

# Cross-National Differences in Early Family Stability by Socioeconomic Status

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# Background

- Family stability linked to positive child outcomes
- Growing inequality in family patterns, at least in the U.S. – “diverging destinies” (McLanahan 2004)
- Less clear whether pattern is similar in other industrialized countries



# Previous Research

- Several prior studies have considered family stability in cross-national perspective – U.S. is an outlier w/ much greater instability (Andersson 2002; Heuveline, Timberlake & Furstenberg 2003)
- Mixed evidence about an SES gradient in specific family behaviors (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010; Kalmijn 2013; Härkönen and Dronkers 2006; Kennedy & Thomson 2010)



# Our Paper

- Extends the literature on family change and inequality
- Examine family stability over child ages 0-15 by education (can't yet look at cohort change)
- Uses data on 15 countries with multistate life tables



# Data

## Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS) ~ 2004

- Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, and Russia

## Spanish Survey of Fertility and Values

- Spain

## National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG)

- United States

Data are harmonized to account for survey differences across countries

- Use harmonized data on women's relationship and fertility histories, and women's education at the time of the survey



# Sample

Unit of analysis is children

Use all children born to interviewed women who are ages 0 to 15 at some point during 1990-2004

Assume children reside with mother continuously from birth

Censor children's family history at age 15 or 2004, whichever occurs first



# Measures

## Children's family structure history

- Use women's relationship histories to follow children from birth to age 15 (2004) to construct age-specific family structure measures
  - Two-biological parent family
  - Unpartnered-mother family
  - Mother-stepfather family

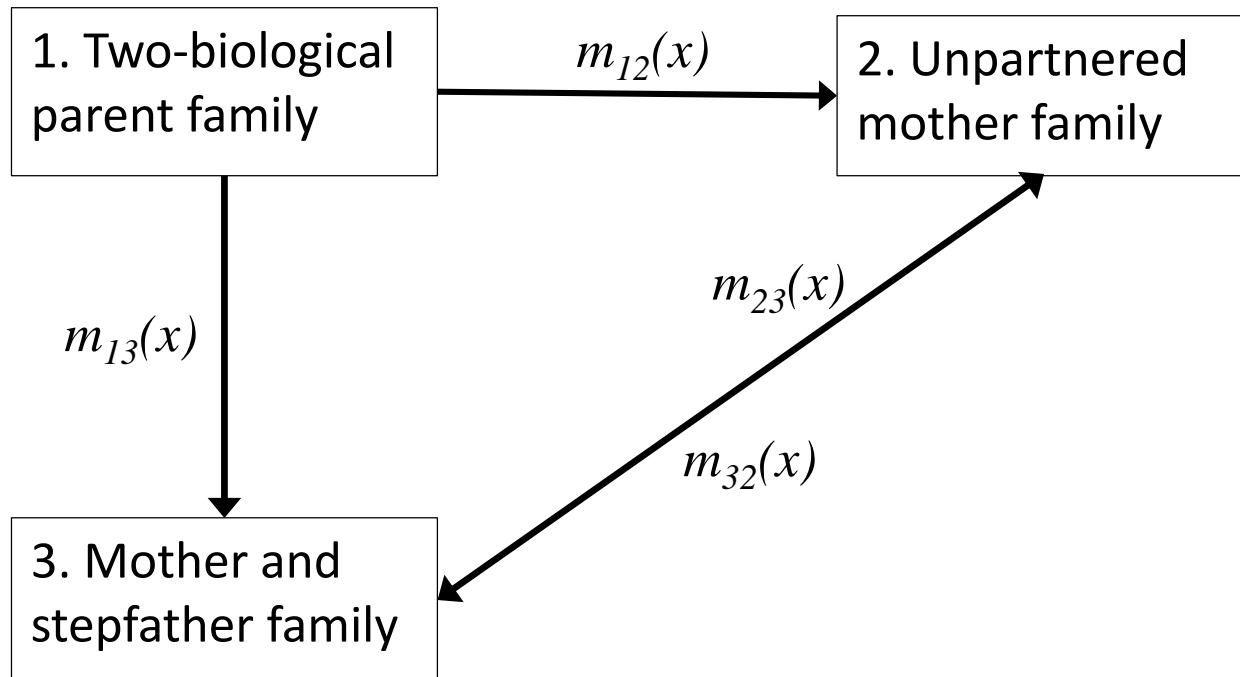
## Mother's education

- 7-category ISCED converted into three categories
  - Low education: less than secondary school
  - Medium education: completed secondary school or some college/university
  - High education: completed tertiary education or higher



# Method: Multistate period life tables

Use discrete-time event history techniques to convert age-specific measures of children's family structure experience into the following age-specific transition rates:





# Method: Multistate period life tables

Apply the transition rates using life table procedures

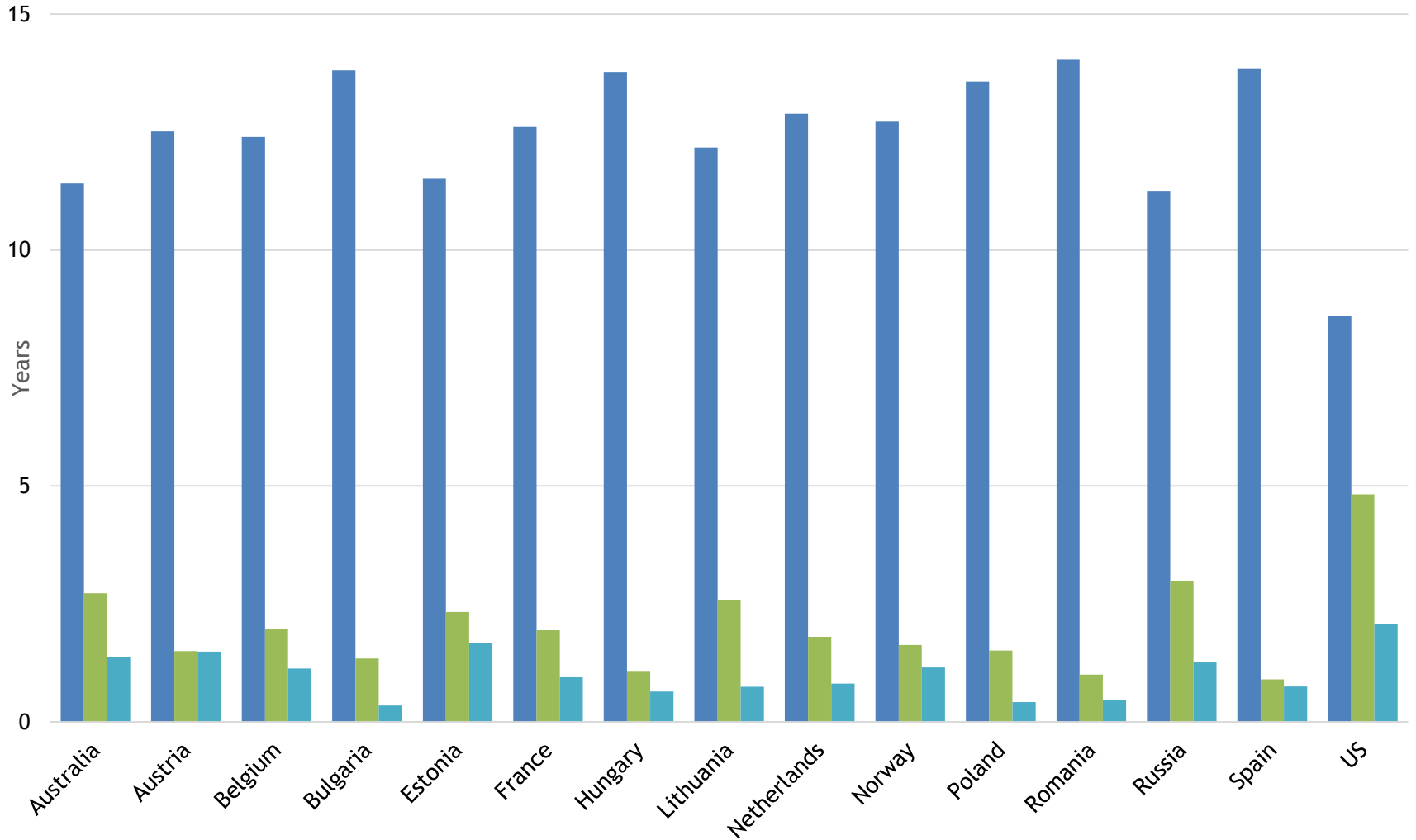
Calculate the duration children could expect to live in each family status if exposed to the prevailing transitions over the entire course of childhood

All rates and life table construction conducted using the SPACE (Stochastic Population Analysis for Complex Events program)

All analyses are country and education specific



# Overall duration in each family status



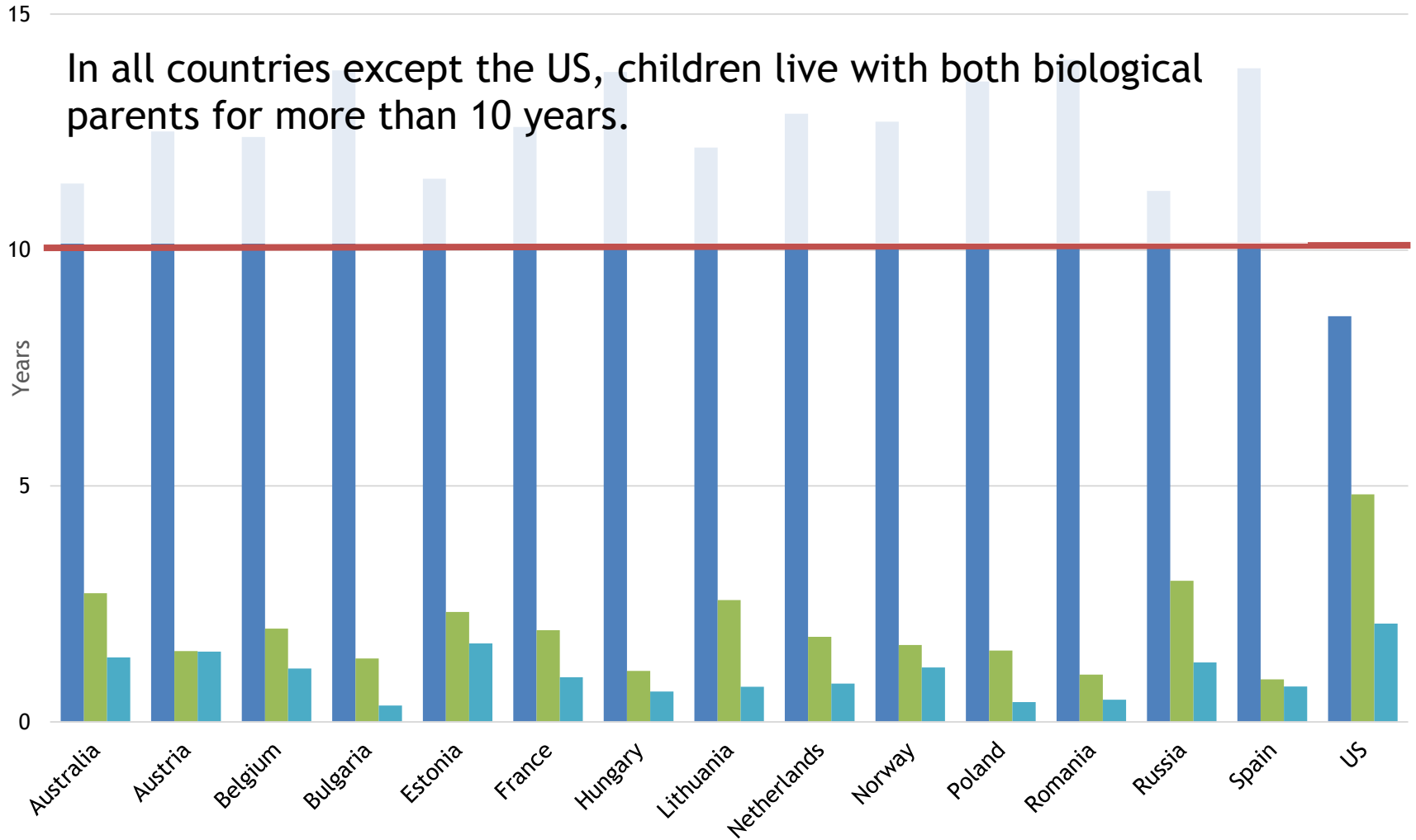
■ Two-biological parent family

■ Unpartnered mother family

■ Mother and stepfather family



# Overall duration in each family status



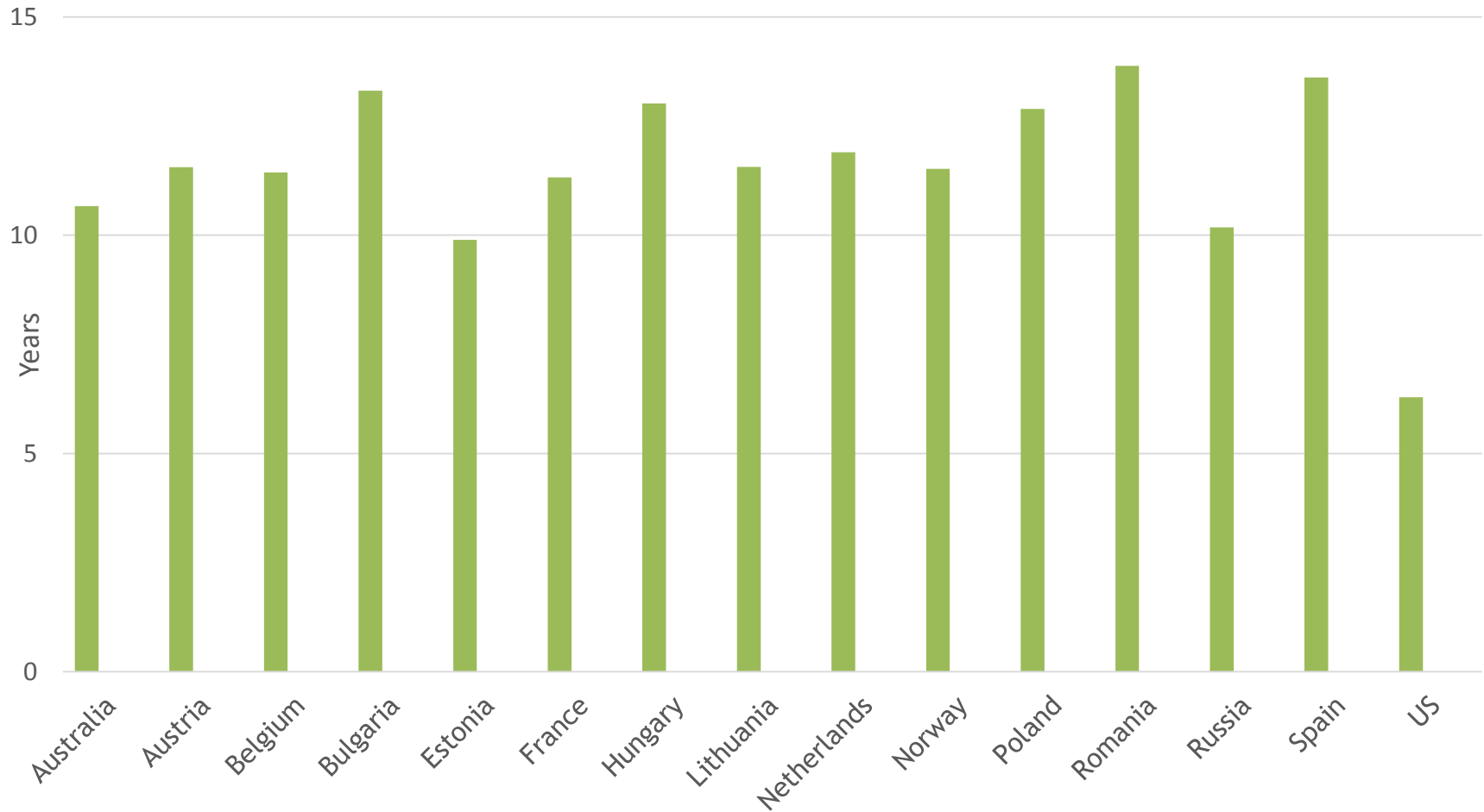
■ Two-biological parent family

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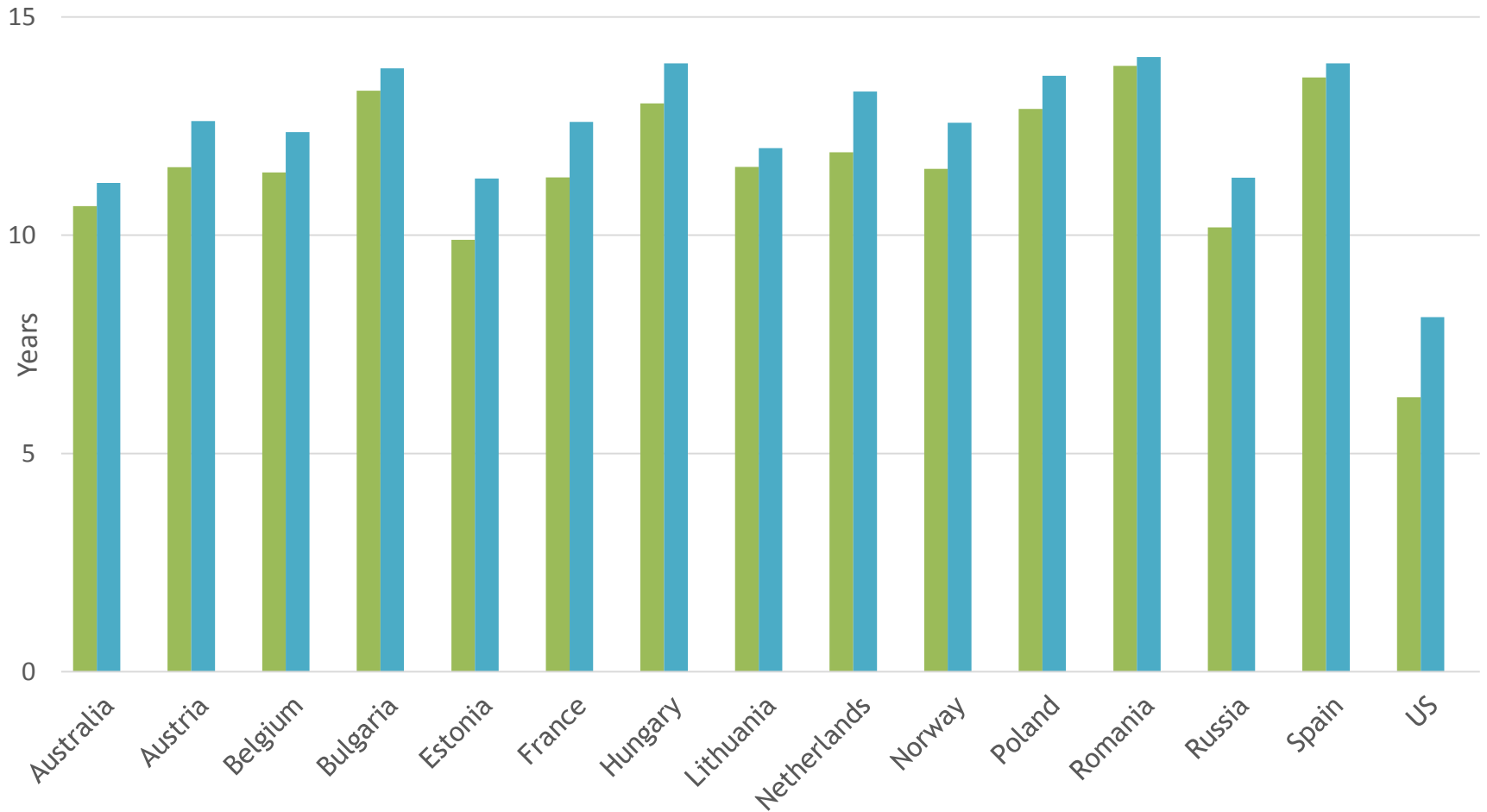
# Duration by education: two-biological parent families



■ Low    Medium    High



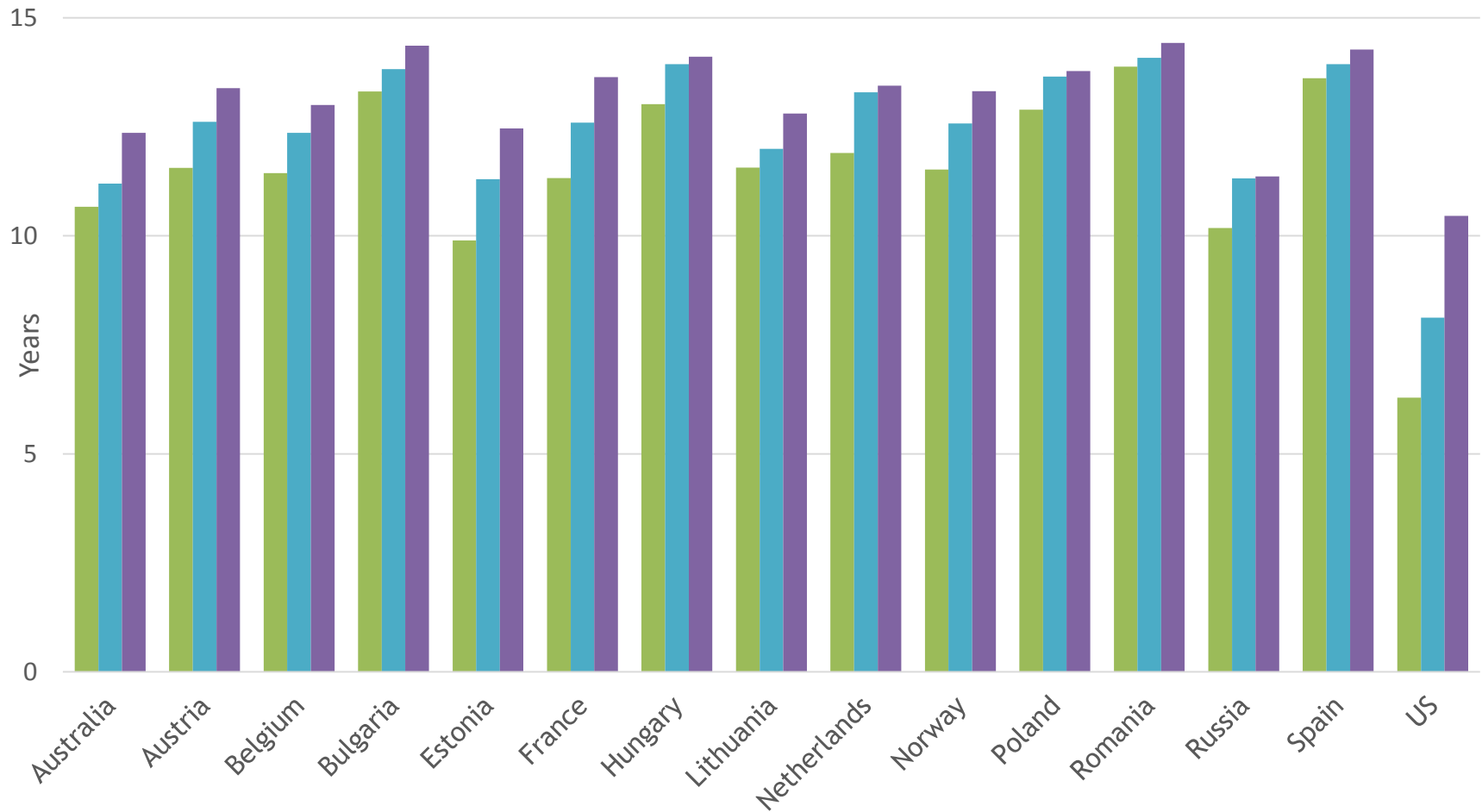
# Duration by education: two-biological parent families



Low Medium High



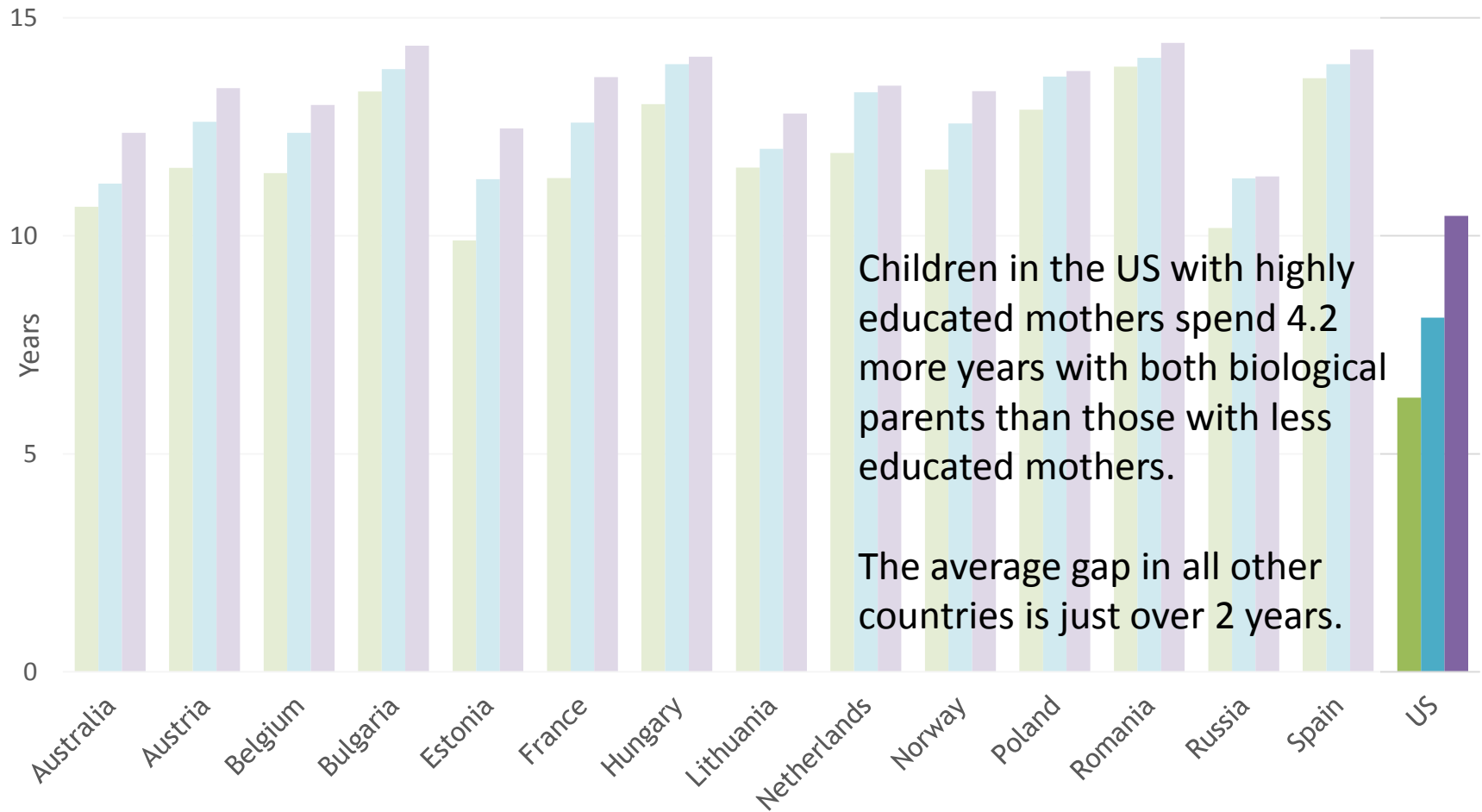
# Duration by education: two-biological parent families



Low Medium High



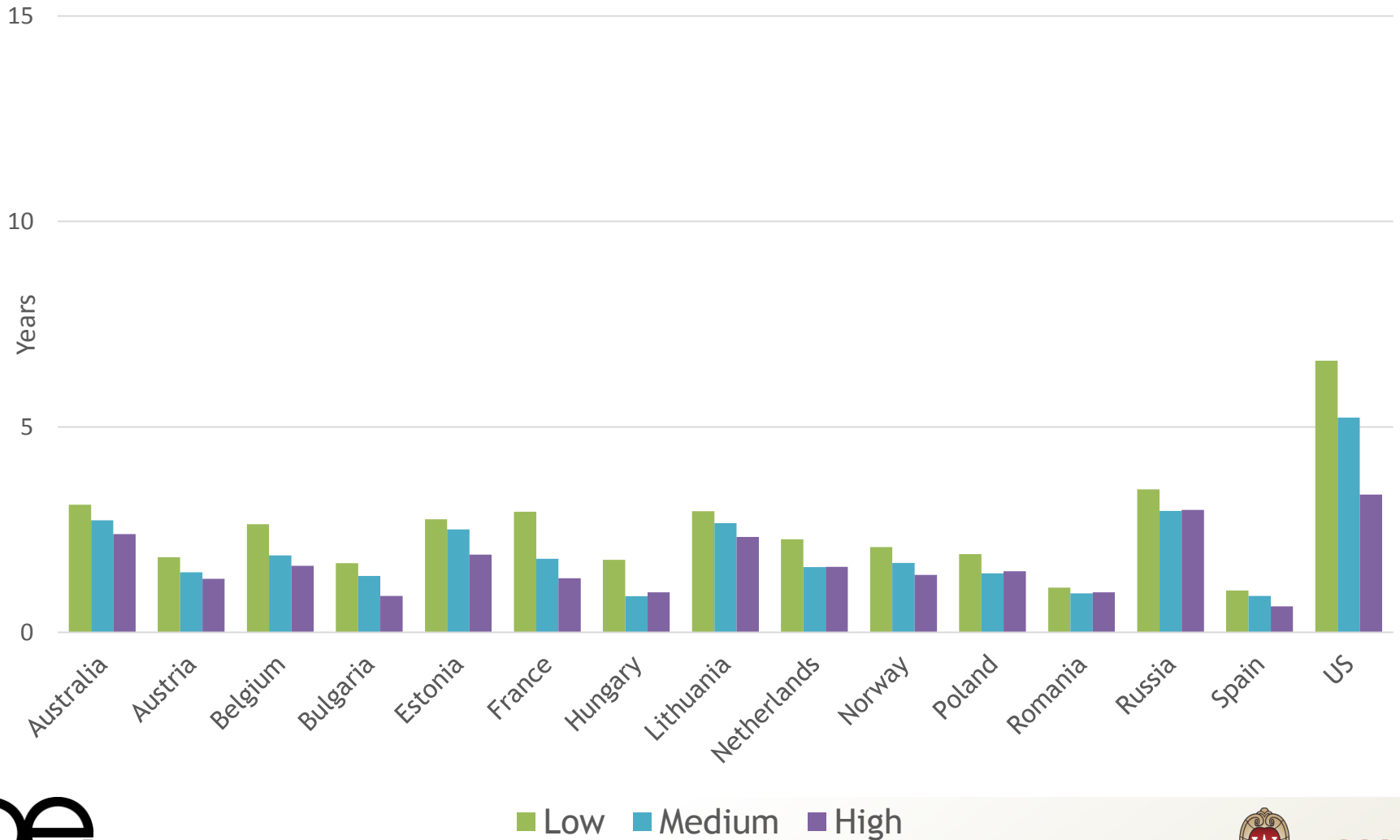
# Duration by education: two-biological parent families



■ Low ■ Medium ■ High

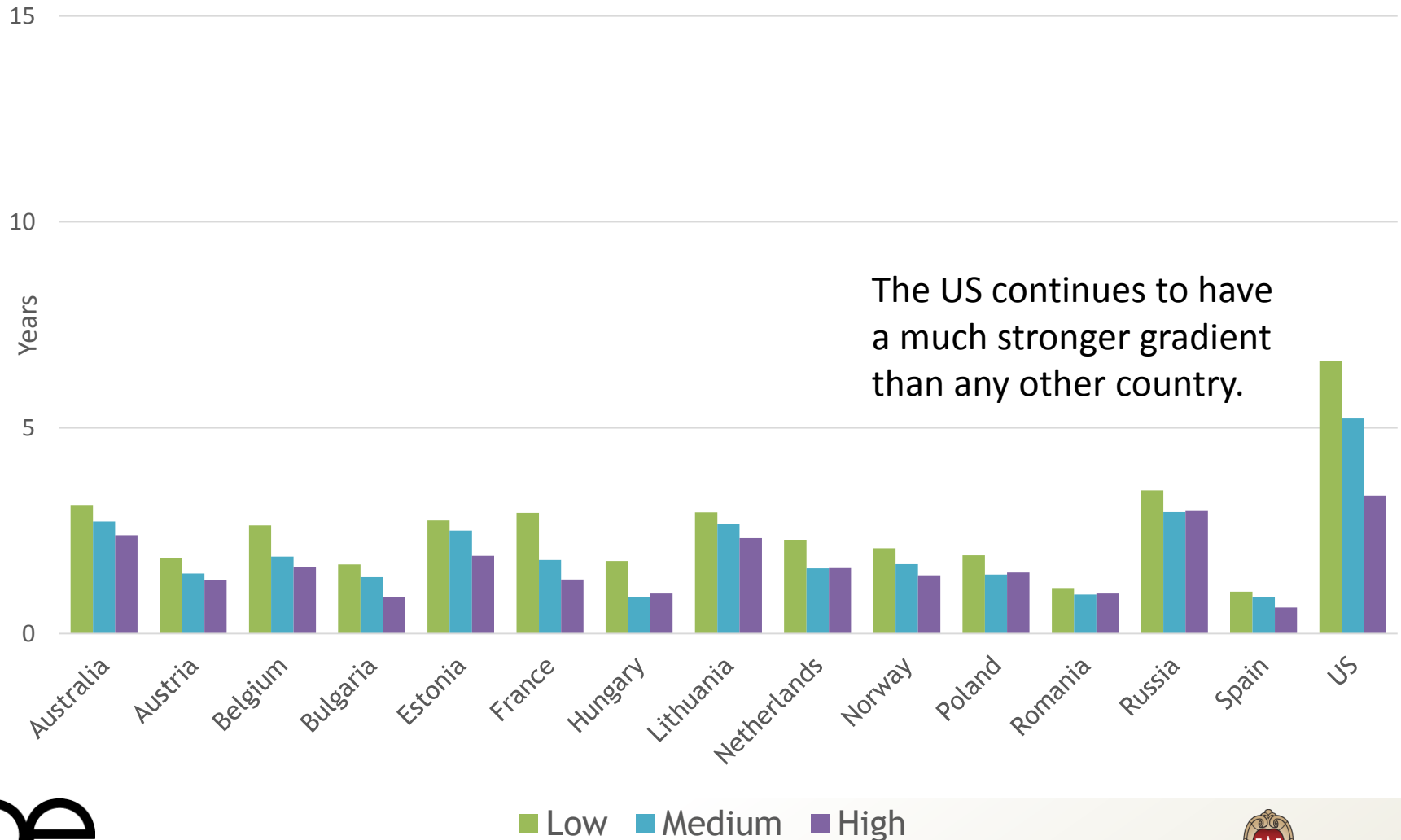


# Duration by education: unpartnered mother families

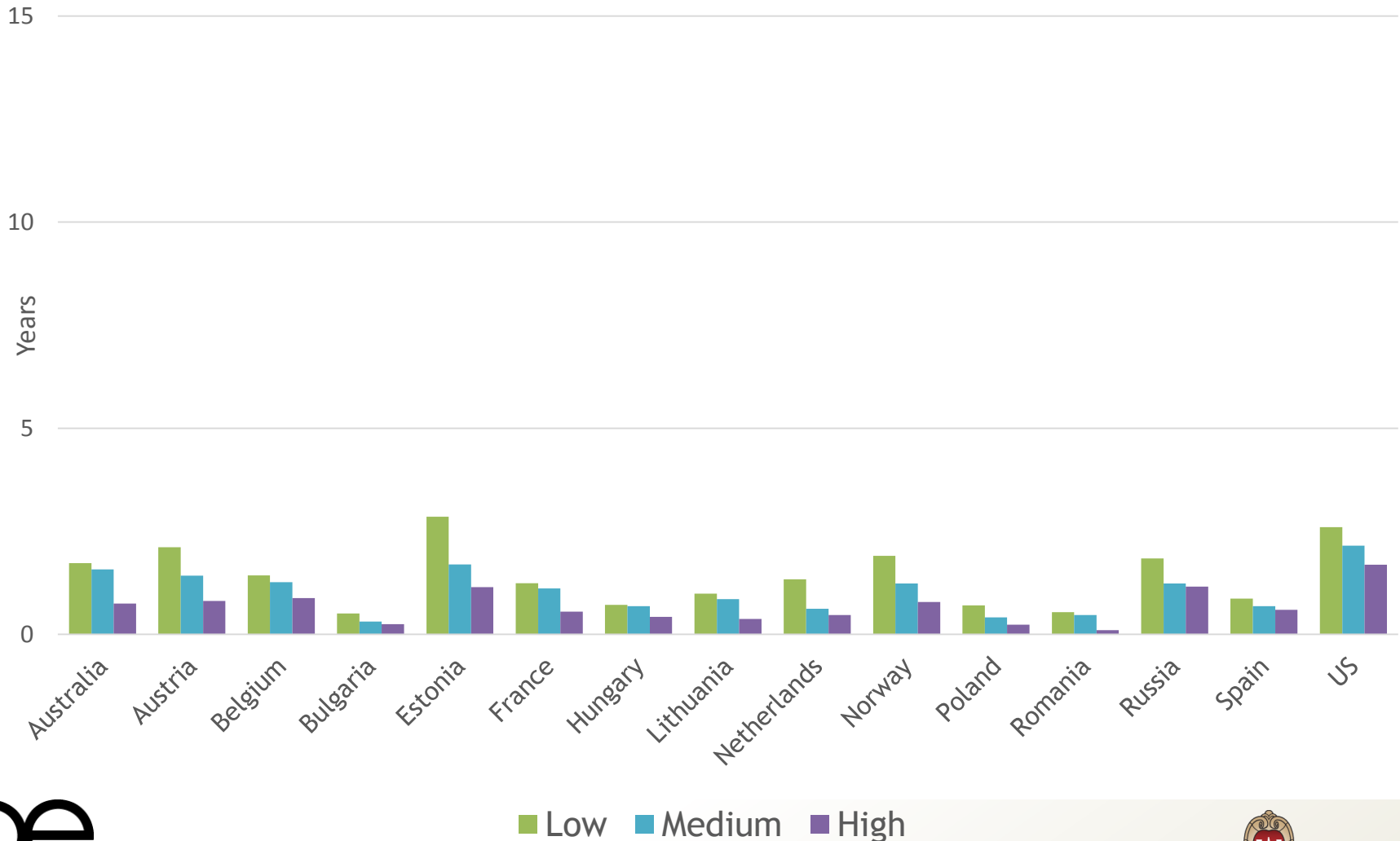




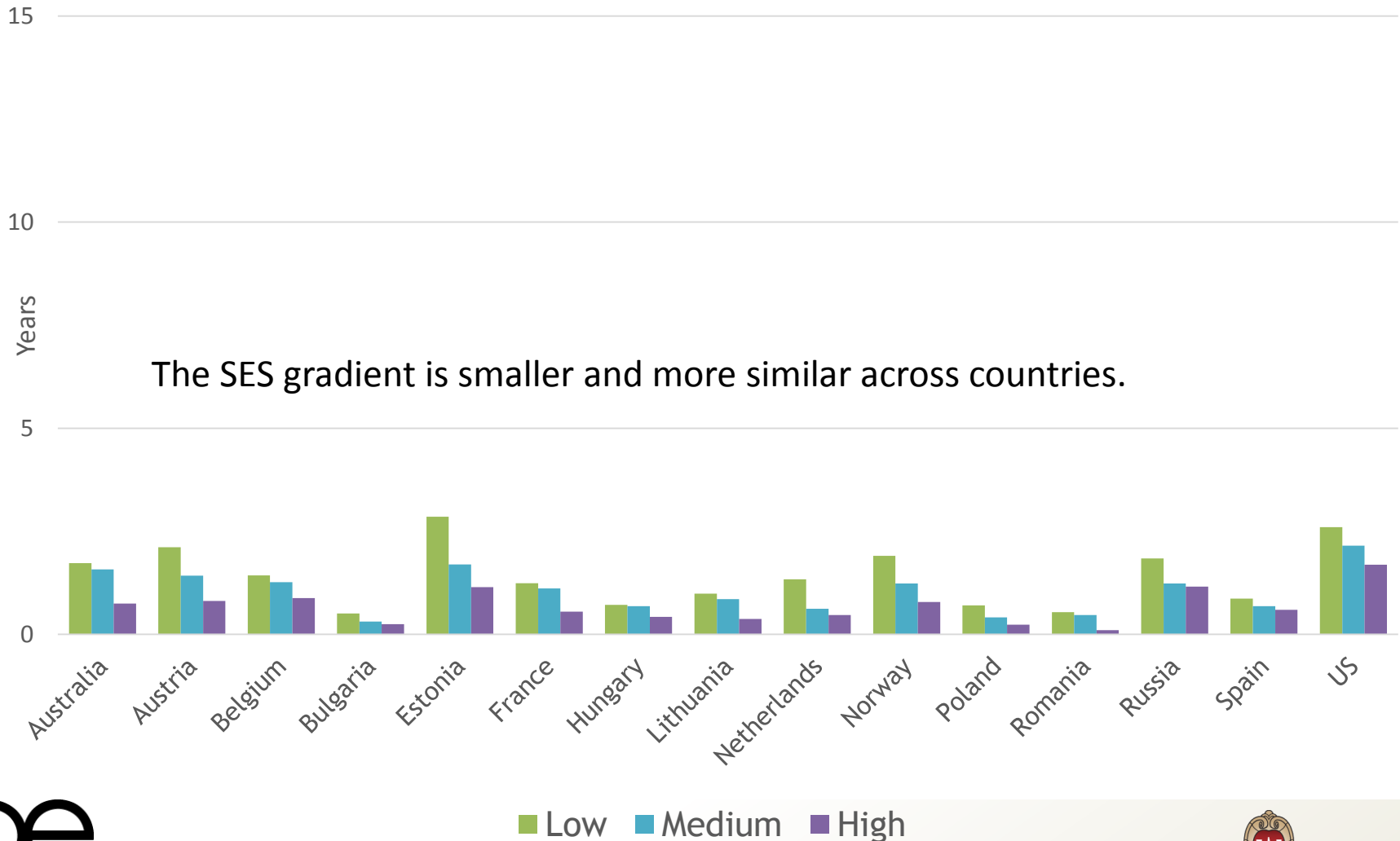
# Duration by education: unpartnered mother families



# Duration by education: mother-stepfather families



# Duration by education: mother-stepfather families

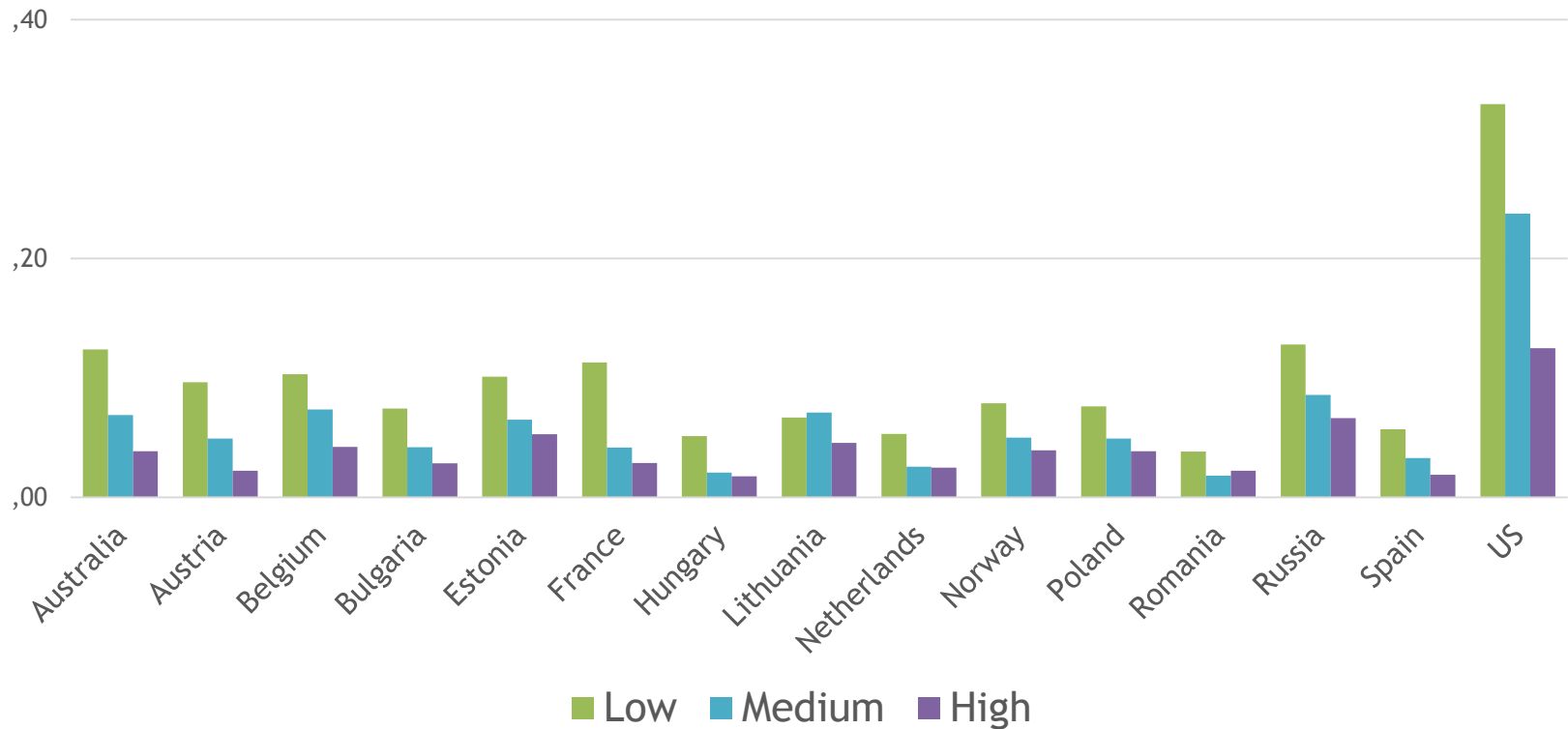


# SES gradients depend on family status at birth

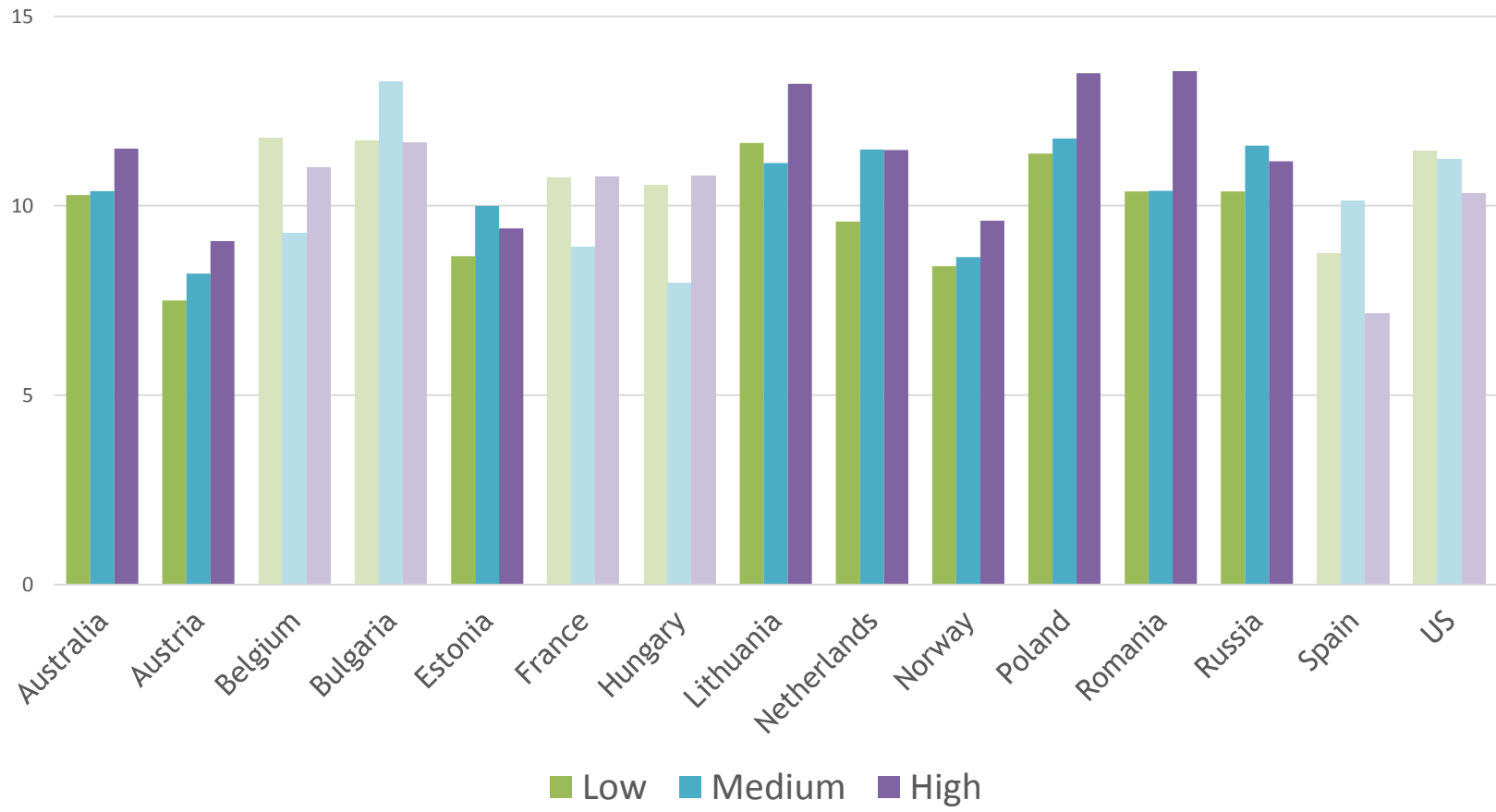
- In nearly all countries, the SES gradients for children born to two-biological parent families are similar to the overall SES gradients
- There is more variation across countries in the direction and magnitude of the SES gradients for children born to unpartnered mothers



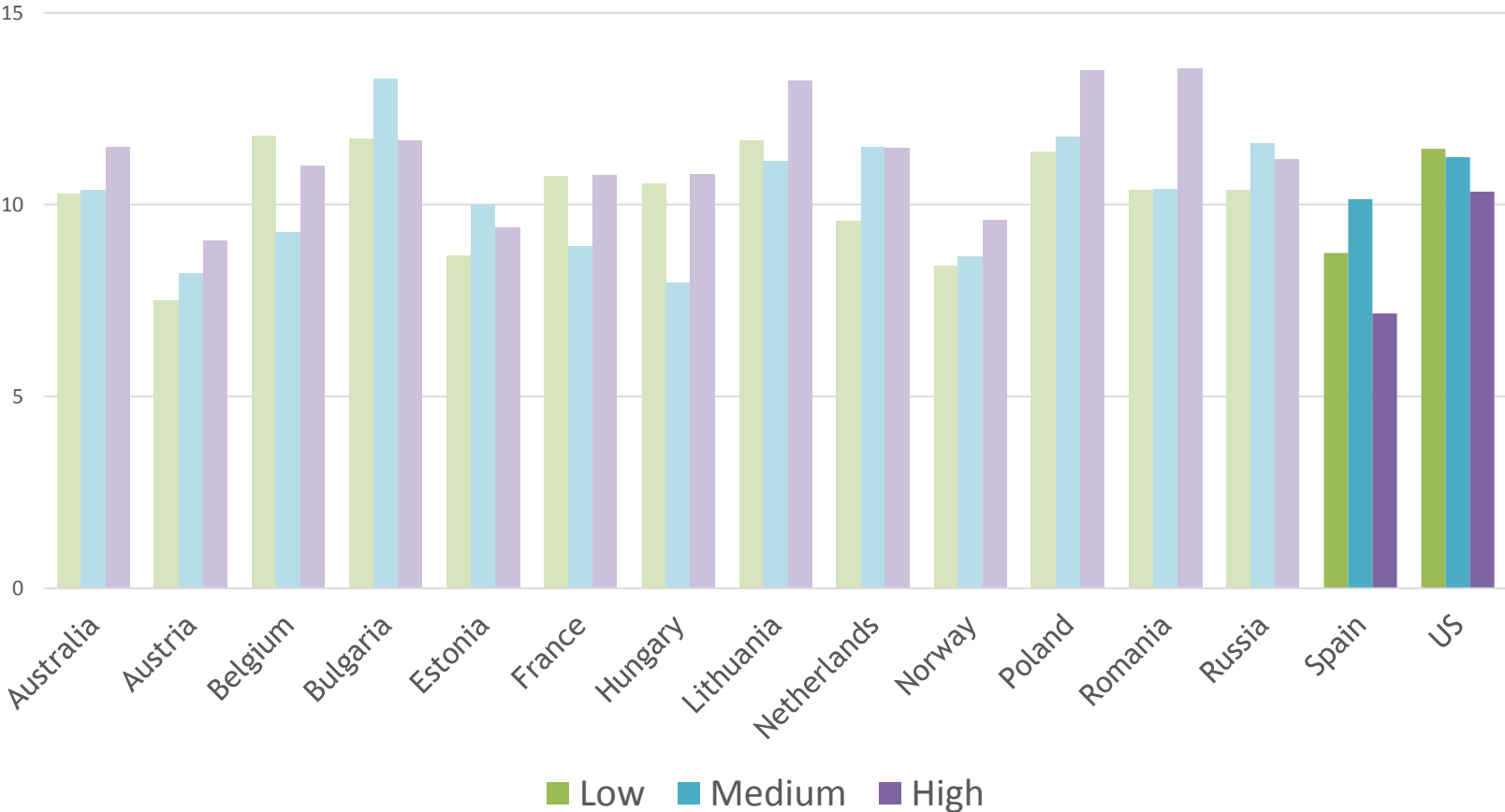
# Proportion of children born to unpartnered mothers by education



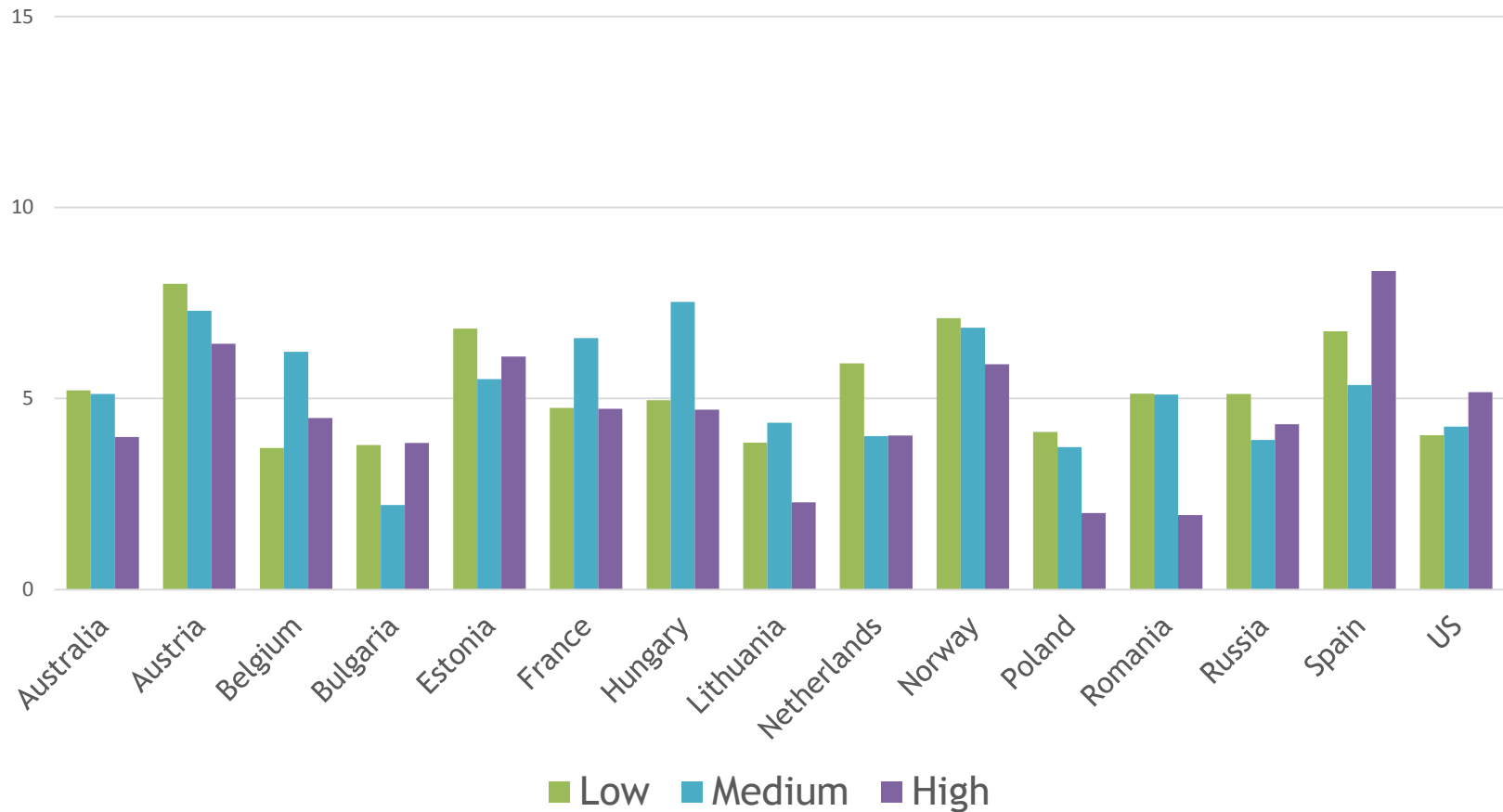
# Duration with an unpartnered mother: among those born to unpartnered mothers



# Duration with an unpartnered mother: among those born to unpartnered mothers



# Duration in a mother-stepfather family: among those born to unpartnered mothers





# Summary

- We find a negative SES gradient in family stability over child ages 0-15 across all countries
- But the U.S. is an outlier;
  - Stronger relationship between education and duration in two-parent family (gap of 4 yrs)
  - Much higher fraction of children begin with unpartnered family (and strong SES gradient)



# Limitations and Next Steps

- Simplifying assumptions
- Education measured at time of survey
- Will next examine *change* in SES gradients over time
- Link change in family structure to children's well-being



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