No time to lose? Stable partnership as a prerequisite to childbearing across ages

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1. Motivation and hypotheses

- Over the last decades, European countries have experienced an increase in the average age at parenthood (Neels et al., 2017; Billari et al.., 2019).

- People often wait to have children until they meet certain conditions (Gustafsson & Kalwij, 2006; Mills et al., 2011; Wood & Neels, 2017; Rotkirch, 2020), such as finding the right partner (Slabá et al., 2024).

- However, because of the age-related fecundity decline (Te Velde et al., 2012; Leridon, 2017), these prerequisites may vary in importance depending on a woman's age.

1. Motivation and hypotheses

We expect to find:

Older women to approach these requirements with more flexibilitiy, potentially having children in shorter or less stable relationships.

This fact should be reflected in the following situations:

1. Older single women may be more likely to enter motherhood shortly after starting a union.

2. Older partnered women may be more likely to end a relationship shortly after having a child.

3. Older women may be more likely to have children without a partner.

2. Data and Methods

- Database: European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (**EUSILC**) – longitudinal aspect.

  - Information about the household composition and relationship between its members for 4 observations.

- We analyse how the situation in the first observation (t1) is connected to the behaviours observed in the three subsequent observations (t2, t3, and t4).

- Pooling different countries and time periods (2004-2023), we observe **variations across time and space** (clustering countries according to fertility characteristics).

2. Data and Methods

1. Among single childless women at t1 who enter a co-residential union at t2 or t3, likelihood of having a child in t2, t3 or t4, by age.

2. Among childless women having a child in a co-residential union in t1, t2 or t3, likelihood of ending co-residential unions in t2, t3 or t4, by age.

3. Among childless single women in t1, t2 or t3, likelihood of having a child outside of a co-residential union in t2, t3 or t4, by age.

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3. Results. Variations across time

Predicted probabilities of having a child during the observation period among women single in t1 who begin a co-residential union during the observation period, by age and period

Own elaboration based on EU-SILC data. All countries, years 2004-2023.

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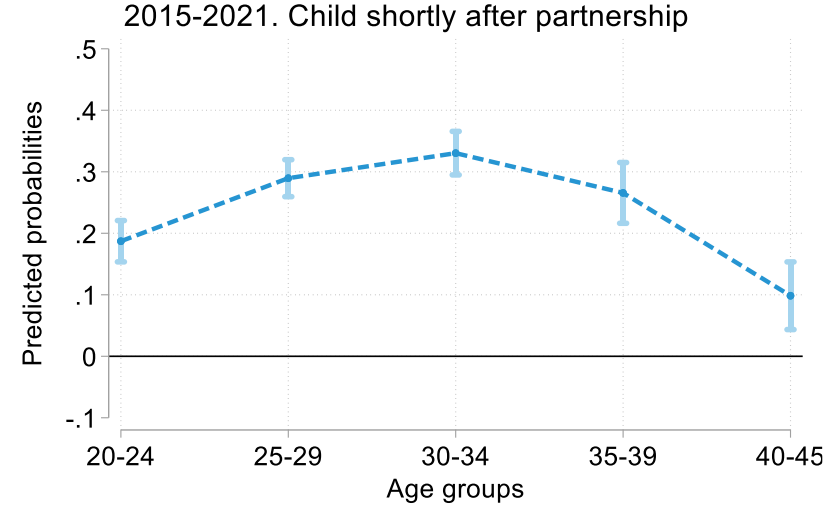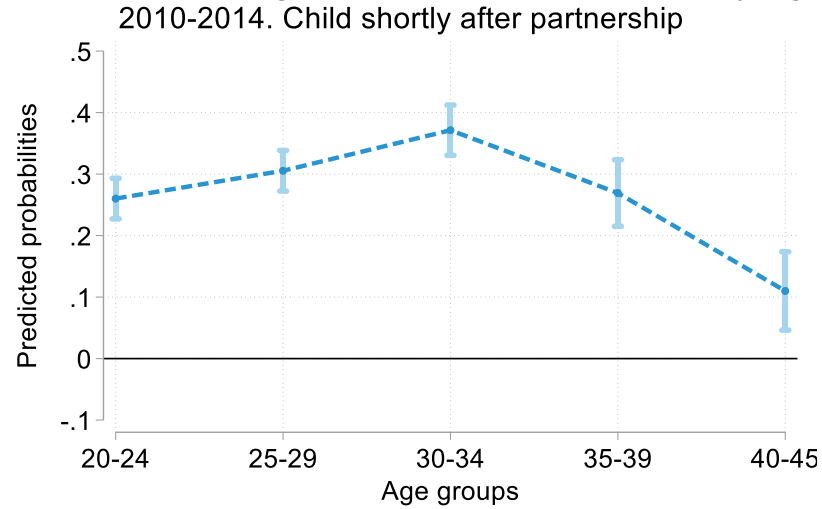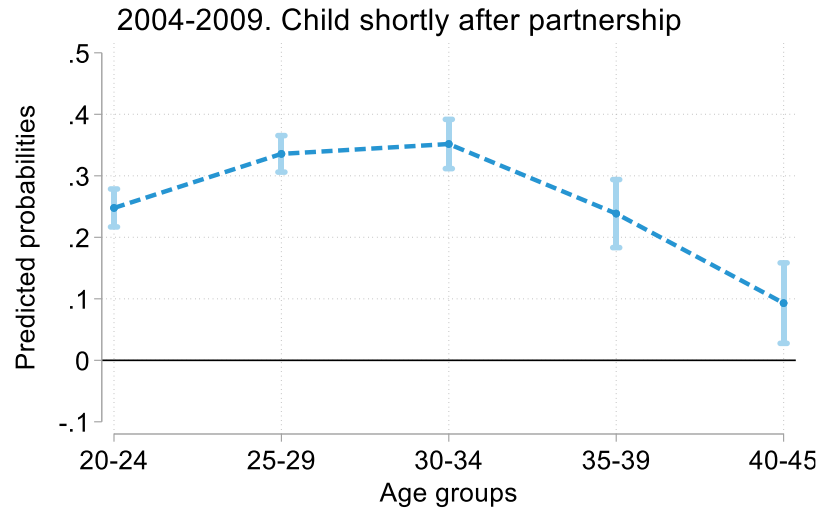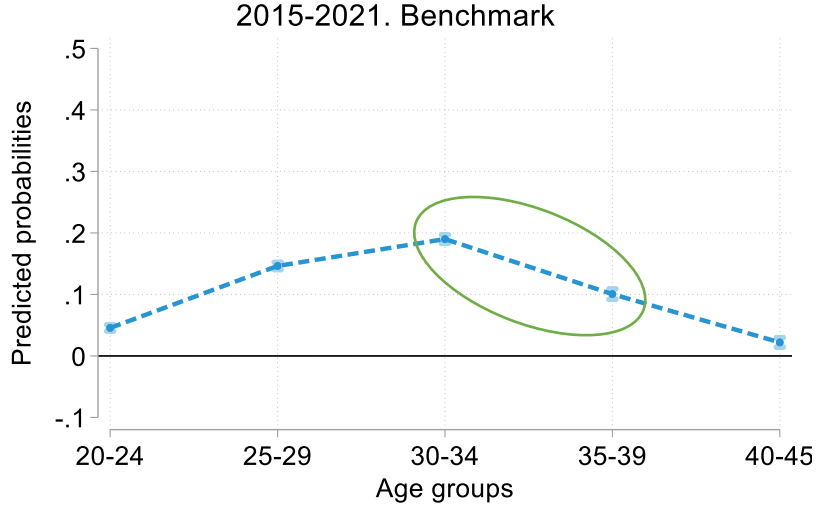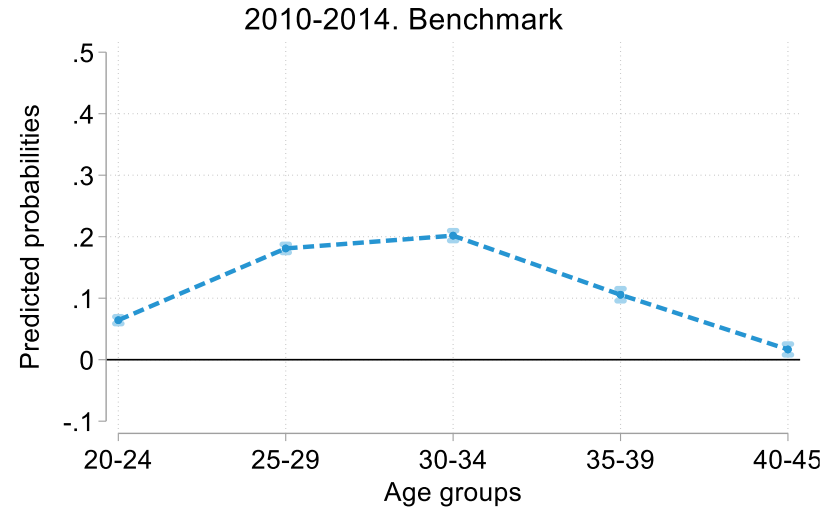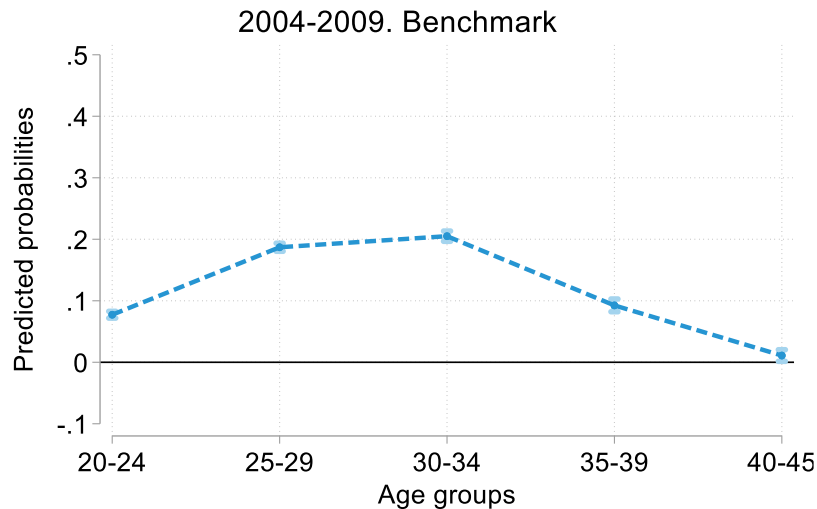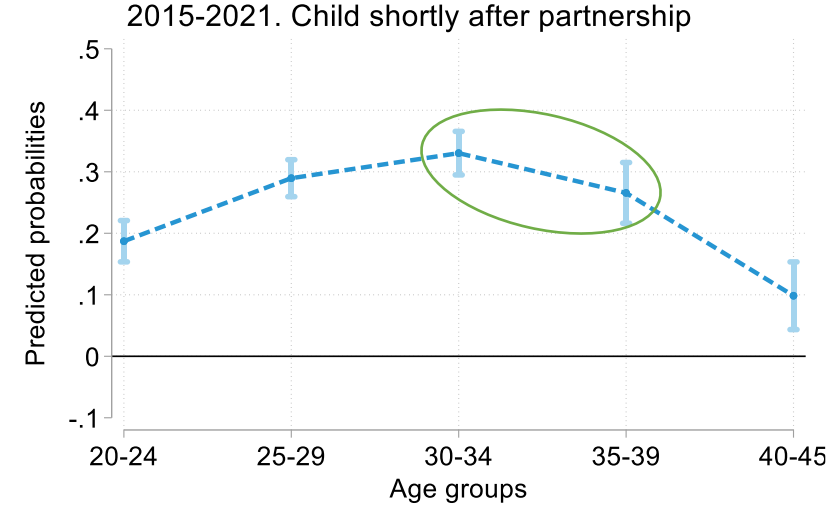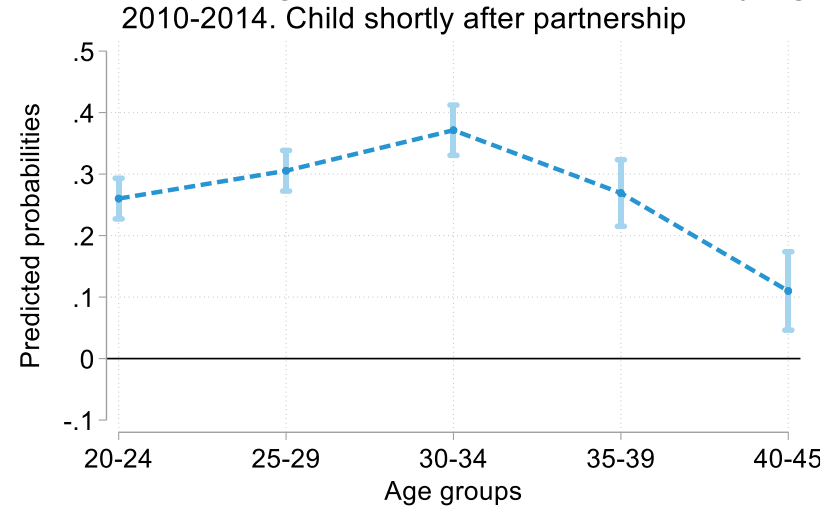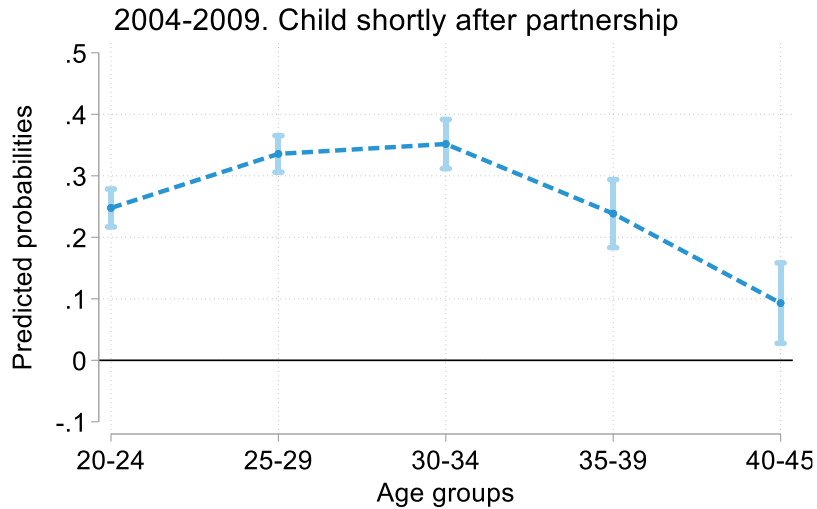
4. Conclusions

- We observe an **increased likelihood of older women entering motherhood** after initiating co-residential unions **over time** (1) -> more prevalent as fertility has been postponed.

- Single older women entering a co-residential union **are more likely to transition to motherhood during the observation period in countries with late fertility patterns** compared to those with earlier fertility patterns (1) -> the relationship seems to relate to what is considered late in a country.

- We do **not find a clear trend indicating that older women are more likely to experience union dissolutions** after entering motherhood (2). However, the findings suggest that **older women are more likely to experience single motherhood** (3).

Thank you!

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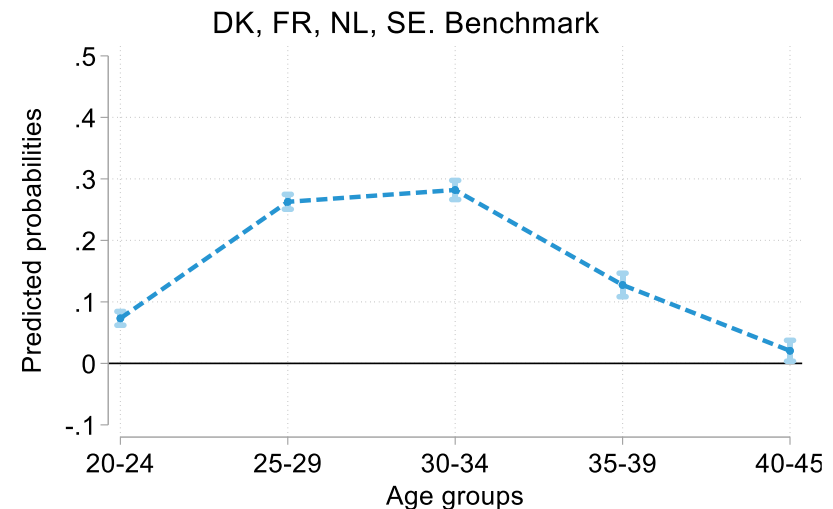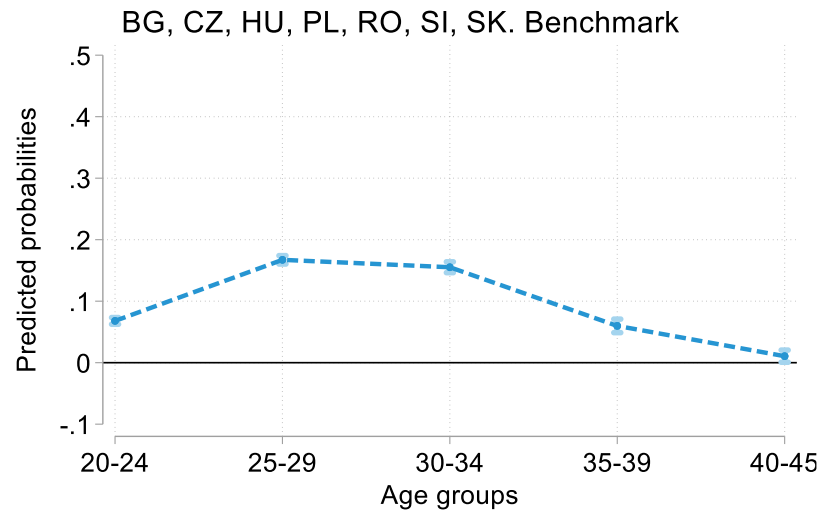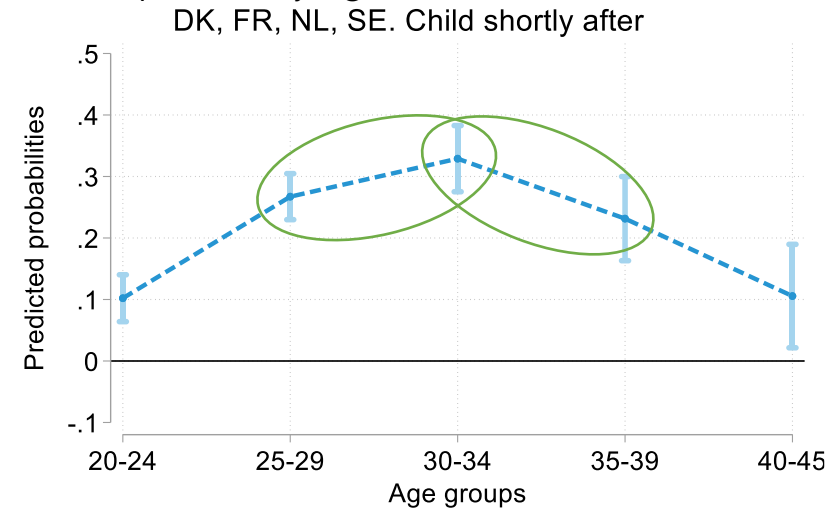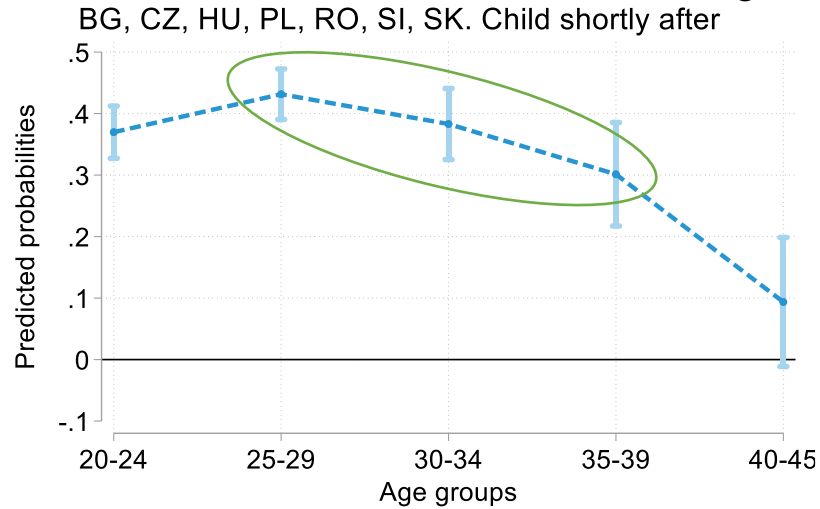
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Appendix 1. Results. Variations across countries

Predicted probabilities of having a child during the observation period among women single in t1 who begin a co-residential union during the observation period, by age and cluster

BG, CZ, HU, PL, RO, SI, SK. Child shortly after

DK, FR, NL, SE. Child shortly after

BG, CZ, HU, PL, RO, SI, SK. Benchmark

DK, FR, NL, SE. Benchmark

MA1B2004: 25,69, TFR2004: 1,26
MA1Bdiff: 1,97, TFRdiff: 0,35

MA1B2004:28,55, TFR2004:1,79
MA1Bdiff: 0.97 TFRdiff: -0.09

Own elaboration based on EU-SILC data. Years 2004-2023.

Appendix 1. Variations across countries
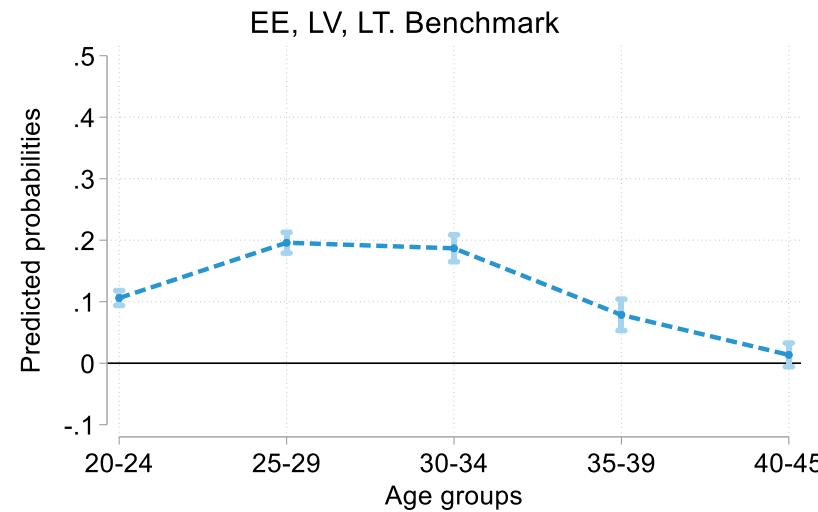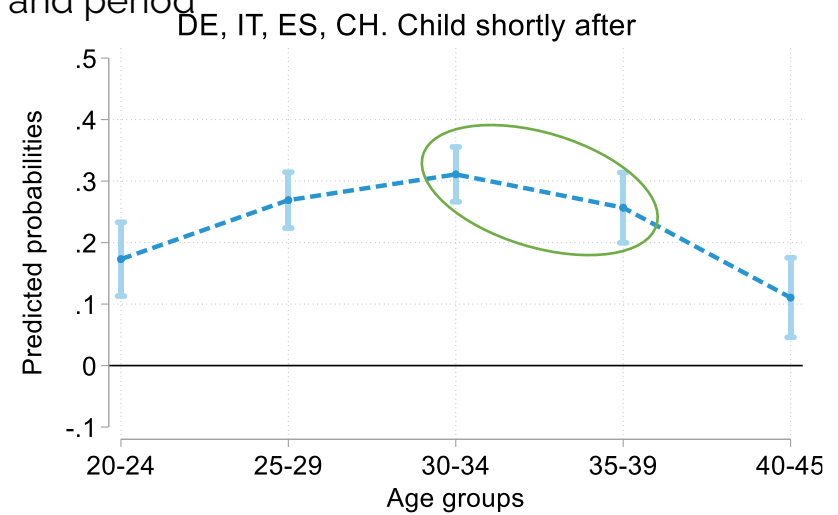
Predicted probabilities of having a child during the observation period among women single in t1 who begin a co-residential union during the observation period, by age and period

EE, LV, LT. Child shortly after

FI, IE, LU, NO. Child shortly after

DE, IT, ES, CH. Child shortly after

EE, LV, LT. Benchmark

FI, IE, LU, NO. Benchmark

DE, IT, ES, CH. Benchmark
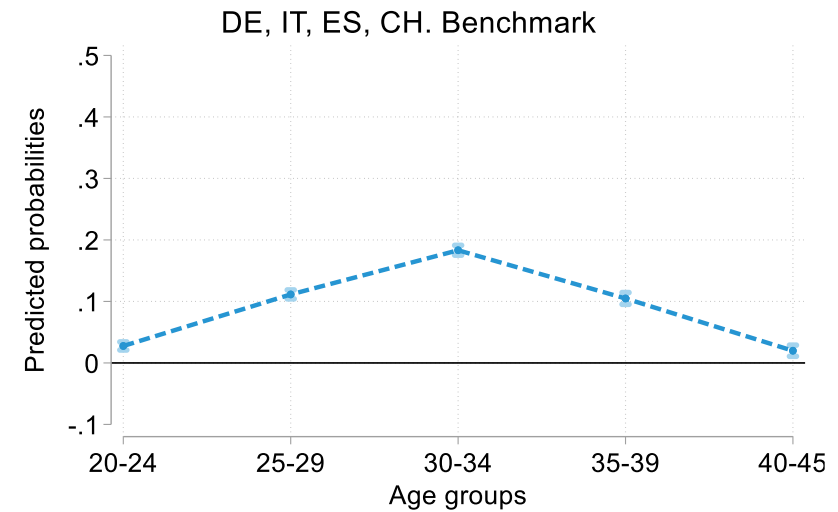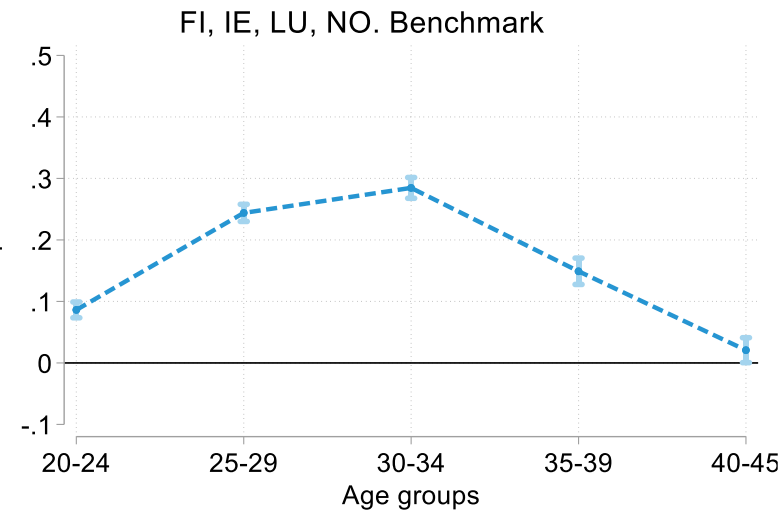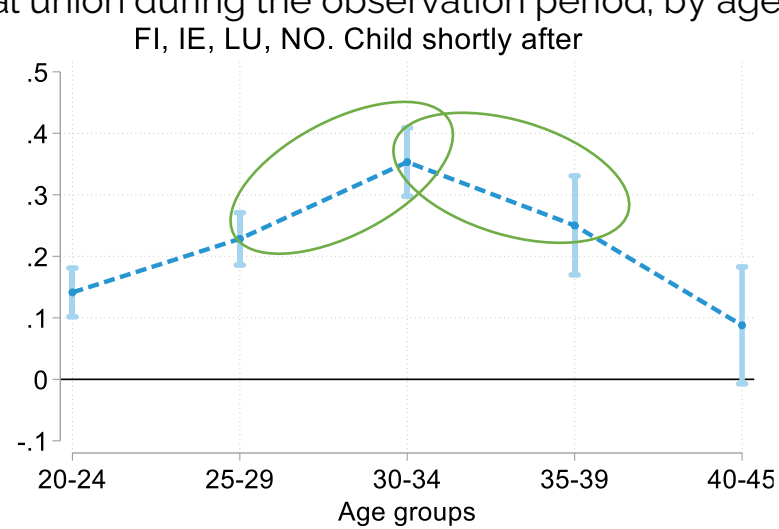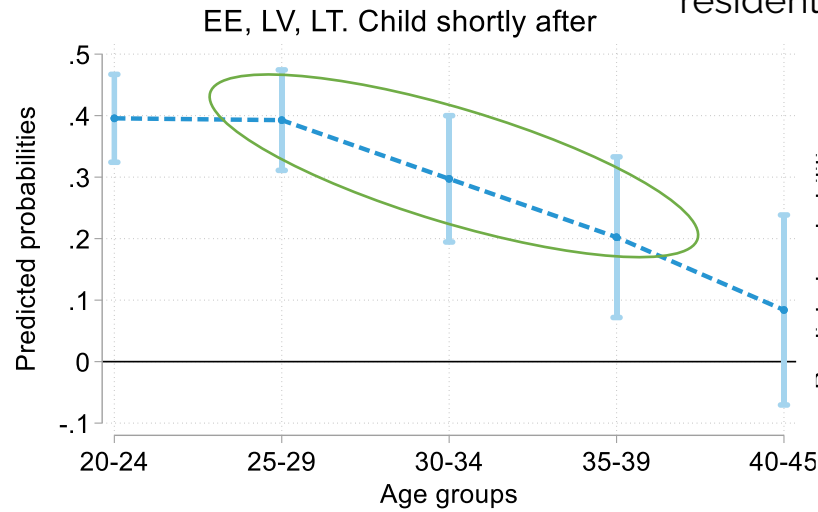
MA1B2004:24.69, TFR2004:1,35
MA1Bdiff: 3.13, TFRdiff: 0,27

MA1B2004: 28,23, TFR2004: 1,8
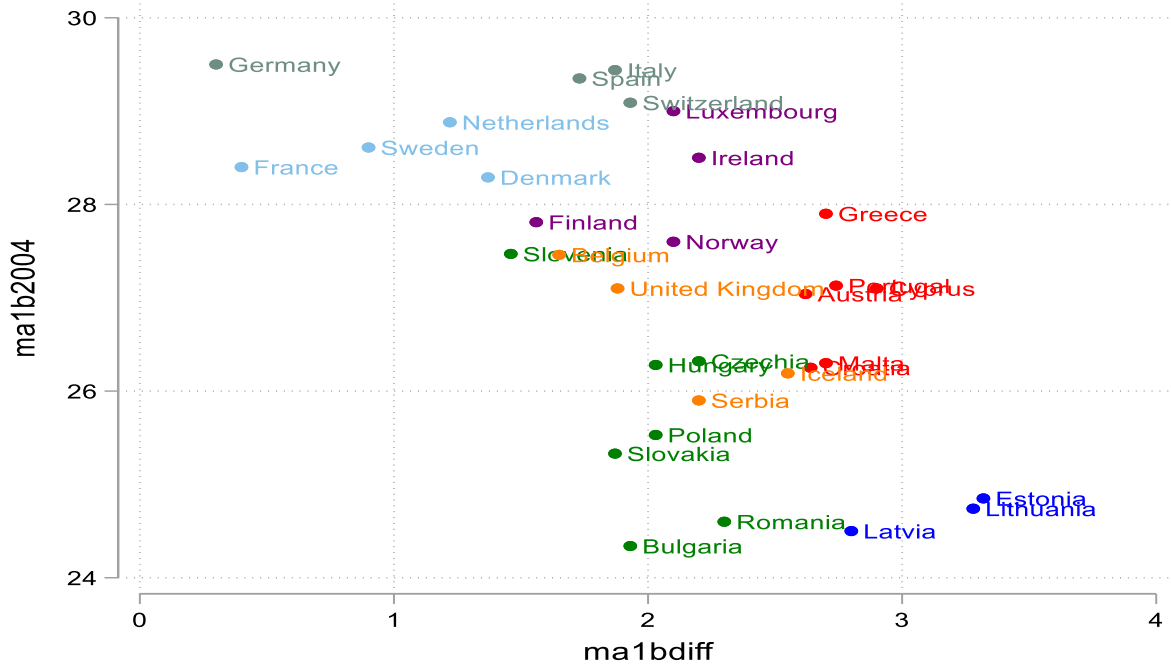MA1Bdiff: 1,99 TFRdiff: -0,34

MA1B2004:29,35, TFR2004:1,36
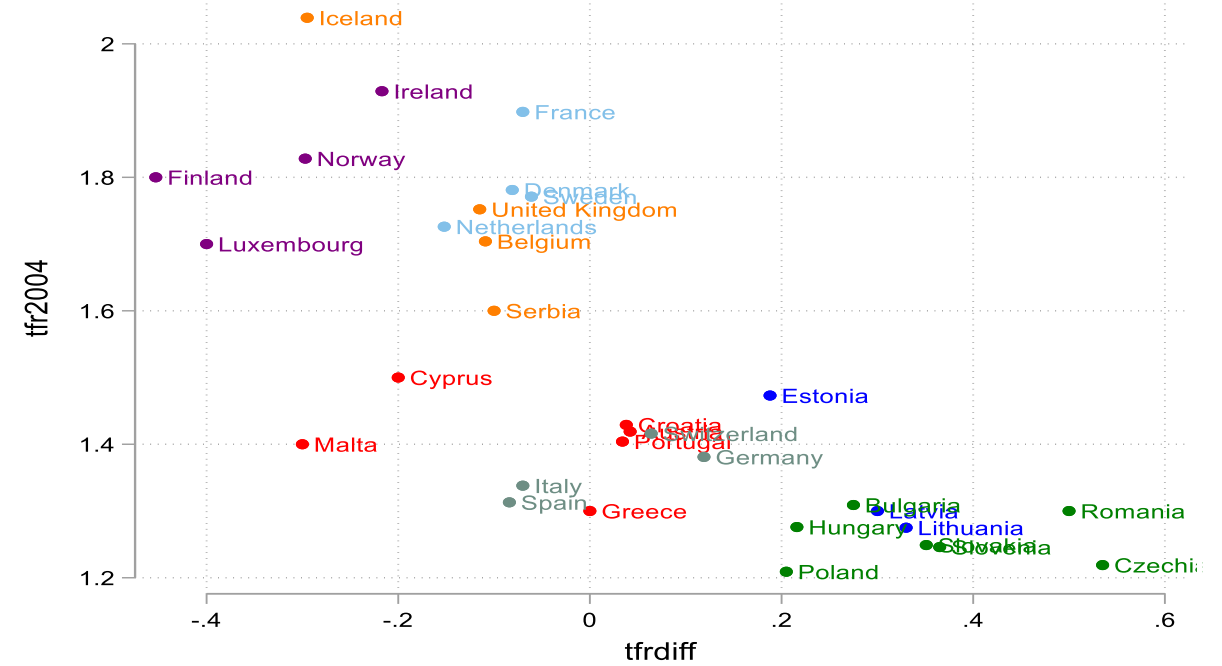MA1Bdiff: 1,46, TFRdiff: 0,01

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Appendix 2. Clusters

Cluster analysis using fertility characteristics
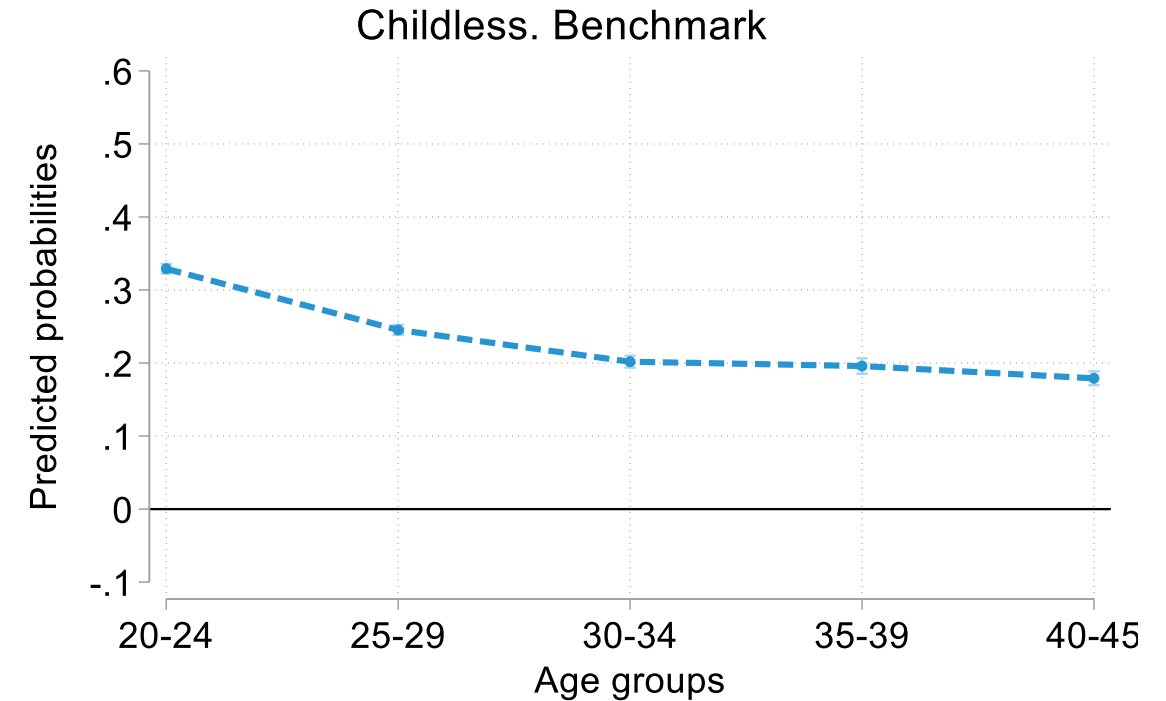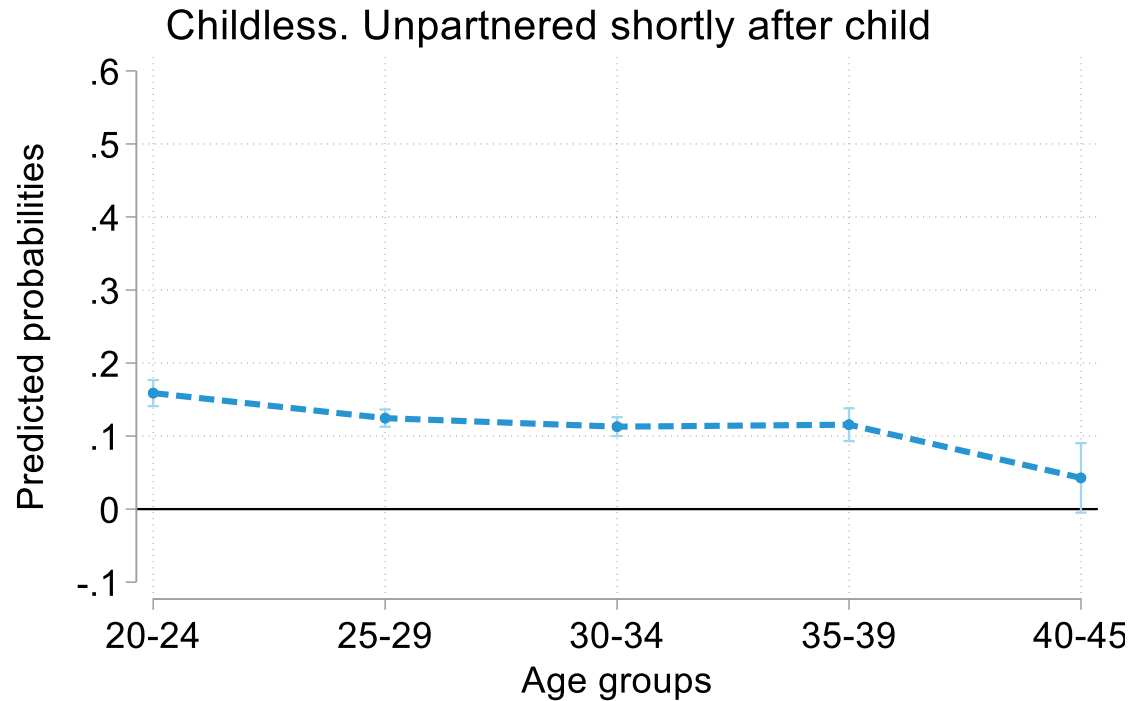

MA1B2004, MA1B2019-2004

TFR2004, TFR2019-2004

Appendix 3. Union dissolution after childbearing

Predicted probabilities of ending co-residential union after having a child in partnership during the observation period, by age

Childless. Unpartnered shortly after child

Childless. Benchmark

Own elaboration based on EU-SILC data. All countries. Years 2004-2023.

Appendix 4. Single motherhood

Predicted probabilities of entering motherhood outside a co-residential union among single mothers in t1 during the observation period, by age

Own elaboration based on EU-SILC data. All countries. Years 2004-2023.