Final Report Summary - REPRO (Reproductive decision-making in a macro-micro perspective)

REPRO aims to fill gaps in knowledge of factors which drive changes in fertility rates and generate new scientific and policy-oriented knowledge on the reproductive decision-making of contemporary Europeans. Understanding obstacles that prevent people from realising their intentions to have a child can bring about valuable policy implications. REPRO partners (RP) studied reproductive decision-making from a macro-, micro- and macro-micro perspective.

Macro-level

Rigorous studies at the macro-level were supported by the initiation and creation of a fertility database (db) and a policy db. RP analysed fertility trends in European and OECD countries and came to the following important conclusions: At high GDP levels, further economic development is likely to stimulate an increase of fertility rates; steeper increases in fertility are observed in countries where opportunities for women to participate in the labour market and to combine work with family have increased.

Micro-level

RP pursued used the socio-psychological TPB approach in the analyses of reproductive decision-making. Important inferences about the role of policies include that they have an impact on attitudes and social pressure beyond their conventional effect through financial support, parental leaves and childcare facilities. Changes in fertility across the life course and the role of economic uncertainty were studied in detail and qualitative studies provided in-depth information about the construction of fertility intentions. The role of crucial factors such as gender roles and the work-family conflict were studied in more detail.

Macro-micro level

Multilevel models were used to study the influence of economic, cultural and institutional macro-level factors on individual-level fertility attitudes and behaviour. The attention focused on: Norms concerning fertility-related behaviour, determinants of variation in fertility intentions and factors influencing childlessness, completed family size and the timing of childbearing. The findings revealed enormous differences across European countries with respect to the normative environment around the construction of childbearing intentions. REPRO identified a range of policy implications which will be helpful for better understanding how individuals construct their intentions and how policies may support the fulfilment of these decisions.

Project context and objectives

There is a fertility gap between people's wishes and behaviour with regard to childbearing. Its existence has been well acknowledged. The fertility 'gap' is considered to be the result of obstacles which prevent people from having the number of children they wish to have. The fertility 'gap' can be reduced by appropriate public policies. This intuitive idea masks a range of
unsolved and unclear issues whose elaboration is a prerequisite to the choice of relevant policies and their effectiveness. A search for answers shows the need for appropriate academic theories. This facilitates understanding the factors that drive changes in fertility rates and implies useful inferences for relevant policies. The main objective is to fill gaps in knowledge on factors which drive changes in fertility rates and to generate knowledge on the reproductive decision-making of contemporary Europeans. A sound knowledge of these decision-making processes offers a solid foundation on which to reflect about relevant public policies.

Objective 1: Trends in timing and fertility

REPRO generated two major databases: a fertility database and a policy database. Participants successfully initialised these databases and will also maintain them beyond the project. Next to that, the effect of family policies and policy packages on fertility levels and the relations between fertility rates and macro-level socioeconomic characteristics have been analysed.

Objective 2: Reproductive decision-making

The TPB was applied for the analysis of intentions to have a first or second child within the next three years. Use was made of the GGS data available for eight countries. Analyses revealed the significance of the three main antecedents of fertility intentions: individual attitudes towards having a child, perceived social pressure and the perceived ability of the individual to exercise control over the fulfilment of intention. The TPB was also studied with respect to couples’ decision-making.

Objective 3: Fertility decisions

This objective aims at understanding how people realise their constructed intentions and to identify factors that obstruct the realisation of intentions. Panel data were used for four European countries. The data show that some people manage to realise their short-term intentions, while those that do not realise these short-term intentions either postpone their realisation for the next three years or completely abandon the intention to have that child. Analyses identified a diversity of factors that impeded the realisation of intentions. Some of these factors are personal and do not need any policy action. Other factors deserve the attention of policymakers as proper policies may weaken their impact. Among these factors are; employment status, level of income and housing conditions. Specific studies were carried out to changes in fertility intentions over the life cycle and the impact of economic uncertainty on the realisation of intentions.

Objective 4: Fertility decision-making processes

An important step was the creation of an empirically grounded typology of fertility intentions. It was found to include six different components with respect to the certainty and timing of the intended birth. The typology was helpful for analysing social norms and competing life paths. Attention was given to a better understanding of the reasons for the ‘culture of childlessness’. The uneven advance of social change across Europe was also addressed: the mismatch between stated ideals and actual practices related to childbearing. The results enriched the understanding of the effect of components of the TPB on the formation of fertility intentions.

Objective 5: Impact of the environment

To get a better understanding of perceived norms concerning fertility-related behaviour, four fertility-related norms were examined. European countries differ significantly with respect to the approval of voluntary childlessness, having a child in an unmarried cohabitation and having a full-time job when the child is below age 3. To get a better understanding of the factors influencing child-number and child-timing intentions, intentions to have a child within the next three years as well as intentions about completed family size were analysed. The former were found to be more closely related to situational factors. The number of children that the ‘parental generation’ had was found to be positively related to the intended number of
Objective 6: Implications for policy strategies

A large set of policy implications was elaborated which refer to; the macro-level, the micro-level and the macro-micro-level; timing of a birth or number of children wanted; comparisons of efficiency of family policy packages; the effect of the economy on fertility levels and aggregate measures of fertility intentions and new areas of policy interests such as social pressure and individual attitudes.

Project results

All objectives were successfully reached. The final result includes a set of scientific results in terms of new theories, methods and findings and detailed policy implications.

Macro perspective

The team started with preparation of data necessary for accomplishment of the project. This includes the establishment of two databases related to fertility and fertility policies:

1. Human fertility database (HFD)
   Fertility is measured by various indices. Their compatibility is a primary requirement for international analyses of fertility rates. European countries provide statistical data on fertility. REPRO initiated the construction of a fertility database which contains fertility data for various countries. All data have the same structure and permit direct construction of indices, which users may utilise for specific purposes. The HFD was started by constructing protocols and fertility data for three countries. Due to the addition of data for a larger number of countries, the HFD rapidly transcended the REPRO requirements and kept continuing its development.

2. Database on family policies and fertility

A macro-level database on fertility, family policies and workplace practices was elaborated. This database contains information on fertility trends, contextual indicators on household structure and living arrangements along with detailed information on the policy support received in order to compensate the economic costs of children and to combine work and family life. Indicators on labour market and poverty outcomes were included. Information was derived from various sources and international databases, above all from the OECD family database.

Fertility trends

Most European countries have low fertility rates. However, period fertility declined to low levels in part due to the postponement of childbearing, which has negatively affected period fertility rates. Completed cohort fertility rates, which are not affected by this, have also declined in most countries, but remained well above the level of the period fertility rates. It was indicated that a continuing European-wide fertility decline is no longer valid. RP concentrated on the role of seven broader sets of factors: economic development, changing family-related norms, changing gender norms, attitudes and practices, changing costs of children, policy influences, economic uncertainty, especially unemployment, and the rapid pace of structural changes in society. Changes in family-related norms are likely to affect aggregate fertility patterns.

Economic development

REPRO conducted an extensive analysis of the relationship between period fertility rates and GDP in the OECD countries. Economic development has a negative impact on period fertility rates when GDP is relatively low. Once societies attain a
certain level of economic development, economic growth is associated with increased fertility rate. A decomposition of GDP into different components shows that fertility rates co-vary with the increase in female employment rates. Most of the effect attributed to an increase captures increasing opportunities for women to combine family life and employment. Further economic development is likely to stimulate an increase of fertility rates.

Family policies

Policies influencing family and reproductive behaviour have a wide variety of objectives. Most were not enacted with an explicit or implicit aim to influence individual reproductive behaviour, and their success or failure should not be judged by their fertility effects. Policies may affect various social groups in different ways with respect to their age, number of children, educational attainment, employment status or partnership status. Findings on the influences of policies at an individual level may not be easily translated into statements about the aggregate impact of policies on fertility rates. Financial support for families has a major impact on the cost of children, but its impact on fertility seems limited. While there is a clear influence on the timing of births, the impact on fertility is often short-lived and the policy influence of completed cohort fertility is often debatable. This debate is further complicated by the fact that it is frequently impossible to disentangle the effects specific policies may have on fertility in the absence of long-term information on policy changes and mutual interactions between policies. There is usually no evidence concerning the ‘counterfactual’ situation, i.e. what would the observed fertility trend be in the absence of given policy measures. REPRO’s contribution to understanding the policy effects on fertility levels is based on international comparisons. The analyses refer to a typology of countries by types of family policies and analyses of the effect of policy packages on fertility.

Typology

European countries were divided in three groups according to welfare regimes: socialist welfare regimes; liberal welfare regimes and traditional welfare regimes. REPRO participants used the OECD Family database to map cross-country differences in family policy models and update the existing classification. A principal component analysis was performed to characterise how the components of family support are combined and how different countries are located with regard to these ‘packages’. The results support the view of persistent differences in family policy patterns embedded in different contexts of work-family outcomes. Previous groupings of policy regimes are only partially corroborated, owing to considerable within-group heterogeneity and the presence of group outliers. Four main groups were identified; The Nordic countries stand out for their comprehensive support to working parents with very young children; Anglo-Saxon countries where support for working parents with very young children is less comprehensive and spending is higher for older children.

In these countries, financial support is more clearly targeted on low-income and/or large families and a mix of countries from eastern and southern Europe plus Japan and Korea, where the degree of support is lower, whichever type is considered. Other European countries form a less homogeneous group with a more intermediate position. REPRO investigated the three salient contextual dimensions related to key objectives of family policies: poverty, fertility and labour market position of families. Considering country groupings by policy regime is important for other reasons than classifying existing policy sets and analysing their changes over time. Existing policies were not established in a vacuum, but they were shaped by cultural traditions and prevailing societal norms in a given country and in turn shaped these traditions. It is important to consider whether a policy measure lagged behind the broader social change or acted as a forerunner of some behavioural and value changes. Policies that have a certain effect in one welfare context may not operate in the same way in another one.

Policy packages

REPRO reviewed contemporary evidence on the effect of policies in the areas of financial support, parental leave and childcare on fertility patterns. Here we discuss major findings based mostly on literature review. The results are diverse, but some general conclusions can be drawn.
Financial transfers

Much of the effect of financial transfers on fertility concerns the timing of births rather than completed fertility rates. The relatively small effect of cash transfers to families found in a number of studies can be explained by the fact that financial transfers do little to reduce the opportunity costs of childrearing, which have increased with rising female labour market aspirations. They only cover a small part of the direct cost of children and can be one-time contributions that do not substantially reduce costs.

Duration and payment of parental leave

The effect of paid and employment-protected leave on fertility is ambiguous. These entitlements support household income and labour market attachment around childbirth, which will have a positive effect on fertility. However, as entitlements are often conditional on employment, they encourage men and women to postpone childbirth until they have established themselves in the labour market, which has a negative effect on overall fertility. This is likely to explain the variable results reported for the effect of leave entitlements on fertility rates from cross-country comparisons. It is not clear whether the duration of leave entitlements increases or decreases fertility, but its effect is small. Payment conditions during the leave period can affect fertility behaviour. The effect is small and influences the timing of births rather than completed family size. Some countries allow long periods of home-care leave or childcare leave benefits paid at a flat rate. Payment rates are much lower than earnings-related parental leave payments but, taken together with other financial transfers they can amount to up to one-third of net average income in Finland. These payments can have a positive effect on fertility rates, particularly by promoting second and third children, often among low-income families.

Formal child care

Evidence from cross-country and national studies almost invariably points to a positive and significant effect of formal child care availability on fertility rates. Studies also find that affordable, good-quality childcare can have a substantial effect on fertility rates. Part-time employment and a more equitable sharing of unpaid work between partners can also contribute to higher birth rates.

Family policy packages

In the light of the recent fertility rebound observed in several OECD countries, the impact of different family policy settings on fertility was tested, using data from 18 OECD countries. The robustness of the findings was tested by controlling for birth postponement and for different national contexts. Results confirm that fertility trends depend crucially on opportunities for mothers to combine work and family. Family policy packages appear as important factors to explain why fertility rates are currently and sustainably higher in countries where women have a larger access to the labour market. Different policy instruments are found to have a cumulative influence, suggesting that a continuum of support for working parents during early childhood is likely to facilitate parents’ choice to have children. Policy levers do not have similar weight. In-cash benefits covering the years after childbirth and the coverage of childcare services for children under the age of three, have a larger potential influence on fertility than leave entitlements and benefits.

Micro perspective

Different individuals experience the impact of the macro-environment in different ways as individuals have their own attributes and personal characteristics. Both the construction of childbearing intentions and their subsequent realisation or frustration bears individual specifics.
Fertility intentions

A regression analysis is performed where intentions are a dependent variable which is explained with variables such as age, sex, union status and education. It is assumed that intentions are formed under direct influence of these factors. Influences on having a child can be measured by asking people about their beliefs about the impact of having a child (behavioural), the extent to which others want them to have a child (normative), and the extent to which both internal factors and external factors impede or assist with having and caring for a child (control).

The GGS provided useful data for the application of the TPB which includes questions about beliefs and traditional ‘background’ factors, and data were available for eight countries: Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Russia. We were able to include responses from 58,014 individuals aged between 18 and 49 in our analyses. The new knowledge achieved form the application of the TPB is presented in three groups: first, related to beliefs about having another child; second, about the impact of the three antecedents on the formation of fertility intentions; and third, about the impact of macro-level factors and relevant policy implications.

Beliefs

Beliefs about positive outcomes were measured with the question: ‘Do you expect having a child to be better or worse for joy and satisfaction; care in old age; certainty in life, and closeness with partner?’ On average it was found that in all countries having a second child will bring joy and satisfaction. At the lowest level is Germany, while France and Italy were leading the list. Normative beliefs were measured with the question: ‘Do your parents, friends and relatives, agree or disagree you should have another child?’ The least normative pressure was reported by the German respondents while Italians were the most affected by the opinion of important members of their social network. Beliefs about perceived control were analysed with caution because the GGS measured perceived constraints but not whether the respondents believe they can be overcome.

Attitudes, norms and control

Beliefs about control are divided in two groups: material control and childcare. The findings show that variables that are important to people from different countries do not always influence the intention to have a child. In most countries, the more one expects positive outcomes the more likely it is to have a second child, and expected positive outcomes have the strongest effect on intentions.

Other conclusions

- Parity: The decision to become a parent for the first time involves only expected positive outcomes and subjective norms in most countries.
- Age: Under 25s are influenced by possible negative outcomes more than 25 to 34 year olds. Under 25s are concerned about loss of freedom, while 25-34 year olds are concerned about making ends meet and finding childcare.
- Gender: Perceived control has a stronger influence for men in most countries.
- Values and general attitudes affect intentions by influencing social psychological beliefs.
- Social psychological explanation of fertility intentions substantially improves our understanding of how fertility intentions are formed, increasing variance explained from around 10 % for traditional variables to between 35 % and 67 % in different countries for different subgroups of the population based on beliefs that reflect the theory of planned behaviour.

Macro-level differences and policy implications

Grouping by policy context provided a good explanation of the intentions to have a second child of 25 to 34 year old females with one child. This highlighted more differences in influences than grouping by either wealth or employment stability. The
differences highlighted by differences in policy context are not those that respond to policy: expectations in higher policy support contexts of satisfaction have a stronger influence on the decision to have another child than they do for women in lower policy support contexts. Social influences are more important and personal control is less important. No significant differences between these contexts were observed in the effect of attitudes to freedom, material control or perceived need for childcare on the decision to have another child, yet these are the factors that reflect policymakers’ concerns with work-life balance. It appears that women in countries with stronger policy support think more about social and emotive issues that have the strongest influence on the decision to have another child.

Realisation of intentions

Four data sets could be synchronised for a joint study: Bulgaria, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Data for the United Kingdom and France were analysed in separate. Research on this topic rested on the use of panel data for: Bulgaria, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. In the data sets there were questions which measured an intention to have a child within a specified period of time. Data from the subsequent panel could be used to check the fulfilment of this intention. As an outcome, the following categories were identified and analysed: intentional parents (fulfilled their intention and had a child within three years), postponers (did not have the intended child during the three years but declared that they intend to have a child during the subsequent three years) and abandoners (did not have the intended child during the three years and at the second wave declared that they do not intend to have a child during the subsequent three years). This categorisation help understand better the influence of factors that may obstruct the realisation of intentions to have a child. The intentional parents presumably did not confront insurmountable obstacles for the realisation of their childbearing intention. Postponers confronted factors that either had a temporary effect or were evaluated as surmountable within a short time, and abandoners have confronted hard constraints for the fulfilment of their intention at least during the next few years. The categorisation can be an important contribution to the understanding of contemporary fertility postponement. Recuperation of fertility is a trend of relative rise in the fertility rates observed when the rise in the mean ages declines. The term 'postponement' at macro-level needs not correspond to postponement of births by individuals. Macro-level postponement can be the outcome of diverse changes in fertility behaviour.

A rise in the mean ages can appear also because of postponers. REPRO analysed the three categories for the four countries where the survey data were compatible. In these countries, short-term intentions were defined for a period of two years and measured for a period of three years. Wide differences between countries were found for the success or failure to realise childbearing intentions within specific population groups. The pace of social change in the former communist countries could be responsible for the observed weak relationship between intentions and behaviour. Ideas about family formation and social schemes about the timing of parenthood change only gradually. The slowly changing normative system of childbearing has coexisted with rapidly changing societal conditions. This involved many uncertainties and resulted in a high rate of postponement and abandonment of fertility intentions. A complementary interpretation can be based on the concept of ‘unrealistic optimism’: individuals can be unrealistically optimistic in their intentions if they overestimate the degree of control they have over their fertility behaviour. Further research is needed on this field.

Researchers shed new light on the concept of childbearing postponement. Often there is the indirect assumption that the aggregate postponement occurred because people intended to have a child later in their life. However, another kind of causality is plausible as well: postponement of fertility results from a failure to realise one’s childbearing intention. Aggregate-level postponement is to a large extent the consequence of involuntary postponement. This connection could be an important element of the ‘behavioural understanding of the postponement’. The underlying argument for hindering the first or second birth is that certain social and demographic positions can create favourable or unfavourable circumstances for the realisation of childbearing intentions. Among the factors analysed, age, sex, parity, partnership status and education had a strong effect on the realisation of childbearing intentions. Those who failed to realise their intention within three years are older than those who succeeded. This result supports the ‘biological clock’ argument, namely the importance of an age-related increase in infertility which prevents some couples from achieving a pregnancy and carrying it to term. However, lifestyle factors may play
an important role as well: for instance, some men and women may 'accommodate' to their childlessness status to the point of becoming reluctant to realise their earlier intentions. The term 'perpetual postponement' characterises this situation best. Except in Bulgaria childless people have a higher risk than parents to become postponers rather than realising their childbearing intention 'on time'. This confirms the assumption that conflicting life goals prevent the realisation of birth intentions especially among those without children. Parents are more likely than the childless to abandon their childbearing intention. Partnership is a strong prerequisite to the realisation of fertility intentions and people living without partner are much more likely to postpone their childbearing intention. Separation also hinders the realisation of fertility intentions towards postponement as well as abandonment. There was no significant difference the realisation between cohabiting and married couples. There are contradictory results regarding the impact of education on the postponement of birth intentions.

Changes in fertility intentions

WP4 researchers analysed the determinants of revisions to fertility plans. They employed the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) using 17 waves of data. The analysis showed that individuals who expect not to have any children are most likely to maintain that expectation. Expectations are less stable among those expecting to have larger families. Changes in expected family size were frequent and occurred in both directions. The proportion of people changing their expectations is larger below age 30, when fertility intentions are less stable. The presence or absence of a partner is not a very important factor. Women who have a job show higher stability of intentions and are less likely to change their expectations. Women with higher earnings are more likely to decrease their expectations. Having a child aged 4 or older is associated with a reduced likelihood of revising fertility intentions. People whose partners expect more children than they themselves do are more likely to revise upwards. Income and employment of women are significantly associated with revisions in expectations for their male partners in both directions. Men's income does not affect such revisions for their female partners. The study found evidence of conforming to the social norm of two children.

Economic uncertainty and fertility intentions, timing and level

Economic uncertainty has been identified as one of the main explanations for delayed childbearing in Europe. REPRO partners examined in WP4 the impact of work uncertainty on fertility in France, using a variety of fertility indicators. France has a peculiar position in Europe, having one of the highest fertility levels, combined with generous and diversified system of family policies on one hand and high levels of employment uncertainty on the other hand. Relatively high labour protection for most employees and rather high flexibility in work-family arrangements is combined with high unemployment rate and high frequency of non-standard labour contracts, especially among younger people. Fertility intentions are affected by uncertainty especially among men, for whom being unemployed decreases their fertility plans. Women's fertility intentions are reduced when they have an insecure job. These results suggest that for men it is important to get a job, whatever its quality or stability, before becoming fathers. After controlling for cohort, achieved education, religiosity, age at union formation and the number of siblings, there was no effect of unemployment at the beginning of partnership on the timing of first birth. A spell of unemployment or an insecure job during partnership reduces first birth intensity among men, whereas for women unemployment does not have any significant effect. However, insecure jobs also reduce their first birth propensity. The accumulation of unemployment spells and non-permanent jobs reduces their likelihood of entering parenthood; for women, only the accumulation of non-permanent jobs has a negative effect. However, the pattern is different for the birth of the second child: having an insecure employment path before first birth tends to accelerate the arrival of the second one. Women discouraged by the job market may decide to concentrate on the family life instead, especially once they have their first child.

To find out whether labour market uncertainty has a permanent effect on fertility, an additional analysis of completed fertility was conducted. Both descriptive analysis and multivariate model show that past unemployment history neither prevents women from having children nor encourages them to have more. For men, on the other hand, the number of children is closely linked to their unemployment history. Men who have experienced several unemployment spells and have spent more than one year out of 10 in unemployment since completing their education are more likely to remain childless and less likely to have
two children. However, short-term unemployment and time spent in insecure job position does not affect their completed fertility. These results illustrate how the social roles of men and women continue to differ in France, with men still predominantly being main breadwinners. As in other European countries, a gap between fertility aspirations and behaviour persists. It results partly from unexpected shocks, such as death or disease of the partner and couple dissolution, but also from the changes in one's labour market status. The unfavourable situation on the French labour market, reflected by high unemployment, is an additional reason for postponing the first childbearing. However, the overall impact of unemployment on fertility intentions and behaviour is lower than in other countries, probably because France has rather generous family and employment policies.

Fertility intentions and behaviour in context

The qualitative data used in REPRO were mostly collected prior to the project. A series of comparable in-depth interviews was conducted with mostly middle class respondents in their late 20s and early 30s living in cities in seven European countries. The research team followed a ‘grounded theory’, grouping individuals with similar practices or representations and comparing these categories. Comparative qualitative analysis allowed researchers to grasp factors of behaviours acting at the individual level, as well as factors acting at the aggregate level. Researchers focused on the subjective expression of the intention to have a child. The study explored fertility goals, the relation between fertility goals and fertility intentions and the way in which specific intentions are motivated. Semi-structured data were based on 261 interviews with both childless individuals and those in the early stage of family formation. The interviews were classified according to the clarity of childbearing goal, the strength with which it is expressed, and the time horizon for its realisation. Six categories of fertility intentions were developed, which cover all the cases encountered in the interviews.

Category 1: ‘Surely yes’ (29 childless, 32 parents)
The respondents in this category want a child mainly because of its emotional advantage. They feel they are mature and responsible enough to become parents and are being in a relationship that is stable, able to provide for the future offspring and wishing to become parent before one is too old.

Category 2: ‘Surely Not’ (10 childless, 30 parents)
These respondents represent the opposite end of the fertility intentions continuum. They are firmly decided not to have another child. They either completely miss the desire to have a child or they have highly valued life priorities perceived as competing and incompatible with having children. The most distinctive feature is their satisfaction with the lifestyle they have at the moment.

Category 3: ‘As soon as’(36 childless, 20 parents)
Reasons are mostly perceived as external factors, often outside of the control of the respondent. These could be relational issues, being enrolled in education, issues related to employment and issues related to housing. Many respondents express fears related to parenthood: losing personal freedom, reducing the standard of living, not being able to balance family and childbearing, or being a bad parent.

Category 4: ‘Surely one day’ (45 childless, 8 parents)
Often due to the feeling that they have not reached the right stage in their lives yet. They desire to have a child, but typically in a far-off future. Often related to young age, lack of economic independence or lack of a partner.

Category 5: ‘Maybe’ (19 childless, 21 parents)
Participants usually give the following reasons: problems with the current relationship; competing intentions between parenthood and other priorities and fears to become bad parents. Financial situation often plays a small role in this category.

Category 6: ‘At times’ (eight childless women and three mothers)
This category comprises only women for whom living a childless life is not an easy alternative. Childless respondents held beliefs, which contrast positive aspects of childlessness with the disadvantages of parenthood but also fears of loneliness and a concern about care and well-being at old age and the fact that children bring joy and happiness.

Culture of childlessness

Countries varied widely in their attitude to childlessness. Partly due to limited child care options until recently, mothers had to sacrifice their personal life for their children. There is a widespread notion that one has to choose between career or family life. A commonly expressed wish is to stay childless because the sacrifices of motherhood might be too demanding. These expectations are linked to traditional expectations about women's complete responsibility for child care. Employment and independence (if not power) are part of their identity and it is hard to sacrifice them.

Changing gender roles and fertility decisions

With respect to changing gender roles and fertility decisions, REPRO highlighted the following three interrelated dimensions for explaining individual fertility decision-making in contemporary Europe: Women's participation in the labour market; men's involvement in unpaid family work and the use of non-maternal child care options. Analyses show that the decision to have a child closely relates to the answers to these questions, and practices with regard to participation on the labour market and in family work and plans to use non-maternal child care. These considerations jointly form the basis for calculations of the benefits and drawbacks of having a child. The studies showed that labour market options for men and women, as well as child care options in different countries are of paramount importance for understanding the way respondents envision and practice gender roles.

Men's involvement in child care and household work

In most contexts analysed in REPRO gender roles are still predominantly traditional, characterised by a low degree of men's involvement with childrearing and most other regular household tasks. This may explain why in the interviews collected in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Italy, men's involvement in family care does not appear to be important in couples' fertility decision-making. In contrast, men in France and Germany often contribute to family work. The relationship between men's involvement in family work and fertility decisions depends at least partly on the 'national model' of gender roles in each country-promoting the male breadwinner model in Germany and the dual-earner couple in France. In these two countries it was found that individuals who are unable to conform to the 'national model' of gender roles tend to have negative fertility intentions. This discrepancy may be linked to a lack of men's-but also of women's-involvement in family work, or to a lack of men's involvement in the economic sphere.

When values do not fit practices: The uneven advance of social change

Individual's values and behaviours are usually in agreement, conforming to a psychological need to have a coherent approach to life. People's visions of women's paid work usually match what they or their partners do for a living, their visions of male participation in family work often match what they or their partners do in the household, and the same can be said of institutional child care. This pattern is clear, for example, in the case of women's attitudes towards work in eastern European countries. A majority of women have worked in the labour market there since decades, but usually in low-paying and low-level positions, and they also kept responsibility for most of the domestic work. Accordingly, paid work there is seen as a normal and desirable part of life for women, although a work career is seen as detrimental to a woman's family. However, a mismatch between the stated ideals and actual practices may arise. In REPRO studies, the link between negative fertility intentions on one side and a mismatch with regard to gender roles ideals and practices on the other side was noted. Another discrepancy repeatedly identified by REPRO researchers is the contrast between prevailing social norms and structural conditions in times of social change. When structural conditions change, individuals could be expected to adjust their behaviours rapidly.
However, social scientists repeatedly observed that individuals do not adapt fast, because they follow social logic: norms often change more slowly than structural conditions, and ‘obsolete’ values then hinder individuals in the adoption of the new behaviours, until the values change and ‘catch up’ with social, economic or technological change.

The studies highlighted the remarkable stability of attitudes towards child care and working mothers within each country studied: in France 'even couples with stay-at-home mothers believe in the benefits of organised day care', whereas in Germany 'even dual earner couples with children believe in the benefits of exclusively maternal care'. Obviously, strong social influence mechanisms combined with the historical legacy of prevailing family policies in the past are at work in sustaining country-specific attitudes towards child care and the role of mothers. Given the large inertia in child care-related attitudes, new policies may be slow in affecting fertility behaviour. In Poland, research stressed the persistence of negative views on later timing of childbearing despite economic and institutional factors favouring a rapid shift to a late-fertility regime. The argument that value changes may frequently lag behind structural changes in society has been repeatedly made in the social science and demographic literature. However, the persistent mismatch between structural conditions, norms and values, as identified in a number of instances by WP5 studies, suggests that individuals often act more according to their socially-inspired visions of what is right than according to the rational cost-benefit calculation.

The macro-level determinants of fertility decision-making

This sub-section reports results achieved in work package (WP)6. In WP6, multilevel models were used to study the influence of economic, cultural and institutional macro-level factors on individual-level fertility attitudes and behaviour. Attention was focused on four sets of factors, around which the next three subsections are organised:

- norms concerning fertility-related behaviour (fertility norms);
- determinants of variation in fertility intentions;
- factors influencing childlessness, completed family size and the timing of childbearing and increasing our understanding about educational differences in total family size across Europe.

These four broad tasks used extensive individual-level datasets that cover most European countries. Multilevel models were employed to study to what extent these norms, intentions and behaviours differ between individuals within a country and to what extent country-level differences play a role. In addition, these models were used to assess to what extent these differences can be explained by taking relevant institutional, cultural and economic factors into account. All other WPs in REPRO report results that refer to these topics. In particular, some parts of WP6 are relatively close to the work reported in WP2 and described in sub-section (A). However, WP2 remains firmly anchored at an aggregate level, using macro-level data only, whereas WP6 uses individual-level datasets and models that connect the micro-evidence with macro-level factors and outcomes taking into account also the intermediate level of regions within countries.

Perceived norms concerning fertility-related behaviour: Cross-national differences

Norms belong to the three cornerstones of the theory of planned behaviour. They fulfil an important psychological function in regulating the life course and are important for demographic decision-making. Differences in fertility patterns across countries may partly stem from the differences in prevailing norms. Other explanations suggest, however, that the importance of norms has waned during the last decades owing to increased individual autonomy and rising tolerance of non-conventional and non-traditional behaviour. Given these opposing views on the existence and importance of norms, the WP6 study examined the existence, content and cross-national variation in fertility-related norms.

Their report addressed the following research questions:

- What kinds of norms exist in Europe with regard to childbearing issues?
- How large is the variation in childbearing norms across Europe?
How can cross-national variation in childbearing norms be explained?

Data for 25 countries, including on average 1500 respondents aged 15 and older per country, were drawn from the 2006 wave of the European Social Survey (ESS).

Questions pertaining to four fertility-related norms were analysed:

1) age when women and men are considered too young or too old for having children;
2) approval of voluntary childlessness;
3) approval of having a child in unmarried cohabitation;
4) approval of having a full-time job when the child is below age 3.

Variation in childbearing norms: Descriptive findings

Relatively little variation exists across Europe in the mean lower and upper age threshold to childbearing. The social reproductive life span is therefore shorter than the biological reproductive life span. A large variation exists between countries in disapproval rates with respect to voluntary childlessness. Disapproval rates of female voluntary childlessness vary from 4 % in Sweden to 86 % in Ukraine. In 10 European countries, a majority of the population disapproves of voluntary childlessness; almost all of these countries are formerly state-socialist countries in central and eastern Europe. At the same time, another nine countries-mostly western and northern European ones-have less than 20 % of the population disapproving of voluntary childlessness of either men or women. Especially some former state-socialist countries, such as the Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania, highly disapproved of voluntary childlessness and unmarried parenthood. Overall, only a minority of respondents disapprove of having children while living with a partner unmarried except in the Ukraine, where over 50 % of respondents disapprove of this behaviour. In contrast, a very tiny share of respondents expresses disapproval in the Nordic countries.

Considerable variation exists with regard to combining motherhood and full-time employment. However, the pattern of disapproval is quite different than for other norms. A majority of respondents in Ukraine, Estonia and Bulgaria disapprove of being full-time employed and having a child below the age of 3, but the same is also true in Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands, countries that have much less strict norms with regard to other aspects of childbearing behaviour. In addition, disapproval of combining motherhood and a full-time job is even surprisingly high in Scandinavian countries, with between 13 and 21 per cent of respondent disapproving of this combination. Norms for men and women differ very strongly, with only a small share of respondents disapproving full-time work for fathers with young children. For example, in the Netherlands more than half of the respondents disapprove of full-time female labour force participation while having little children whereas only nine per cent disapproves of males combining these two roles.

Variation in childbearing norms: Multilevel modelling

Multilevel modelling was used to address the following two questions:

- How much of the variation in childbearing norms in Europe is explained at the national level?
- To what extent is cross-national variation in childbearing norms related to differential advancement of countries in terms of the second demographic transition?

Three important conclusions can be pointed out. First, the variation in norms that had relatively low cross-country variation in the descriptive analysis, is by and large accounted for by individual-level differences, with a bare 5 % of the variation attributable to the country-level differences. At the same time, there is substantial cross-national variation in approval for voluntary childlessness, having a child while one is cohabiting unmarried and women combining a full-time job and small children. Between 15 and 30 % of the variation is located at the country level. Second, cross-national variation in approval of
voluntary childlessness and in approval of having children in a consensual union is strongly related to how far a country is 'advanced' in the second demographic transition (SDT) process. The most advanced countries have much higher approval levels of these behaviours, indicating that the changes in norms occur in tandem with the changes in values and behaviours typical of the SDT. However, other analysed norms remain more or less unaffected by a country's advancement in the SDT. Third, across Europe, the highly educated, the religiously uncommitted and those who value autonomy are much more likely to approve behaviours that are in line with the SDT than people with the opposite set of characteristics. At the same time, country-level differences in norms related to voluntary childlessness and to having a child outside marriage remain prominent, even if compositional differences in these individual-level characteristics are taken into account.

Explaining cross-national variation in childlessness norms

Finally, special attention was given to the norm about voluntary childlessness, which varied strongly between countries. Two-level models were used to investigate variation in the association between individual and cultural factors with norms on voluntary childlessness in 25 European countries. The role of individual determinants, such as age, gender and education, was analysed alongside the role of macro-level structural and cultural determinants of norms about childlessness, specifically, the availability of child care facilities and the role of religion and gender equality. Especially cultural factors, such as individual religiousness, education and gender equality in a country were important factors associated with approval of childlessness. Interestingly, most variation in norms on childlessness was explained by country-level factors, especially gender equality.

More tolerant views with respect to voluntary childlessness were found among women, singles, respondents without children, the currently employed and those satisfied with their income level compared to their counterparts: partnered, fathers, currently not employed and less satisfied with income. Consistent with earlier work, religious people were found to endorse more negative norms with respect to childlessness compared to non-believers. The gender difference does not seem surprising considering the persistence of higher opportunity costs for women of becoming a parent. The gender main effect disappeared when adding the interaction with education, pointing to structural constraints for women to enter parenthood, especially for those who have invested in higher education and better career opportunities. Contrary to earlier research, older respondents showed stronger approval of voluntary childlessness, with a highest approval around age 45.

Most important was the explanation power of country-level predictors. Adding these macro factors, i.e. gross domestic product (GDP), gender equality and child care availability, increased the explained variance of the model by 24 per cent. In particular, gender equality was strongly associated with norms about voluntary childlessness. In countries where the level of gender equality is high, it might be commonplace to accept that both men and women make autonomous decisions about how to structure their lives. As a result, the decision not to have children is not met with much disapproval. However, the availability of child care facilities did not associate significantly with norms about childlessness. Among people with children, though, parents in countries where a large child care gap existed were more disapproving of voluntary childlessness than parents in countries where good parental leave and child care arrangements existed. It seems that parents who live in countries where they had to make relatively large sacrifices to care for their children are much more disapproving towards people who make the choice not to have children - and thus not to make these sacrifices themselves.

These findings show that quite strong opinions on the appropriateness of specific aspects of childbearing behaviour 'still' exist in many European societies. This widespread existence of childbearing norms is remarkable, given that theories of modernisation-such as the second demographic transition-expect an increase in the importance attached to individual autonomy and thus a weakening of normative constraints on demographic behaviour. These norms may be less binding than in the past, but still have an important orienting function. The study also conveys clear evidence that a double standard continues to exist with regard to the combination of parenting young children and full-time employment. For fathers, full-time employment is widely accepted, presumably because they are not expected to spend much time on parenting activities anyway. For mothers, strong resistance to this combination is still pervasive in many European countries. A likely reason is that parenting is still considered mainly to be the task of the mother and that the parenting role may be thought to come
under pressure if much time of the mother is consumed by work-related activities.

Child-number and child-timing intentions

Results shed light on the causal process underlying fertility behaviour of individuals in a social context and on selected aggregate-level factors influencing fertility decision-making of Europeans. The analysis used Eurobarometer survey data collected in the 27 EU countries as well as Croatia and Turkey. Analysis was restricted to women and men in the prime reproductive ages, including 5291 respondents aged 20 to 39 years. The research was based on two questions on fertility intentions:

- ‘How many children do you (still) intend to have?’ Respondents were given a choice between seven answers ranging from ‘no children’ to ‘six or more children’.
- The second one was asked only respondents who intended to have (at least) one additional child: ‘Do you intend to have another child in the next three years?’ Respondents were given a choice between four answers: ‘definitely not,’ ‘probably not,’ ‘probably yes,’ and ‘definitely yes’.

The first measure can be labelled as a child-number intention and the second one is referred to as a child-timing intention. Both measures were treated as ordinal variables in the proportional odds models with random intercept, which was run separately for respondents without children and respondents with one child. The choice of a stratified analysis by parity was motivated by the finding that childbearing preferences are determined by the actual number of children, corresponding to a sequential nature of fertility decision-making process. Due to the limited sample size, this study could not include an additional set of models for individuals with two or more children. The multilevel framework enabled study the hierarchical structure of the data with 5291 individuals nested in 99 regions, which were clustered in 31 countries. The variance of the dependent variable was explained with individual-level variables, regional- and country-level variables. The following set of individual-level variables was included in the models: age, sex, school enrolment, level of education, marital status, employment status, household situation, church attendance and gender attitudes towards childrearing.

Two regional-level explanatory variables represented the ‘fertility context’ in which individuals aged 20-40 were socialised. The analogous variables at the country-level were the completed fertility rate and the mean age at first birth among women born in 1960. The GDP in purchasing power standards (PPS) was included as a country-level economic contextual variable. According to estimates, short-term fertility intentions are more closely related to situational factors. The total intended family size is closely linked to more enduring individual characteristics. There are some common predictors of both child-number and child-timing intentions. The ability to foresee what one's household situation will be like in the next one or two years increases the number of intended children. This can be interpreted as a signal that increased perceived behavioural control has a positive impact on fertility intentions. Contextual social and economic factors significantly explained the residual variance. The mean actual number of children of the ‘parental generation’ was positively correlated with the intended number of children among the ‘children generation’ at the regional level. The GDP per capita was negatively associated with the first child intentions and positively associated with the second child intentions.

Educational differences

Little is known whether increased educational attainment leads to a lower average level of completed fertility. It was found that the ultimate number of children that women have across Europe is negatively related to their level of educational attainment. The higher educated are expected to value autonomy and independence more than the lower educated. The higher educated are expected to spend more time with their children, leading them to prefer a smaller number of children. The higher educated have a stronger preference to pursue a career, this will lead them to decide for a smaller number of children. It was found that the negative educational gradient is stronger for women than for men. These processes lead to expect a weaker negative gradient for men. The negative educational gradient was weakest in countries classified as ‘social-
The negative educational gradient was strongest in Mediterranean countries and in post-Communist countries. The reduction in the educational gradient across cohorts seems mainly caused by a drop in total number of children among women with low levels of educational.

The negative educational gradient is weakest in social-democratic welfare regime countries and in countries belonging to the former USSR. The weakening of the educational gradient among women born after 1944 compared to women born before 1945 all across western Europe seem to result for a large part from a stabilisation of fertility among the higher educated and a reduction of fertility among the lower educated. One interpretation could be that the 'policy package' to facilitate combining parenthood and employment is less effective for women and men with a low level of education.

Potential impact

A large set of policy implications was achieved around the main message that individual fertility intentions can bring useful information to stakeholders. REPRO relied on the use of theories and methods developed in a wide range of scientific disciplines. A key contribution is that studies of fertility intentions should be based on theories developed in social psychology. Another achievement is the use of a macro-micro scientific approach. New knowledge on fertility intentions can help understand why fertility is low, and whether family policies can be helpful towards its increase. REPRO scientists were in close contacts with OECD officers, and the steering board included a representative of the OECD. Close contacts were also maintained with officers from the European Commission (EC). REPRO research was based on a multi-team framework. Scientists from more than 12 countries participated.

Dissemination

The website of the REPRO project available at http://www.repro-project.org and http://www.oeaw.ac.at/vid/repro is being continuously updated. And a leaflet about the project was prepared and distributed at various meetings. Several papers were presented on conferences and several peer-reviewed papers and non-refereed papers were published. Selected conference papers of the REPRO Conference in December 2010 will be published in the peer-reviewed journal of OEAW-VID 'Vienna Yearbook of Population Research'. Two of them stem from members of the REPRO consortium. The papers are currently under review. There were two policy briefs published and distributed at several conferences including the Conference of the European Association for Population Studies and the final REPRO conference. They are available on the REPRO website. Several press releases were sent out around the final REPRO conference in German, English and Italian. Some articles appeared in the press. A contract with the Springer publishing house exists for a book on REPRO. Its content was developed at the two last meetings. The book will appear in the beginning of 2012.

List of websites:
http://www.repro-project.org
http://www.oeaw.ac.at/vid/repro

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Why Europeans are having less children

Final Report - REPRO (Reproductive decision-making in a macro-micro perspective)

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