

# “Starting a family is starting adulthood”

Young people’s subjective meaning of parenthood for the transition to adulthood:  
Findings from the Luxembourgish Youth Report 2015

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Andreas HEINEN, University of Luxembourg

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Youth Research



UNIVERSITÉ DU  
LUXEMBOURG

□ FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE, HUMANITIES, ARTS AND EDUCATION

# Starting points

- **Youth** as a transition phase between **childhood and adulthood**
- **Developmental tasks:** Independency, autonomy, identity, change of status/roles (Havighurst, 1972; Hurrelmann, 2012)
- **Parenthood**/starting a family as a transition marker to adulthood



# Research questions

- A. What are the structural conditions in which the transition to parenthood takes place? **(Context)**
- B. When does the transition to parenthood takes place? **(Timing)**
- C. What are young people's perspectives on adulthood/parenthood? **(Subjective view)**

# Theoretical background

# 1) Transition to adulthood in the age of individualization and uncertainty

- Youth phase has **extended**, age limits hard to define (12...30+)
  - «post adolescence» (Galland, 2001); «emerging adulthood» (Arnett, 2000)
- **De-standardization** and **reversibility** of the transition to adulthood (Walther, 2006)
- Adult positions determined by **‘negotiation’** rather than simply following pre-defined paths (du-Bois Reymond, 2001)
- New **opportunities** as well as new **dilemmas** (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002)

## 2) Transition to parenthood: Current trends and discourses

- **Starting a family** for young people (still) an **important aim in life** (e.g. Shell Youth Study, 2015)
- **Postponement** of parenthood, decreasing fertility rates (Mills et al., 2011)
- **Disconnection** from marriage (Smock & Greenland, 2010)
- **Early parenthood** («teenage pregnancy»)
- **Reconciliation** of family and working life

# Data

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# A. Structural conditions in Luxembourg

# 1) Demography and labour market

## Demography

- **Immigration** rate very high, high population growth (since 1991: +40%)
- **Fertility** rate stable but on a rather low level (2014: 1,5)

## Labour market

- **Protective** labour legislation, minimum wage
- **Dynamic** labour market
- Low level of unemployment, **high youth unemployment** rate
- **Female activity** rate rising but on average level (2014: 65,5%)

## 2) Housing and family supporting policy

### Housing:

- **High and increasing housing costs**

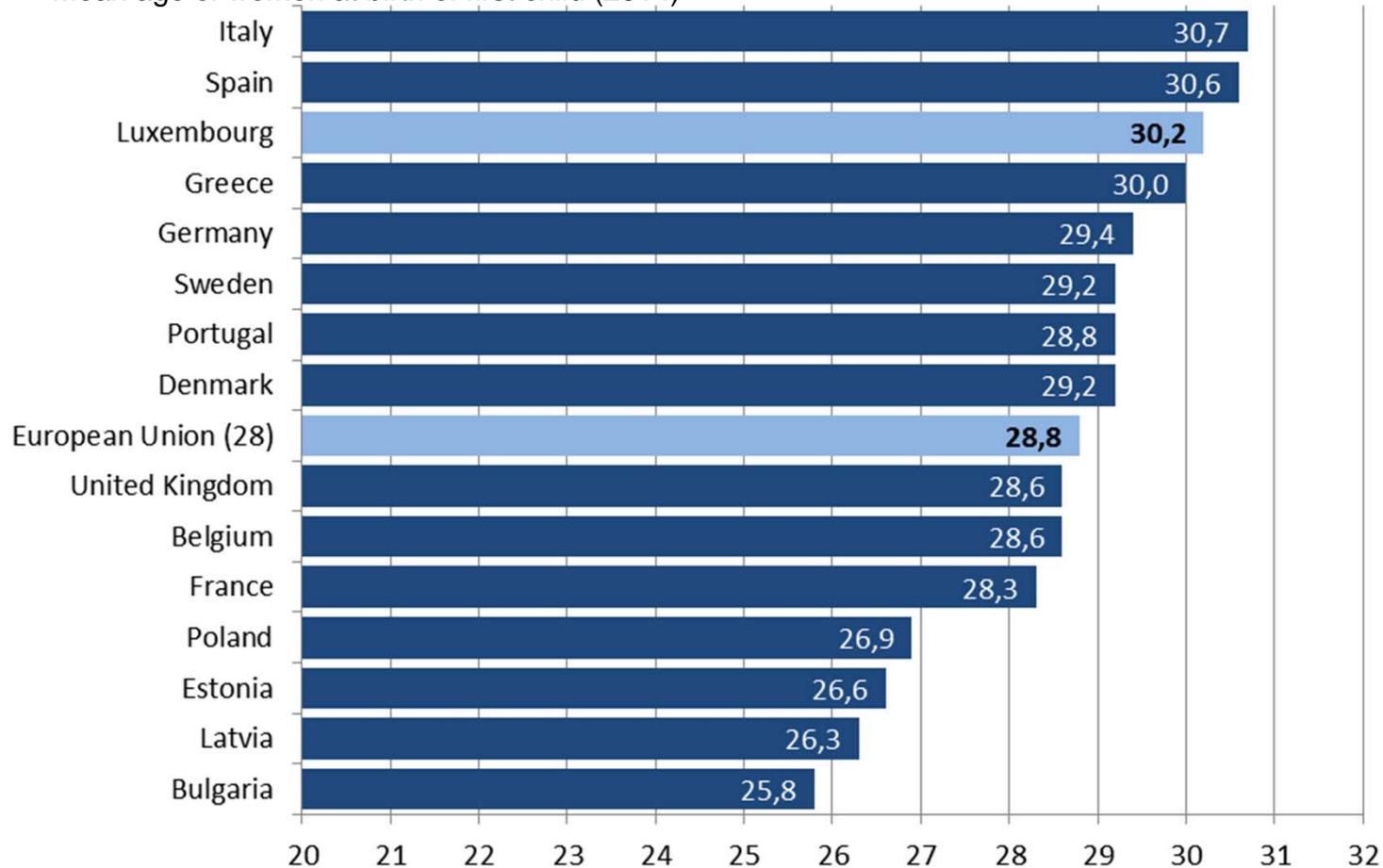
### Family supporting policy:

- **Leave entitlements** (e.g. maternity leave, parental leave)
- **Income support**/subsidies (child-related cash transfer, tax exemptions)
- High invest in **child care services**
- From the **male-breadwinner** to the **dual-breadwinner** model

## B. Timing of parenthood

# 1) Late timing of parenthood

Mean age of women at birth of first child (2014)



Eurostat, 2014

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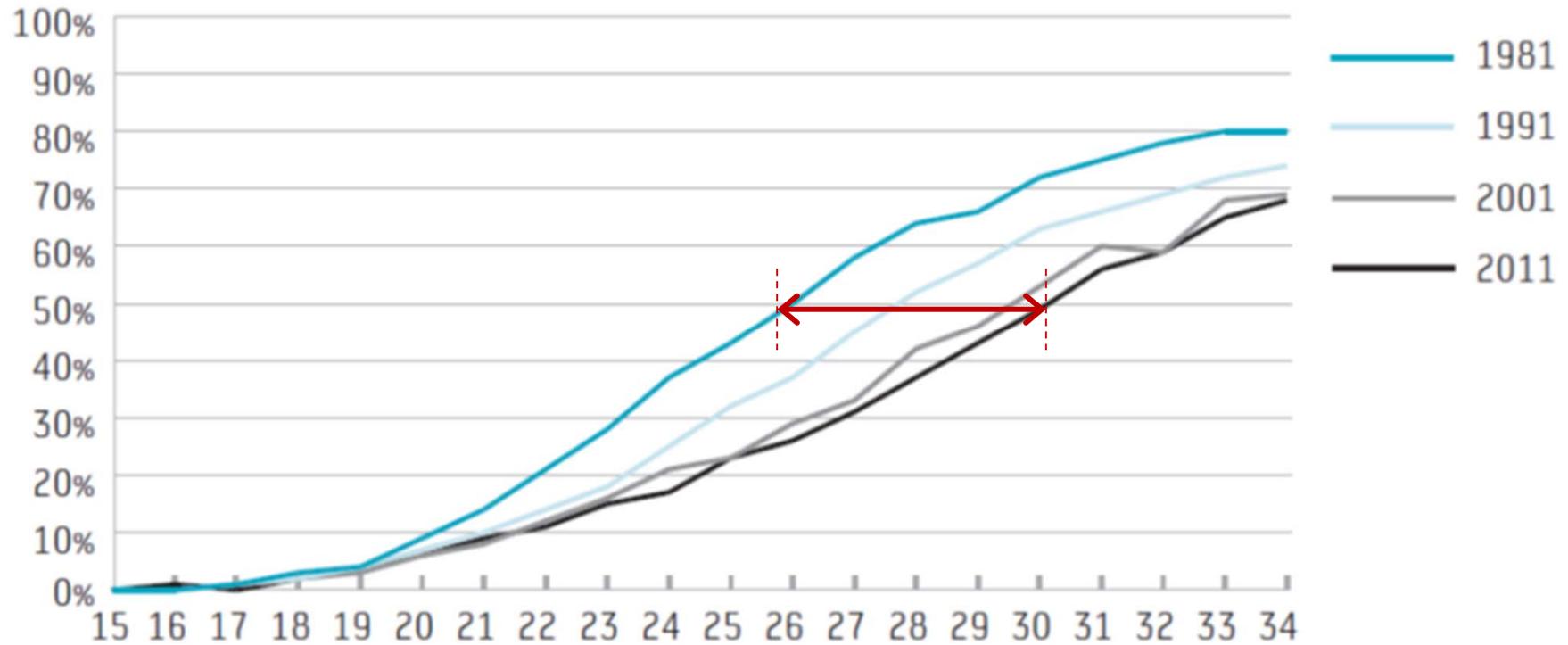
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## 2) Postponement of parenthood

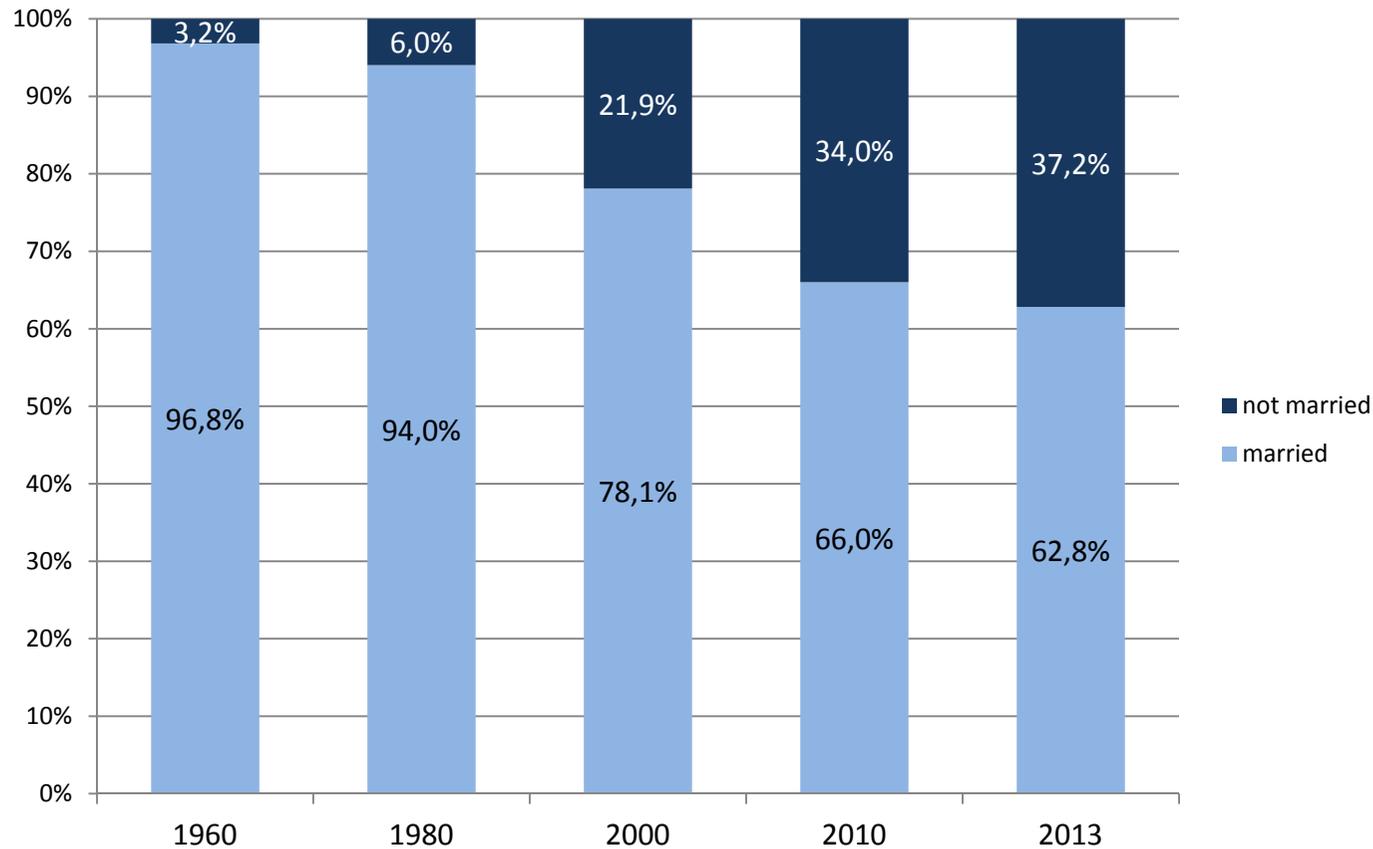
Share of women with one or more child(ren) in Luxembourg, by age (1981-2011)



*Census Luxembourg, 1981-2011*

### 3) Parenthood disconnected from marriage

Share of newborns by mother's marital status (1960-2013)



## C. Subjective view on adulthood/parenthood

# 1) Notion of adulthood: Autonomy and becoming independent

- Transition markers play an important role (job entry, leaving parental home, starting a family)
- Young people associate the transition to adulthood with the development of autonomy and independency

«that's different things, actually the sum of those, you can go to the polls, **you decide by yourself** what and where you go to have lunch, and all these things that are part of **autonomy**.» (Jean, m, 34 yrs)

«Yes, **independency**, that's being an adult.» (Madeleine, f, 29 yrs)

«Living independently, yes. It means **not depending on your parents**.  
(Tiago, m, 25 yrs)

## 2) «Emerging adulthood» as a status «in between»

- Transition to adulthood as a (long) process

«That's maybe a stage after you started working. I'd say when you are end of 20, that you become adult **step by step**.» (Nuno, m, 31 yrs)

...and the status «in between»

«Actually, I really don't know [...] I still feel young. Young adult (*laughing*)...  
**I have not arrived yet.** (Marco, m, 29 yrs)

«Even though on paper I'm an adult now, I **don't feel adult** yet.» (Tun, m, 18 yrs)

### 3) Parenthood – a planned decision

- A well-considered choice that depends on meeting conditions

«And after that, buying a house, **starting a family** and just live a normal adult life» (Madeleine, f, 29 yrs)

«I don't feel ready for it and I want to improve the conditions. For myself I can make ends meet, but **I want to ensure that I can offer something to my children** so that they are in a better situation than me.» (André, m, 26 yrs)

## 4) Parenthood – responsibility and maturity

### – Parenthood associated with responsibility

«...being **responsible** because of work...the house and the child.» (Françoise, f, 30 yrs)

«Also a family and seriousness, and responsibility. Well, I have responsibilities already, but **further responsibilities...for children.**» (Lara, f, 22 yrs)

«Yes, I can be adult since I'm here and I have children. And I have a responsibility for them and all the decisions I take with my husband have **consequences not only for us but also for others** that's growing up.» (Angela, f, 34 yrs)

### ...and maturity

«If I wouldn't have had my children [...], I wouldn't have developed the **maturity** I have today.» (Maria, f, 27 yrs)

## 5) Parenthood – change of lifestyle and priorities

- A change of lifestyle

«At a certain age most of the time you think about **going out, enjoy life** [...] Well, you change yourself without noticing it. You are also thinking about starting a family.» (Marc, m, 31 yrs)

- ...and priorities

«For me, it's since I have children, since they were born, than you must become adult [...] You **feel different** you know that we **have other priorities now than going out**. We have to take care about our children, that nothing happens to them. (Patricia, f, 29 yrs)

# Conclusion

- Gradual development of **autonomy** and **independency** from parents during the transition phase, characterized by insecurity and instability («not arrived yet»)
- Decision for parenthood is **well-considered** and depends on whether young people meet certain conditions (security, maturity, responsibility)
- Transition to adulthood is characterized by
  - (a) becoming **independent from the family** (phase of «emerging adulthood») and
  - (b) the decision for parenthood (phase of «starting adulthood») with **new responsibilities and commitments**
- Parenthood as the «final» transition marker to adulthood
- Further steps: gendered patterns, differences by social class

**Thank you for your attention!**

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