

# Change in the educational gradient of single mothers since the 1970s across European countries: a family life course approach

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Caroline Berghammer<sup>1,2</sup>, Anna Matysiak<sup>2</sup>, Torkild Lyngstad<sup>3</sup>,  
Francesca Rinesi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sociology, University of Vienna

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein Centre (IIASA, VID/ÖAW, WU), Vienna Institute of Demography/Austrian Academy of Sciences

<sup>3</sup> Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo

<sup>4</sup> Italian National Institute of Statistics

# Introduction

- Single parent households have fewer financial and time resources than couple parent households
- 14% of households with dependent children were single parent households in 2017, mostly headed by mothers (Eurostat 2019)
- U.S.: risk of single parenthood higher among lower educated mothers, this gradient has widened over time → *diverging destinies* (McLanahan 2004)
- Different family structures have contributed to increase in inequality: lower educated lose resources through divorce/separation (also in next generation)
- U.S. specific pattern: very high share of single mothers, low welfare state provision → high poverty rate, intertwined with race

## Research question

- Changes in the education gap in single motherhood in 8 European countries: Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, United Kingdom
- Focus on differences in education gap by family life course stage (age of youngest child)
- Since the 1970s: divorce rates rose along with liberalization of divorce legislation

## Literature review (1)

Härkönen (2017): negative relationship with education and increasing gap; no/weak gradient in Southern Europe and partly CEE countries

### **Why has the education effect turned from positive to negative?**

- Goode hypothesis: at the onset divorce is costly, later diffusion to lower educated
- Growing labour market uncertainties and flexibilization → increased economic strain on family relationships
- Gender egalitarian attitudes prevail more among highly educated → higher relationship satisfaction
- Changing composition of low and highly educated

## Literature review (2)

### Family life course stage

- Consequences differ between continuously single households and experience of divorce or separation; child's age at divorce/separation matters
- Type of problems differ, e.g. separation anxiety, nightmares or school performance (Clarke-Stewart et al. 2000; Cavanagh & Huston 2006)
- Longer-term consequences seem to be stronger among children who experienced their parents' divorce at a younger age

# Country characteristics

	Total divorce rate		Child-care enrolment rate, 3-5 year olds		At-risk of poverty rate before and after social transfers, single parents (2016)			Social benefits as % of net income, single parents (2016)	
	1985	2015	Mid-1980	2014 (% in full-time childcare 2016)	Before	After	% lifted out of poverty	Average income	50% of average income
<b>Austria</b>	31	42	60	83 (26)	59	30	51	13	20
<b>Germany</b>	32	42	66	97 (53)	57	33	58	17	38
<b>Ireland</b>	-	-	51	79 (26)	84	47	56	13	46
<b>UK</b>	42	40	47	94 (27)	79	32	41	6	39
<b>France</b>	31	42	98	100 (57)	62	35	56	12	35
<b>Poland</b>	17	30	49	74 (46)	51	34	67	14	52
<b>Italy</b>	4	30	-	95 (74)	42	33	79	8	18
<b>Norway</b>	33	43	38	97 (78)	58	34	59	8	21

Sources: (1) Recent demographic developments in Europe; Eurostat database, (2) OECD Family database; Eurostat database; (3) Eurostat database; (4) OECD Social Expenditures Database

# Data and methods (1)

COUNTRY	SURVEY	YEARS
Austria	Population census	1971
	National LFS	1984-2017
France	Population census	1962, 1968, 1975, 1982, 1990, 1999, 2006, 2011
	EU-LFS	2012-2015
Germany	National LFS	1973, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000
	EU-LFS	2005-2015
Ireland	Population census	1971, 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2002, 2006, 2011
	EU-LFS	2012-2015
Italy	National LFS	1977-2017
Norway	National LFS	1972-2016
Poland	Population census	1978
	National LFS	1993-1999
	EU-LFS	2002-2015
United Kingdom	National LFS	1975, 1977, 1979, 1983-1991, 1994, 1995
	EU-LFS	1998-2015

## Data and methods (2)

- Prioritize datasets that have family information (Bradshaw, Keung and Chzhen 2018); EU-LFS since 1998 (or later)
- Single mothers: live with their child(ren) up to age 19, but without a partner; we include mothers of all marital statuses
- Education: low (ISCED 0-2), medium (3-4), high (5-6)
- Age of youngest child: 0-4, 5-9, 10-14, 15-19

### Logistic regression analysis

- Dependent variable: (0) mother in couple, (1) single mother
- Independent variables: year, education, age of youngest child (+ interactions)
- Control variables: number of children, mother's age (centered around mean), mother's age squared

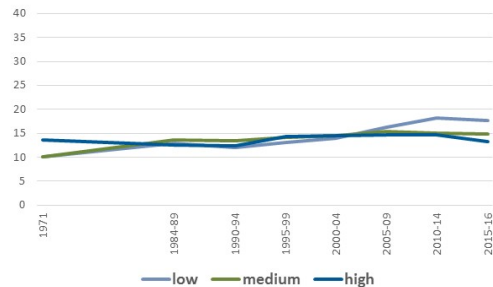


# Results

# Single mothers (%) by education and age of the youngest child

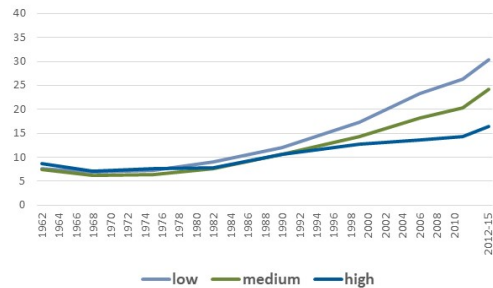
## Austria

All ages



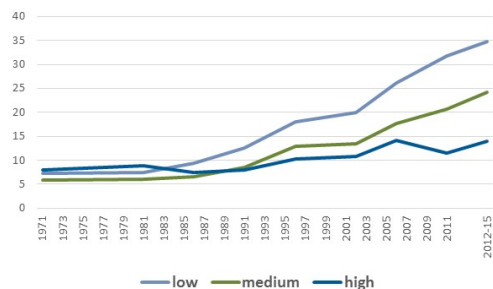
## France

All ages



## Ireland

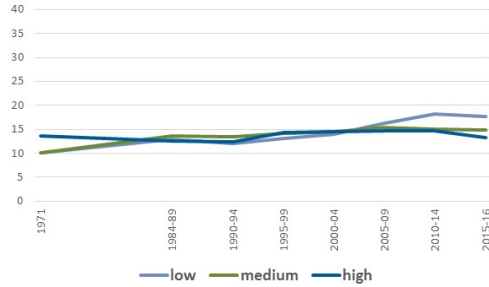
All ages



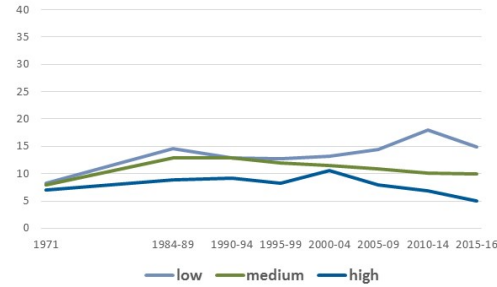
# Single mothers (%) by education and age of the youngest child

## Austria

### All ages

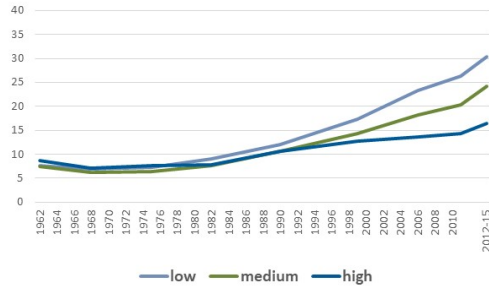


### 0-4 years

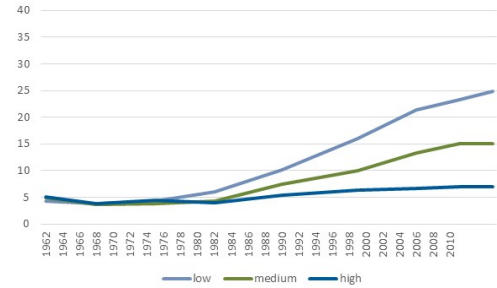


## France

### All ages

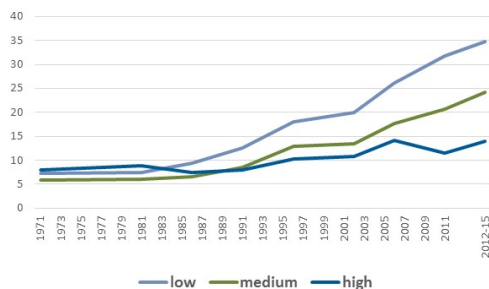


### 0-4 years

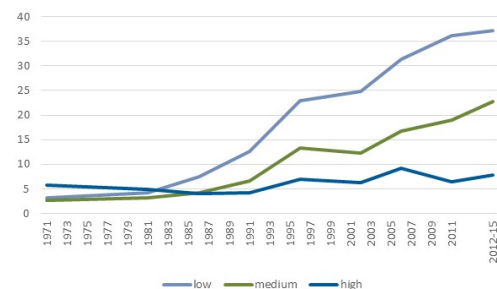


## Ireland

### All ages



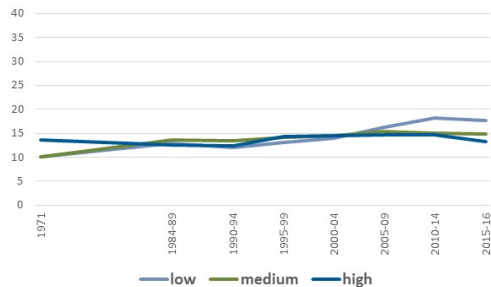
### 0-4 years



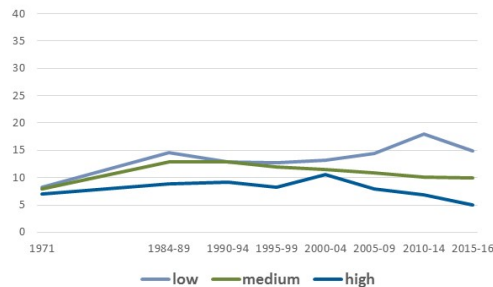
# Single mothers (%) by education and age of the youngest child

## Austria

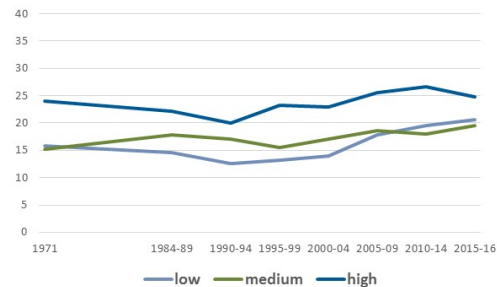
### All ages



### 0-4 years

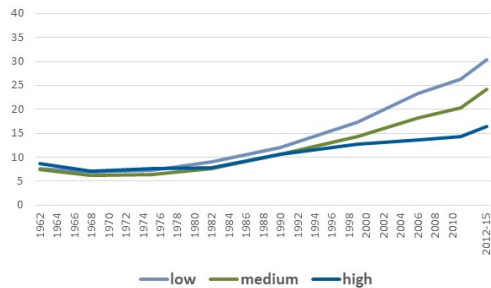


### 15-19 years

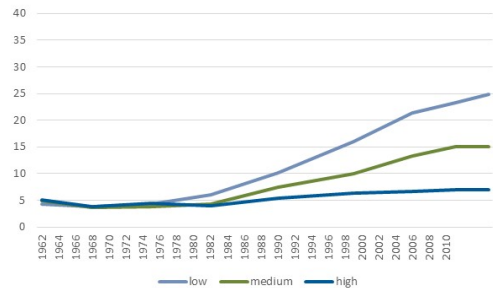


## France

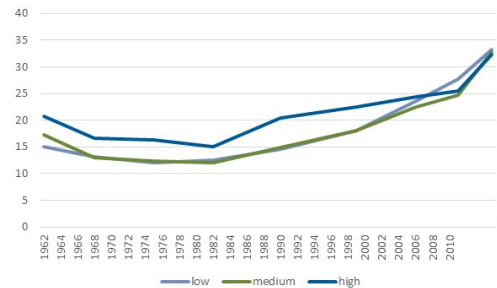
### All ages



### 0-4 years

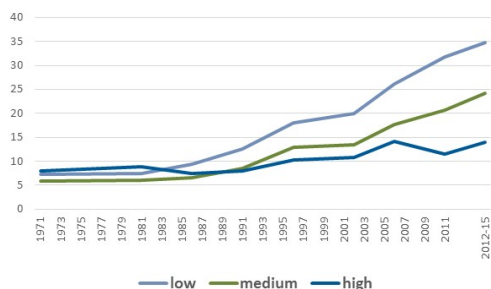


### 15-19 years

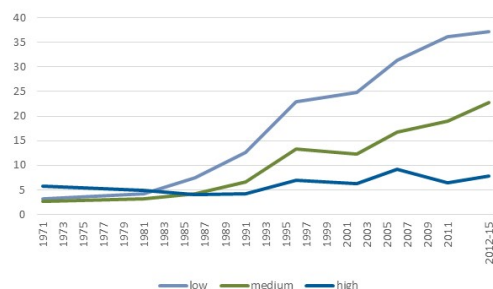


## Ireland

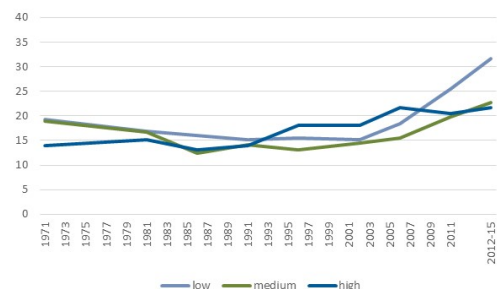
### All ages



### 0-4 years



### 15-19 years



## Results (3)

**Table:** Results from logistic regression: (0) mother in couple, (1) single mother

	AUSTRIA	FRANCE	IRELAND
<b>Year</b>	1.020***	1.040***	1.050***
<b>Med educ X 5-9 years</b>	1.365***	1.334***	1.120***
<b>Med educ X 10-14 years</b>	1.564***	1.312***	1.192***
<b>Med educ X 15-19 years</b>	1.568***	1.311***	1.151***
<b>High educ X 5-9 years</b>	2.010***	2.122***	1.775***
<b>High educ X 10-14 years</b>	2.576***	2.676***	2.029***
<b>High educ X 15-19 years</b>	2.943***	3.053***	2.088***

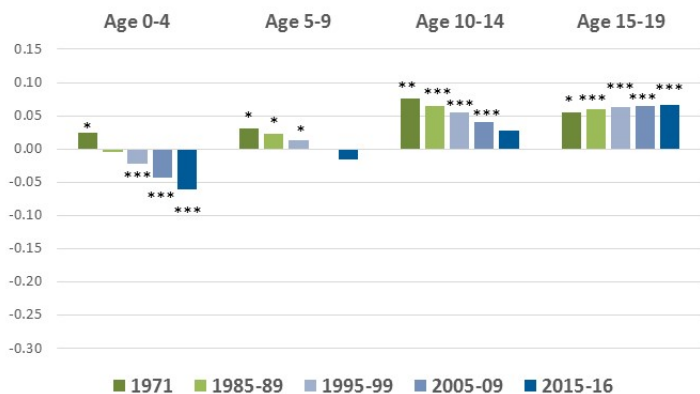
Note: Year is centered around first survey year. Controlled for: age of the youngest child, number of children, mother's age (centered around mean), mother's age squared; Significance levels: \*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.05$  (two-tailed tests).

# Results (4)

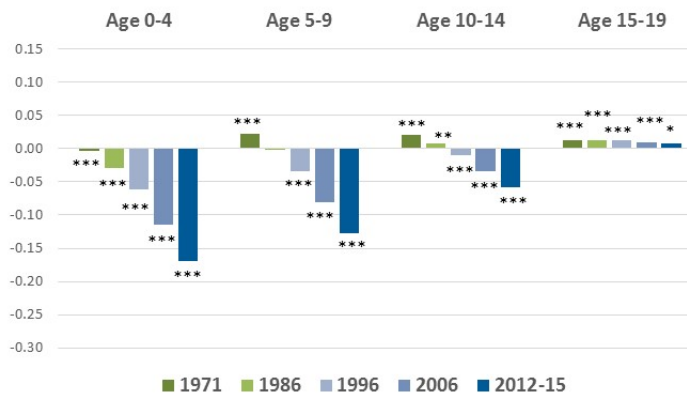
**Figure:** Difference b/n higher and less educated in single motherhood by age of the youngest child (in percentage points)

Positive values: Single motherhood higher among highly educated

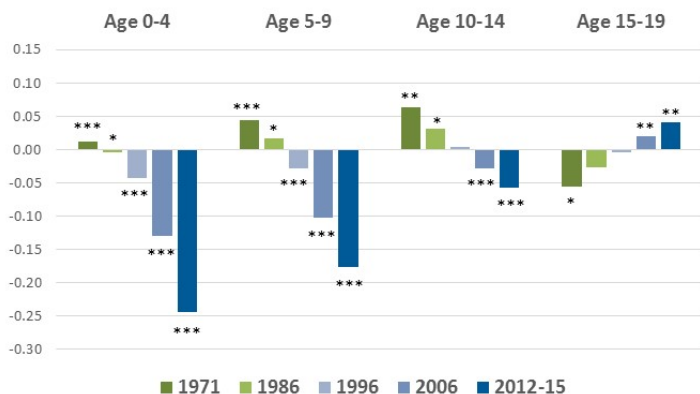
## Austria



## France



## Ireland



*Logistic regression models with three-way interaction*

*Marginal effects at representative values: 2 children, mean mother's age (squared)*

## Conclusion

- Educational gap generally turns from positive to negative, at different times
- Around 2015: educational gap largest in UK and Ireland (approx. 20 pp.), moderate in France, Norway and Poland (10-15 pp.), lowest in Austria and Italy (< 5 pp.) (not shown in presentation), nowhere near U.S. value (40 pp., McLanahan and Jacobsen 2015)
- Primarily driven by increasing risk in single motherhood with young children (single mothers at birth?)
- Especially pertinent in UK, Ireland and Poland
- By age 15-19: convergence of educational groups
- “Double burden”: less educated have lower resources and are single mothers of young children, who may particularly be in need of higher resources

## Questions? Comments?

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FATE website: [www.fate-project.at](http://www.fate-project.at)

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