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European Latecomers: Cohabitation in Italy and Spain

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Introduction

Over the past three decades, union formation patterns have undergone significant transformations in all Western societies (Billari, 2005). Marriage, which was once part of the natural progression into adulthood, has lost much of its centrality in structuring young adult lives and has been gradually replaced by cohabitation as the initial stage of family formation (Bumpass and Lu, 2000; Seltzer, 2000; Smock and Manning, 2004). In an increasing number of societies, marrying without prior cohabitation is becoming an exceptional behaviour (Raley, 2000; Kiernan, 2001). Numerous factors have favoured the spread of non-marital partnerships –either as a prelude or alternative to marriage–; among them, broad social acceptance of premarital sex, weakening religious, institutional and social control over private behaviour, increasing female economic autonomy, changing gender roles, and rising emphasis on personal development and partnership quality (Bumpass, 1990; Smock, 2000).

The diffusion of cohabitation, however, has been rather hesitant in Southern Europe (Kiernan, 2002). According to the Fertility and Family Surveys, only 7% of Italian women and 11% of Spanish women born in 1960-1964 entered cohabitation as a first union.[1] A steady trend towards later marriage has been manifest since the early 1980s and current female age at first marriage is well above EU-25 average, both in Italy (29.5) and in Spain (29.4),[2] but the postponement of marriage has not been compensated by a parallel increase in cohabitation. Whereas in Northern Europe first union formation occurs significantly earlier than reflected in marriage statistics, in Italy and Spain late union formation is the norm, not only because cohabitation is infrequent, but also because the age pattern of entry into cohabitation is only slightly earlier than the pattern of entry into marriage (Schröder, 2005). Consequently, the percentage of women aged 25-29 who have not yet entered their first union is among the highest in Europe (63% in Spain and 59% in Italy, according to the 2001 census).

[1] Standard country tables for FFS data: http://www.unece.org/ead/pau/ffs/f_h_151b.htm.

[2] The corresponding age at first marriage for males was 32.2 in Italy and 31.2 in Spain in 2004.

The North-South divide in cohabitation prevalence has attracted considerable attention in the demographic literature, but there are diverging interpretations. In some studies, Southern European countries are portrayed as being at odds with the predictions of the second demographic transition theory (Coleman, 2004), and the diffusion of cohabitation is considered confined to a highly selective population with little prospects to spread to the larger population (Nazio and Blossfeld, 2003). This viewpoint, however, does not fit with the relatively large increase in nonmarital fertility that has recently taken place in Spain and Italy –the proportion of nonmarital births reached 26.8% in Spain and 17.3% in Italy in 2005–. In other studies, the low prevalence of cohabitation is interpreted as a delay in the adoption of innovative behaviour. The increase of cohabitation is considered "inevitable" (van de Kaa, 1987) or just a question of time, and Southern European countries are portrayed as later-comers in the global process of family change (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 2007). However, this perspective does not fully explain why South European countries were *forerunners* of lowest-low fertility in the early 1990s and continue to be *laggard*s in cohabitation. In the debate over gradual convergence versus persistent divergence in partnering behaviour, an increasing number of studies opt for an eclectic view: cohabitation in South Europe is likely to move in the direction of Northern Europe, but might not converge to the same levels, because of the specificities of the Mediterranean pattern of family formation (Jurado and Naldini, 1996; Billari et al., 2002) and also due to a series of economic and institutional barriers, which will be examined below.

The aim of this paper is to provide some empirical evidence showing that the spread of cohabitation is underway, although at a slow pace. We will describe the potential barriers to cohabitation in Southern European societies and reflect on whether they are expected to persist in the near future. Given that cohabitation is still an emerging behaviour, cohabiting couples are likely to be a selective group of the population. In order to examine their distinctiveness, we will compare the profile of cohabiting and married couples using census microdata. Since cross-sectional information does not provide adequate information on the dynamics of union formation, we will also perform an event-history analysis, using FFS data, to ascertain the influence of several background factors on women's decision to cohabit or to marry (or to remain single).

The Mediterranean pattern of union formation

The "Mediterranean" or South European pattern of family formation is characterized by prolonged co-residence with parents, late transition to a union, predominance of marriage among first unions, and high synchronization between leaving the parental home, union formation and first birth (Baizán et al., 2003). A handful of new terms have been coined initially referred to Southern Europe, such as "lowest-low fertility" (Kohler et al., 2002), "latest-late transition to adulthood" (Billari, 2004) or "postponement syndrome" (Livi Bacci, 2001). The Mediterranean pattern is also highly responsible for the shift in the macro-level relationships between union dynamics and total fertility: contrary to what was happening about twenty years ago, fertility is currently higher in countries with a larger share of cohabitation, nonmarital births and union disruption (Billari and Kohler, 2004).

Early views of the second demographic transition assumed that the decline of fertility would go hand in hand with the pluralization of family forms (van de Kaa, 1987). However, the emergence of lowest-low fertility in the early 1990s in Southern Europe,[3] the region with less diversified family forms, questioned the initial assumption of convergence (Billari and Wilson, 2001), led to a reevaluation of the main theories of fertility (Kertzer et al., 2006), and strengthened the view of path dependency (Blossfeld 2000). In order to explain the "paradox" of lowest-low fertility coexisting with traditional family patterns in Southern Europe (Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004), some scholars have emphasized socioeconomic barriers to union formation, such as high youth unemployment (Ahn and Mira 2001), increasing uncertainty linked to unstable job positions (Simó et al., 2005), and tight housing markets (Holdsworth and Irazoqui, 2002). Other scholars have focused on the institutional barriers to union formation, such as the familism embedded in the welfare system –which presumes that the family is the primary responsible for the well-being of its members–, and the lack of specific public policies directed to youth, which reinforce their dependency on the family (Ferrera, 1996; Esping-Andersen 1999). Inconsistent gender relations in the public and private spheres have also been pointed out as a potential explanation for the concurrence of lowest-low fertility and traditional family forms (Chesnais, 1996; McDonald, 2000).

[3] The two countries that first entered this category were precisely Italy and Spain, in 1993.

Another key element in the Mediterranean model of family formation is the strength of intergenerational ties, assumed to be rooted in the collective culture (Reher, 1998; Dalla Zuanna, 2000). Strong family ties are manifest in multiple life spheres, such as the prolonged permanence in the parental home (Moreno, 2003); the support from the parental family to set up a new household and buy a house, the high residential proximity afterwards, and the continuous contact, economic support and care transfers throughout the life course (Tomassini et al., 2003). Both in Italy and Spain, the child care provided by grandparents has become an important component in the strategies to reconcile work and family responsibilities among young cohorts (Tobío, 2001*a*).

In this context of strong family ties, parents' traditional values have been hypothesized to account for the low diffusion of cohabitation. According to numerous opinion surveys, Italian and Spanish youth display very high acceptance of non-traditional family forms: 80% of Italian 15-24 year olds don't rule out cohabitation (2000 IARD Survey, 2000) and 85% of Spanish 18-29 years olds declare that a couple should live together before getting married (2002 ISSP Survey). These favourable attitudes have not been translated into practice, but they signal readiness. A widespread explanation for the gap between attitudes and behaviour is that parental views on union formation have a considerable influence on their children's decisions (Di Giulio and Rosina, 2006). Young adults, in spite of favouring cohabitation, would refrain from cohabiting in order to avoid confrontation with their parents. In support of this hypothesis, Rosina and Fraboni (2004) found that women with higher educated fathers, assumed to be more open minded, tend to be forerunners in the adoption of cohabitation, and Schröeder (2005) found that mother's education had a significant impact on daughters' transition to cohabitation.

In sum, most of the studies agree that the low diffusion of cohabitation in Southern Europe cannot be attributed to traditional values among youth, but rather to the context of economic uncertainty, difficult access to housing and weak state support, which act as barriers to union formation –whether via cohabitation or marriage– (Tobío, 2001*b*), as well as to a desire to avoid intergenerational conflict.

However, under the apparent surface of tradition and immobility in family forms in Southern Europe, significant transformations are underway. For instance, nonmarital fertility, a behaviour which was rare in the 80s, can no longer be labelled as marginal. In the period 1995-2005, the proportion of nonmarital births has more than doubled in both countries: from 11.1% to 26.8% in Spain and from 8.1% to 17.3% in Italy. Estimations from the FFS 1995 reveal that 42% of nonmarital first births correspond to consensual unions in Spain, but this proportion is probably higher nowadays, as it is suggested by the fact that 94% of non marital births in 2004 had registered father's age, an indirect proxy for legal recognition.

The Italian and Spanish social context

Before examining recent patterns of cohabitation, we will briefly review recent social trends in Italy and Spain, focusing on some of the key factors that have been documented to underlie the broad changes in union formation: women's economic independence (Bracher and Santow, 1998), economic uncertainty (Blossfeld et al., 2003) and value change (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe, 2004).

Women's educational advancement has been notable in Italy and Spain since the second half of the 20th century (Coppola, 2004). For younger generations, access to university is no longer restricted to the upper social classes and women have surpassed men in tertiary education enrolment since the mid-1990s in both countries. According to the 2001 round of Census, the proportion of University graduates among females 25 to 34 years old was 29.1% in Spain and 14.3% in Italy. This is a remarkable advancement compared with the past –less than 4% of Spanish and Italian women born in the 1930s had access to college education–, but it also reveals a different pace of change in the two countries.

With the improvement of female education and corresponding earnings potential, women's working aspirations and actual attachment to the labour force have changed dramatically. Aggregate indicators usually employed to illustrate the gap between Northern and Southern Europe regarding women's social and economic position are often misleading, because they do not take into account the large differences prevailing

between coexisting cohorts. Although women's labour force participation rates for both countries are well below EU average, when the comparison is restricted to the younger cohorts, differentials attenuate or even disappear. In 2005, 77.2% of Spanish women aged 25-34 were economically active, a proportion that is slightly above the EU-25 average for this age group (75.7%). In Italy, women's labour force participation rates in the 25-34 age segment are lower (64.9%), but this is due to large regional differences: the rate of labour participation for women in the North is 78.9% whereas for women in the South is 43.1% (ISTAT, 2006).

Despite considerable progress, it should be noted that women's incorporation into the labour market has been partly via unemployment. The unemployment rate averaged 20% in Spain in the period 1985-1998, a rate more than double the EU average. This very high level of unemployment was not evenly distributed, but largely concentrated among young adults and women. Unemployment has declined markedly in recent years and is currently around 9%, but considerable gender and age differentials still persist: in 2005, 12.2% of women compared to 7% of men were unemployed in Spain, and the corresponding rates among women and men aged 20-24 were 20.4% and 14.3% (Labour Force Survey). Overall unemployment rates have been lower in Italy, averaging 11% in period 1985-2000 and declining afterwards to 8%, but unemployment is also largely concentrated on young adults and particularly young women (Bernardi and Nazio, 2005).

Another distinctive feature of the Spanish labour market is the increasing share of temporary contracts. Temporary employment increased from 10% of the salaried labour force in 1985 to 33.3% in 2005, the highest rate in the EU, and is highly concentrated among young adults: 53% of working persons aged 20 to 29 held a temporary contract in 2005. The overall share of temporary contracts is lower in Italy (12.3%), but they are also largely concentrated among youth (about one-third of contracts among working population younger than 25).

Social transformations have occurred in parallel with broad ideational changes. In many comparative studies, Spain and Italy are usually classified as "traditional" societies in terms of values, due in part to their Catholic inheritance. And this was certainly so in

the past, but the Catholic Church has lost its traditional power of shaping family-related legislation in Spain –as reflected in the bill passed in 2005 by the Spanish Parliament that enables same-sex marriages–, although it retains influence on the educational system and social habits. In Italy, the influence of the Catholic Church has also weakened over time, although it is still visible in politics, as reflected in the difficulties recently faced by the Italian government to pass a law on consensual unions.

Recent public opinion surveys reveal that secularization and acceptance of new family forms are now widespread among youth in both societies. Table 1 presents selected attitudinal data regarding religion and family from the European Values Survey (1999), which reveal large inter-cohort differentials. Church attendance and conformity with Catholic Church views on family life are quite low among young adults, particularly in Spain. Although the questionnaire did not include any question relative to acceptance of cohabitation, we can observe that disapproval of single motherhood has weakened significantly among younger cohorts compared to older ones. Specific attitudes on cohabitation, collected by the 2004 Spanish Survey on Opinions and Attitudes Towards Family, also reflect a wide intergenerational attitudinal gap: 48% of respondents aged 18 to 29 mentioned cohabitation as their ideal living arrangement, compared to 6% of respondents older than 50 (Table 2). A large majority of young adults think that cohabiting couples should have the same benefits as married couples (89%) and declare that they never follow Catholic Church recommendations on sexuality (92%) or partnerships (88%).

Attitudes towards gender roles have also undergone a considerable change, but the family domain remains strongly gender-specialized. Although the traditional male breadwinner/female homemaker family model has been substantially eroded (Luxán et al., 1998), and most women (and men) endorse the dual-earner family model, progress in the reallocation of unpaid housework and care responsibilities within the family has been slow (Trifiletti, 1999). Cohabitation usually entails less pressure to conform to traditional gender roles than marriage (Batalova and Cohen, 2002). However, a recent study by González et al. (2006) found that, departing from the patterns documented in other countries, consensual unions did not entail significantly more egalitarian relationships and higher male involvement in caring activities in Southern Europe.

In sum, we have described a context where women's advancement in education and employment has been remarkable. However, for the younger cohorts, labour force participation does not guarantee economic self-sufficiency, because of low salaries and increasingly precarious work contracts, which reinforce prolonged dependence from the parental family and deter engagement in long-term commitments, such as partnership formation. Social norms and values regarding new family forms have also undergone an impressive change, but while younger generations are highly accepting of cohabitation, older generations do not favour it. Gender role attitudes have also become more egalitarian, but family responsibilities remain structured along traditional gender roles, even in cohabiting relationships.

Data and methods

In order to explore recent developments in cohabitation, we will use two different sources of data. First, we will compare the socio-demographic profile of cohabiting and married women using the 5% sample of the 2001 Spanish Census. The census did not ask directly about cohabiting status, but consensual unions can be identified indirectly taking into account the marital status and the type of relationship ties among household adult members. The advantage of census microdata is that very large sample sizes permit the description of relatively infrequent behaviours, such as cohabitation (the sample contains 22,745 cohabiting women aged 15-49). The Italian census microdata have been just released and will be incorporated in the analysis shortly. Provisionally, we use data from the 2003 Multipurpose Survey (ISTAT, 2003). A logit regression model will be employed to assess the socio-demographic factors which are associated with being in a cohabiting versus a marital partnership among women currently in union. Since cohabitation tends to be short-lived and is often transformed into marriage, cross-sectional analysis can be deceptive, so we will use it only as a first exploratory step.

Census data are also ill-suited to study union formation dynamics, because they lack retrospective information. For this reason, we will perform an event history analysis of entry into first union, based on data from the Fertility and Family Surveys (FFS). The

primary disadvantage of the Italian and Spanish FFS is that they were conducted in 1995, more than 10 years ago, and it is precisely in this past decade where changes in family behaviour have accelerated –as reflected, for instance, in the rapid increase of nonmarital fertility. However, the FFS remains the only source with retrospective union histories that is fully comparable for both countries. We limit our analysis to women because young men's choice of union type might be driven by different factors (Oppenheimer 2003) and because of the small size of the male samples (1992 in Spain and 1206 in Italy).

Discrete-time multinomial logistic regression is used to estimate simultaneously the odds of marrying, cohabiting or remaining single. The observation starts at age 14 and the analysis is based on person-months of exposure to the competing risks of marriage or cohabitation, an approach that is analogous to continuous-time hazard regression (Allison 1984). The duration pattern is approximated by a piece-wise linear spline. Since the Italian FFS did not interview women younger than 20, we limit the analysis to women 20 to 40 at the time of the survey in both countries. After cleaning and restricting the data, information on 2914 women in Spain and 3512 women in Italy was used. The small number of women in the analytical sample that entered cohabitation as first union (287 in Spain and 242 in Italy) recommends some caution when interpreting the results.

If we view the rise of cohabitation as a diffusion process, and consider Italy and Spain at the initial stages of this process, we expect early innovators or forerunners to be a selective group of the population characterized by high educational attainment, high employment rates and low religiosity. Educational attainment –a proxy for earnings potential, modern values and higher demands for gender equality within partnerships– is categorized into four levels: primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and college. Employment status in entered in the model as a time-varying covariate categorized as never worked, unemployed (with prior work experience), working in the same job less than 2 years and working in the same job more than 2 years. We chose 2 years as a benchmark because, according to Spanish labour regulations, fixed-term contracts should be transformed into permanent contracts after that duration, and we expect temporary or unstable work conditions to have a differential impact on union formation

plans and union type decisions. Religiosity is measured by frequency of church attendance and it is only available at the time of interview, so we have to assume that it has not changed over time.

Given the hypothesized link in the literature between strong family ties and low diffusion of cohabitation, we will pay special attention to the impact of having been raised in a non-conventional family –measured as having experienced parental separation– and, in particular, to the impact of having lived independently from the family of origin. A time-varying covariate identifies those respondents who left the parental home to live alone or with unrelated adults before union or interview for at least one year, and we expect women who have already left the parental home to be more likely to form a cohabiting union than those who did not. We also include in the models information on pregnancy and motherhood status as time varying-covariates and region of residence in the case of Italy, because family patterns are documented to be more traditional in the South.

Prevalence of cohabitation and socio-demographic profile of cohabiting women according to Census data

Recent studies have shown that, although its prevalence remains low, cohabitation is gaining social and statistical visibility, both in Italy (Rosina and Fraboni, 2004, Schröder, 2006) and Spain (Meil Landwerlin, 2003; Castro Martín and Domínguez, 2006).

Table 3 presents the proportion of women in reproductive ages that were cohabiting at the time of the 2000 round of census in several European countries. Italy and Spain remain at the lower end of the classification: only 3% of Italian women and 4.5% of Spanish women aged 15-49 were in a nonmarital union in 2001. The prevalence captured in these cross-sectional data, however, provides only an underestimate of the proportion of women who have ever cohabited at some stage of their life, because the duration of cohabitation in Italy and Spain tends to be short, linked to frequent separation (Liefbroer and Dourleijn, 2006) and frequent transition to marriage (Heuveline y Timberlake, 2004).

If we focus on women aged 20 to 29, the prevalence of cohabitation continues to be low (3.2% in Italy and 5.6% in Spain), not because of the high incidence of marriage within this age group, but partly linked to the large proportion of unpartnered women. In fact, the proportion of women 20 to 29 out of union (71.3% in Italy and 75.3% in Spain) is among the highest in Europe. Once we look at partnered young women, the proportion cohabiting is no longer trivial: 11% in Italy and 22.8% in Spain. There are, hence, some signs that cohabitation might be abandoning its traditionally marginal position.

Table 4 presents the distribution of Italian and Spanish women by union status for all age groups. Although cohabitation is quite frequent among partnered women younger than 25, we must note that this is a selected population given the current late pattern of union formation. In the overall population, the prevalence of cohabitation is highest in the 25-29 and 30-34 age groups. From the marital status composition of cohabitants, we can also infer that cohabitation at older ages usually follows a prior marriage.

Cross-sectional data entail important limitations for describing conjugal states of relatively short duration, such as cohabitation, or for studying union dynamics in general. Nevertheless, comparing the socio-demographic characteristics of currently cohabiting and married couples can give us some hints on the factors associated with cohabitation. Table 5 presents the profile of cohabiting and married women, based on the 2001 Spanish census and the 2003 Italian Multipurpose Survey. We also present the relative risks of being in cohabitation versus marriage among women currently in union in Table 6.

As expected, currently cohabiting women are younger and much more likely to be childless than their married counterparts. With regard to education, the percent distribution shows that cohabiting women are better educated than married women, but once age and employment status are controlled in the logit model, education is negatively related to current cohabitation in Spain and not significantly related to current cohabitation in Italy. We should bear in mind that educated women might be more likely to transform their cohabiting relationship into marriage and, hence, the observed associations do not necessarily reflect the effect of education on entry into

cohabitation. With regard to employment patterns, cohabiting women are less likely to be economically inactive than their married counterparts, and their employment rates are significantly higher. There are, however, some indications that cohabitation might be less demanding in terms of financial requirements than marriage: cohabiting women's and their partners' unemployment rates are higher than married women's, and living in a rented dwelling is more common among cohabiting than married couples. The data also suggest that the degree of homogamy is lower among current cohabiting couples than among married couples. In the case of Spain, the proportion of partnerships in which the woman is older, more educated or of different nationality than her partner is higher among cohabiting than married couples. In the case of Italy, partners' age differentials are higher among cohabiting than married unions, but not educational differentials.

Current status data can provide some clues on socio-demographic disparities between cohabiting and married couples. However, since they do not capture those cohabitations that have been dissolved or transformed into marriage, they do not represent adequately the population who has ever cohabited. Moreover, since they are not confined to first unions, their relevance to identify the factors that influence young women's decisions on the type of first union is limited. For these reasons, we conduct next an event history analysis of entry into first union based on FFS data.

Factors influencing the choice of cohabitation over marriage as first union

Table 7 presents the results of the discrete-time event history analysis of entry into first union in Spain and Italy. Odds ratios for several contrasts of the multinomial logit model are presented: entering marriage versus remaining single, entering cohabitation versus remaining single, entering cohabitation versus entering marriage, and entering any type of union.

Birth cohort effects suggest significant changes in the patterns of union formation over time and confirm an upward trend of cohabitation. While the likelihood of entering directly into marriage has declined markedly across cohorts, the likelihood of entering cohabitation has increased significantly, monotonically in the case of Spain and in a less

gradual fashion in the case of Italy. Spanish and Italian women born in 1965-1969 were about 3-4 times more likely to choose cohabitation over marriage as their first union than women born only 10 years earlier. Nevertheless, the increase in cohabitation has not been large enough to compensate for the decline in marriage, and the overall rate of transition to first union, regardless of type, is considerably lower among younger cohorts than older ones.

We have previously mentioned that, since the diffusion of cohabitation is still at an early stage, we expect highly educated, employed and less religious women to be forerunners in the adoption of cohabitation, since they tend to be less conditioned by tradition and more open to innovation. The effect of religiosity is clear-cut. Both Italian and Spanish women who never attend church are significantly more likely to choose cohabitation over marriage as their first union. The association between education and cohabitation, however, is not conclusive. Women's educational attainment has a strong negative effect on the likelihood to enter direct marriage in both countries, but regarding the transition to cohabitation, education has a negative effect in Italy and no significant effect in Spain. The data suggest that better educated women are less likely to enter any type of union but, once they decide to form a union, they tend to favour cohabitation over marriage in Spain, although not in Italy.

In contrast with the effect of education, the effect of stable employment on the transition to cohabitation is positive in Italy and stronger than in the case of Spain. Italian women who have been working for two or more years are more likely to exit singlehood through cohabitation than women who have never worked. The effect is in the same direction in the case of Spain, although it looses statistical significance after controlling for education. Unstable employment –proxied by work spell durations of less than 2 years– deters marriage, but increases the likelihood of cohabitation in both countries. The relative risk of cohabiting versus marrying among women in unstable jobs is 2.4 times higher in Spain and 2.9 higher in Italy than among women who never worked. These results suggest, on one hand, that cohabitation presumes a double-income partnership, particularly in Italy, and that cohabitation might be a more flexible living arrangement for women with no stable job position.

Among all the variables included in the model, the one that seems to exert a stronger influence on the probability to enter cohabitation is the experience of having lived independently from the family or origin for at least one year. Residential –and presumably economic– emancipation from the parental family reduces the odds of direct marriage and multiplies the probability of transition to cohabitation by nearly a factor of 6 in the case of Spain and nearly a factor of 3 in the case of Italy. This result is in consonance with the studies that argue that strong parental influence over their children's union formation decisions deters cohabitation. Women who have left the parental home are less likely to be conditioned by parents' opinions in their decision-making, and have probably already achieved the preconditions for union formation, such as a dwelling of their own and a job, so they do not have to rely on parental economic support. It is also possible that women living on their own develop a stronger attachment to personal independence, and regard cohabitation as a living arrangement that is better suited to preserve it.

The effects of the rest of the background variables are consistent with those documented in the literature. Pregnancy increases considerably the risk of transition to first marriage and, to a lesser extent, the risk of transition to first cohabitation. But if we compare the odds of entering cohabitation relative to entering marriage, the results confirm that pregnant women tend to choose marriage over cohabitation. On the other hand, nonmarital children do not have a significant effect on the transition to direct marriage or cohabitation, but Italian women who are already mothers tend to favour cohabitation over marriage when they form their first union. Being brought-up in a non-traditional family setting also influences the type of first union chosen. Women who experienced their parents' separation are more likely to choose cohabitation over marriage than women that were raised in a two-parent family, both in Italy and Spain. Finally, living in a large city increases the odds of transition to cohabitation in Spain, and women living in Northern Italy are more likely to enter cohabitation than women living in the South.

In brief, the results reveal important commonalities regarding the background factors that favour cohabitation over marriage in Italy and Spain, but also some differences. Low religiosity and living independently from the family or origin are strongly related

to the choice of cohabitation as first union in both countries. Women's unstable employment also favours cohabitation over marriage. However, the effects of education and stable employment are not analogous in Italy and Spain. College education increases the likelihood of cohabiting versus marrying in Spain, but not in Italy, and the opposite is true for the effect of stable employment.

Conclusions

Cohabitation remains an infrequent living arrangement in Italy and Spain, but it is gaining social and statistical visibility. Census data revealed that, although the prevalence of cohabitation in the overall population remains among the lowest in Europe, cohabitation among partnered young women is no longer marginal. FFS data confirmed that the rate of entry into cohabitation has increased across birth cohorts, suggesting a steady, albeit slow, diffusion. Although FFS data collected 10 years ago cannot capture the latest developments, the recent rise in nonmarital births also points towards a continued increase of cohabiting unions.

Since the diffusion of cohabitation is still at an early stage, we expected highly educated, employed and less religious women to be forerunners in the adoption of cohabitation. The analysis confirmed that cohabitation is a selective process, but not identical in Italy and Spain. Low religiosity was strongly associated with the likelihood to enter cohabitation in both countries. Yet, better educated women favoured cohabitation over marriage only in Spain, and the effect of long-term employment was stronger in Italy than in Spain.

Secularization and acceptance of new family forms are currently widespread among Italian and Spanish youth. But favourable attitudes towards cohabitation have not yet translated into behaviour. Previous studies have argued that young adults refrain from cohabiting in order to avoid confrontation with their parents. We have provided some indicators that confirm the existence of a wide intergenerational gap in attitudes towards cohabitation. Moreover, the analysis showed that having lived independently from the family or origin for at least one year had a strong positive influence on the likelihood to cohabit. Women who have already made the transition to residential autonomy are

presumably less likely to be conditioned by parents' opinions and also less likely to rely on parental economic support.

Previous studies have also argued that the preconditions for marriage (having a stable relationship, a job and a place to live) apply for cohabitation as well, and that youth unemployment, increased uncertainty in work trajectories, high housing prices and lack of public policies aimed at facilitating youth transition to adulthood in Southern Europe act as structural barriers to union formation, whether via marriage or cohabitation. In this regard, the high proportion of women aged 25-29 out of union in Italy and Spain, compared to other European countries, could be interpreted as evidence of the difficulties faced by young adults to reach economic self-sufficiency and residential independence. The results of the analysis indicate that women's unstable work decreases the odds of marrying, although it increases the odds of cohabiting, both in Italy and Spain, suggesting that cohabitation might be a more flexible living arrangement for youth with unstable work patterns.

What is the likely path in the future? The high acceptability of cohabitation among youth reflected in major opinion surveys indicates a large potential for future increase. And if parental attitudes towards their children's living arrangements are a key obstacle to the diffusion of cohabitation, these are bound to change, as current young cohorts, highly tolerant towards new family forms, become parents themselves. Also, if barriers to union formation are linked to the difficulties faced by young adults to achieve residential and economic independence, it could be argued that, since cohabitation has less demanding prerequisites –in terms of home ownership, savings and job stability–, it might be better suited to youth's circumstances, at least as a temporary arrangement, and hence likely to increase in the future. Of course, it all depends on whether young adults respond to income uncertainty by remaining even longer at the parental home or venture to emancipate even if this entails a decline in their standard of living with respect to the parental home. Our results suggest that living on one's own or with friends is often a decisive intermediate step to forming a cohabiting union.

Changes in the institutional and legal framework of cohabitation may also play a role in future developments. Nowadays, Italian and Spanish couples enjoy more social

protection if they are married or if they separate after marriage. Married and unmarried parents have the same obligations towards their children and cohabiting couples have the right to adopt jointly in Spain since 2005, but cohabiting couples are regarded as two single individuals rather than a family for income tax, inheritance, social security or pension rights. However, the legal context is likely to change. Pension rights for cohabitors, for instance, are currently being discussed at the Spanish Parliament. Growing social acceptance and increased institutional security for cohabitors might contribute to blur the boundaries between cohabitation and marriage, even if marriage is still preferred when it comes to raising children.

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Table 1. Attitudes regarding religion and family in Spain and Italy, by age group

		15-29	30-49	50+
Goes to church at least once a month	**Spain**	13.4	30.2	54.0
	Italy	39.9	49.8	64.5
Thinks church(es) are giving adequate answers to problems of family life	**Spain**	17.6	29.9	49.8
	Italy	34.0	46.1	56.6
Agrees that marriage is an outdated institution	**Spain**	30.2	18.9	9.8
	Italy	20.1	18.2	14.2
Disapproves that a single woman with no partner has a child	**Spain**	6.9	8.5	32.1
	Italy	33.5	33.0	50.9

Source: European Values Surveys (1999)

Table 2. Attitudes towards cohabitation in Spain, by age group

	18-29	30-39	40-49	50+
Regardless of your actual situation, which living arrangement would you prefer?				
Live alone	11.7	7.6	5.6	8.5
LAT	3.2	3.4	2.5	1.1
Cohabitation with no intention to marry	28.4	14.8	8.6	2.7
Cohabitation with intention to marry	19.7	8.2	6.6	3.4
Marriage	24.8	62.1	71.5	79.8
Other	12.1	3.8	5.3	4.5
Should a cohabiting couple have the same benefits as a married couple?				
Yes	88.9	85.2	79.3	66.0
No	6.1	9.2	14.6	19.6
DK	4.9	5.6	6.1	14.4
% that never (or practically never) follows Catholic Church recommendations on...				
Politics	93.4	91.0	85.4	73.0
Sexuality	92.2	89.2	83.6	64.5
Partnerships & Marriage	88.4	85.0	79.5	58.6
N	*588*	*499*	*396*	*1001*

Source: Survey on Opinions and Attitudes Towards Family (CIS, 2004). Study No. 2578.

Table 3. Percent distribution of women aged 15-49 and 20-29 by union status, according to the 2000 round of Census *(Countries ordered by share of cohabitation among women 15-49)*

	Women aged 15-49					Women aged 20-29				
	All women			Women in union		All women			Women in union	
	cohabiting	*married*	*not in union*	*cohabiting*	*married*	*cohabiting*	*married*	*not in union*	*cohabiting*	*married*
Denmark	20.3	42.1	37.6	32.5	67.5	35.0	18.8	46.2	65.0	35.0
Finland	18.6	40.0	41.4	31.8	68.2	32.1	20.0	47.8	61.6	38.4
Norway	17.1	40.0	42.9	29.9	70.1	24.0	18.4	57.6	56.6	43.4
Iceland	15.3	37.9	46.9	28.7	71.3	23.5	14.6	61.9	61.6	38.4
France	14.8	43.7	41.6	25.3	74.7	25.5	22.8	51.8	52.8	47.2
Netherlands	14.7	49.0	36.3	23.1	76.9	27.4	23.9	48.7	53.4	46.6
Estonia	14.3	36.7	49.0	28.0	72.0	23.4	24.0	52.6	49.4	50.6
U.K.	14.0	43.9	42.1	24.1	75.9	22.8	21.4	55.8	51.6	48.4
Austria	9.6	45.9	44.6	17.2	82.8	6.4	25.2	68.4	20.3	79.7
Germany	9.4	51.9	38.7	15.4	84.6	16.5	28.3	55.2	36.8	63.2
Hungary	8.8	50.0	41.2	15.0	85.0	13.0	34.6	52.4	27.3	72.7
Switzerland	8.7	50.9	40.4	14.6	85.4	15.1	29.1	55.8	34.1	65.9
Belgium	8.3	51.9	39.8	13.9	86.1	13.2	30.8	56.1	30.0	70.0
Ireland	7.3	40.8	52.0	15.1	84.9	13.0	13.5	73.4	49.1	50.9
Bulgaria	7.2	56.0	36.8	11.4	88.6	12.5	41.9	45.6	23.0	77.0
Slovenia	7.2	46.2	46.7	13.4	86.6	8.5	19.8	71.7	30.1	69.9
Romania	6.2	57.5	36.3	9.7	90.3	8.8	48.2	43.0	15.5	84.5
Portugal	5.6	54.0	40.4	9.4	90.6	6.3	37.3	56.3	14.5	85.5
Lithuania	4.7	50.2	45.0	8.6	91.4	5.9	42.6	51.5	12.1	87.9
Spain	4.5	45.1	50.4	9.1	90.9	5.6	19.0	75.3	22.8	77.2
Czech Rep.	3.5	49.4	47.1	6.7	93.3	4.5	33.6	61.9	11.9	88.1
Latvia	3.3	37.6	59.1	8.1	91.9	4.9	23.5	71.6	17.2	82.8
Italy	3.0	51.5	45.5	5.5	94.5	3.2	25.6	71.3	11.0	89.0
Greece	2.4	53.8	43.9	4.2	95.8	3.6	32.9	63.5	9.9	90.1
Poland	1.5	51.2	47.2	2.9	97.1	2.1	35.6	62.3	5.6	94.4
Cyprus	1.3	60.0	38.8	2.1	97.9	2.8	48.4	48.9	5.4	94.6
Slovakia	1.0	45.4	53.5	2.2	97.8	1.3	30.9	67.8	4.0	96.0

Source: EUROSTAT <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

Table 4. Percent distribution of women by union status for successive age groups. Spanish and Italian 2001 Census

		All women			Women in union		Women cohabiting
		% cohabiting	*% married*	*% not in union*	*% cohabiting*	*% married*	*% never married*
SPAIN	15-19	0.7	0.6	98.7	56.3	43.7	96.5
	20-24	4.2	6.9	88.9	38.0	62.0	96.2
	25-29	6.9	30.1	63.0	18.7	81.3	89.7
	30-34	6.4	57.2	36.4	10.1	89.9	75.4
	35-39	5.0	68.5	26.5	6.8	93.2	57.1
	40-44	3.8	72.8	23.4	5.0	95.0	44.6
	45-49	2.9	74.5	22.6	3.7	96.3	36.4
ITALY	15-19	0.3	0.8	98.9	30.8	69.2	99.7
	20.24	2.0	11.2	86.8	15.4	84.6	98.3
	25-29	4.0	37.1	58.9	9.8	90.2	95.0
	30-34	4.4	62.0	33.6	6.6	93.4	86.4
	35-39	3.8	72.3	24.0	4.9	95.1	74.0
	40-44	3.0	76.1	20.9	3.8	96.2	59.2
	45-49	2.2	77.9	19.9	2.7	97.3	44.5

Source: EUROSTAT <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

Table 5: Comparison of socio-demographic profile of cohabiting and married women. Spanish 2001 Census (5% sample) and Italian 2003 Multipurpose Survey

		SPAIN		ITALY	
		Coha-biting	*Married*	*Coha-biting*	*Married*
Age	15-19	1.7	0.3		
	20-24	14.1	2.6	*28,6	*11,1
	25-29	25.3	11.5		
	30-34	22.5	20.3	23.9	17.9
	35-39	16.8	23.2	22.5	24.9
	40-44	12.1	22.5	14.3	24.9
	45-49	7.4	19.7	10.6	21.2
Educational level	Primary or less	18.2	24.1	5.1	8.4
	Lower Secondary	30.9	34.4	39.9	38.1
	Upper Secondary	29.4	23.9	42.1	42.9
	University	21.5	17.6	13.0	10.6
Work status	Employed	63.8	50.3	69.7	53.8
	Unemployed	14.6	10.7	7.7	4.2
	Student	3.1	1.5	2.4	0.8
	Not active	18.5	37.5	20.2	41.2
Partner's work status	Employed	84.0	90.1	90.6	91.6
	Unemployed	10.1	5.7	5.8	4.2
	Student	1.3	0.2		
	Not active	4.6	4.1	3.6	4.2
House tenure	Owned	67.1	82.8	54.5	68.4
	Rented	32.9	17.2	45.5	31.6
Number of children	0	53.6	19.8	40.7	13.8
	1	25.2	27.2	37.6	28.3
	2	15.5	40.6	12.9	44.4
	3+	5.7	12.4	8.9	13.6
Age difference between partners	Less than 4 years	53.6	63.1	58.2	64.0
	Man 4+ years older	37.7	34.3	36.0	34.9
	Woman 4+ years older	8.7	2.5	5.8	1.1
Educational differences between partners	Same education	49.2	54.6	62.2	65.5
	Man higher education	21.2	21.9	22.0	20.1
	Woman higher education	29.6	23.5	15.9	14.5
Nationality differences between partners	Both nationals	85.2	95.4		
	Different nationality	8.3	2.0		
	Both foreigners	6.5	2.6		
Town size	<20.000	25.6	35.6		
	20.000-100.000	27.3	27.1		
	100.000-500.000	24.9	22.5		
	>500.000	22.1	14.8		
N		*22,745*	*259,528*	*350*	*6131*

* 15-29, due to small number fo couples in the 2003 Italian Multipurpose survey sample

Table 6. Odds ratios from logistic regression analysis of being in cohabitation vs. marriage among women currently in union. Spanish 2001 Census (5% sample) and Italian 2003 Multipurpose Survey

		SPAIN	ITALY
Age	15-19	4.21 ***	
	20-24	2.45 ***	2.04 ***
	(25-29)	1.00	1.00
	30-34	0.67 ***	0.77
	35-39	0.56 ***	0.62 *
	40-44	0.45 ***	0.50 ***
	45-49	0.31 ***	0.37 ***
Educational level	(Primary or less)	1.00	1.00
	Lower Secondary	0.94 **	0.95
	Upper Secondary	0.92 **	0.65
	University	0.92 **	0.60
Work status	Employed	1.96 ***	2.23 ***
	Unemployed	1.84 ***	1.89 *
	Student	2.06 ***	
	(Not active)	1.00	1.00
Partner's work status	Employed	0.57 ***	1.17
	Unemployed	0.93	1.32
	Student	1.43 ***	
	(Not active)	1.00	1.00
House tenure	(Owned)	1.00	1.00
	Rented	1.90 ***	1.83 ***
Number of children	(0)	1.00	1.00
	1	0.41 ***	0.51 ***
	2	0.23 ***	0.17 ***
	3+	0.30 ***	0.24 ***
Age difference between partners	(Less than 4 years)	1.00	1.00
	Man 4+ years older	1.22 ***	1.37 *
	Woman 4+ years older	3.92 ***	5.99 ***
Educational differences between partners	(Same education)	1.00	1.00
	Man higher education	1.18 ***	1.15
	Woman higher education	1.13 ***	1.06
Nationality differences between partners	(Both nationals)	1.00	
	Different nationality	2.17 ***	
	Both foreigners	0.80 ***	
Town size	(<20.000)	1.00	
	20.000-100.000	1.33 ***	
	100.000-500.000	1.51 ***	
	>500.000	1.84 ***	

** p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*

Reference categories in parentheses.

Table 7. Odds ratios from multinomial logistic regression on entry into first union. 1995 FFS.

	Marry vs. no union		Cohabit vs. no union		Cohabit vs. marry		Any union	
	SPAIN	**ITALY**	**SPAIN**	**ITALY**	**SPAIN**	**ITALY**	**SPAIN**	**ITALY**
Birth cohort								
(1955-59)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1960-64	0.94	0.96	1.38	2.72 ***	1.47 *	2.81 ***	0.99	1.02
1965-69	0.70 ***	0.69 ***	1.93 ***	2.74 ***	2.73 ***	3.96 ***	0.81 **	0.75 ***
1970-74	0.46 ***	0.32 ***	2.07 **	2.84 **	4.42 ***	8.78 ***	0.60 ***	0.39 ***
Educational level								
Primary	1.17 *	1.11	0.90	1.33	0.89	1.20	1.16 *	1.12
(Lower Secondary)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Upper Secondary	0.57 ***	0.61 ***	0.84	0.45 ***	1.45 *	0.74	0.61 ***	0.59 ***
College	0.43 ***	0.39 ***	0.76	0.42 **	1.74 **	1.06	0.47 ***	0.39 ***
Employment status								
Never worked	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Unemployed	0.93	0.82 *	1.82 *	1.20	1.96 *	1.44	1.00	0.85 *
Working less than 2 yrs	0.68 ***	0.83 *	1.64 *	2.41 **	2.41 **	2.88 ***	0.76 **	0.92
Working more than 2 yrs	0.87	0.97	1.25	2.09 **	1.43	2.15 **	0.90	1.03
Lived independently	0.90	0.70 **	5.83 ***	2.82 ***	6.40 ***	4.00 ***	1.42 ***	0.83
Fertility status								
(not pregnant/no child)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Pregnant	31.83 ***	23.46 ***	7.14 ***	16.33 ***	0.22 ***	0.69	27.70 ***	22.65 ***
Child	1.57	0.72	1.40	2.15	0.89	2.96 *	1.48	0.81
Parental separation	0.82	0.95	2.15 ***	1.12 **	2.61 ***	1.18 *	1.08	0.97
Size town 100,000+	1.05	0.97	1.46 *	1.20	1.38	1.23	1.08	0.99
Religious practice								
(Once a week)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Sometimes	0.99	1.07	2.86 **	1.62 *	2.87 **	1.50	1.05	1.11
Never/almost never	0.94	0.84 *	5.24 ***	2.49 ***	5.56 ***	2.96 ***	1.09	0.94
Region								
North		0.96		1.45 *		1.51 *		1.00
Center		1.11		0.88		0.78		1.00
(South)		1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00

** p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*