

Comparing Life-Course Data from Multiple National Panel Surveys: Challenges of Ex-post Harmonization.

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Introduction

- **Cross-national biographies – Young (CNB-Young) research proposal: background, description, and rationale**
- Idea – to study youth precarious employment in a comparative cross-national framework
- Our argument / starting point – labor market precarity cannot be captured using cross-sectional data
- In particular, studies which associate precarity with fixed-term / non-standard employment arrangements draw on findings suggesting that, in general, fixed-term employees tend to feel less secure (Chung and van Oorschot, 2011), receive lower wages (EC, 2010; OECD, 2014), and have worse access to employee benefits and training opportunities (Arulampalam and Booth, 1998; McGovern et al., 2004; O'Connell and Byrne, 2012).
- However, this is not so simple due to the possible stepping-stone effects of fixed-term employment

CNB-Young background

If a person is on a fixed-term contract in a given moment, this may mean two different things:

- he/she may have recently found a job and be on probation preceding regular employment (stepping-stone effect), or
- he/she may be in the midst of a series of short-term, unstable jobs with periods of unemployment in between (trap effect → precarity)

→ **studies of careers based on longitudinal data needed to assess which interpretation is true**

We propose a conceptualization of precarity as a specific career pattern, involving short spells of recurrent short-term / non-standard employment separated by periods of joblessness, coupled with low and / or unstable incomes (over long periods of time).

Why cross-national?

Research on the stepping stone vs trap question suggests that the answer is dependent the institutional and policy context

Country-level differences

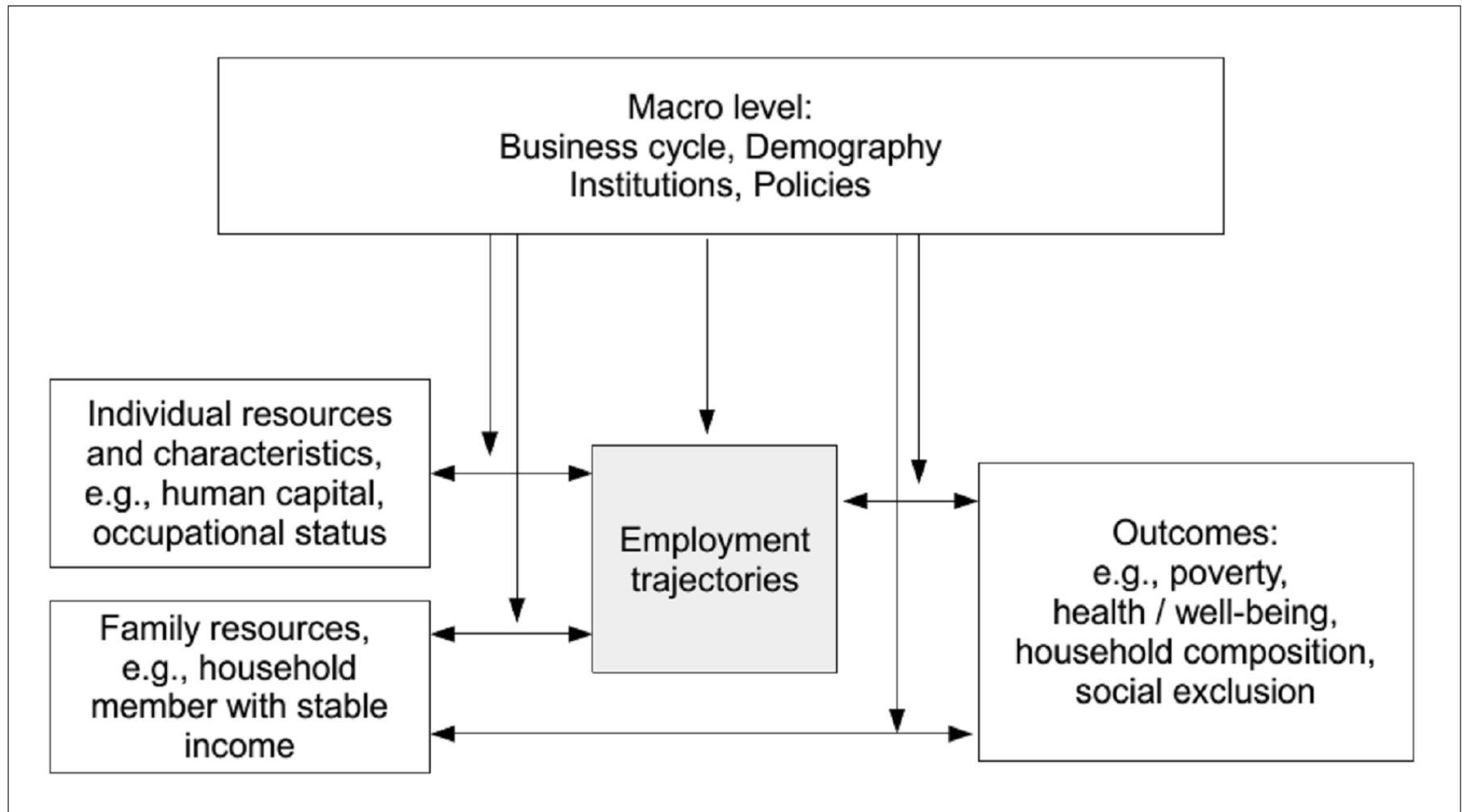
- EPL gap between open-ended and fixed-term contracts
- macroeconomic indicators
- trade unions: collective bargaining coverage
- access to unemployment benefits (people can afford prolonged search)
- (for youth) vocational specificity of the educational system (affects employers' need for probationary employment)

But less research on within-country differences and – especially – conditional relationships and cross-level interactions...

- ...affecting the movement into / out of precarious trajectories
- ...affecting the life-course outcomes of precarious trajectories

CNB-Young proposal

Figure 1. Conditional relationships shaping economic trajectories and life-course outcomes



CNB-Young proposal

- Goal: to assess these effects using harmonized ex-post quantitative longitudinal data from long-standing panel surveys which track individuals over many years of their lives:
 - (a) The Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN)**
 - (b) The German Socio-economic Panel (SOEP)**
 - (c) The United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey – Understanding Society (UKHLS)**
 - (d) The U.S. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79) Young Adults Study.**
- Subsamples of respondents age 21-35 in the most recent available waves of each panel (2016-18)
- To capture precarity and assess the relationship between precarity, resources and life-course outcomes, CNB-Young proposes to harmonize information on the characteristics of the respondents' successive employment spells (starting from their first job), employment status (whether permanent or temporary), their educational histories, income and household composition, and health/well-being indicators.

Novelty of CNB-Young

- It moves beyond the existing large-scale ex-post harmonization efforts – through its focus on longitudinal data and the inclusion of new indicators not covered by previous harmonization projects.
- Harmonization of cross-sectional data: e.g., the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), International Stratification and Mobility File (ISMF), Harmonized International Census Data (IPUMS), and more recently the Survey Data Recycling (SDR) project.
- Harmonization of panel variables: e.g., the Cross-National Equivalent File (CNEF); Consortium of Household Panels for European Socio-Economic Research (CHER) – include only basic indicators of employment (working / not working; employment / self-employment) and income / wages.
- The EU-SILC does include information on permanent vs temporary status in job held at time of interview – but respondents are tracked over a relatively short period of time (4-year rotating panel)

But the project also faces many challenges...

Table 1. CNB-Young: characteristics of the participating countries

	Unem- ploid ment	Employ- ment	Tempo- rary jobs	NEETS 15-29	Welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1990)	Production regime (Visser et al. 2009)	EPL – regular (OECD 2013)	EPL – tem- porary (OECD 2013)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
PL	14.8	29.6	68.2	15.1	Central & Eastern Europe	State-led market economy / Liberal market economy	2.23	1.75
DE	6.8	46.5	52.6	9.6	Continental	Coordinated market economy	2.68	1.13
UK	11.8	54.0	14.6	13.2	Liberal	Liberal market economy	1.10	0.38
USA	9.2	50.3	8.5	14.1	Liberal	Liberal market economy	0.26	0.25

(1) LFS unemployment rate (%), 15-24-year-olds in 2017. Source: OECD Statistics Database (Access 01.12.2018)

(2) LFS employment / population ratio, 15-24-year-olds, 2017. Source: OECD Statistics Database (Access 01.12.2018)

(3) LFS temporary employment as a percentage of employment, 15-24-year-olds, 2017. Source: OECD Statistics Database (Access 01.12.2018). Data for the U.S.A. are from the May 2017 Current Population Survey Supplement on Contingent and Alternative Employment Arrangements (<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/conemp.pdf>).

(4) NEET: youth not in employment, education or training, 15-29 year-olds, 2016. Source: Education at a glance: Transition from school to work (<http://www.oecd.org/employment/action-plan-youth.htm>).

Different countries, different surveys...

Table 2. Methodological differences between surveys

	SOEP	POLPAN	UKHLS	NLSY: Young Adults
Sample	Individuals 18+ in households	Individuals 21+ (national sample)	Individuals 16+ in households	Children 15+ of NLSY79 women (living in selected households)
Mode of interviewing	PAPI / CAPI; self-administered	PAPI	CAPI; self- administered; proxy interviews	CAPI / CATI; self-administered
Dependent interviewing	No	No	Yes	Yes
Frequency of interviews	yearly	5-year intervals	yearly	2-years (4 years for respondents above 30 since 2010)
Information on temp / perm status	"repeated measurement" Job held at time of survey	Retrospective (for each job since start of career)	"repeated measurement" Job held at time of survey	Since 2008 available for each job reported by respondents; retrospective

...and different questions

Example: questions on fixed-term / non-standard employment

SOEP, 2015 individual adult questionnaire:

- Are you currently employed? Which one of the following applies best to your status? [Options include: Employed full-time; Employed part-time; Completing in-service training (betriebliche Ausbildung)/ apprenticeship (Lehre)/ in-service retraining (betriebliche Umschulung); In marginal (geringfügig) or irregular employment (unregelmäßig erwerbstätig); ...]
- Is this work through a temporary employment agency (Zeitarbeit, Leiharbeit)? [Yes / No]
- Do you have a fixed-term or permanent employment contract? [Permanent contract / Fixed-term contract / Not applicable, do not have an employment contract]
- Is it “marginal” part-time work in accordance with the 450/850-euro rule (Mini-Job / Midi-Job)? [Yes, Mini-Job (up to 450 euros) / Yes, Midi-Job (450.01 to 850 euros) / No]

Example: questions on fixed-term / non-standard employment (continued)

POLPAN 2018

- What type of contract did you have in your job [Options include: Employment contract (fixed-term / open ended and full-time / part-time) / civil law agreements / apprenticeship / managerial contract / self-employment / without a written contract / other]
- Were there any changes in your contractual arrangement while you were in this job [Yes -> write down the nature and timing of change(s) / No]

NLSY79 Young Adults 2010-2016

- Some people are in jobs that last only for a limited time or until the completion of a project. [Is/Was] your job with [name of new employer] like this? [YES/ NO]

UKHLS Understanding Society 2017

- Leaving aside your own personal intentions and circumstances, is your job: [1] A permanent job? Or [2] is there some way that it is not permanent?
- In what way is the job not permanent, is it... [1 Seasonal work; 2 Done under contract for a fixed period or a fixed task; 3 Agency temping; 4 Casual type of work; Or is there some other way that it is not permanent? -> In what way is the job not permanent?]

So, why harmonize?

- Note that such differences, while posing problems with the comparability of data (e.g., on temporary employment), are substantively important – cross-national studies of youth labor market outcomes typically try to compare countries which represent contrasting “regimes” → more explanatory power?
- Existing studies can only create separate models for different countries and compare the results; no way to see whether cross-country differences in effects of specific variables are significant or not. Harmonization provides data which allow to explicitly test for interaction effects in single models.
- **Separate models for different countries – side-steps the issue of comparability of variables included in the analysis?**
- Harmonization forces us to address these differences directly and explicitly control for them (while also generating metadata which can be useful for future research)
- Addressing these differences encourages cooperation in the design of future waves of the panel studies, to make the questionnaires more comparable.

Conclusion

- If we want to compare countries using existing panel data, a systematic ex-post harmonization effort is better than no harmonization?
- In a sense – we don't have a choice (we need to compare countries and we need to rely on existing data for multi-year longitudinal information) but to harmonize as best we can?
- Given the changes on contemporary labor markets (the move towards LM deregulation but also gig economy!) - type of employment arrangement becomes an increasingly important variable in stratification research ->
- Need for a corresponding development in the International Classification by Status in Employment (ICSE) to distinguish fixed-term from permanent employment and true from "bogus" self employment, in a way which is comparable across countries

Thank you for your attention!

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