

Transition Patterns of School Leavers in Europe. A Comparison of Early Careers using Optimal Matching

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The transition from school to work is shaped by both, institutional arrangements, such as apprenticeship systems, and youth labour market policies. Institutions and policies can be seen as youth transition regimes that shape specific patterns of transitions between different labour market statuses. In research on school-to-work-transitions there is no systematic comparison or classification of the whole period of labour market integration. The vast majority of empirical studies available deals only with single events to analyse the matching process using either logit models or event history analysis. However, this is insufficient to make statements about the way early careers are shaped by institutional settings, which have to include both duration and patterns of labour market statuses. The different patterns of labour market transitions can be examined by comparing monthly calendar information of 12 European countries from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP). The calendar information covers a period from 1993 to 2000 and contains labour market statuses like employment, unemployment, inactivity, education and paid apprenticeship. Using the explorative method of Optimal Matching (OM) it is possible to detect different patterns of labour market transitions, which can be grouped by means of cluster analysis. After that the transition patterns can be treated as both, independent as well as dependent variables to clarify the relationship between patterns and either micro-level factors (e.g. age, gender, education, work experience) or, to some extent, macro- level factors.

The questions are to be answered are: Are there distinct labour market patterns of school leavers? How country- specific are they? What are the preconditions for particular labour market patterns? What is the impact of a particular school-to-work transition on other variables? Regarding the types and their appearance in particular countries it can be assumed that school leavers in liberal transition regimes (e.g. UK) more often have to go through a period of frequent status changes than those in more structured transition regimes (e.g. Germany). Furthermore, the German dual system produces a higher degree of long-term social exclusion for disadvantaged groups like school dropouts and immigrants. This should be reflected in a small group of long-term unemployed as well as in a higher share of long-term inactive young people.