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Published online: 20 Oct 2016.

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The prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies in Europe: can the Hajnal line help us to describe regional patterns?

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ABSTRACT

The study's main objective is to gauge the prevalence of family forms following separation and divorce in Europe. In addition to the comparison of the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies in Europe based on data of the 'Generations and Gender Program' (GGP), family patterns which draw on marriage and divorce rates on the one hand, and on the incidence of single parenthood and stepfamilies on the other hand are investigated. Data are available for 17 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Sweden) and include a total of 58,336 family households with minor children. The analysis first presents descriptive statistics allowing comparisons of the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies. Secondly, a cluster analysis was carried out to identify family patterns around Europe and to answer the question, whether the Hajnal line can help us to describe regional differences. By taking marriage and divorce rates as well as the prevalence of single parenthood and stepfamilies into account we were able to identify four clusters of family patterns, which give no support for Hajnal's line anymore. Family patterns in Europe are quite complex and hard to systemize by an East–West divide.

1. Introduction

Research on separated and divorced families has a long tradition in the United States (Amato, 2000, 2010; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Ganong & Coleman, 1984), but similar research has begun to burgeon in Europe as well (Allan, Hawker, & Crow, 2001; Kreyenfeld & Martin, 2011; Zartler, 2011). The main motivators of this large interest in post-separation and post-divorce families are the well-documented consequences of separation and divorce for children. Child-rearing in these families is commonly associated with less favorable cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social outcomes (e.g. Amato, 2010; Bernardi et al., 2013), some of which last well into adulthood (e.g. Kalmijn, 2008; Klaus,

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This article was originally published with errors. This version has been corrected. Please see Erratum (http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2016.1267357).

Nauck, & Steinbach, 2012). Studies of such outcomes of separation and divorce in families almost universally begin by noting the increased prevalence of separation and divorce, from which they infer an increase in single-parent families and stepfamilies. Yet for most countries, it is by no means clear how many families with minor children are actually affected by parental separation or divorce. Reliable data on the proportion of single-parent families and stepfamilies and the number of children who live in them are available for only a very small number of countries, resulting in an unfortunate lack of cross-nationally comparative studies (Kalmijn, 2007, p. 243). Despite the large number of publications on the effects of separation and divorce, our knowledge of the numbers of involved families and family members thus remains sketchy.

The present study aims to close this gap by presenting and comparing recent European data on the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies with minor children. We extend previous research in multiple ways: (1) Whereas the studies by Andersson (2002) or Andersson and Philipov (2002) are based on Family and Fertility Surveys (FFS) conducted in the late 1980s and 1990s, we draw on more recent harmonized survey data of the United Nations''Generations and Gender Program' (GGP), which contains complex information on household family structures, surveyed between 2003 and 2013 (Vikat et al., 2007). (2) We cover 17 Continental European countries, including new Eastern European member states of the European Union such as Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, and Romania. (3) Our analysis goes beyond simple descriptive findings and presents results of a cluster analysis, where countries are grouped on the basis of crude marriage and divorce rates as well as their proportion of single-parent families and stepfamilies.

In order to analyze European countries in a comparative perspective, we draw on the well-known concept of the 'Hajnal line' which provides a comprehensive perspective on all European countries including East and Central East Europe with reference to marriage and household compositions. Other concepts that also analyze dividing lines of family systems within Europe (e.g. Duranton, Rodríguez-Pose, & Sandall, 2009; Reher, 1998) are on the one hand too limited, because they are restricted to Western Europe, but on the other hand too detailed, because they focus on fine regional differences. Because our aim is to investigate whether the long-standing geographic East–West divide in European marriage and household patterns also exists with regard to divorce and family forms following separation and divorce, we would like to shed light on country-specific differences. More detailed analyses with respect to regional variations within and between certain countries should be part of future research.

To begin with, official statistics on marriage, divorce, and extramarital births are presented in order to establish the background context for each of the countries considered in our analysis (Section 2). This provides a rough impression of household and family structures in each country, but more importantly, it allows us to gauge the reliability of estimates of the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies derived from divorce rates through a comparison with survey-generated data. Following a description of our data and variables in Section 3, we present results on the distribution of different family types (nuclear families, single-parent families, and stepfamilies) across Europe, first on a country-by-country basis and then by specific groups of countries, which we identified through a cluster analysis. The paper ends with concluding remarks and discussion of limitations.

2. Background: marriage, divorce, and extramarital fertility in Europe

2.1. The Hajnal line as conceptual framework

Over the past several decades, families in Europe have undergone extensive change, observable as changes in the processes of family formation and in the resulting family structures. A well-known and important concept to assess differences in family patterns between European countries is the 'Hajnal line' (Hajnal, 1965, 1982), whose focus is on households and potential household compositions, which corresponds well with our interest in single-parent and stepfamily households. Empirically based on historical data, Hajnal suggests a virtual line running from Trieste (Italy) to Saint Petersburg (Russia), dividing Europe into (South-)Eastern and (North-)Western regions according to marital behaviors and household composition (Figure 1).

According to Hajnal (1965) countries in the (North-)Western region are characterized by nuclear family households, late marriages, and a sizeable proportion of individuals of both genders who never marry, while countries in the (South-)Eastern region are characterized by multigenerational households, early and almost universal marriage, and consequently a small proportion of individuals who never get married. Thus, our expectation about the distribution of single-parent families and stepfamilies with minor children in Europe based
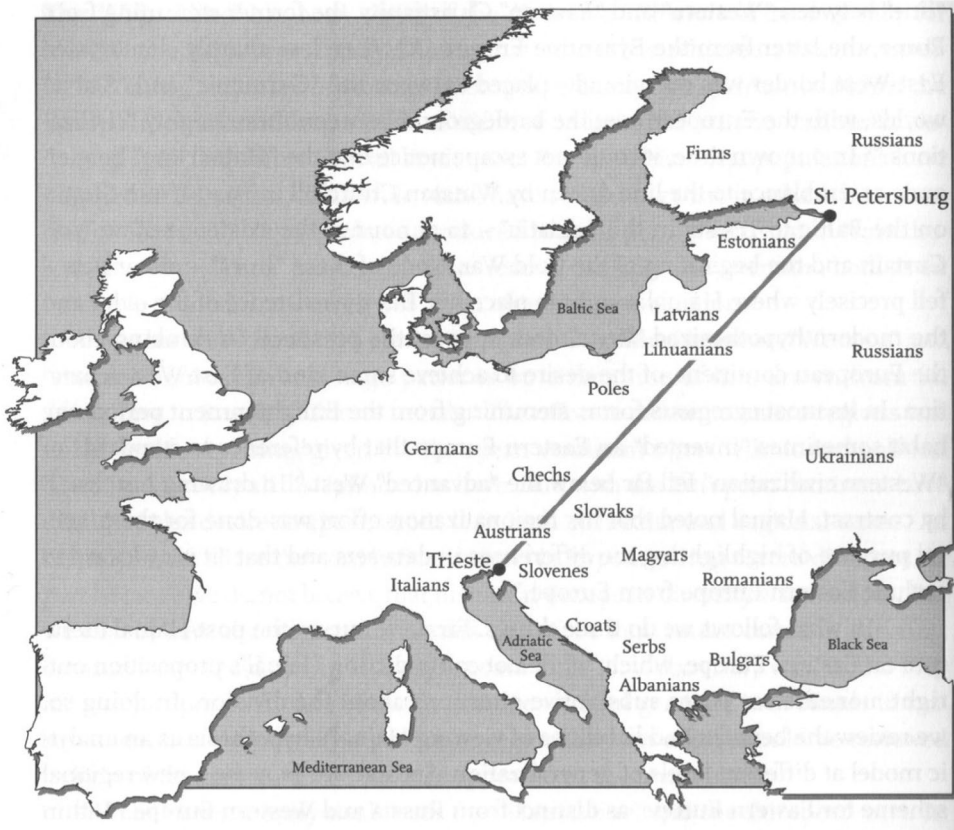

Figure 1. The Hajnal line, literally interpreted, c. 1850.
Source: Plakans and Wetherell (2005, p. 108).

on the Hajnal line is that in (North-)Western Europe single-parent families and stepfamilies are much more common than in the (South-)Eastern part.

Hajnal's study on European marriage patterns and household formation systems dominating in the East and West gave rise to a large and diverse body of research (see for a systematic overview Hendrickx, 2005; Plakans & Wetherell, 2005), showing greater variation on sub-national levels of regional aggregation than the Hajnal line suggests.[1] For example Reher (1998) demonstrated for Western Europe a North–South dividing line regarding family systems and family solidarity. However, Hajnal's general finding of long-standing and distinct marriage and household patterns in Western and Eastern Europe was confirmed (Hendrickx, 2005; Kalmijn, 2007; Plakans & Wetherell, 2005), though, particularly with regard to nuptiality regimes (Hoem, Gabrielli, Jasilioniene, Kostova, & Matysiak, 2010; Maslauskaite, Jasilioniene, Jasilionis, Stankuniene, & Shkolnikov, 2015). Accordingly Plakans and Wetherell (2005, p. 103) concluded that 'if the European continent is to be conceived of as having two large and inclusive areas, the line serves as a reasonable good predictor'. But can the Hajnal line also help us to categorize regional variations in the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies across Europe?

2.2. Descriptive background information

In the following we describe patterns of marriage, divorce, and extramarital births in 17 countries covered by the GGP (namely: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Sweden), using official statistics from Eurostat and the United Nations Year Book. All values presented in Table 1 refer to the years in which the GGP surveys in the respective countries were carried out (2003–2013) to enable a comparison between the rates of the official statistics and the empirical results based on the GGP surveys (see below).

Table 1. Crude marriage rate, crude divorce rate, and live births outside marriage in selected European countries.

Country (ISO-Code)	Survey year*	Crude marriage rate (per 1000 persons)	Crude divorce rate (per 1000 persons)	Live births outside marriage (% of live births)
Russia (RU)	2004	6.8	4.4	–**
Romania (RO)	2005	6.7	1.6	28.5
Lithuania (LT)	2006	6.5	3.4	28.8
Poland (PL)	2010	6.0	1.6	20.6
Sweden (SE)	2012–2013	5.4	2.8	54.4
Norway (NO)	2007–2008	5.3	2.1	55.0
Georgia (GE)	2006	5.0	.5	–**
Czech Republic (CZ)	2005	5.1	3.1	31.7
Italy (IT)	2003	4.6	.8	13.0
Estonia (EE)	2004–2005	4.5	3.0	58.5
Germany (DE)	2005	4.7	2.4	29.2
France (FR)	2005	4.5	2.5	48.4
Hungary (HU)	2004–2005	4.4	2.5	35.0
Netherlands (NL)	2002–2004	4.4	1.9	32.5
Austria (AT)	2008–2009	4.3	2.3	39.3
Bulgaria (BG)	2004	4.0	1.8	48.7
Belgium (BE)	2008–2010	3.9	2.6	45.9
Mean		*5.1*	*2.3*	*38.0*

*If data were collected in more than one year, the most recent year was chosen from Eurostat or the United Nations Yearbook.; **No information available.; Source: Eurostat 2014/United Nations Year Book 2006.

If, for example, the survey year was 2004 in Bulgaria all indicators for Bulgaria stem from 2004. If the survey was conducted in a certain time frame, the most recent survey year was considered. In Estonia, for example, the survey was conducted between 2004 and 2005 and the values of the indicators in Table 1 stem from 2005.

Since the Hajnal line is historically based on marriage rates, in Table 1 the countries are sorted in descending order according to their marriage rate. Given that most crude estimations of the number of single-parent families and stepfamilies in industrialized countries are derived from divorce statistics, Table 1 also exhibits crude divorce rates. This is a first step to evaluate whether an East–West divide as claimed by Hajnal can still be identified with regard to marriage rates (as in the original work) and for divorce rates as a historical relatively new phenomenon. Since marriage is not a prerequisite of childbirth anymore, we also added the proportion of live births outside marriage (as the percentage of all live births) to complete the picture of family settings in the different countries.

A first glance at crude marriage rates (Table 1) revealed that we can find an East–West divide in tendency, even if less strict than Hajnal's line would suggest. This result is in line with recent results of others regarding nuptiality regimes in Europe, which conclude that variations in detail (also historically) can be observed, but that there is some evidence that the Hajnal delineation still matters (Hoem et al., 2010; Hoem, Kostova, Jasilioniene, & Mureşan, 2009; Puur, Maslauskaitė, Rahnu, & Stankuniene, 2012; Puur, Rahnu, Maslauskaite, Stankuniene, & Zakharov, 2012). Based on divorce rates (Table 1), a differentiation of Eastern and Western European countries according to the Hajnal line is not easily possible. This finding is in line with results of recent studies on divorce in the European context (Kalmijn, 2007; Philipov & Dorbritz, 2003; Wagner & Weiss, 2006). Finally, by considering live births outside marriage (Table 1) as a crude indicator for the prevalence of cohabiting couples with children, the picture gets even fuzzier. But interestingly enough the deviations from the Hajnal pattern based on marriage rates in the Western and the Eastern parts can be explained now, because all of these countries have, with about 50% or more, a quite high share of births outside marriage (Table 1). These findings are in line with regional patterns regarding extramarital births found in other studies (Kalmijn, 2007; Kiernan, 2001; Sanchez Gassen & Perelli-Harris, 2015). However, the divorce rate is in none of these countries a reliable estimator of the proportion of separated families and stepfamilies, because the data contain no information about the number of children involved, about breakups of non-married parents, or about separations that do not culminate in divorce. Thus, in the following analysis we explore survey data that include information about the presence of children in the household, the presence of a partner, and the relation of the respondent and the respondent's partner to the child in each observed household.

3. Data and variables

We use survey data from the Generations and Gender Program (GGP), a social science research infrastructure of the United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE) (Vikat et al., 2007). The nationally representative longitudinal surveys, which were conducted between 2003 and 2013, include men and women between the ages of 18 and 79.[2] Currently, Wave 1 data are available for Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, and Sweden. We included all available countries except

Australia and Japan, for which no comparable data on family forms were gathered. In the first wave, respondents were asked to provide information about their partners and about parent–child relations both within and outside the household, which allows assertions on the family (or household) level. Currently, data from the second wave of the GGP are available for 10 countries – Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, and the Netherlands. However, we restrict our analysis to the first wave, because it allows us to include more countries. Thus, a much higher number of cases can be included, which is a critical advantage because some family constellation types are rare in some countries.

GGP survey respondents were asked to name up to 17 persons with whom they live in a household and to give detailed information about their relationship with each. For children, five possible relationship types could be indicated: (1) 'biological child of current (marriage) partner'; (2) 'biological child of former (marriage) partner'; (3) 'stepchild'; (4) 'adopted child'; and (5) 'foster child'. With this level of information, it is possible to differentiate between a diverse set of family and stepfamily constellations. Specifically, being able to differentiate between biological children from a former partner and current stepchildren is crucial for estimating the total number of stepfamilies in a given country. Doing so makes it possible to identify in a sample not only those households in which the respondent is a stepparent, but also the households in which the respondent's new partner is a stepparent.[3]

A constellation is coded as a *nuclear family* when one or more children living in the household were identified as the biological offspring of the respondent with a partner who also lives in the household, as long as the respondent reported no stepchildren or children of a former partner in the household. A *single-parent family* is indicated when the child was the biological offspring of a respondent who had no partner in the household. A *stepfamily* is indicated when the respondent had a child, not the biological child of the current partner, living in the household, or when a child of the respondent's current partner, not the offspring of the respondent, lived in the household. A stepfamily is also coded as stepfamily if children other than stepchildren live there, because the household is a stepfamily household and it affects biological children and stepchildren in the same manner (Ceballo, Lansford, Abbey, & Stewart, 2004). Respondents in all family types may have had additional adopted or foster children. However, we coded as 'adoptive or foster families' only those families who had no children other than adopted or foster children. The analysis encompassed data from the 17 European countries noted above. Table 2 shows the countries included, the years in which the respective surveys were conducted, the total number of cases sampled for each country, the number of cases of included families with at least one minor child in the household, and the proportion of families with minor children in the household in each country's sample.[4]

4. Results

4.1. Proportions of nuclear families, single-parent families, and stepfamilies

Table 3 provides an overview of the proportion of nuclear families, single-parent families, stepfamilies, and (for the sake of completeness) adoptive or foster families with at least one child under the age of 18 years in 17 selected countries of Europe. The last row provides the mean proportion of each family type for the total sample. The countries are sorted by the proportion of nuclear families in ascending order.

Table 2. Analytic sample.

Country (ISO-Code)	Survey year	All households N	Households with minor children N	Households with minor children of all households %
Austria (AT)	2008–2009	5,000	2,446	48.9
Belgium (BE)	2008–2010	7,163	2,278	31.8
Bulgaria (BG)	2004	12,858	4,660	36.2
Czech Republic (CZ)	2005	10,006	2,427	24.3
Estonia (EE)	2004–2005	7,855	2,576	32.8
France (FR)	2005	10,079	3,169	31.4
Georgia (GE)	2006	10,000	3,577	35.8
Germany (DE)	2005	10,017	2,994	29.9
Hungary (HU)	2004–2005	13,540	3,882	28.7
Italy (IT)	2003	9,570	3,193	33.4
Lithuania (LT)	2006	10,036	2,972	29.6
Netherlands (NL)	2002–2004	8,161	2,624	32.2
Norway (NO)	2007–2008	14,881	5,385	36.2
Poland (PL)	2010–2011	19,987	5,658	28.3
Romania (RO)	2005	11,986	3,641	30.4
Russia (RU)	2004	11,261	3,868	34.4
Sweden (SE)	2012–2013	9,688	2,986	30.8
Total		*182,880*	*58,336*	*32.0*

Source: GGP Wave 1 (Release: 4.2).

Table 3. Proportions of households of nuclear families, single-parent families, and stepfamilies with children under the age of 18 in selected European countries (percentage).

Countries (ISO-Code)	Nuclear families	Single-parent families	Step-families	Adoptive and foster families
Estonia (EE)	66.7	15.0	18.3	.1
Russia (RU)	69.0	18.2	12.1	.8
Germany (DE)	70.8	15.2	13.5	.4
Sweden (SE)	73.8	11.8	14.2	.2
Czech Republic (CZ)	74.3	14.1	10.9	.7
Norway (NO)	75.0	12.6	11.7	.6
France (FR)	75.5	15.5	8.2	.9
Belgium (BE)	75.9	11.9	11.9	.4
Lithuania (LT)	78.3	14.3	6.9	.5
Hungary (HU)	80.0	9.8	9.6	.3
Austria (AT)	80.7	10.3	8.7	.3
Poland (PL)	83.0	11.2	4.7	.9
Netherlands (NL)	83.2	11.7	4.4	.7
Bulgaria (BG)	87.2	7.8	4.4	.6
Romania (RO)	88.9	5.5	4.9	.8
Georgia (GE)	91.8	6.9	.9	.4
Italy (IT)	92.0	6.9	1.2	.0
Mean	*79.7*	*11.5*	*8.3*	*.5*

Source: GGP Wave 1 (Release: 4.2).

Nuclear families dominate the samples in all the countries examined, with proportions varying between 67% (Estonia) and 92% (Italy). With a share between one-third and one-fifth in the majority of the countries, single-parent families and stepfamilies have reached a proportion of families with minor children living in Europe that cannot be ignored. Therefore, they should get more attention in demographic as well as family research in the future. Another important result is that stepfamilies are less common than single-parent families in almost every country (exceptions are Estonia, Sweden and Belgium). The difference

between the proportions of single-parent families and stepfamilies seems higher, as fewer divorces in a country occur (see Table 1). Thus, if divorces (and separations probably too) are rather rare events in a country, remarriage or re-partnering seems to be much less likely. This is because of the availability or unavailability of a partner on the partner market.

If we compare the crude divorce rates of the included countries (Table 1) with their proportions of single-parent families and stepfamilies (Table 3) – and thus try to answer the question whether the divorce rate is an indicator of separated families at all – we see that the divorce rate is indeed a rough indicator of the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies. Countries with a relatively high divorce rate like Russia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Estonia, Sweden, Belgium, or France are at the top of Table 3, which means that they have a relatively low proportion of nuclear families and respectively a relatively high proportion of single-parent families and stepfamilies. But one can also see that there are countries like Norway with a lower divorce rate and a quite high proportion of single-parent families and stepfamilies. This may be explained by their quite high proportion of unmarried couples with children. In this case, single-parent families and stepfamilies arise from a separation and not from a divorce.

In sum, these findings show that official divorce statistics do indeed roughly correlate with the proportion of single-parent families and stepfamilies. Divorce or separation is of course a prerequisite for the formation of single-parent families and stepfamilies. However, some separated or divorced couples are childless, and some separated and divorced individuals form new nuclear families with new partners in households that do not include children from their previous partnership. Using cluster analysis, we now aim to identify European family patterns by matching official statistics and survey generated data on the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies.

4.2. Family patterns in Europe

Both official statistics of marriage and divorce and the descriptive findings regarding the prevalence of single-parent and stepfamilies of European countries show that the Hajnal line, i.e. an East–West divide, is observable. However, further differentiation is needed taking into account new behavioral patterns of separation and divorce. Thus, in the next step we combine with the help of a hierarchical cluster analysis all indicators (crude marriage rate, crude divorce rate, and prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies) to examine whether the Hajnal line is suitable to describe dominant national family patterns after separation or divorce in Europe. Even if a lot of research has been done on family systems (e.g. Duranton et al., 2009; Reher, 1998; Wall, Robin, & Laslett, 1983) as well as on patterns of separation and divorce (Haskey, 1992; Kalmijn, 2007) in the past decades, research on family systems applying contemporary, individual data is very rare. In particular, comparative research that focuses on single-parent families and stepfamilies with minor children is completely missing. The present study aims to fill this gap.

Since the variables crude marriage and divorce rates are measured on a different scale than the proportion of single-parent families and stepfamilies, each of the four metric variables were z-standardized prior to the cluster analysis. As agglomerative method Ward's method was used with the squared Euclidean distance as clustering criterion (Everitt, Landau, Leese, & Stahl, 2011). Based on the distances in the dendrogram (Figure 2) and on the
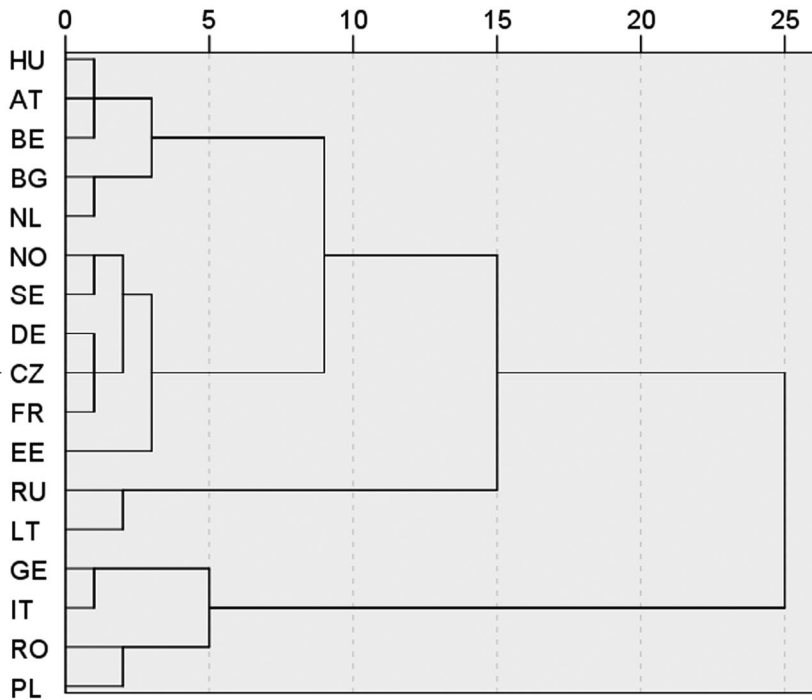
Figure 2. Dendrogram.
Source: GGP Wave 1 (Release: 4.2).

elbow-criterion in an inverse scree test (Lathrop & Williams, 1987, 1989, 1990), we could identify four clusters.[5]

We describe and discuss the cluster in the following in forms of parallel coordinate plots (Figure 3), where for each cluster the difference from the mean is reported. The differences are listed for marriage and divorce rates as well as the share of single-parent families and stepfamilies.

Cluster 1 (Figure 3) consists of only two countries, *Lithuania and Russia*. One country is located in Western (Lithuania) and the other one in Eastern (Russia) Europe (see Figure 1). They have not only a very high marriage rate, but also a divorce rate above average and a high proportion of single-parent families (14.3% in Lithuania and 18.2% in Russia). The pro-portion of stepfamilies in relation to the divorce rate and the proportion of single-parent families is quite small (6.9% in Lithuania and 12.1% in Russia) (see Table 3). The curves of the parallel coordinate plot (Figure 3) are very similar, even though Lithuania shows somewhat smaller values than Russia regarding all included variables which is not surprising because the Baltic states are assigned to Western countries (see for example Therborn, 2004, p. 145ff.). However, both countries of the first cluster show the following characteristics: in Lithuania and Russia, people marry with almost no exception, but Lithuanians and Russians are also getting divorced very often (Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2013; Maslauskaite et al., 2015).[6] Correspondingly, we find a relatively high proportion of single-parent families (Utrata, 2015). In contrast, stepfamilies are comparably rare, which suggests that separated and divorced Lithuanians and Russians rarely find a new partner. This has different reasons. In Russia, alcohol abuse by males and violence against women continue to be a major social problem
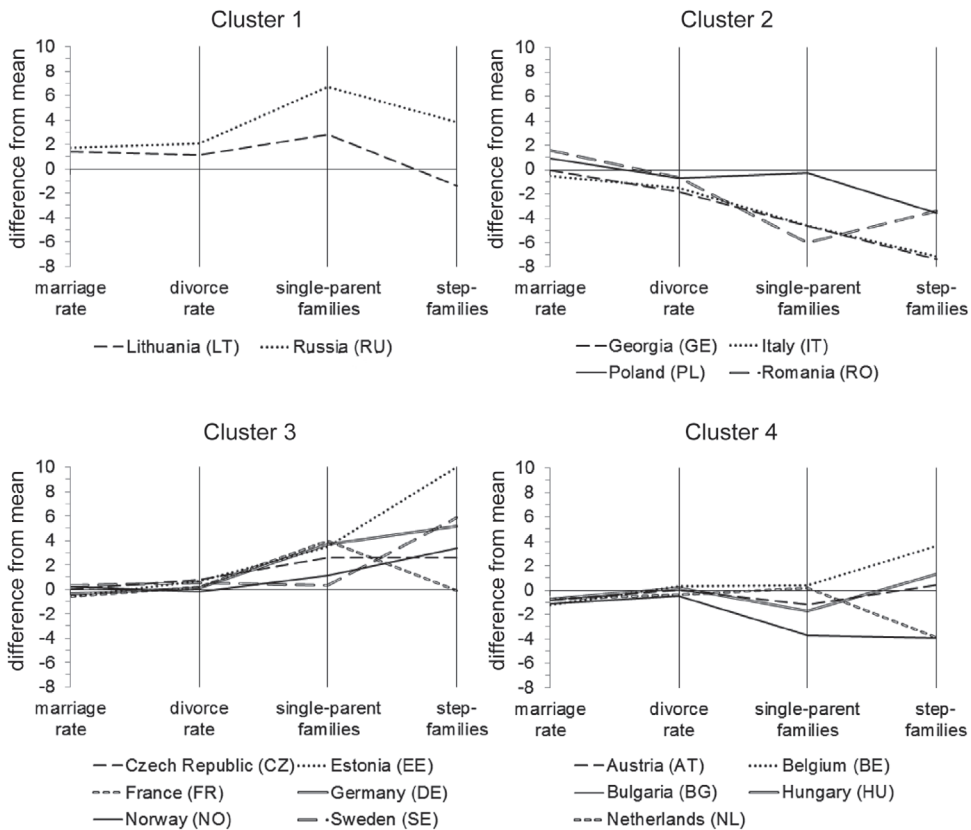
Figure 3. Parallel coordinate plots of family patterns in Europe based on crude marriage and divorce rate and the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies in selected countries.
Source: GGP Wave 1 (Release: 4.2).

(Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2013, p. 1049; Kravchenko & Grigoryeva, 2014, p. 227). Thus, separated or divorced Russian women find no (or only a small proportion of) attractive partners at disposal for remarriage or re-partnering (Utrata, 2015). The high mortality of Russian men is another reason (Meslé, 2004). In Lithuania, beyond comparable problems of alcoholism and domestic violence against women (Dvorak, 2013, p. 720), another factor is at work. Lithuania's entry into the European Union in 2004 eased restrictions on labor market migration. This has conveyed 'artificial or de facto divorce' (Dvorak, 2013, p. 721), which occurs when one spouse leaves to pursue employment in another country. A long absence of the partner is not only a factor contributing to formalized divorces but it could also be a reason for the relatively small proportion of stepfamilies because no alternative partners for remarriage or re-partnering exist. Also, a closer look at partnership histories in this country shows that Lithuanian women are less likely to have dissolved a union before the age of 35 in comparison to nearby countries like Estonia (Fürnkranz-Prskawetz, Vikat, Philipov, & Engelhardt, 2003, p. 117). The mean age of entry into a first union is also relatively high (Katus, Puur, Põldma, & Sakkeus, 2007, p. 260). Individuals establishing their partnerships later in life have less time to go through a first union dissolution and to start a second union with children from a prior union.

The countries of *cluster 2* (*Georgia, Italy, Poland, and Romania*) are again located West and East of Hajnal's line (see Figure 1). The countries in cluster 2 have a middle to quite high marriage rate (similar to the countries in cluster 1), but a very low divorce rate. As we can see in Table 1, the proportion of births outside marriage is not high either. On the contrary, it is comparably low (from 13% to 28.5%). In line with these results we find for the countries of cluster 2 a relatively small proportion of single-parent families (from 5.5% to 11.2%) and stepfamilies (from .9% to 4.9%). It should be mentioned here that Poland is an outlier in terms of the proportion of single-parent families: with a share of 11.2%, Poland displays twice the proportion of single-parent families as compared to the other three countries (Georgia, Italy, and Romania). Religious background and a time-consuming divorce process in Poland could contribute to an explanation (Palmer & Molenda-Kostanski, 2013, p. 974). Thus, costs of divorce appear to be relatively high and a separation may not end in a judicial dissolution. Apart from this deviation, the patterns of all four countries are very similar (Figure 3). The four countries of cluster 2 have in common a high importance of religiosity (Mills, 2013; Palmer & Molenda-Kostanski, 2013; Pantea, 2013; Schnabl, 2013), which is an important influencing factor for family formation and dissolution (Kalmijn, 2007). While Italy and Poland are highly Catholic, Romania and Georgia are predominantly Orthodox Christians. Accordingly, traditional church weddings are more common than civil ceremonies, and divorces are less frequent. In Italy, divorce legislation did not even exist before 1970 (Schnabl, 2013, p. 607), and in Poland (as mentioned) the process of divorce is often lengthy and expensive, especially if children are involved (Kte'pi, 2013a; Palmer & Molenda-Kostanski, 2013, p. 974). Italy and Poland are also quite similar in regard to union formation (Hoem et al., 2010). The economic dependency of women could be an additional factor discouraging divorce in all of the countries of cluster 2. In Romania, social and economic costs of divorce are especially high (Pantea, 2013). In this group, separation is more than just a short-term transition to divorce because many separated couples avoid official divorce proceedings due to legal restrictions, cultural norms, and high costs.

Cluster 3 consists of six Central and Northern European countries (*Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Norway, and Sweden*) basically located West of the Hajnal line (Figure 1). They share middle-ranged marriage and divorce rates. These countries are marked by a comparably high proportion of single-parent families (from 11.8% to 15.5%) and stepfamilies (from 8.2% to 18.3%) (Table 3). The countries of cluster 3 show very similar patterns (Figure 3) except for heterogeneity in the prevalence of stepfamilies. While France in comparison to the other countries of cluster 3 has a quite small share of stepfamilies (see also Mignot, 2008), Estonia has the highest proportion of stepfamilies not only in cluster 3 but of all included countries. The high prevalence of stepfamilies in Estonia can be explained by the early age of first partnership (Katus et al., 2007, p. 261), the high share of non-marital cohabitation (Katus et al., 2007, p. 265), the high rates of dissolution of first partnership (Fürnkranz-Prskawetz et al., 2003, p. 123), and the high prevalence of second partnership (often with children from a prior relationship) before the age of 35 (Fürnkranz-Prskawetz et al., 2003, p. 121). The countries in cluster 3 have in common that the second demographic transition is clearly advanced in all of them (Lesthaeghe, 2010), with decreasing fertility rates, now below the critical level of 2.1 children per woman, and increasing life expectancy. Also evident in these countries are the later onset of childbearing and an increase in the number of non-marital unions (Kasearu & Kutsar, 2011; Lappegård, 2014; Philipov & Dorbritz, 2003). In France, (West-)Germany, Norway, and Sweden a change in family patterns (including an

increase in divorce rates) occurred quite early (Baker & Hamilton, 2013; Limmer & Schütz, 2013; Moore, 2013; Schroth & Helfer, 2013b). In the ex-socialist countries of cluster 3 (Czech Republic, Estonia, and also Eastern Germany), these changes in family formations started well before the collapse of the socialistic regimes (Kantorová, 2004; Kte'pi, 2013b, 2013c; Philipov & Dorbritz, 2003). In addition: especially in ex-socialist countries which were quite advanced with their development in regard to changes in family formation patterns, the changes took place rapidly after the fall of the wall (Puur, Maslauskaitė, et al., 2012; Puur, Rahnu, et al., 2012).

Cluster 4 consists of five countries (*Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Netherlands*), which are located both West and East of Hajnal's line. The marriage and divorce rates of the countries in cluster 4 are relatively low. Also, the proportion of single-parent families is below the overall mean (from 7.8% to 11.9%). Last but not least, we can see that the prevalence of stepfamilies is (as in cluster 3) very heterogeneous: it ranges from a very low proportion of 4.4% in Bulgaria and the Netherlands to a moderate proportion of 11.9% in Belgium. While all of the countries in cluster 4 are situated at the bottom of Table 1 and thus have a relatively low marriage rate, the group is inconsistent regarding divorce rates: Belgium, Austria, and Hungary have average divorce rates, whereas Bulgaria and the Netherlands have low divorce rates (1.8% and 1.9%) (Dvorak, 2013; Kte'pi, 2013a; Mortelmans, 2013; Schroth & Helfer, 2013a; Zartler, 2013). The very low divorce rates in Bulgaria and the Netherlands are reflected in the proportions of single-parent families and stepfamilies: Bulgaria has not only a very low proportion of single-parent families (7.8%), but also a very low proportion of stepfamilies (4.4%). The Netherlands has a very low proportion of stepfamilies too (4.4%),[7] while all of the other countries in this cluster have a proportion of about 10%. It is difficult to tell what the countries have in common beyond quite similar patterns with the exception of Bulgaria: a comparison of the values in the parallel coordinate plot of clusters 2 and 4 shows that Bulgaria also fits in cluster 2. But certainly Bulgaria is different from Georgia, Italy, Poland, and Romania because it has a relatively high divorce rate. If Bulgaria were classified to cluster 2, which would make sense geographically, Hungary would be the only post-socialist country in this group, with a divorce law that is more 'Western' than 'Eastern' European (Therborn, 2014, p. 12). This is explained by its historical, cultural, and geographic proximity to Austria and thus to the rest of what has now become Western Europe. Austria[8] is a country with rather conservative attitudes toward divorce and the only European country where two kinds of divorce are recognized: divorce on the grounds of a fault and divorce for other reasons (Zartler, 2013, p. 112). In many other respects, Austria is European average like Belgium and the Netherlands, also regarding demographic developments. But as already mentioned, divorce rates and the proportion of single-parent families and stepfamilies in Belgium are much higher than in the Netherlands (Kte'pi, 2013d; Mortelmans, 2013).

5. Summary and discussion

A first aim of the current paper was to close the research gap regarding the availability of reliable cross-nationally comparable estimates of the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies with minor children in Europe. Moreover, we investigated whether the distribution of these family forms subsequent to separation or divorce follows a geographic East–West divide along the lines of the well-known 'Hajnal line', in spite of the overarching political and social changes in the former state-socialist countries. This seemed particularly

interesting, because divorce rates were only starting to increase after Hajnal's original pub-lication in the late 1960s, being very influential on family formation patterns ever since.

Our results with regard to the first research objective are in line with other studies: regard-ing marriage pattern Hajnal's line (and thus a difference between Western and Eastern Europe) could be confirmed. In the (South-)East of Europe people marry earlier and more often than in the (North-)West of Europe. Regarding divorce, the Hajnal pattern appears less clear, because some of the Eastern European countries have a high marriage rate and a low divorce rate (Georgia, Poland, and Romania), and some have not only high marriage rates but also high divorce rates (Russia). The complexity grows further, if one takes into account that in some countries of Europe people don't marry or don't marry that often, even if chil-dren were born (Kasearu & Kutsar, 2011; Kiernan, 2001). Because the proportion of single-par-ent families and stepfamilies is not based on divorces alone but also on separations of parents, who don't get divorced or didn't get married at all the question arises whether typical regional family patterns can be detected. Thus we calculated the proportions of single-parent families and stepfamilies with the help of the Generation and Gender Surveys for 17 countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Sweden) and calculated a cluster analysis also taking into account marriage and divorce rates.

Findings regarding the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies in Europe show that family forms following a separation or divorce have a significant share in all fam-ilies. But differences between countries are quite considerable. While in countries like Estonia, Russia, or Germany separated and divorced families make up to about one-third of all families with minor children already, we find a quite low proportion of separated and divorced fam-ilies of less than 10% in Romania, Georgia, and Italy. In most countries more single-parent families than stepfamilies exist, which points to the problem that finding and eventually marrying a new partner after a separation or divorce with children can be difficult. Hence, future research should focus on the conditions for single parents to find a new partner and also on the differences between countries.

To address our second research objective, we employed cluster analysis to identify family patterns in Europe taking into account marriage rates, divorce rates as well as the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies. We found four clusters: the first cluster includes Lithuania and Russia, lying West and East of Hajnal's line. They have in common high marriage and divorce rates, a quite high share of single-parent families, but diverge in the share of stepfamilies. The second cluster encompasses Georgia, Italy, Poland, and Romania. These countries also lie West and East of the Hajnal line. The countries of cluster 2 have a middle to high marriage rate, but in contrast to Lithuania and Russia they have a very low divorce rate. The proportions of single-parent families and stepfamilies are accordingly low. The third cluster covers the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Norway, and Sweden; countries of North-West and Central Europe. They have in common a middle marriage rate and a middle divorce rate, but a middle to high share of single-parent families. Regarding step-families these countries show a quite high variance. The fourth and last cluster, which again includes countries East and West of Hajnal's line, namely Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Netherlands, has marriage and divorce rates which are low to middle but they both are rather lower than in cluster 3. Thus, also the proportions of single-parent families and stepfamilies in all families with minor children are clearly lower than in cluster 3. However,

patterns in cluster 3 and cluster 4 are quite similar. In sum, by taking marriage rate, divorce rate, the prevalence of single parenthood, and stepfamilies into account we were able to identify four clusters of family patterns, which do not support Hajnal's line, because all four clusters include countries lying West and East of the line. Going beyond marriage and divorce by looking at single-parent families and stepfamilies including paths that lead to such family forms via separation and re-partnering shows that there are quite complex family patterns in Europe that are hard to systemize with the help of a West–East divide.

While our study provides valuable new insights into the prevalence and patterns of single-parent families and stepfamilies across 17 European countries, it also has its limitations. First, it was not possible to distinguish separation from widowhood. This is unfortunate, as the consequences for children of a separation or divorce can diverge sharply from the consequences of a parental death. For most European countries it can be assumed that most single-parent families and stepfamilies emerge due to divorce or separation because of the very low mortality of young and middle-aged adults, but in Russia, mortality rates especially for middle-aged men are high (Meslé, 2004, p. 59). Second, the selection of countries was not theory-driven. It was limited to the countries whose governments approved and financed participation in the GGP survey. The number of Eastern European countries is overrepresented, and a more balanced sample would be preferable to sharpen the comparison. Nonetheless, as Eastern European countries are not commonly included in studies of family living arrangements, our study serves the important function of expanding knowledge of this part of Europe. Future analyses of family types and family-related household constellations should include more countries within and beyond Europe. In addition, a look at regional differences within countries (e.g. lower levels like NUTS 2) could shed light on important theoretical differences that are not tied to national borders. We would certainly expect to see cultural (mainly religious) differences in the prevalence and constellations of single-parent families and stepfamilies at least for Germany (East–West), Italy (North–South), and Belgium (North–South). That also leads to the assumption that other factors than family systems, such as family politics or family law, might drive the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies. However, to answer these questions must be left to further examinations.

The present study demonstrates that the prevalence of family types still varies widely among European countries in the North, South, East, and West. In European countries such as Italy, more than 90% of families with minor children live in families where both parents live in the same household only with their own biological children (nuclear families). However, in countries such as Estonia, this family form is characteristic of only two-thirds of all families with minor children living in the household. The same high variance can be seen in the prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies. It must be left to future investigations to gauge the extent to which the relative prevalence of different family forms moderates the impact of separation and divorce on children.

Notes

1. See for a critical discussion of the European demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural differentials and for references of Kaser, Laslett, Mitterauer and many others, which have enhanced and differentiated Hajnal's concept Szołtysek (2012).
2. In Austria, respondents were between 18 and 45 years of age. For the sake of completeness, we included Austria despite this limitation.

3. Unfortunately, it was not possible to distinguish separation from widowhood. First of all, we do not know whether the partner got separated, divorced or was widowed. Second, to get a complete picture it would be necessary to match every child to a certain former partnership. Although the GGP surveys include a partnership history of the respondent, which covers questions regarding divorce and widowhood, it is not possible to match children to certain partnerships, because there is no date for the beginning of the partnership and (even more important) there is no date in case of widowhood. Above that, there are very high rates of missing values in this variable: respondents either do not want to or cannot remember. However, for most European countries it can be assumed that most single-parent families and stepfamilies emerge due to divorce or separation, because of the very low mortality of young and middle-aged adults.

4. Again, we would like to point out that respondents in Austria were between 18 and 45 years of age. Thus, the high percentage of households with minor children of all households is not very surprising but reflects that fact.

5. We decided on the four-cluster solution to achieve a better visualization of the results, but one should keep in mind that cluster 2, consisting of Georgia, Italy, Poland and Romania could be further split up, dividing Georgia and Italy from Poland and Romania. This five-cluster solution fits the data most according to the inverse scree test.

6. Russia's divorce rate of 4.4 per 1000 persons is not only the highest divorce rate in our sample, it is also the highest divorce rate globally (Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2013, p. 1049). Note, however, that the Russian divorce rate may be artificially inflated. In Russia, both former partners receive separate certificates of divorce, so if each former partner registers the divorce at different civil registry offices, it might be counted twice in the official statistics (Russian Family Code, 1995; Vishnevskij, 2008, pp. 83–85). However, the number of divorces in Russia would be high even if such cases were purged.

7. The proportion of stepfamilies is 7% according to Statistics Netherlands (2008) (http://www.cbs. nl/en-GB/menu/themas/bevolking/publicaties/artikelen/archief/2008/2008-2360-wm.htm), which is still smaller than the proportion in other countries, but it also deviates from our results.

8. We would like to point out again, that the sample of Austria has a limited age range in comparison to the other countries. One should keep that in mind in interpreting the results. However, since we only look at households with minor children an age range ending with 45 should be at most lead to a slight underestimation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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