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Pathways to Low Fertility: European Perspectives

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A. INTRODUCTION

In Europe, concerns about low birth rates have been recurrent for over the last century. Many European countries have also experienced a long history of government involvement in stimulating birth rates and supporting families with children. The situation is not much different today; some experts, many politicians, as well as the general public, think Europe is facing an unprecedented demographic crisis caused by low birth rates and the resulting population imbalance leading to ever more "sclerotic" societies that lose dynamism and are becoming irrelevant in the global arena. Jacques Chirac, who later became the President of France, remarked in 1984 that "in demographic terms, Europe is vanishing. Twenty years or so from now, our countries will be empty" (Teitelbaum, 2000). More recently, Pritchett and Viarengo (2012) likened current below-replacement fertility in Europe to a slow "demographic suicide".

Are European fertility trends really so negative? Both alarming and reassuring news can be found. European fertility trends have undergone two turnarounds in the last 15 years: the first started since the beginning of the new century and ended the spell of record-low period fertility rates. The global economic recession beginning in 2008 largely ended this recent spell of increasing fertility. However, on balance, Europe is far from "getting empty". This paper aims to provide a concise account of European fertility trends and their determinants, highlighting old and newly emerging regional divides. It focuses on the period since 1990, when the political division of Europe into the East and the West came to an end and the European demographic landscape has been redrawn. First, the study gives a broad-brush account

self-fulfilment rather than following established norms and obligations (Lesthaeghe 1995, 2010). In contrast, the "pattern of disadvantage" view stresses the social status gradient observed in most countries in non-marital childbearing, with lower-educated women having the highest likelihood of having children outside marriage, in particular as single mothers (Perelli-Harris et al., 2012). In this view, the shift in childbearing away from marriage might be seen as a "by-product" of increased unemployment and economic uncertainty which is concentrated especially among people with lower social status. The empirical findings are mixed. In some parts of Europe the frequency of non-marital births appears to have stabilised in the 2000s, at a high level between 40 and 65 per cent in the Nordic countries and at lower levels between 10 and 30 per cent in parts of South-eastern Europe. In several Eastern European countries (Belarus, Moldova and Russian Federation), the share of births outside marriage declined after 2005, suggesting the importance of a stable economic environment for marriage in this region. Nonetheless, the shift towards non-marital births progressed without interruption in most regions in Europe in both economically prosperous times in the early 2000s and in the recession period since 2008. Also the strong link between religiosity, country of origin and non-marital childbearing lends support to the SDT view (Sobotka, 2008b).

D. THE ONGOING TREND TOWARDS LATER CHILDBEARING

Many ups and downs in the period TF during the last three decades were largely caused by the shifts in the timing of births rather than by genuine falls and increases in fertility "quantum" (Bongaarts, 2002; Sobotka, 2004; Goldstein et al., 2009a; Bongaarts and Sobotka, 2012). Since the early 1970s, women in Western and Northern Europe started postponing motherhood to later ages. This trend began about a decade later in Southern Europe, and in the early 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe. The shift to delayed childbearing was losing momentum in the 2000s (Bongaarts and Sobotka, 2012), but picked up again since the beginning of the economic recession after 2008. The expansion of higher education, especially among women, the increased career involvement of women, the spread of effective contraception as well as the rise of economic uncertainty in young adulthood are among the key factors contributing to this trend (Sobotka, 2004a; Schmidt et al., 2012; Mills et al., 2011). By 2011, most European countries were characterized by a high age at first birth, which for women reached the ages of 27 to 30 years, an increase of 4 to 5 years when compared with the early 1970s. Only countries of Eastern and South-eastern Europe have retained earlier first birth pattern with the lowest age at first birth between 24 and 25 years recorded in Belarus, Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine (figure VI). In contrast, first-time mothers in Spain and Switzerland have surpassed age 30 on average.

The long-lasting transformation in the timing of childbearing is manifested in trends in age-specific fertility rates averaged for 11 countries of the European Union between 1975 and 2011 (figures VII and VIII). The continuous fall in fertility of women below age 25 is remarkable; between 1975 and 2011 their fertility rates fell by two-thirds on average across the analysed EU countries, and their share of total fertility dropped from 42 to 19 per cent. Since the mid-1990s the fall in early childbearing has been

countries with distinct fertility developments

reaching the minimum socially-accepted threshold of one child. Recently, the share of women with one child has risen fast in the region (Sobotka, 2011). In Russian Federation, one-child families, reached by four out of ten women, have become as common as the families with two children. The lowest-fertility countries have a low share of larger families combined with many women being either childless or having one child only; their share reaches 44-48 per cent in the three analyzed countries with a cohort fertility at 1.6 or lower (Austria, Russian Federation and Spain). Spain represents a Southern European pattern with a very low share of women having more than two children (11 per cent). Two countries, Austria and the United Kingdom (data for England and Wales shown in the table), represent a "polarized" pattern where two-child families are less frequent, childlessness is relatively high, and many women either have larger families (United Kingdom pattern) or one child only (Austrian pattern, also typical for Germany and Switzerland).

Social status is also linked to variability in cohort fertility across Europe (figure XII). In the Nordic countries and Belgium, the cohort fertility differentials by level of education have almost disappeared. Most of Western Europe and Southern Europe show moderate fertility differentials with fertility among women with lower secondary education about 15 per cent above that of the women with upper secondary education. Paradoxically, the sharpest cohort fertility differentials are found in Eastern Europe, where the official government ideology during the period of state socialism stressed equality and the disparities in wages and living standards were low (Sobotka, 2011; Brzozowska, 2013). Despite this, Eastern Europe has a sharper negative education gradient in cohort fertility than the United States, where social status polarization in reproductive behaviour is particularly pronounced (Carlson and England, 2011).

F. Reproductive preferences

In most European societies the use of effective contraception is widespread and reproductive decisions are largely considered a matter of personal preferences. Therefore, fertility intentions and ideals are key for understanding fertility decisions (Bongaarts, 2002; Hagewen and Morgan, 2005). Survey data for European countries provide little evidence on shifts towards a massive preference of one-child families or even childlessness. Rather, they indicate stable preferences centred on a two-child family model among both women and men. These low reproductive preferences can be achieved by most women when starting their first pregnancy attempt in their early to mid-30s. In fact, the variation in intended family size among adults aged 25 to 29 is remarkably low (figure XIII). Women's intended family size averaged 2.18 in the sample of 15 countries with the FFS survey in the 1990s and 2.16 in the ten analysed countries with the GGS survey in the 2000s, with most countries falling into a range of 2.00-2.35. Men in the same age group displayed slightly lower family size intentions, averaging 2.05 in the GGS surveys in the 2000s (Beaujouan et al., 2013). However, surveys of intentions show a rapid increase in the share of childless women at ages above 35 desiring to have a child in the future (e.g., Sobotka, 2013 for Austria; Hagewen and Morgan, 2005 for the United States)—a potentially problematic trend given the rapid increase in infertility, especially after age 40 (Leridon, 2008).

Small shifts can be observed in ideal family size (table 3). Between 1990 and 2011, ideal family size among women of reproductive age (15 to 44) declined slightly in all parts of Europe, with the one-child ideal gradually gaining in importance on account of larger-family size ideals. The downward trend appears more prominent in Italy and Spain and might be partly linked to the impact of economic uncertainty during the recession period (Testa and Basten, 2012). However, the two-child ideal still clearly dominates and, if anything, has become stronger during the last two decades. Also the mean ideal family size remains in most countries above two children. When surveys with a high share of missing responses on fertility ideals are disregarde thare io coniningevgid(n)2c(e o)13(f)-2(a(sh)2(i-13(f)9(t)-3s o)2(f)-2(fr)-2(e

child family size ideal reported for some East Asian settings, especially urban areas in China (Gu and Basten, 2013).

G. POLICY RESPONSES TO LOW FERTILITY

dependent children in Germany[4]

• *Greater involvement of men*. Concerns about the unequal burden of childcare carried out by mothers led to the development of policies encouraging men to contribute more of their time to childrearing. Most typical of these policies are expansions of paternity leave for fathers after the birth of a child and changes in parental leave which are intended to involve fathers. Specifically, an increased number of countries provide an additional period of parental leave that can be claimed only if both parents participate in the leave. This "daddy quota" policy is now in place in Austria, Finland, Germany, Norway and Sweden and has recently been hotly debated in the United Kingdom. Norway has probably gone furthest in allowing men and women maximum flexibility in combining work and childcare. Parents working part-time are entitled to up to 36 weeks of paid parental leave which they can share simultaneously, for instance, by each of them taking parental leave on selected weekdays only.

• *Birth grants and baby bonuses*. Birth grants and baby bonuses are a favourite policy scheme of politicians who want to implement quick, visible and easy-to-understand monetary schemes, typically intended to boost birth rates. Spain had a short-lived "baby bonus" of 2,500 EUR per newborn child, established in 2007 and terminated since 2011 due to recession-related austerity measures (OECD, 2011: 112). More elaborate schemes established in Russian Federation and Ukraine constitute the backbone of pronatalist government efforts. In Russian Federation, "maternity capital" is provided for every own or adopted child of second or higher birth order. This payment is deposited to the pension fund and can be spent for childcare, housing, child's education and other specified purposes. In 2012, this grant amounted to 387,640 Russian Rubles[6] (around 12,000 US Dollars). In Ukraine, "maternity grants" were revised since 2008, steeply increasing for the second, third and subsequent children. These grants are paid in monthly instalments over the period of 24 (first child) to 72 months (third and subsequent children).[7]

spending on childcare and the Netherlands also has average spending on family support. Outside Europe, the United States of America is a notable outlier, having both very low support for families (below any European OECD country) and relatively high fertility.

Luci-Greulich and Thévenon (2013) provide the most recent evidence on the influence of family policies on fertility in OECD countries and compare their results with previous research. They find a positive cumulative effect of all policy instruments analysed (paid leave and its duration, childcare provision, and financial transfers), especially for working parents. This suggests that parents appreciate a mix of in-cash and in-kind support and that policies may be particularly important at the early childhood stage. The study also argues that in light of these findings, an increase in fertility rates observed in Europe in the 2000s was "happening as a by-product of better opportunities to combine work and family" (p. 4). From a different perspective, Kokkonen (2012) finds that generous policies supporting dual-earner families are linked with a higher share of women (and, it would seem, men) living with a partner, which, presumably, has a positive effect on fertility rates.

Thus far there has been little rigorous evaluation of the fertility effect of the new pronatalist incentives in Eastern European countries, especially of the sizeable monetary benefits in Russian Federation and Ukraine. Given that populations in these countries are considerably poorer on average than the inhabitants of most EU countries, worries about material conditions and lack of suitable housing score high on the list of reasons for not having another child. As a result, new monetary incentives may actually have the desired effect on fertility rates, as they help alleviate these economic worries. Based on the period TFs, fertility in both Russian Federation and Ukraine rose by about a quarter between 2006 and 2012, from 1.3 to over 1.6 children per woman. More detailed analysis shows a strong recuperation of fertility rates at higher childbearing ages in Russia, stimulated by considerable increases in second and third birth rates after 2006 (Frejka and Zakharov, 2013; Zakharov, 2013). HoTJ 0.00w,e of teseount-5(dr)d-5(e)-4(w)5

larger families. Austria, Germany and Switzerland also have low cohort fertility around 1.6 children per woman and, similar to the United Kingdom, pronounced social status differentials in fertility and high childlessness. Formerly state-socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe form an increasingly mixed group with a rapidly rising share of women with only one child. Cohort fertility is lowest, at around 1.6 in the mid-1970s cohorts, in Eastern and South-eastern Europe, including Romania, Russian Federation and Ukraine, where one-child families are most prevalent and social status differentials most pronounced. This is also the region where childbearing occurs earlier than elsewhere in Europe.

These divisions partly mirror broad divisions in family policies, welfare regimes, prevailing family values and economic development across Europe. However, in all European regions a shift to a later timing of births has emerged as a key explanation of the observed ups and downs in period total fertility, which often reached very low levels. Since the late 1970s, both tempo-adjusted period fertility indicators and cohort fertility data paint a less dramatic picture of European fertility than conventional total fertility. In fact, low fertility in Europe is increasingly overshadowed by “ultra-low” fertility in many East Asian settings.

2. *Is low fertility a European-wide problem?*

Low fertility in contemporary Europe should be seen in a broader historical, economic and demographic context. [illegible]

3. *Which factors will affect most future fertility trends?*

At present, economic trends, especially employment uncertainties, are the most prominent force affecting family behaviour in Europe. Young adults are the most affected: soaring unemployment, declining wages, and declining opportunities for more stable employment contracts have hit hard the people below age 30, i.e., those in the early stage of family formation. Already in 2011, 13 per cent of young adults in the European Union (and as many as one in five in Italy) were NEETS—not in employment, education or training (European Foundation, 2011). Cuts in government budgets have affected young adults and families with children more than older age groups, including pensioners,[8] strengthening the existing pro-elderly bias in social spending in rich countries (Vanhuysse, 2013).

So far, in most countries the recession has not caused major shifts in fertility; it typically acted to accelerate postponement of first births. Most countries that have been relatively little affected by the recession (including Germany) often did not record any change in their previous fertility trend. Countries that will experience the first economic rebounds are likely to see their fertility stabilize and then rise to 2008 levels or above. In contrast, countries with protracted unemployment and stagnating or declining economic growth are likely to see lasting fertility effects among the "lost generation" of young adults who entered the labour market (or the ranks of unemployed and underemployed) during the recession. These effects will include a further shift to delayed parenthood, rising childlessness, a high share of one-child families, and, ultimately, declining cohort fertility. Southern Europe especially, where fertility rates are already among the lowest in Europe, is on the path to experience the long-lasting reach of the recession on fertility, similar to the effects of the Great Depression in the United States in the 1930s which had a disrupting effect on family formation (Morgan, 1991).

In the long run, many other factors will influence future fertility trends. Given that fertility ideals and intentions remain strongly focused on achieving a two-child family, including among the university-educated, an effective policy approach for Governments is to nurture conditions that support couples and individuals in realizing their goals. As Hagewen and Morgan (2005: 12) observed for the United States, the pervasive desire for two births is conditional on "when and if one can afford them and care for them." Clearly, some European societies perform much better than others in supporting families and(ohor)-(v)11()3(s)14(a

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

[1] Previously and currently published fertility statistics by statistical offices and Eurostat show notable breaks and changes in the series for some high out- and in-migration countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, UK, and Ireland. For example, in Latvia, period TF computed from the Eurostat data released in 2008-11 plummeted in the wake of the recession from 1.46 in 2008 to a low of 1.17 in 2010. However, post-census downward adjustment in the estimated resident population since 2011 (published by Eurostat on October 31 2013), combined 1 >>B1 >>B1 (ia)-3(r)-14(2)-4(0)-4(14(2)-4(0)-4(14((pop(u)-7a)]TJ -0.0t5(n)5(d)-7(3( )]a)-1(e)-3(o)-7(s)]TJ)-15(n)5(3(ta)-15(ti

[3] Policy instability was particularly pronounced in Hungary, where Governments led by conservative and socialist parties were alternating since 1990. *Conservative* Governments (1990-1994, 1998-2002 and since 2010) generally pursued policy expansions, promoting a more traditional family model with home-centered care for small children, supporting larger families and expanding parental leave. Meanwhile, *socialist G*

Sinyavskaya, O. (2013). Changes in fertility intentions and their realization in 2004-2011: what we can learn from GGS data? Paper presented at the HSE conference “Low fertility and low mortality: observable reality and visions of the future,” Moscow, 31 October – 1 November 2013.

Sobotka, T. (2003). Low fertility rates in

TABLE 3: IDEAL FAMILY SIZE IN EUROPEAN REGIONS (SELECTED COUNTRIES), 1990 AND 2011

	Ideal family size (per cent of respondents)				
	0+1	2	3+	Unknown	Mean
1990 (EVS)					
Western & Northern Europe (5 countries)	4	45	42	8	2.59
Italy & Spain	6	52	37	5	2.43
Central & Eastern Europe (6 countries)	8	59	30	3	2.27
2011 (Eurobarometer)					
Western & Northern Europe (5 countries)	6	52	42	8	2.27
Italy & Spain	15	58	37	10	2.01
Central & Eastern Europe (6 countries)	12	60	30	8	2.11

NOTES: The following countries were included, with the data available from both 1990 and 2001 survey and fewer than 13 per cent of unknown and not reported answers. Western and Northern Europe: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, and Sweden; Central and Eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, East Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, and Slovakia. Bulgaria was not included in the 1990 EVS survey; instead the data from the 1994 ISSP survey were used for that year.

Source: Computed by Éva Beaujouan from the EVS 1990 and Eurobarometer 2011 data. Data with more than 12 per cent unknown and not stated responses were filtered out except in Italy in 2011, where results based on 14 per cent share of unknown and non-response were retain to keep the recent data comparable with the earlier records. For more details see Sobotka and Beaujouan 2013.

TABLE 4: OBSERVED PERIOD TF IN 2010 AND PROJECTED TF IN 2050 IN SELECTED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES; EXPERTS' EXPECTATIONS (MAIN ESTIMATES AND 80 PER CENT CONFIDENCE INTERVAL) AND UN (WPP 2010 AND 2012) MEDIUM PROJECTION VARIANT

			TF 2050		
Country	*N (N giving 80% CI shown in brackets)*	*TF 2010*[2)]	*Experts: mean*	*Experts: 80% CI: min-max*[3)]	*UN WPP 2010*

TABLE 5: FACTORS EXPECTED TO HAVE STRONGEST POSITIVE (+) AND NEGATIVE (-) IMPACT ON FUTURE FERTILITY IN EUROPEAN REGIONS

Region and number of respondents	*Abbreviated argument*	*Expected impact*
	+ Immigration f e4h 0.0un er 02 Tc blity0-0.007 h458.52 679.32 0.48 9 0 0 9 47.041 0.48 02xp]TJ ET Q q 4 A	
Western Europe (N=8)		

FIGURES

Figure I: Period total fertility in main European regions, in the European Union, and the United States, 1985-2012

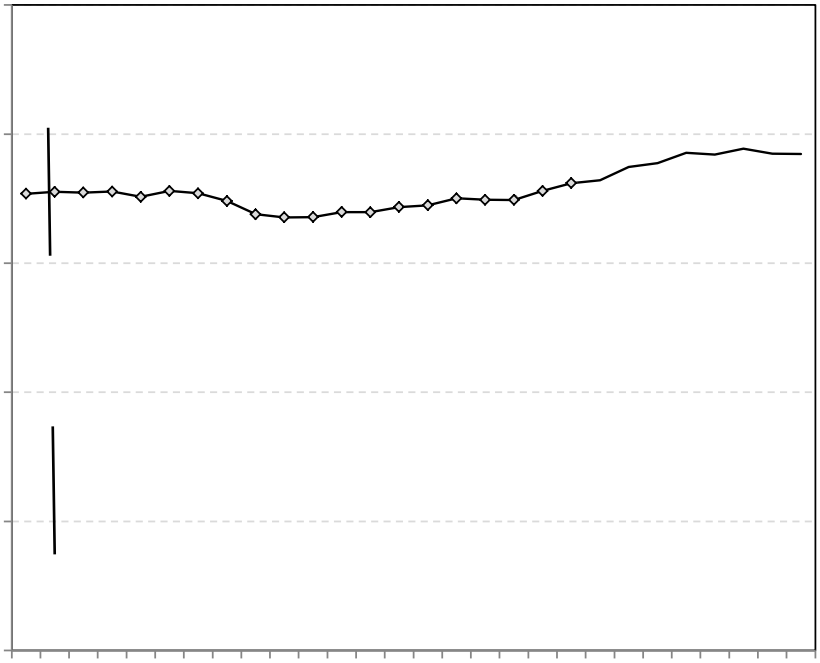
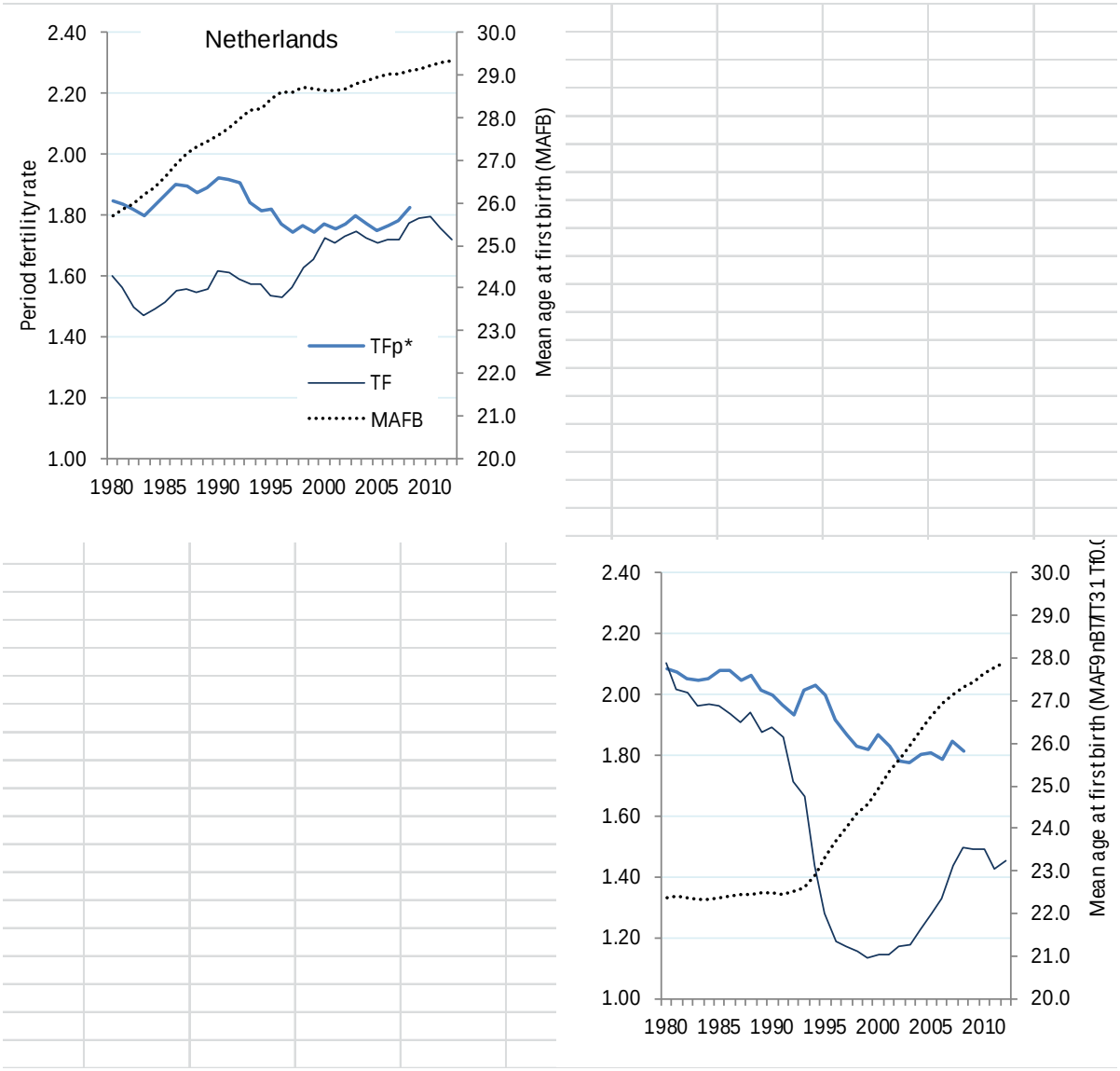


Figure II: Share of European population living in countries with a given range of the period TF, 1970-2012

Figure V: Period Total Fertility and the share of births outside marriage in Europe in 2011

NOTE:

Figure IX: Conventional period Total Fertility, tempo- and parity-adjusted index TFp*, and the mean age of mothers at first birth in four European countries, 1980-2012



NOTE: see note below figure 7

Sources: Computations based on Eurostat (2012, 2013) and Human Fertility Database (2012). TFp* data partly computed by Kryštof Zeman (Vienna Institute of Demography).

Figure X: Tempo-adjusted period Total Fertility in European regions from 1995-2000 to 2007-9

NOTE: Data are presented for 3-years periods to reduce fluctuations and also due to missing annual data for some countries. For the earliest period data are available only for a broader 6-year time span. No regional data have been computed for the most recent period after 2007-9.

Sources: Sobotka 2004b and computations based on VID 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012.

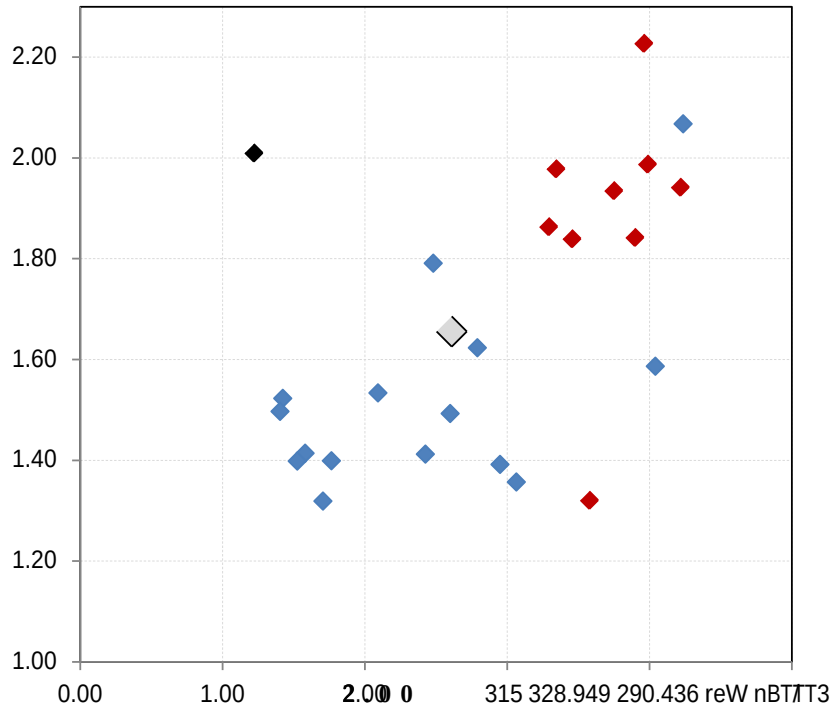
Figure XI: Observed (1960 and 1970) and projected (1979d 03 compi0h -0.005 Tc 0.009 Tw [(f)-15> andb6(a850 0)-25(a)-c9pean reg21(o)-2

Figure XIV. Number of European Governments stating fertility in their country is too low and their policy is to raise fertility, 1996-2011; 22 countries experiencing a period TF below 1.4 since 1995

Source: United Nations (2012 and 2013b).

NOTE: The following countries were included: Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and Ukraine.

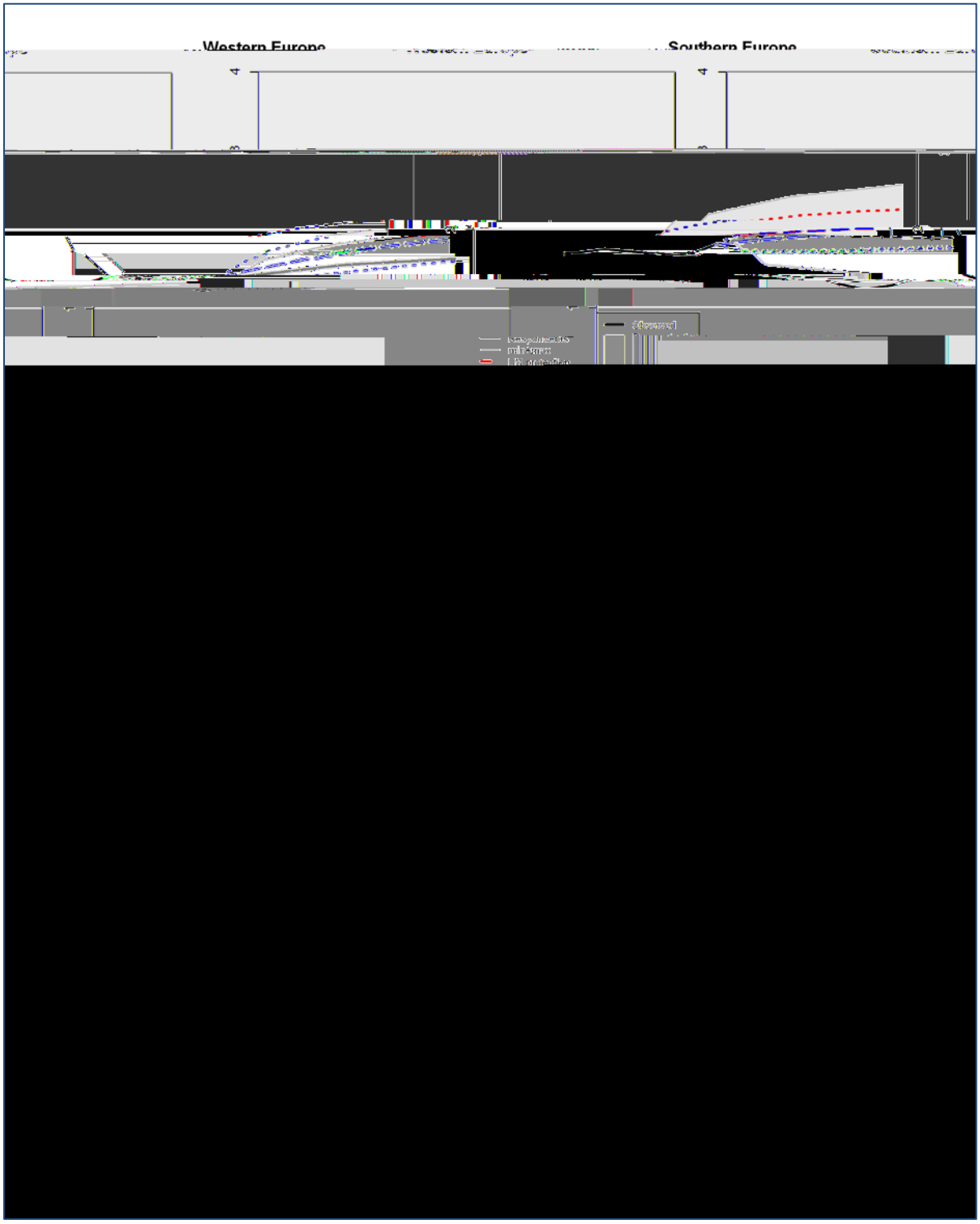
Figure XV: Public spending on families (percentage) and period Total Fertility in 2009; European OECD countries and United States



Source: OECD 2013, Table PF1.1.A (Public spending on family benefits in cash, services and tax measures).

NOTE: Countries represented by blue diamonds have lower spending for childcare services (below 1 percent of their GDP); countries represented by red diamonds have above-average spending for childcare services (at or above 1 percent of their GDP). The USA (black diamond) is the only non-European country shown.

Figure XVI: Regional graphs of expected Total Fertility trends up to 2050: A comparison of the global survey of experts and the 2010 UN projection (probabilistic fertility scenarios)



Source: WIC Global survey of experts conducted in 2011; data published in Basten et al. (2013: 63, Table 5) and Sobotka et al. (forthcoming)

Figure XVII: Completed fertility and net migration gain or loss between ages 15 and 30 in European countries, women born in 1975