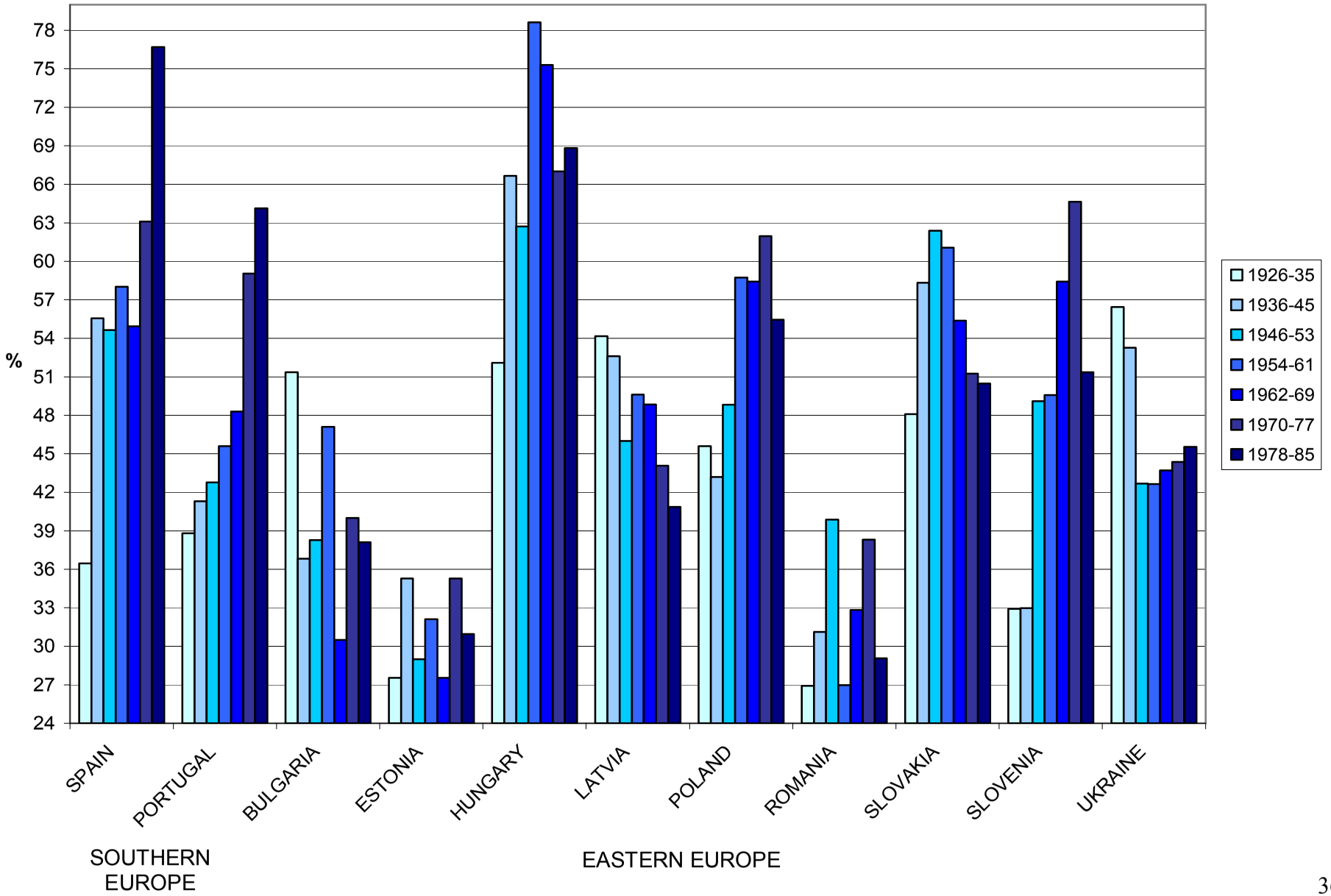


Figure 23 % of young men who entry first job before to leave parental home, by birth cohorts: Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

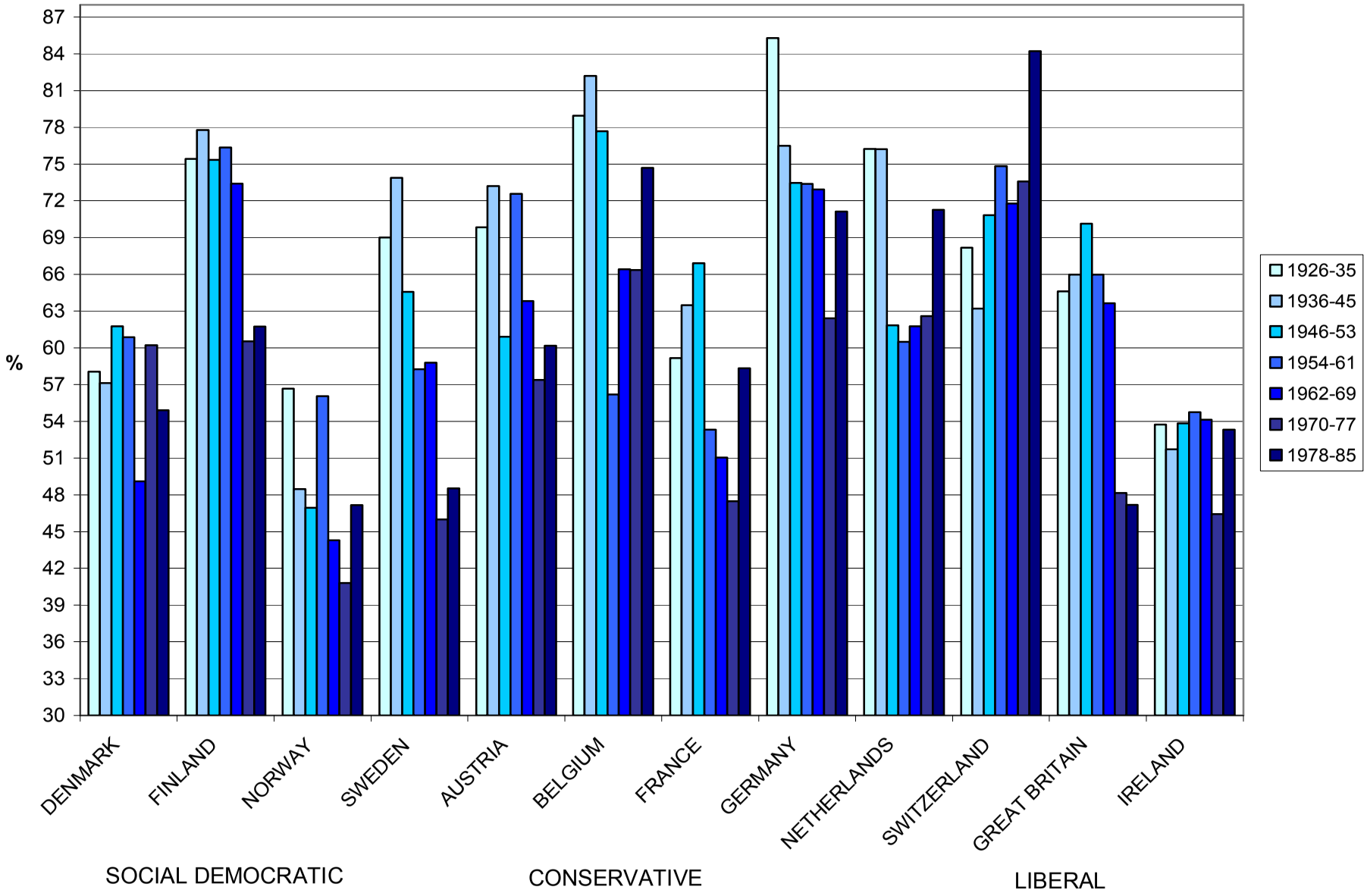
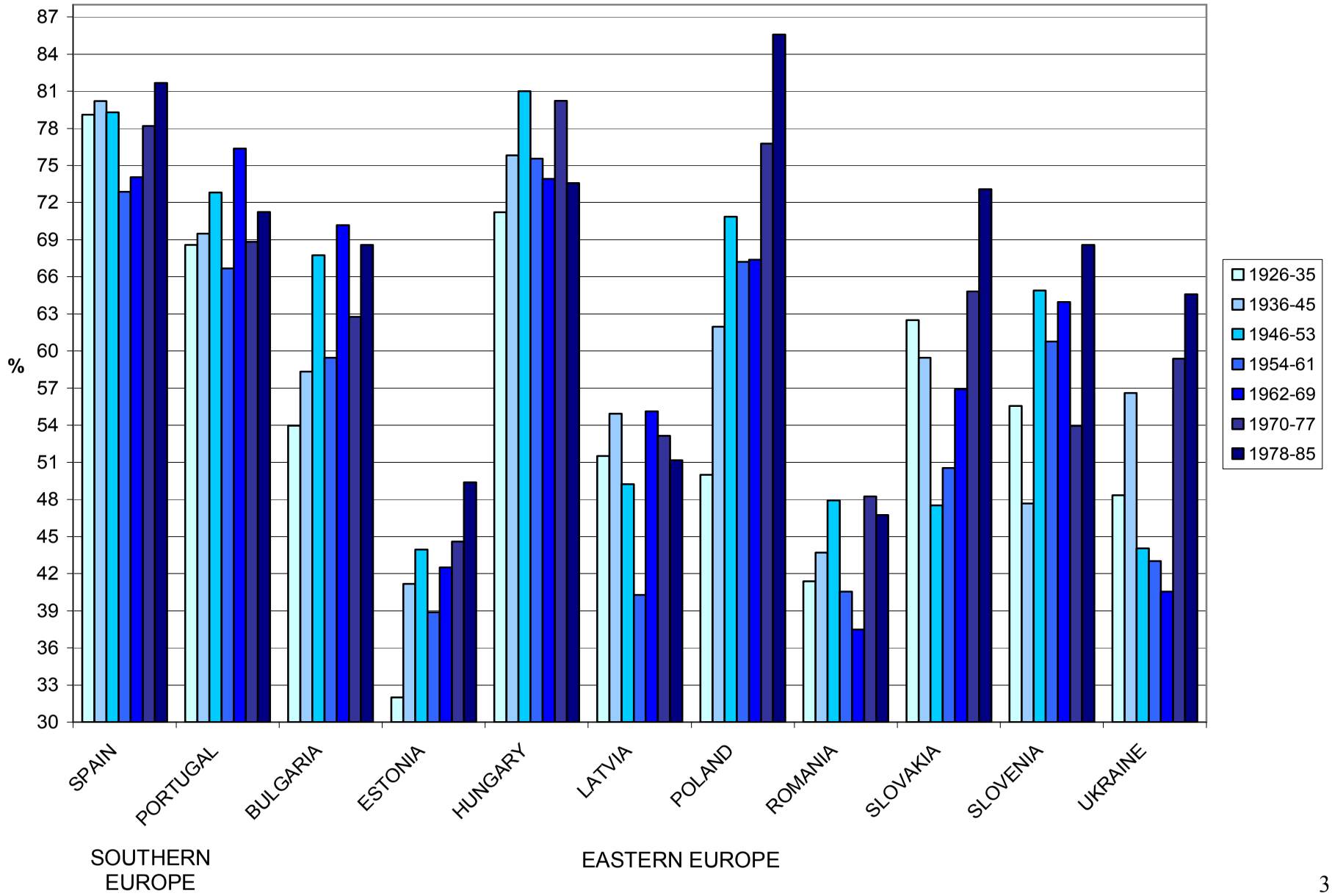


Figure 24 % of young men who entry first job before to leave parental home, by birth cohorts: Southern and Eastern European countries



Also in Portugal men's behavior is steady throughout twentieth century, given that percentage ranges from 69% to 72% and only for those born between 1962 and 1969 it is slightly higher (76.4%).
As we observed for timing, in Eastern Europe trend of those who decide to have their own income to start independent living is not standardized. In Estonia, Bulgaria and Romania the percentage is very low during the whole period considered, also below 30%. On the contrary, in Hungary it is extremely high, also above that recorded in Southern Europe. This is true for both males and females, with the only difference that men show always higher percentages than women.

5.2 RESIDENTIAL AUTONOMY AND PARTNERSHIP: WHICH CONNECTION?

Leaving parental home and entry into first union cannot be considered totally independent decisions. There are countries where a high share of individuals leave home in order to marry the partner or to start a cohabitation, because mainly of social and cultural reasons (Southern European countries in particular). At the same time there are regions (Scandinavian countries) in which most of young adults decide to experience a period outside the family of origin, living independently and before forming a new family. To inspect more deeply the relationship existing between the two events in Figures from 25 to 28, information about the percentage of people leaving home before union -irrespective of whether it is marital or consensual- is presented.
Data on Social Democratic countries confirm the belief that a very high percentage of individuals leave home before to start a union. Values are already especially high among old cohorts and we do not observe large variation across the century. Women show percentages ranging between 64% and 69%, with a small decline for those born between 1954 and 1969 (59%-64%). Norwegian females have two vertical peaks, with values higher than 80% (80.4 for 1946-53 birth cohort and 82.1 for 1978-85 birth cohort). Among males in Northern Europe percentages are even higher, with the only exception of Finland, where the picture is very close to the women's one. The highest level is achieved in Denmark and Norway in the old cohorts, respectively with 79.4% and 84.7% males leaving parental home before entry a union. The trend over time, however, is not very simple and there is a high degree of destandardization in residential autonomy and partnership behavior. The emergence of new living arrangements, like the diffusion of co-residential union, can be considered as one of the elements characterizing the Second Demographic Transition theory. This process results from a general trend toward heterogeneous experiences in individual life courses; changes in the economic structure and cultural shifts trigger individualization in the demographic behavior, which implies flexibility in life trajectories and longer periods spent in states such as single person or unmarried cohabitation (Billari, Philipov, Baizàn, 2001).
This individualization process is less evident in Conservative countries where percentage of people leaving home without entering a union are considerably lower than in Northern Europe. Still we observe an increasing trend for women, except for Austria and Switzerland. The rise is significant for Belgium, which shows an increase from 19% to 47%. This means that leaving parental home is less connected to partnership today than in the 1940's: reasons to leave are not marriage or cohabitation, but being independent from the family of origin.
Among men this destandardization development is weaker and the gap between the oldest and the youngest cohorts is only about 10%. Belgian males, however, present an increase from 29% to 58%. Men commonly show higher percentages with respect to women and the difference is sometimes also larger than 30%, suggesting that for them the need of independence is somehow stronger.

Liberal countries are in a situation that resembles closely that of Western Europe: percentage of women leaving before union grows during the century and the youngest cohort has a percentage above 60%; for men there are more frequent upward and downward oscillations.
Confirming previous studies, the lowest percentages in Europe are recorded among Southern countries. Less than 25% of women belonging to the oldest cohort decide to leave home before union and less than 35% in the most recent cohorts. Only the youngest cohort in Spain shows a significant increase to 46%. Overall the trend is increasing, but the process is extremely slow. Higher values are found among men, always above 32%, but the trend reflects that of females especially for Spain. In the youngest cohort 69.4% and 65% of Spanish and Portuguese men, respectively, leave home before starting a union.
These are countries where typically people start living outside the family of origin only when they enter marriage or consensual union. As the data suggest, this phenomenon is becoming less common over time.
Finally, we look at Eastern Europe. Some of them follow Southern European trend, like Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. On the other hand, there are countries very distant from Spain and Portugal: in Estonia the lowest percentage is 47% for women and 58% for men, and in the youngest cohort 73% of women and 69.2% of men leave home before union.
What may seem surprising is that in some countries, like Latvia, Poland and Ukraine, the percentage is decreasing over time, especially for males. This means that there are more people now than in the past who decide to leave home to enter into marriage or union.

In many European countries, for those belonging to the oldest cohorts, there is a significant percentage of individuals who enter the first union while still in the parental home: they start cohabiting together in their parents' dwelling. This is a distinguishing characteristic for Southern and Eastern Europe, where this percentage can be very high. It can reach 30% among women in Poland (1970-77 birth cohort) , 59% among men in Bulgaria (1962-69 birth cohort). It is interesting to note that also in some Western or Northern countries this feature is not negligible: figures are above 10% in Finland, Germany and Austria.

Figure 25 % of young women who leave parental home before to entry into first union, by birth cohorts: Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

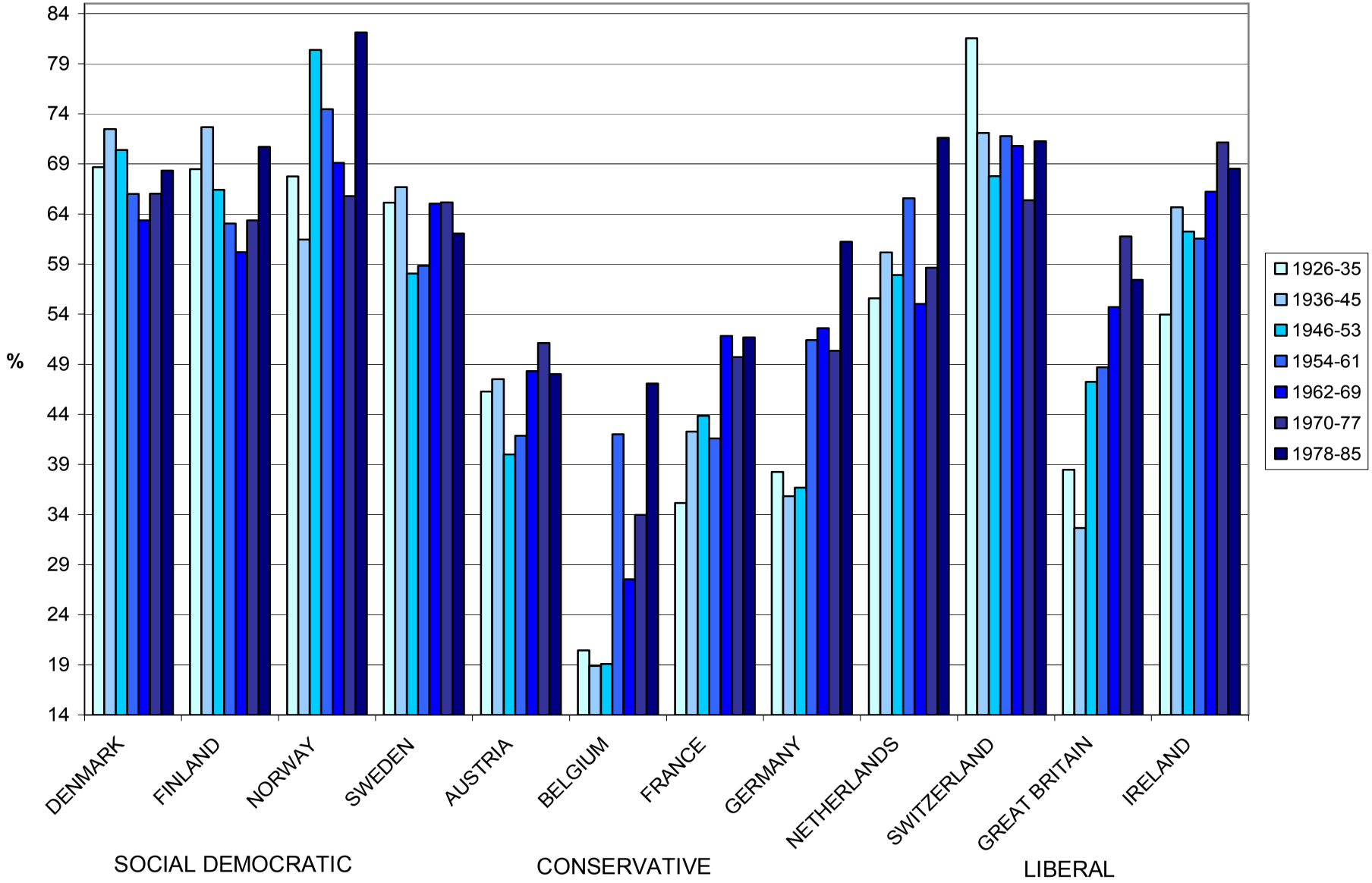


Figure 26 % of young women who leave parental home before to entry into first union, by birth cohorts: Southern and Eastern European countries

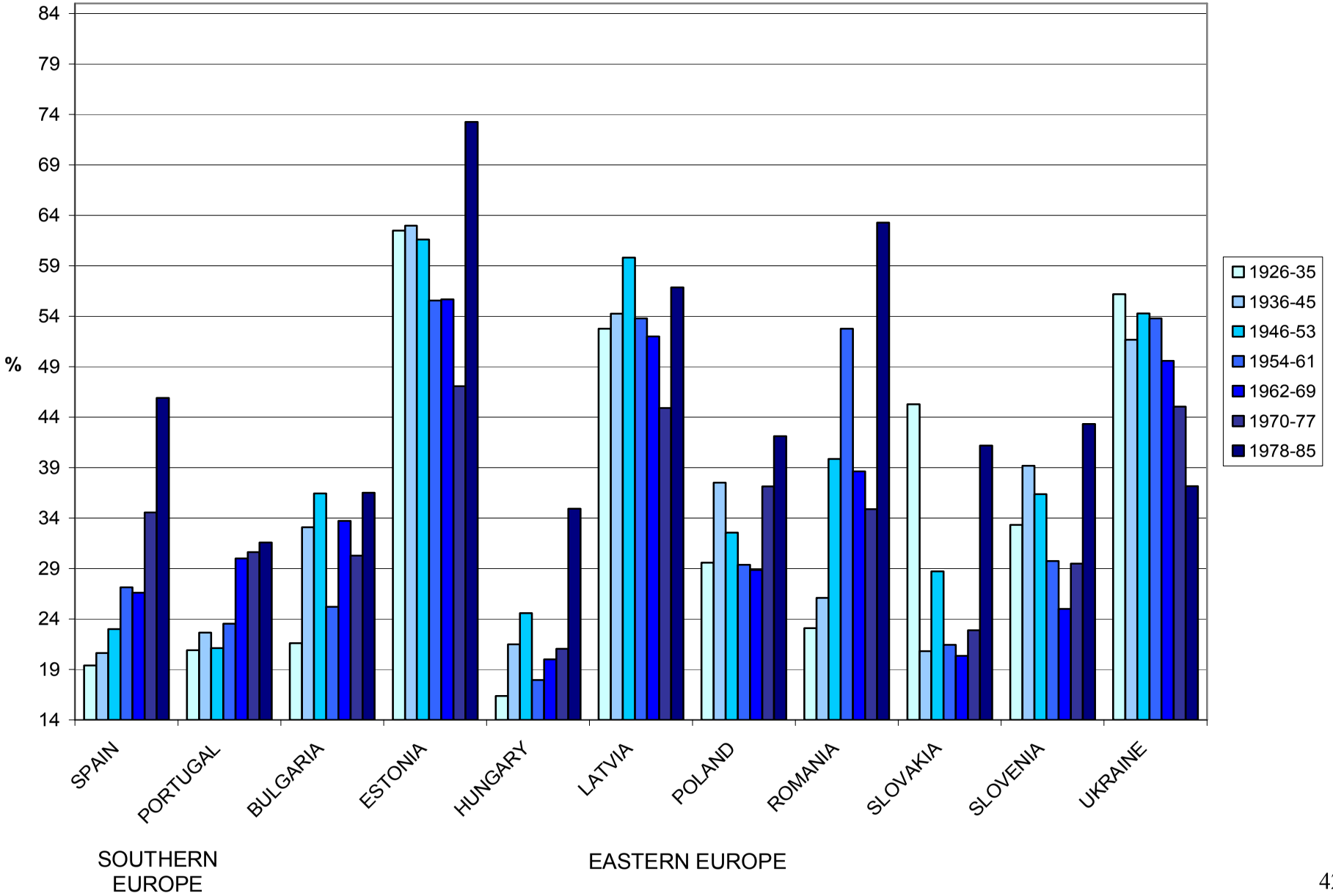


Figure 27 % of young men who leave parental home before to entry into first union, by birth cohorts: Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

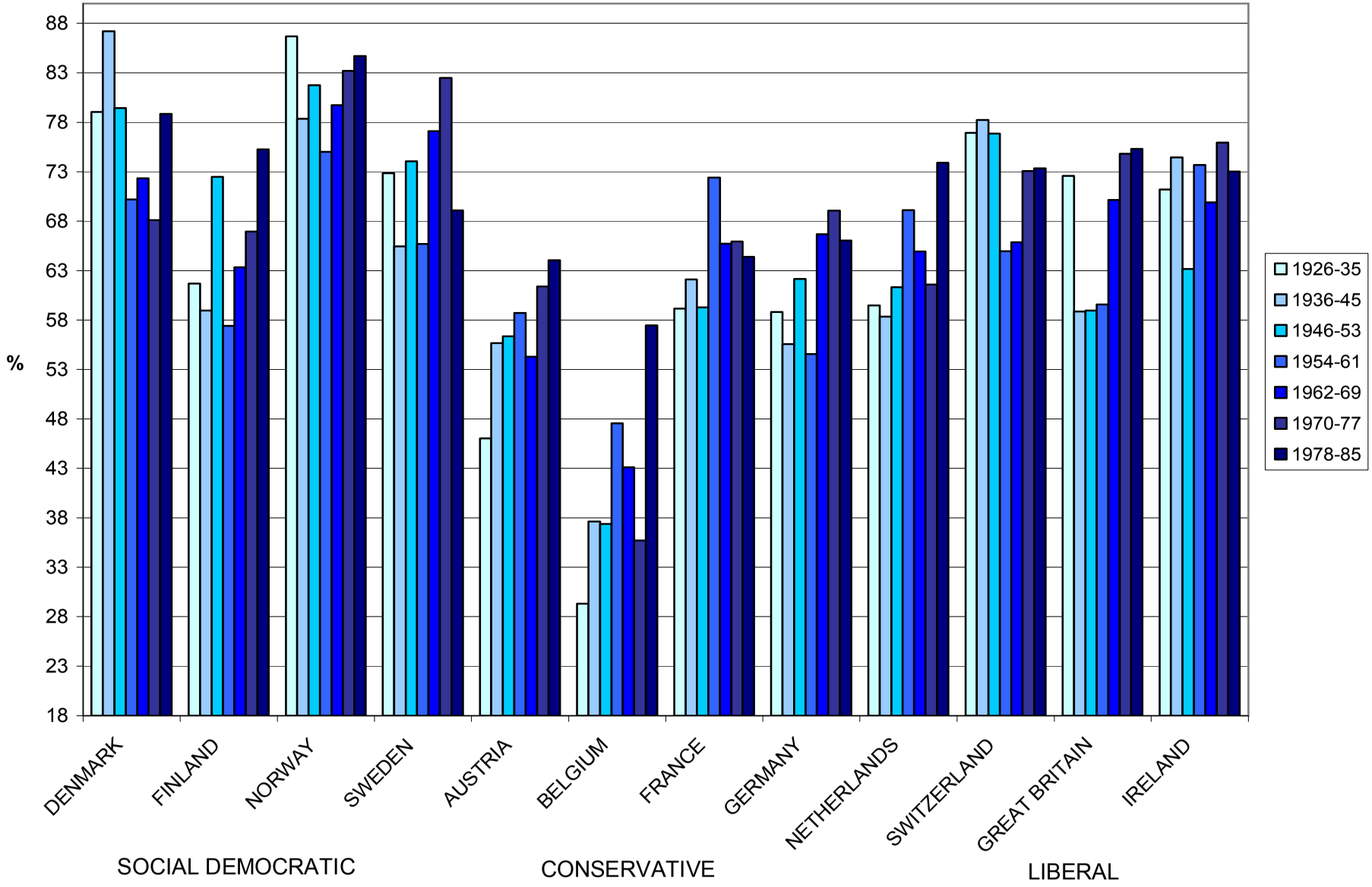
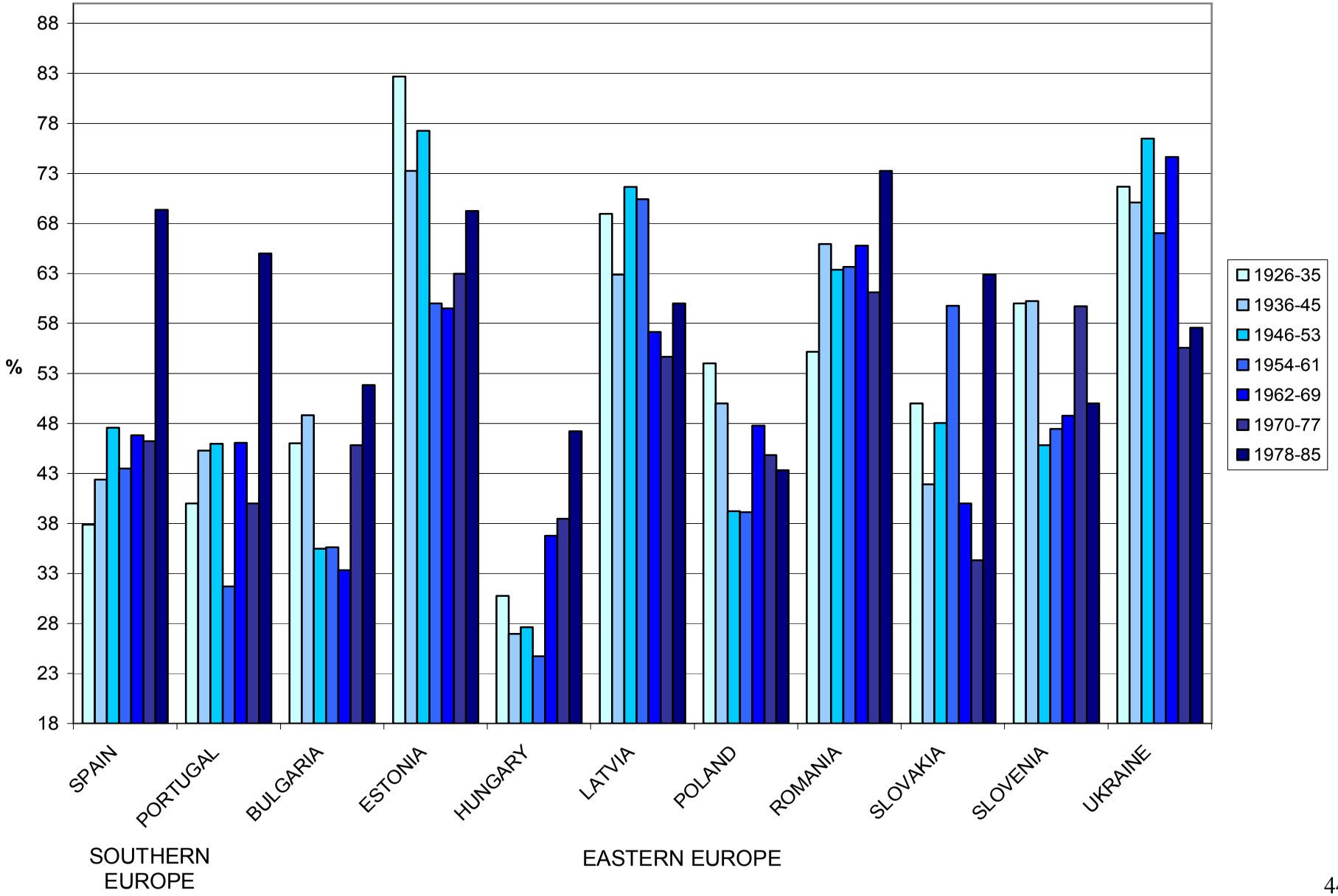


Figure 28 % of young men who leave parental home before to entry into first union, by birth cohorts: Southern and Eastern European countries



5.3 IS COHABITATION REPLACING MARRIAGE?

The hypothesis that cohabitation has become very common since the 1960's is strongly confirmed by ESS data. In each of the 23 considered countries the trend has a positive slope. The same situation is recognized for both men and women; hence data, presented graphically in Figures 29-32, are commented without making gender distinction. The only interesting feature to notice is that, commonly, the percentage of men starting a co-residential union before marriage is higher than that shown by women. The distance between them varies strongly across countries and cohorts, ranging from 0.2% to 25.8%. Some exceptions are represented by Sweden and Netherlands, where most cohorts have a higher percentage for women. In Eastern Europe there is larger variability, with some cohorts showing higher percentage among women and some in the opposite situation.

Social Democratic countries are those in which cohabitation extended first, given that they show the highest percentage for the oldest cohort of those entering first union before marriage (from 15% to 25%). This percentage increases over time, in particular starting from those born between 1946 and 1953; it reaches extremely high levels, over 72%, already for the 1962-69 birth cohort. This means that three people out of four in Scandinavian area experience a period of cohabitation preceding marriage.
In Western Europe the initial situation is fairly different: a very low percentage of people, below 10%, living the transition to adulthood in the late 1940s cohabit before marriage. The only exceptions are Austria and Germany, very close to Northern countries' levels. Nonetheless, the trend is increasing and the difference with Scandinavia is not disappeared, but narrowed considerably. If we look at most recent cohort we notice that there are Conservative countries that overcome Social Democratic ones: this happens for Austrian males with respect to Swedish, and for Austrian and French females with respect to Norwegian.
Liberal countries are characterized by extremely small percentages at the beginning of the century and they experience an increase over time, even if more slowly than in Northern and Western Europe (especially for men). The youngest cohort presents a fraction of individuals living a co-residential union before marriage between 81% and 96.6%.
In Southern Europe the percentage of cohabitation preceding marriage is even lower. Spanish women belonging to the oldest cohort record a percentage equal to 0%. Furthermore, in Portugal we observe lower values for the 1936-45 and 1946-53 birth cohorts with respect to the oldest one, and afterwards a subsequent rise as in the rest of Europe. This means that almost all individuals born in the first half of the twentieth century entered their first union by marriage, and that unmarried cohabitation was very uncommon among these cohorts. In the youngest cohort only 50% to 65% live with a partner without marrying for a certain period, except for Spanish men, reaching 82.4%.

Figure 29 % of young women who entry into the first union before marriage, by birth cohorts: Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

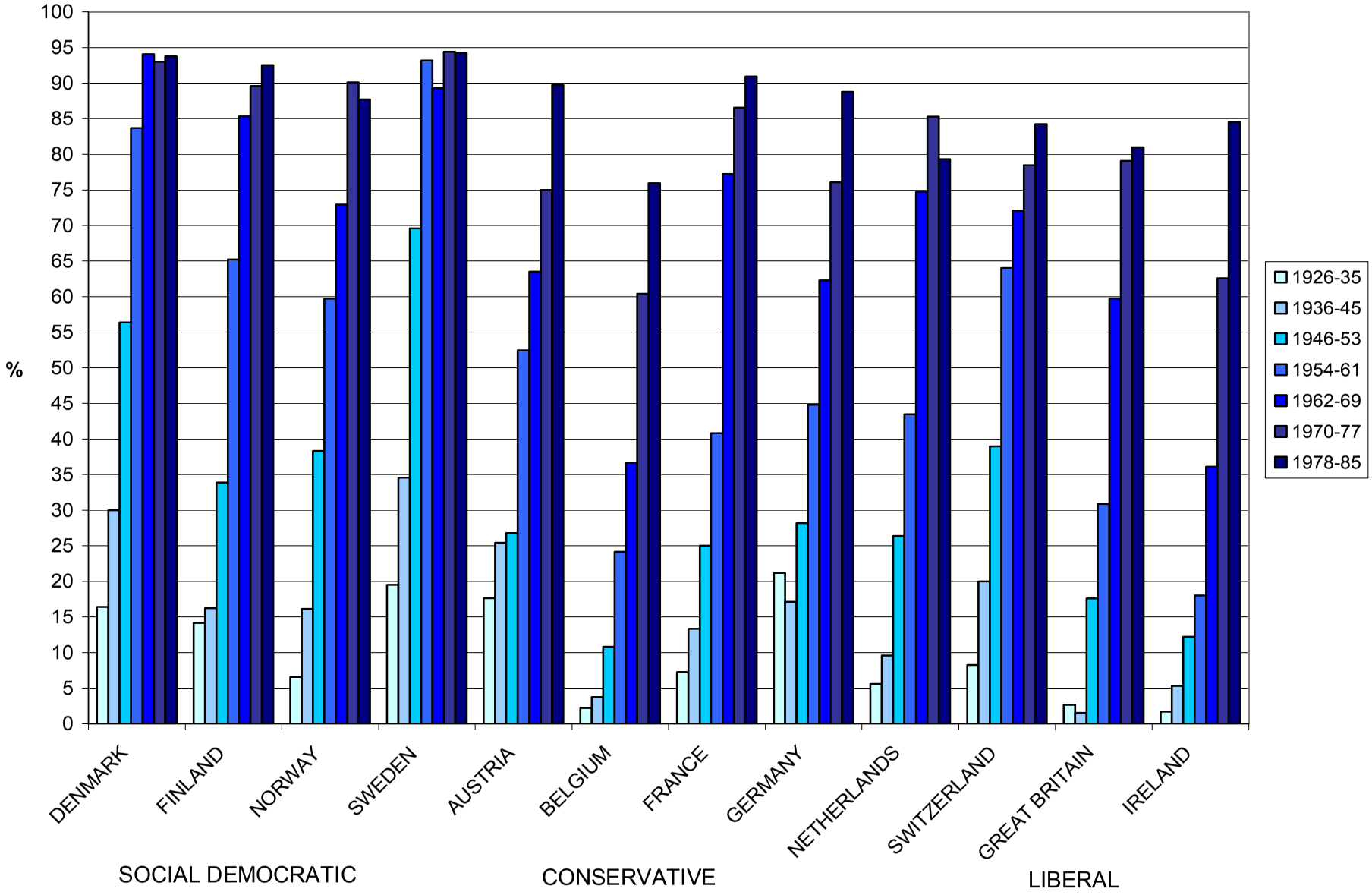


Figure 30 % of young women who entry into the first union before marriage, by birth cohorts: Southern and Eastern European countries

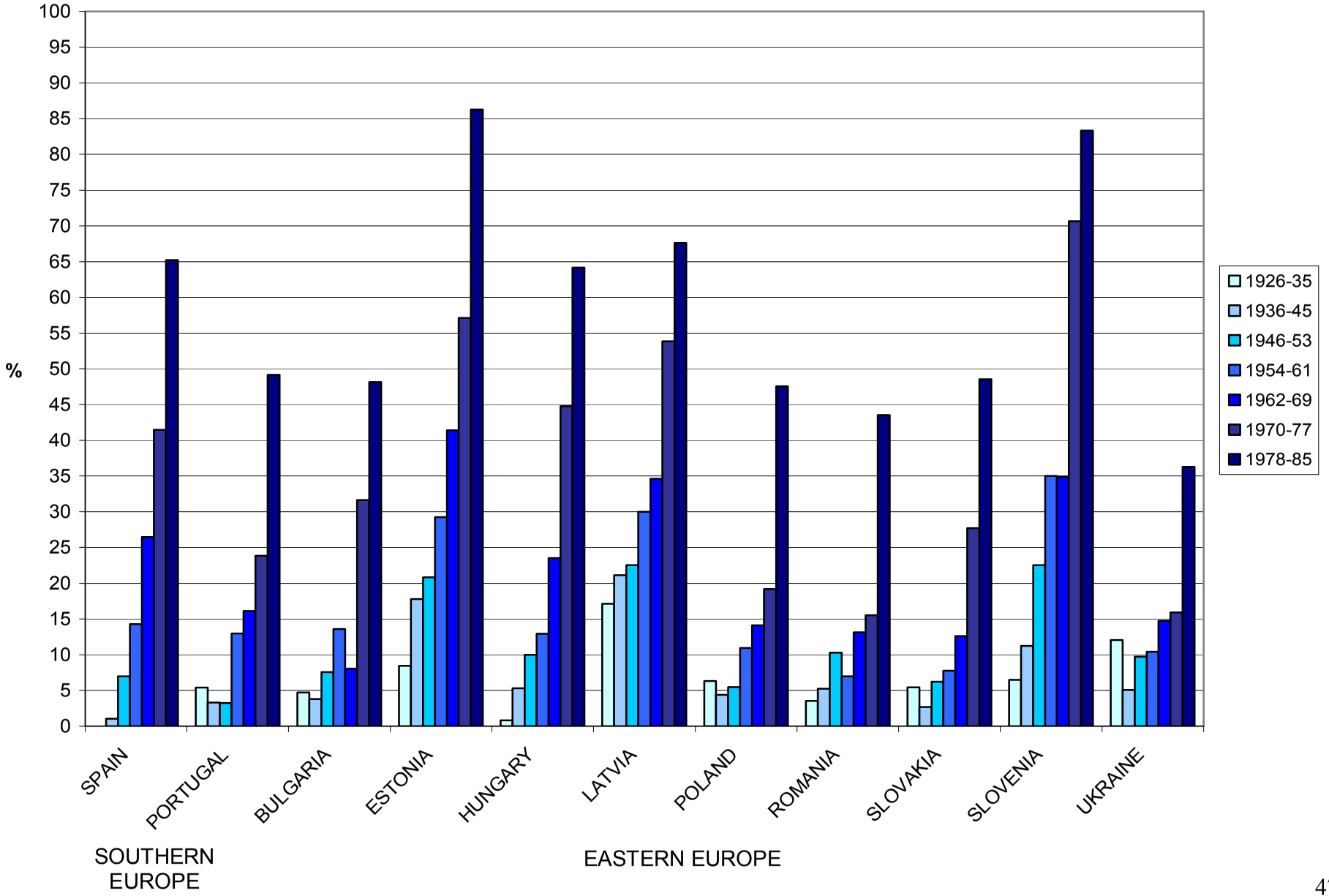


Figure 31 % of young men who entry into the first union before marriage, by birth cohorts: Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

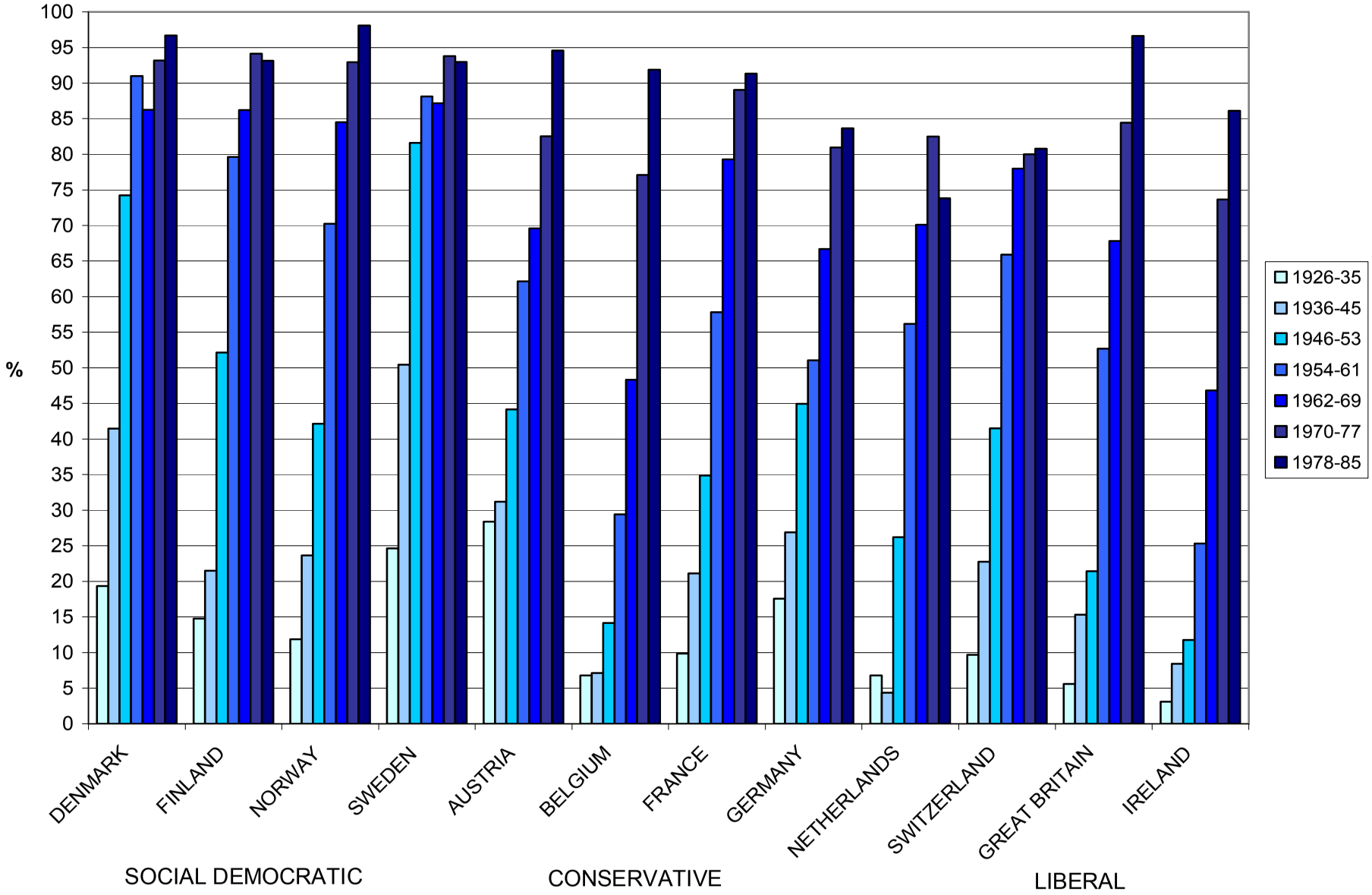
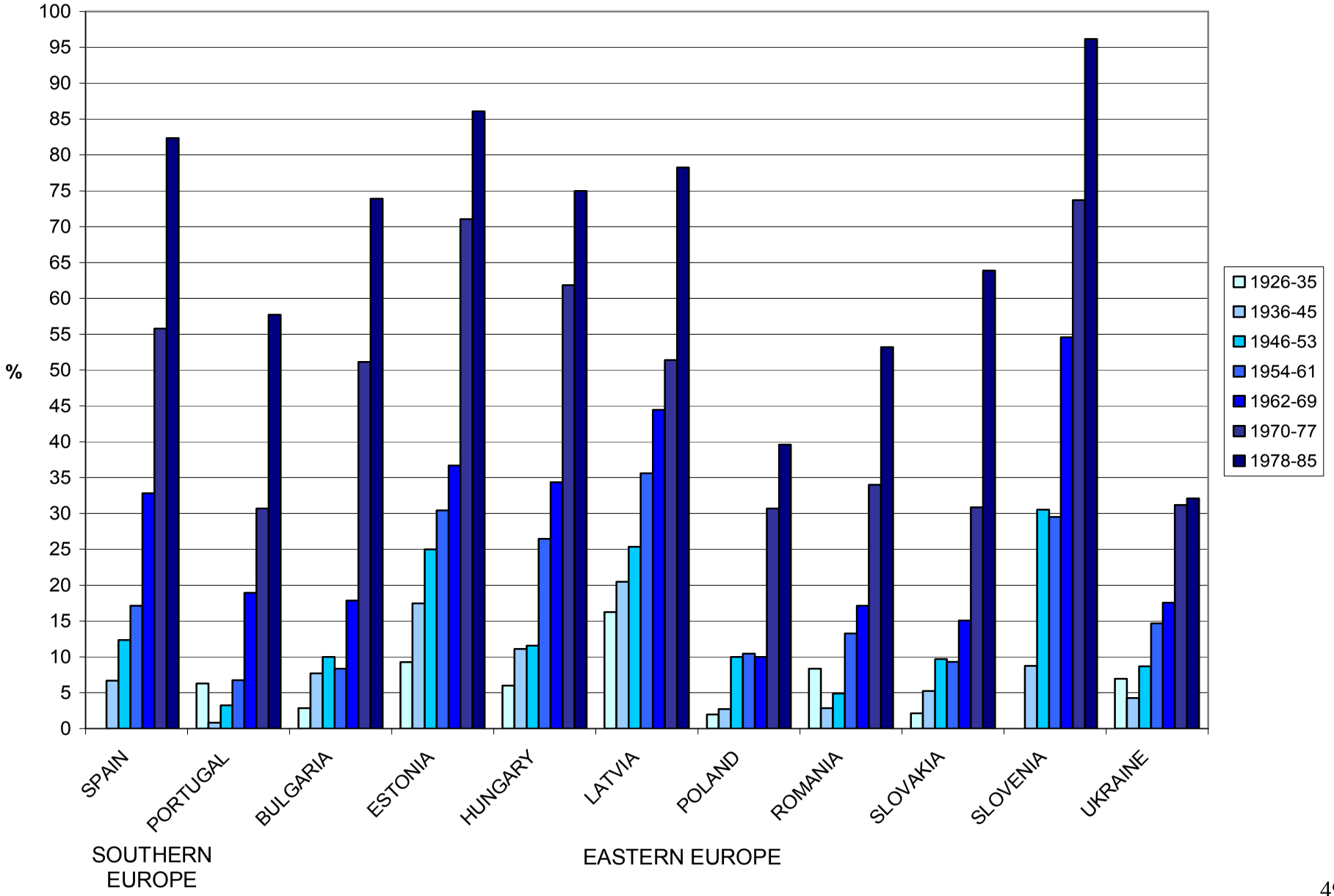


Figure 32 % of young men who entry into the first union before marriage, by birth cohorts: Southern and Eastern European countries



The European area in which the first union more commonly coincides with marriage is the Eastern one, where the percentage may not overcome 40%, as in Ukraine. Again we observe some exceptions as for Estonia and Latvia, where individuals behave similarly to those living in Conservative countries. The process through which cohabitation becomes more popular is, however, fairly slow. In countries like Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine the rise in the percentage of cohabitation becomes visible only with the 1962-69 birth cohort or even later.
From the general picture presented in the graphs it is clear that, even with some differences, the percentage of people who prefer to cohabit rather than marrying early in their life (postponing significantly a phase of the transition to adulthood) is increasing.

5.4 MARRIAGE AS A PREREQUISITE FOR PARENTHOOD?

The spread of cohabitation and the postponement of marriage during the twentieth century had some influence also on the people attitudes toward childbearing.
What we observe in Figures from 33 to 36 throughout Europe is a decline of the percentage of individuals who first marry and then become parents. This may be due to the fact that marriage occurs always later in the life course and in some cases it does not occur at all. It is likely that people living with a partner for a long period do not need to marry to achieve the stability for parenthood. As for cohabitation, even if the trend is to some extent comparable across European countries, we observe some differences in the initial levels of marriage before childbearing and in the pace of the decline.

In Northern Europe we have the lowest percentage of people who marry prior to become parents, as the very large diffusion of cohabitation might suggest. Those born in the first half of the twentieth century still give some meaning to marriage for parenthood: more than 60% of females and 50% of males experience marriage earlier than having children. Only Sweden represents a particular case, showing lower percentages with respect to the other Social Democratic countries.
The decline takes place heavily with the 1954-61 birth cohort and in some countries it goes on without breaks until the youngest cohort, as for Finland and Norway. In the latter men reach very low percentage, around 27%. In Denmark, women who marry before to entry into motherhood smooth around 35% in the three more recent cohorts; men belonging to the same age groups present a percentage between 40% and 45%, with a drop for the 1970-77 birth cohort at 25%. The particular situation of Sweden does not concern only old cohorts, but also recent trends: after the decline, we observe an increase in the percentage of marriage before motherhood, followed by a new drop; among men the rise is extremely small and the percentage stabilizes at 35%.
The decreasing trend is still visible among Conservative countries. There, however, the initial percentage is clearly higher (about 80%, but reaching also 90% in some cases) then in Northern countries, except for Austria and Germany, and the decline is less severe. Younger cohorts show extreme variability in the percentage of marriage before motherhood or fatherhood, given that it ranges from 66.7% (Switzerland) to 36.6% (Germany) for women and from 84.2% (Netherlands) to 25% (Austria) for men. This means that a higher degree of destandardization is in place among those born in the second half of the century. What is interesting to notice is that among males the trend is not always clear-cut: for France, Germany and Netherlands we observe a percentage increase for the youngest cohort, and for Switzerland there are frequent upward and downward movements.
Liberal countries do not present peculiar features, having a continuously decreasing trend. As the graphs show it is faster for women: in both Great Britain and Ireland the starting levels are

between 80% and 90%, while in the last cohort taken into account the percentage of men who want to marry before fatherhood ranges between 35% and 45%, while for women between 24% and 33%.
We could expect higher percentages in Southern Europe, but what we observe is that the difference with Conservative countries for the old cohorts is extremely narrow. What changes in this area is the pace of the decline, which occurs very slowly for women and Spanish men (the maximum gap is 20%) and does not take place for Portuguese males. The only cohort in which fewer individuals marry before parenthood is the youngest one (46.2% among Spanish men).
Marriage maintains its importance overtime to some extent in Southern Europe, but especially in several countries of the Eastern area, like Poland, Romania and Ukraine. There the decline has not started yet and it might not begin in the future. The highest percentage of those who marry prior to have a child is recorded in Romania, never lower than 78.7%. Nonetheless, on one hand there are countries which resemble Western ones (Estonia and Slovenia) and on the other hand some closer to Southern European trend (Bulgaria, Hungary and Latvia).

Even though the prevailing pattern of marriages before parenthood is decreasing, we have to notice that percentages' level at the beginning of the century showed lower variance across countries relative to the variability observable among recent cohorts. This means that a process of destandardization in the attitudes toward values like marriage and parenthood has occurred throughout the twentieth century.

Figure 33 % of young women who entry into first marriage before parenthood, by birth cohorts: Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

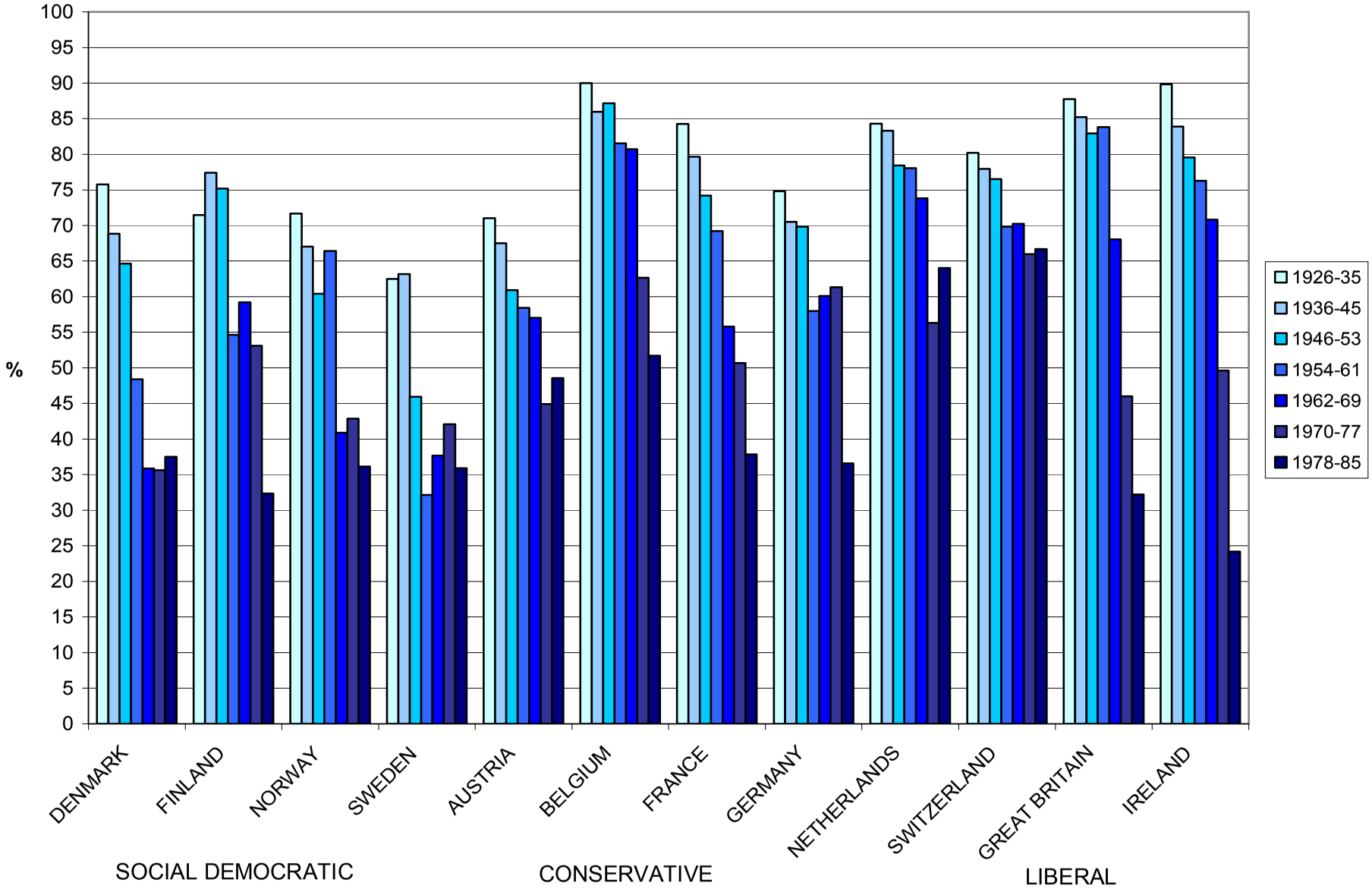


Figure 34 % of young women who entry into first marriage before parenthood, by birth cohorts: Southern and Eastern European countries

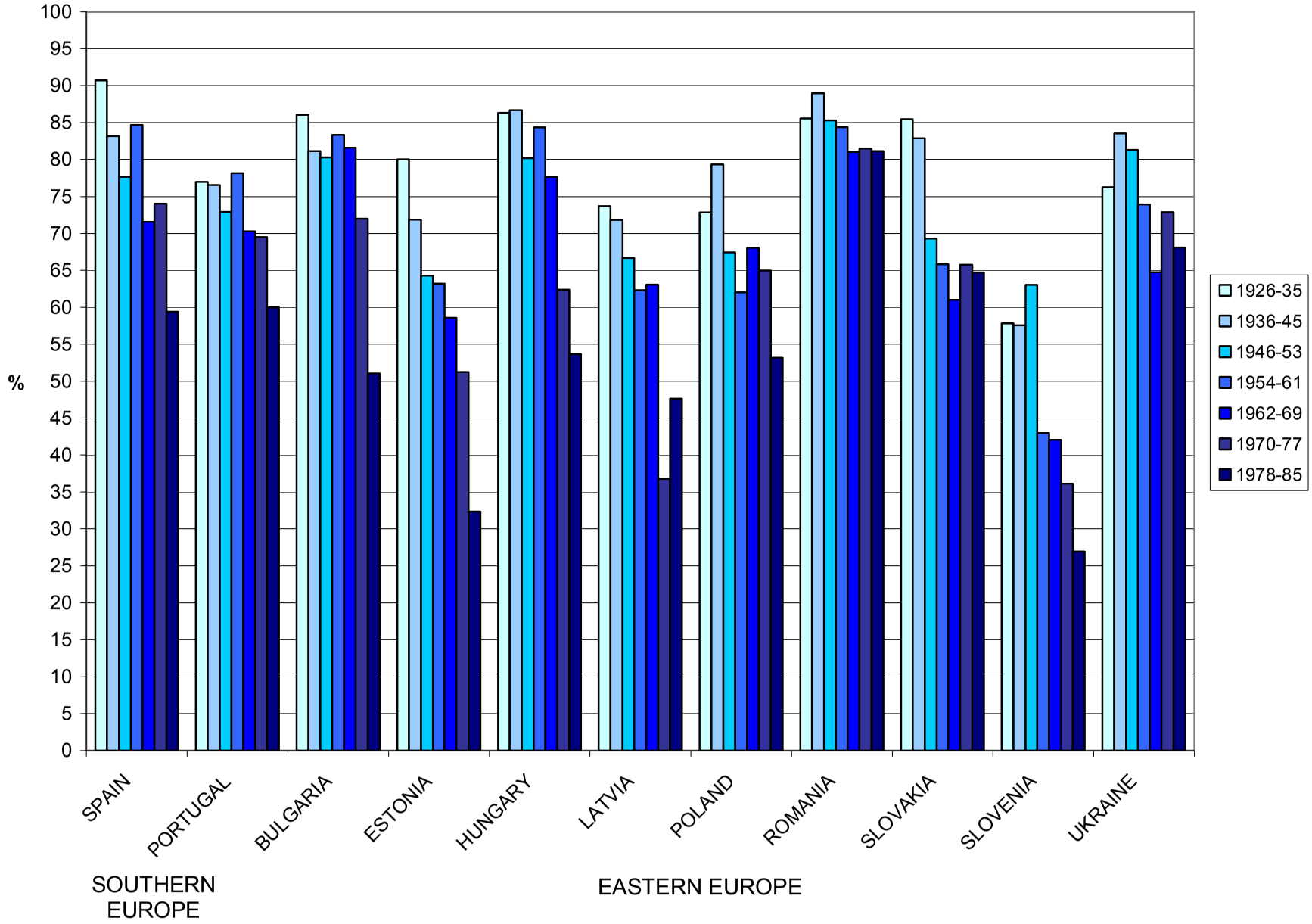


Figure 35 % of young men who entry into first marriage before parenthood, by birth cohorts: Social Democratic, Conservative and Liberal countries

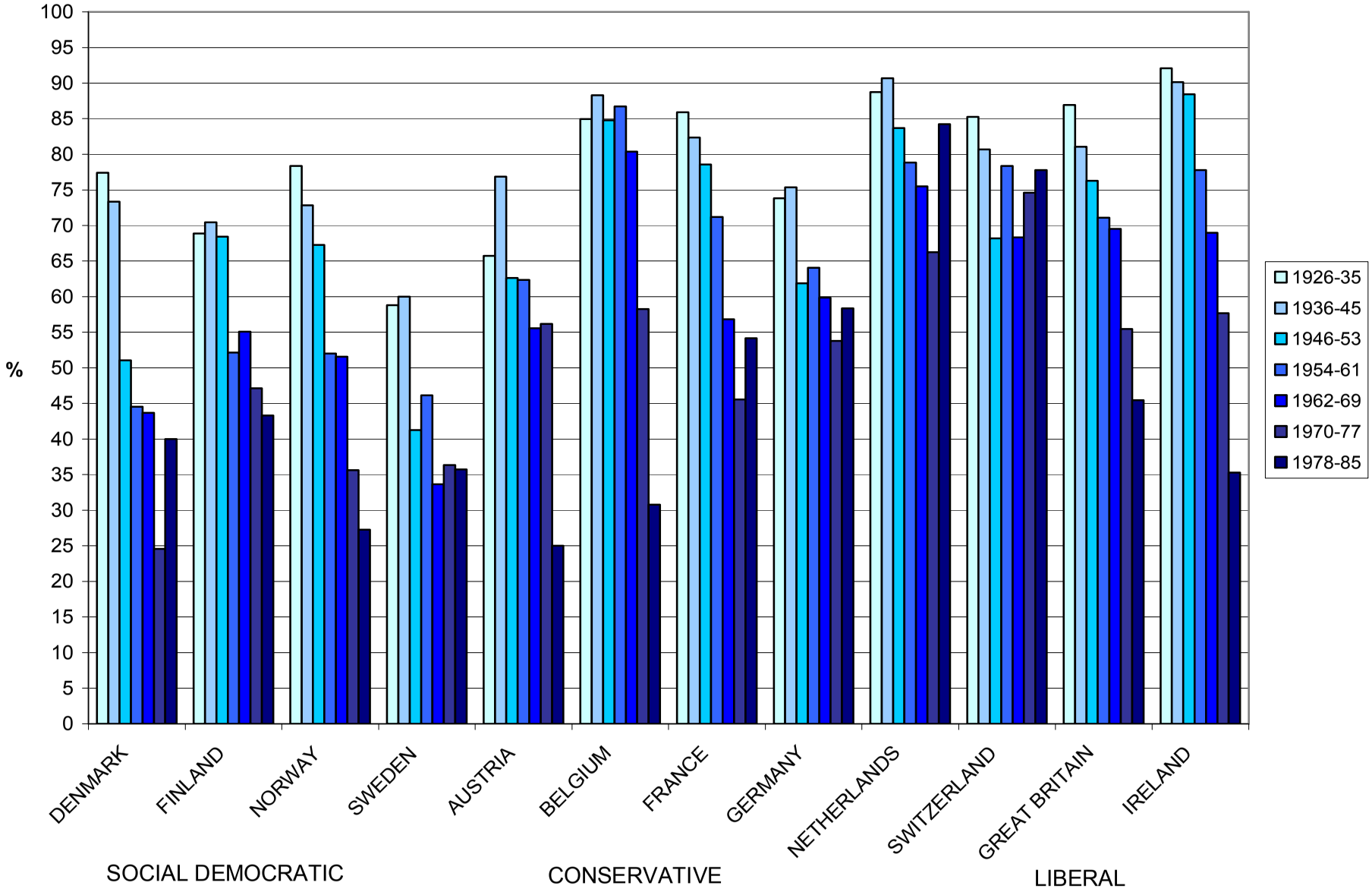
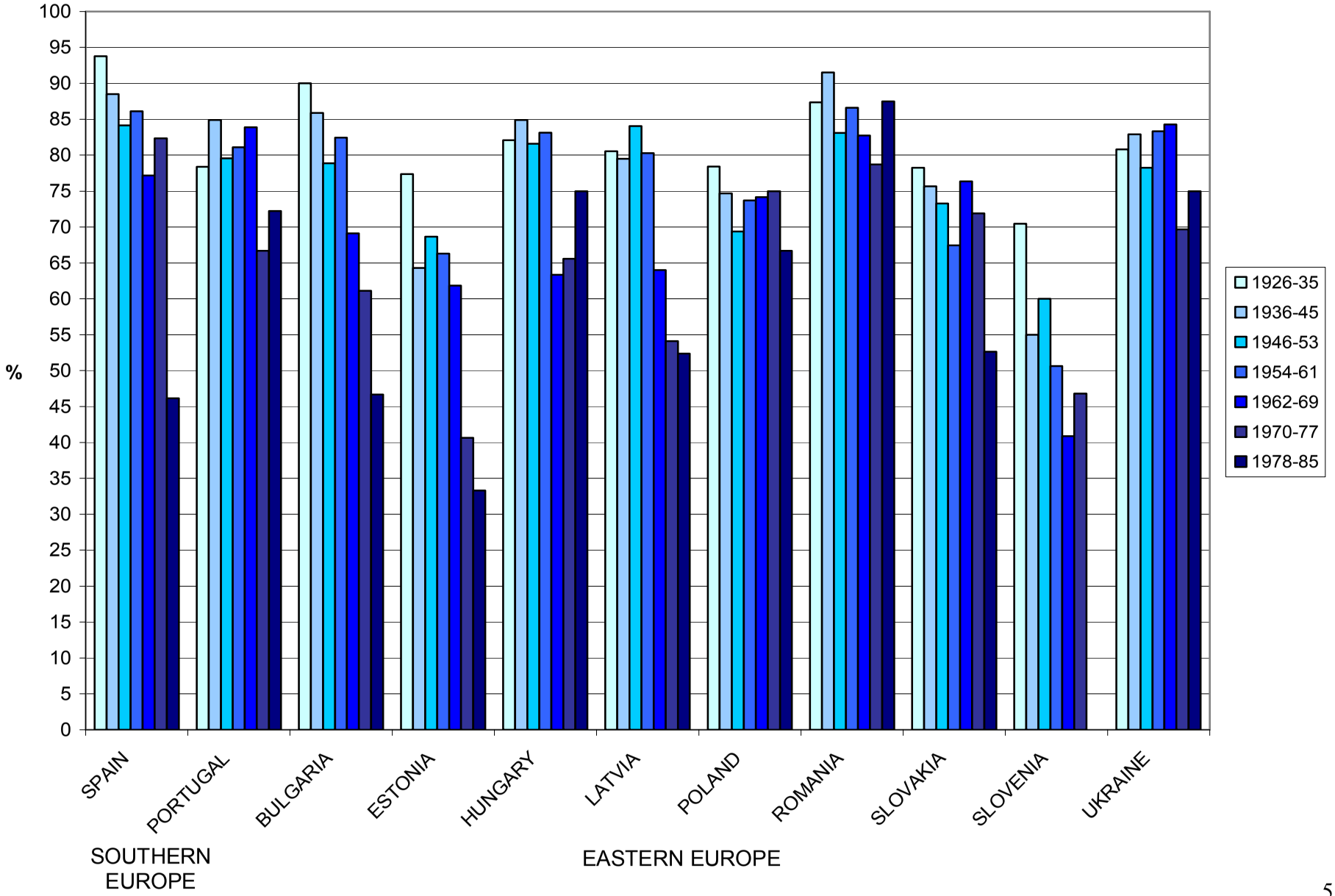


Figure 36 % of young men who entry into first marriage before parenthood, by birth cohorts: Southern and Eastern European countries



6. INFLUENCE OF MACRO-CONTEXTS ON "LEAVING HOME BEFORE UNION" DECISIONS

The life course organization is planned at individual level and, as the Second Demographic Transition theory suggests, a general trend toward heterogeneous experiences can be observed since the late 1960s in Europe. Changes in the economic structure and cultural and institutional differences trigger individualization in the demographic behavior, which implies flexibility in life trajectories and longer periods spent in states such as single person or unmarried cohabitation.
The heterogeneity of life course patterns in Europe may be due to differences among countries (not only among individuals) and to different underlying institutional structures determined by the existence of diverse welfare regimes.
In order to gain additional knowledge on the impact of macro-contexts on the international differences in life course organization, I focus on the possible determinants of the decision of leaving parental home before entry into the first co-residential union. The order of the two events represents an interesting case given that differences in Europe are importantly marked and trends are not always clear-cut.
In particular I examine the effect of housing market conditions and gender disparities on the decision to leave parental home before starting a union (cohabitation or marriage), to understand if cross-country differences may explain the diversity on the order between the two markers of the transition to adulthood.

6.1 THE STATISTICAL MODEL

The data collected in the ESS have a *clustered* structure, given that we have information at individual level and individuals are grouped within countries. Multilevel models recognize the existence of such data "hierarchies" by allowing for residual components at each level in the hierarchy.
In our case, we introduce a 2-level model which allows for grouping of individual outcomes within countries and it includes residuals at individual and country level. Thus the residual variance is partitioned into a between-country component and a within-country one. The country residuals, called "country effects", represent unobserved country characteristics that affects individual decisions concerning leaving the parental home before entry into the first union. It is these unobserved variables which lead to correlation between outcomes for individuals from the same country.
Traditional multiple regression techniques treat the units of analysis as independent observations. One consequence of failing to recognize hierarchical structures is that standard errors of regression coefficients will be underestimated, leading to an overstatement of statistical significance (Goldstein, 2003). This is one of the reasons why we use a multilevel model.
Moreover, one of the key research question is how much of the variability in individuals' decisions about leaving home before union is attributable to country level factors (e.g. housing market conditions) and how much to people level factors. Traditional modeling methods are unable to partition the variation in this way and just estimate a single error term. Hence, multilevel modeling reveals to be an important tool for exploring the structure in this error term.
Given that the response variable used in the model is a dummy variable for the sequence occurring between leaving home and entering into first union for the 1970-77 birth cohort, we use a logistic regression model.

y_{ij} represents the response variable for individual i in country j and x_{ij}' is the vector of covariates included in the model to explain individuals' decisions. Our model is then given by

$$\ln\left(\frac{\Pr(y_{ij}=1\mid x_{ij})}{1-\Pr(y_{ij}=1\mid x_{ij})}\right)=x_{ij}'\beta+\eta_{0j},$$

where η_{0j} is a random intercept which takes on the same value for all units in the same cluster. We assume η_{0j} to be normally distributed with zero mean.
The inclusion of η_{0j} allows the overall logit of sequencing to vary over countries, even after controlling for the covariates x_{ij} (Skrondal and Rabe-Hesketh, 2003).

6.2 VARIABLE DESCRIPTION

The response variable used in the model, as already said, is a dummy variable for the sequence occurring between leaving home and entering first union for the 1970-77 birth cohort: it is equal to 1 when the individual under analysis left home before to start living with a partner, 0 otherwise. The choice of the cohort depends on the fact that people born between 1970 and 1977 experience the transition to adulthood in the 1990s and in the first decade of the twenty first century: hence, this is the youngest cohort for which the transition, if not yet completed, is in its last phase. To this cohort belong 5.176 young adults, 15% of the entire sample, and more precisely 2.365 men and 2.811 women.
Through the model it is possible to study the impact of some macroeconomic features, which characterize cross-country diversity, on the response variable and to understand if they are able to explain international differences. In particular, I will look at the influence of housing market and gender disparities on the decision to leave parental home to spend a period of independent living.
As a proxy for the conditions of the housing market I use the availability of dwellings, in terms of number of dwellings per 1000 inhabitants. Tight housing markets delay moves from parental home and induce a higher return rate. In Southern Europe, for example, where housing markets are particularly 'inhospitable' to new entrants (given difficult credit accessibility and low provision of public housing) one should observe a lower percentage of people leaving parental home before co-residential union.
To grasp gender inequality in a country, moreover, I look at the percentage of males among members of national parliament. It is likely that in countries where women and men have different opportunities, in educational or working fields, they also decide about leaving parental home in a different way. In such a case women are less independent on the family of origin, in terms of income for example, and may be constrained to live at home until they start cohabitating with the partner.
Since the analysis is performed separately for males and females, it is possible to check how gender inequality influences their life course decisions.

Data used in the model are reported in Table 1. It is important to notice that they represent the mean value of the period 1989-2000 and 1990-2000, for housing market and gender inequality respectively. This is due to the fact that the cohort taken into consideration is supposed to leave home exactly during this period.
As we can see from the table, Switzerland is the country with the largest availability of dwellings, with 500 houses every 1000 inhabitants. On the other hand, the lowest values are recorded in Poland (295.6) and Slovakia (308.5). According to welfare categories, we notice that in Social Democratic countries availability is fairly large (between 441 to 479

houses/1000 inhabitants) and the same is true in Southern Europe. The tightness of housing market in Portugal and Spain does not appear evident using this proxy. It depends more on difficult credit accessibility and low provision of public housing. Conservative countries present a higher degree of variability, with Belgium around 392 and France around 477. In Eastern Europe, again, we observed a lot of diversity, even more pronounced than in Western Europe.
The different level of development across these countries is well approximated by the availability of dwellings. Liberal countries, finally, differ among them, given that there are 412.5 houses/1000 inhabitants in Great Britain and only 321 in Ireland.

Table 1: Data on housing market and gender inequality in European countries

	Gender Inequality	**Housing Market**
Country	**Percent of males members of national parliament (mean 1990-2000)**	**Number of dwellings per 1000 inhabitants (mean 1989-2000)**
Social Democratic		
Denmark	64.8	465.6
Finland	66.2	465.4
Norway	62.8	441.0
Sweden	58.5	479.1
Conservative		
Austria	74.5	392.0
Belgium	82.0	385.6
France	92.5	476.7
Germany	70.7	437.4
Netherlands	66.5	408.0
Switzerland	79.3	500.2
Liberal		
Great Britain	88.7	412.5
Ireland	87.5	321.0
Southern Europe		
Portugal	84.8	422.0
Spain	77.7	437.0
Eastern Europe		
Bulgaria	89.2	473.9*
Estonia	86.5	430.7
Hungary	90.5	392.0
Latvia	84.0	381.0
Poland	86.8	295.6
Romania	94.5	377.1*
Slovakia	85.5	308.5
Slovenia	87.2	351.0
Ukraine	94.0	413.0
Source	UNECE Statistics: http://www.unece.org/stats/ UN Statistics Division	GESIS: German Social Science Infrastructure Service

Note: *2003 (Generations and gender contextual database)

Gender inequality is lowest in Northern Europe, where no more than 66% of national parliament members are men (in Finland). The most egalitarian country is Sweden where, on average, in the last decade of twentieth century 41.5% of members are women. Low disparity can be found also in Western Europe, given that in Netherlands the percentage of men is 66.5%. Nonetheless, among these countries, there also cases of extremely high inequality: in France, for instance, the percentage of women is only 7.5%. In the rest of Europe (Liberal countries, Southern and Eastern Europe), equality between genders is fairly low, with a fraction of males parliament members never below 84% (except for Spain where it is 77.7%).

In the estimated model I use different combinations of explanatory variables. Leaving the parental home is constrained by both individual characteristics or resources and by "environmental" conditions. For these reasons the covariates that are combined are both individual and country-level variables. I will use the two indicators described above for housing market conditions and gender inequality. Concerning individuals, I introduce the degree of religiousness, and the education level of respondent's parents.
Religion variable ranges from 0 to 10, where 0 means that the individual is not at all religious while 10 that he answers to be very religious. It is likely that people who believe strongly in religion decide to leave parental home only to start living with the partner, in particular with their husband or wife. Hence, the probability of leaving home to live independently should decrease with the degree of religiousness.
In order to avoid endogeneity problems, no measures of youth's education are included in the factors explaining the home-leaving process, but parents' education level is exploited as explanatory variable (Mulder C and Clark W., 2000). Also in this case it ranges from 0 to 6, where 0 stands for "not completed primary education". Father's and mother's education are introduced separately in the analysis to detect the different impact on males and females decisions. More education of the parents may reflect higher social status and so a more cosmopolitan outlook and even less local attachment, which lead to earlier leaving home.

6.3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the multilevel analysis, obtained through different sets of covariates, are reported in Table 2 for men and women separately. The first specification is an empty one, where only the constant is included. This is the starting point of the analysis, given that we want to consider what happens when also individual and country-level explanatory variables are incorporated in the regression.
The model enables to determine and distinguish the variance at country level, i.e. the variance across countries, and the variance within countries (due to individual diversity). Through the intra-class correlation coefficient ρ we can find out which is the proportion of total variance accounted for by between-country variation.
The coefficient is given by

$$\rho = \frac{Var(\eta_{0j})}{Var(\eta_{0j}) + Var(\varepsilon_{ij})},$$

where ε_{ij} is the error term referred to the individual i in country j. If the macroeconomic variables, housing market and gender inequality conditions, have some explanatory power concerning the differences among analyzed countries we expect the intra-class correlation coefficient to decrease when we include them in the specification: if so, it means that a lower fraction of total variance is accounted for cross-country differences and that availability of dwellings or gender disparities may explain a large portion of the international distance in decisions about leaving parental home.

The first specification (1) gives an intra-class coefficient of 0.625 for males and of 0.631 for females, meaning that about 63% of the total variance is due to cross-country variability.
Variables concerning religiousness and parents' education are introduced in the second specification (2). Starting from men, we observe that the only significant variable, in addition at 1% level, is father's education. It has a positive coefficient, meaning that a higher education of the father has a positive influence on the probability of leaving home before union. Mother's education and religiousness, on the other hand, seem not to affect the sequence between the two events and their coefficients come out to be never significantly different from zero, in all the different specifications generated for men.
The situation for women is not considerably different, apart from the fact that coefficient of mother's education in this case is positive and significant at 10% level. Father education presents a coefficient of 0.224, a bit higher with respect to that observed for men (0.199), again significant at 1% level. Hence, also for young women a higher educational level of the father influences the decision of leaving parental home before starting a union in a positive way. If we consider parents' education as a proxy for social status or as an indicator for the education level of the respondent, the results tell us that higher social status reflects a more open outlook and the search of freedom and independence, prior to start cohabiting with a partner. In the case of females, not only father education plays a role, but also that of the mother, probably because daughters pay more attention to their mothers experience and opinion. Religiousness, as for men, is never significant.
Intra-class correlation coefficients, for both genders, do not show significant changes, apart from an extremely small decrease.
With the third specification (3) we start introducing country-level variables in the model. What we observe is that significance and magnitude of the coefficients already included in (2) do not change. In (3) we add the housing market indicator as a new explanatory variable. The coefficient is equal to 0.005 for both men and women and significant at 5% level. The positive impact on the probability of leaving home is not considerable, but it is interesting to notice that its inclusion reduces the intra-class correlation coefficient. It decreases to 0.555 for men and to 0.581 for women. Hence, a smaller fraction of the total variance is explained by cross-country differences; availability of dwellings is a characteristic which distinguishes countries and may explain the international differences concerning the sequence between leaving home and co-residential union. More precisely, accounting for availability of dwellings explains 21% and 17.3% of between-country variation for men and women respectively.
In regression (4) we replace the housing market indicator with the gender inequality index. Surprisingly, it has a negative impact on the probability of leaving home before union for both men and women (-0.027 and -0.031 respectively). It should be that, where women and men have different opportunities, in educational or working fields, they also decide about leaving parental home in a different way. When gender inequality increases in favor of males, women are less independent on the family of origin, in terms of income for example, and may be constrained to live at home until they start cohabitating with the partner. As the results indicate, however, a higher degree of inequality moves the probability toward the same direction, decreasing it. The only difference is the level of significance, which is stronger in the case of women (1%). Again, the introduction of a "macro" variable is important in terms of variance composition, given that it leads to a further reduction of the intra-class correlation coefficient, especially for females: 0.550 for men, 0.542 for women. Gender inequality when included in the regression is able to explain 22.4% of between-country variation in the case of males and 29.5% in the case of females, revealing to be a relevant factor in explaining cross-country differences

Table 2: multilevel analysis on the sequence leaving parental home - entry first union

Males	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Constant	0.415***	-0.136	-2.123**	2.064**	0.174
	(0.134)	(0.181)	(0.912)	(0.922)	(1.579)
Father's Education		0.199***	0.197***	0.194***	0.194***
		(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)
Mother's Education		-0.011	-0.011	-0.011	-0.011
		(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.043)
Religiousness		0.006	0.008	0.006	0.008
		(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.017)
Availability of Dwellings			0.005**		0.003
			(0.002)		(0.002)
Gender Inequality				-0.027**	-0.020*
				(0.011)	(0.012)
Number of observations	2365	2149	2149	2149	2149
Variance within country	0.219	0.215	0.215	0.215	0.215
Variance across countries	0.364	0.339	0.268	0.263	0.235
Intra-class correlation coefficient	0.625	0.612	0.555	0.550	0.522
Females					
Constant	-0.128	-0.949***	-2.875***	1.580*	0.067
	(0.137)	(0.187)	(0.018)	(0.894)	(1.577)
Father's Education		0.224***	0.222***	0.222***	0.221***
		(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.039)
Mother's Education		0.073*	0.074*	0.072*	0.072*
		(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.041)
Religiousness		0.017	0.018	0.018	0.019
		(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Availability of Dwellings			0.005**		0.003
			(0.002)		(0.002)
Gender Inequality				-0.031***	-0.026**
				(0.011)	(0.012)
Number of observations	2811	2493	2493	2493	2493
Variance within country	0.229	0.221	0.221	0.221	0.221
Variance across countries	0.392	0.370	0.306	0.261	0.245
Intra-class correlation coefficient	0.631	0.626	0.581	0.542	0.526

Note: standard errors in parenthesis. *P-values:* +p<=0.10:*+p<=0.05:**+p<=0.01***.

It is interesting to see what happens when we include both country-level covariates in the analysis. This is what is done in specification (5). As far as parents' education and religiousness are concerned nothing changes, while for both men and women the availability of dwellings' coefficient decreases and is no more significantly different from zero. Also

gender inequality becomes less significant, but retains a 10% significance for men and 5% for women. Moreover, its negative impact on the probability of leaving home before union is a bit lower than in specification (4). Still, the intra-class correlation coefficient decreases to some extent: it drops to 0.522 in the case of men and to 0.526 in the case of women. The inclusion of both variables slightly modifies the proportion of variance due to individuals' disparities and cross-country differences, giving more importance to within-country variability. It is important to notice, however, that the comparison between this last specification and the one including only covariates at individual level pinpoints the power of the macro-variables in terms of variability breakdown; accounting for both availability of dwellings and gender inequality explains 30.7% and 33.8% of between-country variation, respectively for men and for women.

Summing up, we showed the importance of father's education in affecting the decision of leaving parental home for both daughters and sons, and that of mother's level of education for women. Moreover, housing market conditions and gender inequality cannot be disregarded when we try to explain international differences concerning order of events, such as leaving the family of origin and entry into first cohabitation or marriage.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of a new comparative retrospective study, the third edition of the ESS, has created new opportunities for a comparative analysis among European countries concerning transition to adulthood. This work, performed on seven cohorts of men and women born between 1926 and 1985, analyzes the timing and sequencing of a number of important events for young adults in 23 countries. The markers of the transition concern both the occupational and family domain and refer to (1) entry into a first job, (2) leaving the parental home, (3) entry into a first co-residential union, (4) entry into first marriage, and (5) entry into parenthood.
Timing information gives a considerable picture of how the median age at which individuals experience these events changed during the twentieth century and enables to identify existing trends. Sequencing, on the other hand, is representative of the degree of diversity in the life course organization and completes the framework given by timing: the median age of the multiple transitions changes over time and attitudes of individuals accordingly; this can result in a different order of events.

7.1 TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD IN EUROPE: RESULTS ON TIMING

Results concerning timing of the transition can be summarized in six main findings.
First, we observe an increase in the median age at entry into first job, mainly due to the spreading of higher education. This is especially true for Northern countries. In Southern and Eastern Europe the median age is usually higher for both men and women relative to that of other areas. The path showed by Eastern countries, however, is less regular and standardized, meaning that the way in which people decide when to enter their first job is more diverse and complex here than in Western and Northern Europe.
Secondly, we observe a general declining trend in the age at leaving the parental home. This means that in the analyzed period there is an increasing need for independence and freedom, which leads young adults to anticipate autonomous living. If in Northern Europe the median age ranges from 18 to 19 and in Western Europe from 20 to 22, in Southern Europe the situation is fairly different: median age is higher than 22 years in both Portugal and Spain.

This brings us to the third main result of the analysis, which is in line with theories based on welfare regimes. More generous regimes are associated with an enhanced independence of young adults: in Northern countries leaving parental home takes place earlier than in Southern Europe. Moreover, predictions based on culture and historical roots find support in these results: Spain and Portugal are characterized by intergenerational ties much stronger than Scandinavian countries, where a "weak family" standard prevails. This is true not only for this particular event, but also for the other markers in the family domain. The only group of countries, which cannot be framed in these life trajectories, is that of Eastern Europe.
The fourth main point to be stressed concerns exactly the extreme heterogeneity among Eastern countries. We find countries with patterns very close to those observed in Scandinavia and others much more similar to Southern Europe. The large postponement of marriage and parenthood visible in all Europe is only at its very beginning in this area. This is confirmed by the fact that the lowest age for entry into first marriage and entry into parenthood are recorded here, with a rise for those born between 1978 and 1985. It is important to notice that data focus on cohorts in Eastern Europe that experience these events before the fall of the Communist regime, except for the youngest cohort.
Fifthly, as already mentioned, we observe a large postponement of marriage and parenthood during the century. The median age at entry into first marriage varies substantially across Europe, but a common trend shows a decrease followed by a strong increase. What varies markedly is the period in which this upward movement begins: for Northern and Western Europe it happens with the 1946-53 birth cohort, while in Southern and Eastern Europe we have to wait a bit longer, with those born between 1954 and 1961 or between 1962 and 1969. As far as the oldest cohorts are concerned the median age of the first marriage coincides with the median age at entry into the first union. This is true especially for women, meaning that they entered their first union by marriage. What is important is that most recent cohorts show a median age at first marriage on average 6 years higher than that at entry into the first union. This not only means that a postponement is taking place, but also that a large fraction of individuals prefer to cohabit with a partner for the whole life, rather than marrying, foregoing completely a phase of the transition. The large postponement of parenthood in most countries takes place simultaneously with the rise of the median age at entry into marriage. This means that changes in fertility behavior occur tog7ether with changes in marriage attitudes. Increase in the age at entry into childbearing, however, started earlier relative to the increase in the median age at entry into first union, suggesting that postponement of marriage and parenthood precede postponement of co-residential union. What is also interesting is the duration of the period between entry into the first union and entry into parenthood. What we observe, comparing the available information, is that for the first two cohorts it takes on average 1 to 2 years to become parents after a co-residential union started. Among more recent cohorts the duration increases to 5 years for women and to 6 years for men. This is true for Western and Northern countries, while for Southern and Eastern Europe the period is not longer than 3 years. These results suggest that union formation and childbearing have become less connected throughout the twentieth century.
The last point concerns the differences between men and women on the timing of events during young adulthood. This comparison shows that in the occupational life domain, if men experience entry into first job before or after women depends on every single country situation. In many Eastern countries, like Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine, women's median ages are lower than those of men (especially for oldest cohorts), suggesting that men leave the educational system at later age than women do. The same is true for Austria and for some Dutch birth cohorts (1946-53, 1954-61 and 1962-68). The opposite situation can be found in Southern Europe, where median ages for Spanish and Portuguese women are much higher than those of men. Differences are in some cases very significant, reaching also a 5

years gap. This could result from the fact that women are less likely to enter the labor market, also because unemployment is more widespread among females.
This is not true for events in the family life domain, because in this case women experience them a few years earlier than men. Males leave parental home between 1 and 2 years later than women, entry into first union between 2 to 3 years later and entry into parenthood takes place with 2 to 4 years delay.

7.2 TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD IN EUROPE: RESULTS ON SEQUENCING

If we want to have a more accurate picture about the degree of heterogeneity in patterns according to which the transition is experienced over the life course, the temporal sequence of events is a better proxy than timing.
In this case it is possible to identify four main points on which it is worth to focus.
First, and most important, we observe a process of destandardization throughout the twentieth century in young adults' behavior. Oldest cohorts show lower variance across countries relative to the variability discernible among recent cohorts. This is especially true for the sequence leaving parental home – entry into first union and entry into first marriage – entry into parenthood. The process of individualization characterizing the life course organization since the 1960s, and indentified by the Second Demographic Transition theory, finds support in the data of ESS.
Secondly, as we noticed for timing trends, the area with the highest degree of destandardization is Eastern Europe. The order of events differ strongly among countries belonging to this area and this denotes how each country has to be considered and analyzed in a separate way. One of the clearest examples is the sequence between leaving home and entry into first union. Across Europe the percentage of individuals leaving before union is increasing over time, even with different paces. When we look at Eastern European countries we observe that some follow Southern Europe trend (where typically people start living outside the family of origin only when they enter marriage or consensual union) like Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. On the other hand, there are countries very distant from Spain and Portugal: in Estonia the lowest percentage is 47% for women and 58% for men, and in the youngest cohort 73% of women and 69.2% of men leave home before union. What may seem surprising is that in some countries, like Latvia, Poland and Ukraine, the percentage is decreasing over time, especially for males. This means that there are more people now than in the past who decide to leave home to enter into marriage or union.
Thirdly, a peculiar characteristics of Southern and Eastern Europe is that, for those belonging to the oldest cohorts, there is a significant percentage of individuals who enter the first union while still in the parental home: they start cohabiting together in their parents' dwelling. This percentage can be very high, reaching 30% among women in Poland (1970-77 birth cohort) and 59% among men in Bulgaria (1962-69 birth cohort). It is interesting to note that also in some Western or Northern countries this feature is not negligible: figures are above 10% in Finland, Germany and Austria.
The last point concerns cohabitation. This work confirms results obtained in other studies, claiming the spread of cohabitation since 1960s among both men and women. The percentage of males starting a co-residential union before marriage results to be generally higher than that of females. Cohabitation extended first in Northern Europe, but differences with other countries narrowed considerably in the second half of the twentieth century. In the first half of the century almost all individuals living in Southern and Eastern Europe entered their first union by marriage. Even if slowly and with some differences, the percentage of people who prefer to cohabit rather than marrying early in their life (postponing significantly a phase of the transition to adulthood) is increasing.

7.3 THE MULTILEVEL DETERMINANTS OF "LEAVING HOME BEFORE A UNION" IN THE 1990s

The picture outlined through the timing and sequencing analysis of the transition to adulthood reveals the existence of deep differences among European countries. Given that the heterogeneity of life course patterns in Europe may be due to differences among countries and not only among individuals (because of different underlying institutional structures and diverse welfare regimes), I investigated the impact of macro-contexts on these dissimilarities in life course organization.

In particular, exploiting the properties of multilevel statistical models, the analysis looks at the effect of housing market conditions and gender disparities on the decision, taken by individuals belonging to the 1970-77 birth cohort, to leave the parental home before entry into first union. A two-level logistic regression model enables us to answer the question on how much of the variability in individuals' decisions is attributable to country level factors. The specifications are obtained including different sets of covariates: at the individual level, degree of religiousness, father's and mother's education level; at country level, the availability of dwellings as a proxy for housing market conditions and the percentage of males among members of national parliament to grasp gender inequality in a country.

Religiousness comes out to have no impact on the decision to leave home before union, neither for men nor for women, and its coefficient is never significantly different from zero. Parents' education, in contrast, plays a role in young adults' life course organization: father's education level seems to induce both daughters and sons to earlier leaving home, while mother's education has this effect only on females' choice. If we consider parents' education as a proxy for social status or as an indicator for the education level of the respondent, the results tell us that higher social status reflects a more open outlook and the search of freedom and independence, prior to start cohabiting with a partner.

Introducing the macro-variables the magnitude and significance of the coefficients already included do not change, and the explanatory contribution of housing market conditions and gender disparities is not negligible. As a matter of fact, when only the housing market indicator is taken into account, its coefficient is equal to 0.005 for both men and women and significant at 5% level. The positive impact on the probability of leaving home before union is not considerable, but through the decrease of the intra-class correlation coefficient we discover that availability of dwellings is a characteristic which distinguishes countries and may explain the international differences concerning the sequence between leaving home and co-residential union. More precisely, accounting for availability of dwellings explains 21% and 17.3% of between-country variation for men and women respectively.

Not less important is the degree of gender inequality, which has a negative rather than positive effect on the probability of earlier leaving home, and its coefficient stays always significantly different from zero. Also in this case we observe the importance of the country level variable in explaining cross-country differences, given that the indicator account for 22.4% of between-country variation in the case of males and for 29.5% in the case of females**.**

The two macro-variables confirm their importance even when introduced together in the model, because accounting for both availability of dwellings and gender inequality explains 30.7% and 33.8% of between-country variation, respectively for men and for women.

The progressive decrease of the intra-class correlation coefficient throughout the analysis means that a lower fraction of total variance is accounted for cross-country differences, and that availability of dwellings and gender disparities are able to explain a large portion of the international distance in decisions about leaving parental home before or after entry a co-residential union.

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