

Fertility, female employment and reconciliation policies

Research team

France:

Ariane Pailhé & Anne Solaz
(INED)

Christine Barnet-Verzat
(MSH Ange Guépin-Nantes)

Germany:

**Katharina Maul, Johannes Huinink,
Mandy Boehnke, Michael Feldhaus
& Silke Tophoven**
(University of Bremen)

Hungary:

**Judit Takács, Olga Tóth,
Ivett Szalma** (Institute of Sociology,
Hungarian Academy of Sciences)

Poland:

**Ewa Fratzczak, Irena Kotowska,
Anna Matysiak & Aneta Ptak-
Chmieliewska**
(Warsaw School of Economics)

Spain:

Marta Ibáñez
(University of Oviedo)

Sweden:

Livia Sz. Oláh and Susanne Fahlén
(Stockholm University)

WP02
Reconciling Work and
Family Life

Research questions

Is there a relationship between women's labour force attachment and childbearing decisions? Are there any differences by policy contexts?

In what ways, if any, are women's work hours / working conditions and childbearing decisions associated in various policy contexts?

Can pronatalist social norms counterbalance economic constraints on fertility?

Do generous public policies (family and employment policies) create a framework of stability that mitigates the negative impacts of economic uncertainty on fertility decisions?

Can the gender equity, preference and social capital theories provide a better understanding of the interplay between fertility intentions, female employment and work-life balance policies in a specific social context?

Constructing a common research framework

The relationship between work, welfare regimes and fertility is a highly contested topic in the literature. As the previously negative macro-level correlation between fertility rates and female employment rates shifted to a positive one during the 1980s, known as "the positive turn", the role of reconciliation measures in this relationship has become increasingly addressed in research. However, the picture at the micro level is much more complex, which seems to impose a challenge for constructing policies to promote sustainable development in Europe. In our project we have sought to provide a better understanding on the multiple tensions between work life, family life and welfare systems, to facilitate the efforts of policy makers on developing strategies to manage and resolve them.

We have studied fertility intentions (the findings presented in a book) and the births of the first and second child (to be presented in a special volume of a journal) in six countries, two high-fertility and four low-fertility societies, with different welfare regime configurations present in Europe.

Based on the concepts of uncertainty and risk and of incoherence, we have examined the importance of labour force attachment on young women's fertility decisions in the context of increased labour market flexibility and differences in work-life balance policies, considering whether and to what extent such policies facilitate the combination of family and employment across Europe in the early 21st century.

Main research findings

In **Sweden**, **insecure labour force attachment** (i.e. unemployment, short part time work) constrains childless women in considering becoming mothers as relatively strong labour market position is a precondition of generous parental benefit and job-guarantee, whereas fertility intentions of women with children are shaped mainly by own resources due to reconciliation measures facilitating the combination of work and child-rearing for them.

Employment uncertainty (seen in the impact of holding fixed-term contract for women and of unemployment for men) affects fertility plans in **France**, notwithstanding comprehensive reconciliation measures and generous family policies. The woman studying reduces childbearing intentions for both the woman and her male partner, probably due to her time-constraints for childrearing which is still considered as mainly women's domain.

Perceptions of policy support regarding reconciliation shape tensions between fertility and female employment in the two parts of **Germany** differently even today. In West Germany the tensions between family and career produce a selection of women with either family or work orientation with clear impacts on their childbearing intentions, unlike in East Germany where women are more likely to perceive themselves as working mothers with fewer doubts about being able to combine work and childrearing.

While much attention has been paid to the economic aspects of fertility decisions, **the effects of social capital, lifestyle preferences and gender equality** in the family and the society have received only limited attention, even though they are likely to matter greatly in societies facing economic uncertainty along with transformation of values and norms, such as **Poland**. Seeking to identify the main determinants of childbearing intentions in this very low fertility society with less developed work-life balance policies, this study addressed the interplay of fertility intentions, female work and reconciliation policies based on a framework of three theories: (i) preference theory, (ii) gender equity theory and (iii) social capital theory.

In **Hungary**, **fertility related capabilities**, i.e. desires and their realization seem to be constrained mainly by (i) uncertainty concerning the future, especially (the fear of) economic hardship, less successfully mitigated by policies, by (ii) women's and their partner's increasing awareness of women's career to be considered in family/fertility decisions beyond economic aspects, and (iii) worries about own ability to provide good-enough parenting linked among others to shortage of time one can spend with family given labour market constraints and opportunities, suggesting the need of further development of work-life balance policies.

Publication output

Childbearing, women's employment and work-life balance policies in contemporary Europe. Edited by Livia Sz. Oláh and Ewa Fratzczak. Palgrave Macmillan (Work and welfare in Europe series) – forthcoming.

"Introduction" by: Livia Sz. Oláh and Susanne Fahlén

"Work and childbearing intentions in a capability perspective: Young adult women in Sweden" by Susanne Fahlén and Livia Sz. Oláh

"Employment instability and childbearing plans in a child-oriented country: Evidence from France" by: Ariane Pailhé and Anne Solaz

"Same policies - same tensions? Female employment, reconciliation policies and childbearing intentions in East and West Germany" by: Katharina Maul, Mandy Boehnke, Johannes Huinink and Silke Tophoven

"Fertility intentions and female employment in Poland: Can gender equity, preference and social capital theories provide a better insight?" by: Ewa Fratzczak and Aneta Ptak-Chmieliewska

"Unattainable desires? Early 21st century determinants of desired fertility in Hungary" by: Judit Takács

"Aspirations and uncertainties: Childbearing intentions and work-life realities in Europe" by: Barbara Hobson and Livia Sz. Oláh

Tensions between female labor force participation and childbearing in various welfare regimes in Europe, special issue, edited by Livia Sz. Oláh and Ewa Fratzczak (journal to be confirmed later, titles of articles and author-ordering are preliminary)

"Tensions between female labor force participation and childbearing in various welfare regimes in Europe" by: Livia Sz. Oláh

"The impact of family-friendly work conditions on childbearing in Sweden and France" by: Livia Sz. Oláh, Susanne Fahlén, Ariane Pailhé and Anne Solaz

"Employment characteristics influencing the transition to parenthood – East and West Germany compared" by: Katharina Maul

"The 'positive turn'? Women's activity status and childbearing in Spain and Poland" by: Iga Sikorska, Marta Ibáñez and Marcin Bągard

"Childbearing, employment and parental leave policies: a comparison of Hungary and Poland" by: Anna Matysiak and Ivett Szalma

Research task coordinators

Livia Sz. Oláh
(Stockholm University)

Ewa Fratzczak
(Warsaw School of Economics)