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Childbearing, Women's Employment and Work-Life Balance Policies
in Contemporary Europe: Introduction and Conclusions

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Childbearing, Women's Employment and Work-Life Balance Policies in Contemporary Europe: Introduction and Conclusions*

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Abstract: This Working Paper contains the introductory and concluding chapters of an edited book volume for Palgrave Macmillan by Livia Sz. Oláh & Ewa Fraczak (Eds): *Childbearing, Women's Employment and Work-Life Balance Policies in Contemporary Europe*. The Working Paper provides the introduction chapter by Livia Sz. Oláh & Susanne Fahlén (Introduction: Aspirations and uncertainties. Childbearing choices and work-life realities in Europe) and the conclusions chapter by the same two authors (Concluding thoughts on childbearing, women's work and work-life balance policy nexus in Europe in the dawn of 21st century).

*This paper is also available as a *Stockholm Research Report in Demography*

1. Introduction: Aspirations and uncertainties. Childbearing choices and work-life realities in Europe

Background

Europe is facing a demographic challenge based on the conjuncture of population ageing and shrinking labour force that in the long run jeopardizes economic growth and sustainable development. The current situation is the outcome of three trends: i) long-term below-replacement level period fertility (that is less than 2.05 children per woman on average), ii) increasing longevity and iii) growing proportion of people in ages of the late 50s and above in the labour force. While the latter two trends nearly equally apply to every societies in Europe, cross-country variations in fertility levels are quite substantial, accelerating population ageing in societies where fertility rates have remained below the critical level of 1.5 children per woman for longer periods (McDonald, 2006; Myrskylä and others, 2009). In addressing country differences in fertility, the importance of the childbearing, female employment and work-life balance policy interplay has been increasingly recognized in contemporary scholarships of the welfare state, economics, gender and demography (see e.g. Castles, 2003; Gornick and Meyers, 2003; Engelhardt and others, 2004; Frejka and others, 2008a; Thévenon and Gauthier, 2011).

Economists have since long pointed out that there is a link between high and/or greatly increasing rates of female employment and the simultaneous decline of fertility from the late 1960s onwards. While the cost of the time that mothers, who were not engaged in paid work, spent raising children was negligible, having little impact on fertility rates under the primacy of the male-breadwinner family model, the opportunity cost of childbearing has become

substantial as women increasingly remained at the labour market after entering marriage and even motherhood (Becker, 1991; Joshi, 1998). As a result, couples' desire to have more than one or two children has greatly diminished. Highly efficient and easily available contraceptives have provided women with nearly total control over their fertility over the past decades, while a range of new opportunities beyond the family sphere have become available to them on a par with men, so that childbearing has more and more become a choice (Morgan and Berkowitz King, 2001). At the same time, relationships have grown less stable as seen in increasing divorce rates even among couples with children and a growing prevalence of less committed partnership forms such as non-marital cohabitation and living-apart-together relationships, which are inherently more fragile than marriages. Hence, being able to support oneself economically has nearly become an imperative in contemporary Europe independently of one's gender (Oláh, 2011). Consequently, young women increasingly prepare themselves for a long employment career, carefully planning childbearing, both number and timing, while considering how best to combine the dual responsibilities of work and family under given structures of social support (Brewster and Rindfuss, 2000).

During the mid-/late 1980s, the negative macro-level correlation between birth rates and female employment rates shifted to a positive one, known as "the positive turn", capturing the attention of welfare state and gender scholars alike (Ahn and Mira, 2002; Castles, 2003; Gornick and Meyers, 2003). Later studies have shown that the reversal of sign in cross-country correlation has been related to substantial differences across countries regarding the magnitude of the negative time-series association between fertility and female work as well as to unmeasured country-specific factors (Engelhardt and Prskawetz, 2004; Engelhardt and others, 2004; Kögel, 2004). In any case since the late 1980s, countries with low female employment rates are the ones with very low fertility levels, whereas societies that have

embraced the dual-earner family model display reasonably high fertility rates (Bernhardt, 1993; Hobson and Oláh, 2006a; OECD, 2011a). Hence, the role of work-life balance policies in this relationship has become increasingly important to address (Rindfuss and others, 2003; Neyer, 2006; Hoem, 2008). Indeed, fertility has remained at very low levels (below 1.5 children per woman), at least since the early 1990s, in German-speaking countries, Southern European and most Central-East European countries, where policy support for women to combine paid work and family responsibilities has been less consistent and/or comprehensive, while the Nordic states, France and other West-European societies with (usually) more developed reconciliation policies displayed fertility rates quite close to the replacement level (that is 2.05 children per woman).

At the same time, the picture at the micro level has become much more complex. As high levels of youth unemployment over an extended period of time in a number of European countries, combined with high economic aspirations and a reluctance to accept, if only temporarily, a lower living standard than in one's parental home, have strengthened the sense of being able to support oneself among young people, labour force participation irrespective of gender may have become a precondition of childbearing in many societies across Europe (McDonald, 2002; Hobson and Oláh, 2006b). The substantial cross-country variations in fertility rates, which have long intrigued demographers (for a brief overview of that research see e.g. Caldwell and Schindlmayr, 2003; Billari and others, 2004; Frejka and others, 2008b), have been accompanied lately by a decrease in ideal family size among young adults in some societies with very low fertility (Goldstein and others, 2003). Therefore, the so-called 'low fertility trap' hypothesis (Lutz and Skirbekk, 2005; Lutz and others, 2006) has called for close attention to childbearing intentions, seen as an influential predictor of future fertility in a country (see also Schoen and others, 1999). According to this approach, decreasing intentions

in conjunction with specific demographic and economic forces, especially the negative population momentum seen in declining number of women in childbearing ages producing fewer and fewer births in Europe, and the not negligible mismatch between high personal consumption aspirations of young people and a negative or at best stable expected income development due to high (youth) unemployment rates and/or a high prevalence of precarious labour market positions, are likely to inhibit a rise in fertility to above the critical level. The long-term risks are obvious both in terms of future labour supply, economic competitiveness (as young workers are more willing and able to adapt to new technology, labour market restructuring or other changes in economic production) and of the sustainability of welfare states that assume that the productive workforce will provide the resources to shoulder the costs of care for the aged and the disabled (McDonald and Kippen, 2001; Lutz and others, 2003; Bongaarts 2004).

The importance of demographic sustainability has been increasingly recognised also in European policy making. The discrepancy between the number of children desired and achieved (much) lower fertility was a point of departure of the European Commission's Green Paper 'Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations' (European Commission, 2005), as the first comprehensive EU-level document openly concerned with demographic sustainability, acknowledging the need for the European Union to address the childbearing, employment, public policy nexus. In the Renewed Sustainable Development Strategy (European Council, 2006), demographic sustainability has been discussed as one of the key challenges Europe is facing, given distortion in the age structure of the population and the labour force due to long-term low fertility. In the same year, a Communication on 'The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity' (European Commission, 2006) has called for a constructive response to the demographic

changes, especially in terms of reducing uncertainties for young adults entering the labour market and via effective gender equality policies facilitating choices about childbearing. The progress of such work has been monitored in the bi-annual Demography Reports since then. Concerns about low birth rates are clearly articulated in the first two demography reports to be addressed mainly by facilitating the reconciliation of paid work and care (European Commission, 2007; 2008), but little attention has been paid to fertility in the 2010 report (European Commission, 2011) that instead emphasised that the era of extremely low (so-called 'lowest-low', that is less than 1.3 children per woman) fertility levels (seems to have) ended (see also Goldstein and others, 2009).

Nevertheless, we may need to be cautious and maintain concern about fertility trends in Europe for at least three reasons. First, as pointed out in a recent article by Sobotka and Lutz (2010), much of the recent increase in period total fertility rates is the result of the slowing down or end of the postponement of childbearing, particularly of entering parenthood. Consequently, the tempo distortion of fertility diminished greatly, but this does not mean a real increase of fertility. Second, in a number of European countries even the tempo-adjusted total fertility rates (see Vienna Institute of Demography, 2008; 2010; 2012) indicate (much) lower fertility levels than what the simple replacement of the population with relatively stable age structure would require. Third, in line with previous studies on cohort fertility (see e.g. Frejka and Sardon, 2004; Sardon and Robertson, 2004) a recent forecast indicates that completed cohort fertility rates for women born in the mid-/late 1970s will remain at or even below the critical level of fertility in Italy, Spain, Portugal, and be only slightly above that level in Germany, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Greece (Myrskylä and others, 2012), that is one-third of EU member states. As completed family size declined in these countries over the cohorts of women born in the 1950s and 1960s, the forecast results may

call for close attention to the factors influencing childbearing choices and behaviour even if the gap between personal ideal family size and completed cohort fertility may seem modest, as is often the case due to a downward adjustment of childbearing desires given constraints of childbearing (see McDonald, 2000; 2007).

Indeed, at the individual and couple level, the link between childbearing decisions and one's labour market position is likely to have strengthened in the past decades due to increased economic uncertainties related to substantial business cycle fluctuations and relatively high unemployment rates, rendering the male breadwinner family model unviable. At the same time, as childbearing is increasingly perceived as risk and individuals and couples seek to minimise uncertainties in their lives (Beck, 1999), fertility choices, intentions as well as behaviour, are likely to be affected by policies perceived as facilitating or rather, constraining labour force participation and the balance between paid work and family life for (prospective) parents (McDonald, 2006). Hence, cross-country differences in fertility levels are linked to women's agency and capabilities in specific institutional settings given possibilities and/or constraints to combine employment and childrearing. A better understanding of the interplay between paid work, welfare regimes/policy configurations and fertility choices may be thus essential for constructing policies that would increase the capabilities of families to have the number of children they wish to have (Hobson and Oláh, 2006b; Hobson and Fahlén, 2009) and thereby promote sustainable development. We focus on heterosexual individuals, not addressing processes around childbearing decisions in same-sex relationships which are a topic per se. With this book, we seek to contribute to the knowledge base of policy-making as we shed more light on the role of increased labour market flexibility and of work-life balance policies for combining family and employment in relation to childbearing choices (intentions, desires) in different fertility regimes across Europe in the early 21st century. To our

knowledge, no other comprehensive work (book or special journal issue) has taken on such a challenge during the past two decades or so, which makes this volume especially important.

1 Conceptual issues

1.1 Two key concepts

Based on the comprehensive literature of fertility decision-making, we have identified two key concepts that are particularly relevant to address the childbearing, female employment and work-life balance policy nexus. These are: i) uncertainty and risk, and ii) incoherence.

Although a variety of theories is applied building the theoretical frameworks of the different country chapters in this book, they all relate to these key concepts providing a common platform to study the tensions young women and couples face making choices about childbearing and paid work in specific institutional contexts. Here we explain the main features of these concepts and their importance for our topic.

The concept of uncertainty and risk is highly relevant to understand decisions on employment and family formation in contemporary Europe, which are increasingly linked. In the past decades, national labour markets have become more and more deregulated due to increasing globalisation and the spread of social liberalism (Blossfeld and others, 2006; McDonald, 2006), wage inequalities have increased along with substantial variations in the gender earning gap within and across countries (see Brainerd, 2000; Machin, 2008), and eligibility to social benefits and services has become increasingly dependent on own labour force participation, strengthening the impact of economic uncertainties on childbearing decisions. High youth unemployment rates and growing prevalence of temporary positions (e.g. fixed-term contracts, project employment) in a number of European countries, increases in women's earning power but declines in men's earnings as well as growing insecurity of jobs have

strengthened the awareness among young people to seek to minimize the risk of economic uncertainty. Childbearing is seen to greatly increase uncertainty and the risk of economic hardship for a family, making the single earner model a less feasible (and/or desirable) alternative for (prospective) parents. Hence an important strategy for risk-averse individuals is to postpone parenthood and reduce the number of children they (plan to) have, and invest instead in the strengthening of their labour market positions, independently of gender (Beck, 1999; McDonald, 2007). Aspirations to acquire higher educational attainment and/or further employment experiences will in turn reduce the space for other engagements, including family commitments. In this volume we assess whether and how women's employment and (lack of) policy support for the combination of labour market roles and family responsibilities for young people shape their childbearing choices in different national contexts considering the concept of uncertainty and risk as a cornerstone of a comparative framework in which our country case studies are embedded.

The other major component shaping childbearing decisions in modern societies is the incoherence of levels of gender equity in individual-oriented versus family-oriented institutions (McDonald, 2000). Women and men have for the most part equal access to education at all levels and work for pay, that is they are assessed as individuals in the educational system and the labour market, where they benefit of relatively high levels of gender equality. In the family however, the unequal share of domestic tasks prevails with women continuing to perform the lion's share, especially as they become mothers. Indeed, gender equality has remained low in the family (and in some cases the tax system and social welfare system), jeopardizing women's equal position with that of men in other spheres when the domestic burden greatly increases due to for example childbirth. As young women tend to have similar or even higher level of education as young men in modern Europe, their

aspirations are no longer limited to the family. When childbearing is seen as severely constraining women's opportunities beyond the family sphere as domestic responsibilities multiply, fertility aspirations are likely to diminish, perhaps quite substantially, depending on the institutional context. Work-life balance policies can greatly mitigate the negative impact of childbearing and childrearing on economic and other roles women aspire to beyond family life (Hobson and Oláh, 2006b), preventing a downward adjustment of fertility plans. Hence, the degree of incoherence is part of our comparative framework being another key aspect that shapes the interplay between childbearing choices, paid work and policy context.

1.2 Childbearing choices (intentions and desires)

Our rationale to study childbearing choices instead of achieved fertility (births) is the interest in longer-term fertility development, of which childbearing intentions and desires can be seen as feasible indicators (Schoen and others, 1999; but see Hagewen and Morgan, 2005 for an extensive review of their shortcomings). Also, given a time window between plans/wishes and their realisation, if societal constraints can be identified already in relation to childbearing choices, there may be room for policy measures implemented and/or modified to enhance individual agency to be able to combine parenting and labour force activities thereby promoting demographic sustainability in the longer run. The concepts of childbearing intentions and desires might appear similar and are sometimes used interchangeably (see for example Sobotka, 2009; Tazi-Preve and others, 2004). Most often however researchers distinguish between these concepts given their different implications (for example Billari and others, 2009; Philipov and others, 2006; Engelhardt 2004). Childbearing desires or preferences are commonly operationalised through questions concerning *ideal family size*. They relate to what a person would like to do or be if there are no constraints at hand. They are about ideals irrespective of whether they can be achieved or not. Preferences and desires

also reflect social norms and stereotypes (Hagewen and Morgan, 2005; Livi-Bacci, 2001). Childbearing intentions or plans in contrast relate to questions on whether a person *intends*, *plans* or *expects* to have a first or subsequent child, ever or within a certain time span. They reflect potential constraints in a person's life. When asked about intentions, current situation is taken into account as individuals consider whether certain preferences can be achieved and how (Fahlén, 2012). Hence, intentions may differ quite substantially from preferences (Heiland and others, 2005). Intended family size reflects a person's general fertility plans to be achieved during one's life while intentions to have a first or an additional child within a certain time span are more influenced by constraints of the current situation which might be overcome in a longer run.

2 Research design

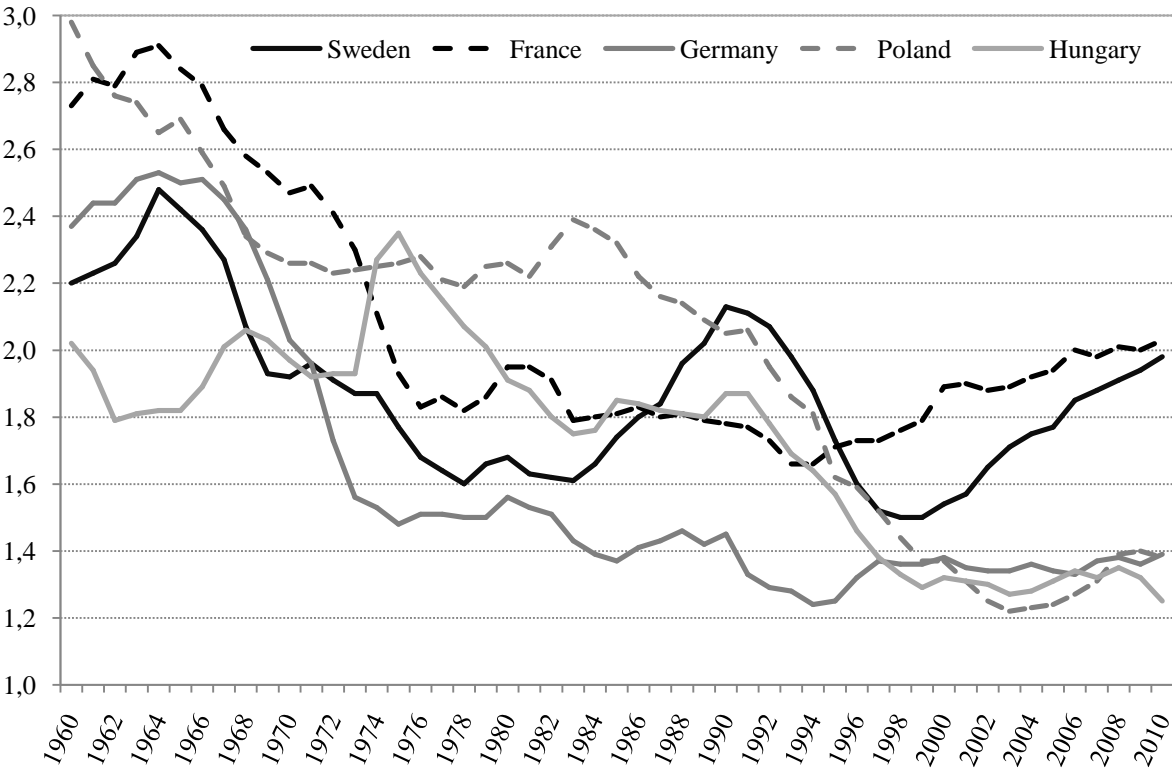
Based on the concepts of uncertainty and risk and of incoherence, we address the tensions in the interplay between childbearing choices, female employment and work-life balance policies via five country case studies. We focus on two high fertility and three low-fertility societies from different welfare regime/policy configuration types (see Esping-Andersen, 1990; Korpi, 2000; Hobson and Oláh, 2006b). First we study Sweden, a high fertility society, which also is the prime case of the Social Democratic welfare regime and the Dual-Earner policy configuration type with extensive policy support to families to achieve a work-life balance (Oláh and Bernhardt, 2008). Thereafter we turn to two Conservative Welfare-Regime-type/General Family Support policy configuration countries; one with high fertility, France (Toulemon and others, 2008), and another, Germany, with low fertility (Dorbritz, 2008). Female labour force participation rates in these countries for the ages 15–64 years have not differed greatly since the 1970s, although French women were somewhat more likely to be in paid work throughout the period as policies in Germany were less supportive of the

reconciliation of work and family life than in France (Köppen, 2006). Also, there have been noticeable differences between East and West Germany with respect to women's employment patterns and the institutional contexts, most importantly public childcare provision facilitating the combination of paid work and childrearing in the Eastern part of the country (Kreyenfeld, 2004). In recent years, higher employment rates were seen for German women than for their counterparts in France. Yet, when looking at full-time equivalent employment rates as well as maternal employment we get a different picture, given low female work hours and low labour market activity rates among women with children in Germany (Salles, 2012). Finally we study two Post-Socialist welfare regime/Transition Post-Socialist policy configuration type societies, Poland and Hungary, with very low fertility and much reduced female employment rates as compared to the state-socialist period (Kotowska and others, 2008; Spéder and Kamarás, 2008; Aassve and others, 2006).

Current fertility regimes may however be the results of relatively recent developments in several of the countries we have studied. Indeed, looking at the trends over a longer period from the 1960s onwards, we notice variations between past and current fertility regimes (see Figure 1.2.1). France and Poland have had the highest fertility levels among our group of countries up until the mid-/later 1980s. Fertility rates in France were among the highest in Northern and Western Europe, and the Polish rates were among the highest in Southern and Central Eastern Europe. During this period, Sweden displayed nearly the lowest fertility rates among the five societies, which changed radically by the late 1980s when Swedish fertility sky-rocketed (linked to the so-called speed-premium that promoted a much closer spacing of children). Although this has been followed by a rapid decline in fertility in the late 1990s, Sweden has had the second highest fertility level in our group of countries since then. Hence, Swedish society experienced a change from a previous low fertility regime to a high fertility

regime in the past two decades. For Poland we have seen a different change, from a high fertility regime up until the late 1980s, to a very low fertility regime since the mid-1990s. In contrast, France can be considered a high-fertility country throughout the period, even though some of the other countries showed higher fertility rates at some points in time. Germany has never showed especially high fertility levels, and had the lowest fertility rates among the five countries over the 1970s, 1980s and up until the late 1990s, when Hungary and Poland became very low fertility regime countries. Hungary has had the lowest fertility in Europe also in the mid-1960s, but thereafter generous reconciliation policies ensured reasonably high fertility rates until the early 1990s, when fertility declined rapidly to very low levels and where they have remained for more than a decade.

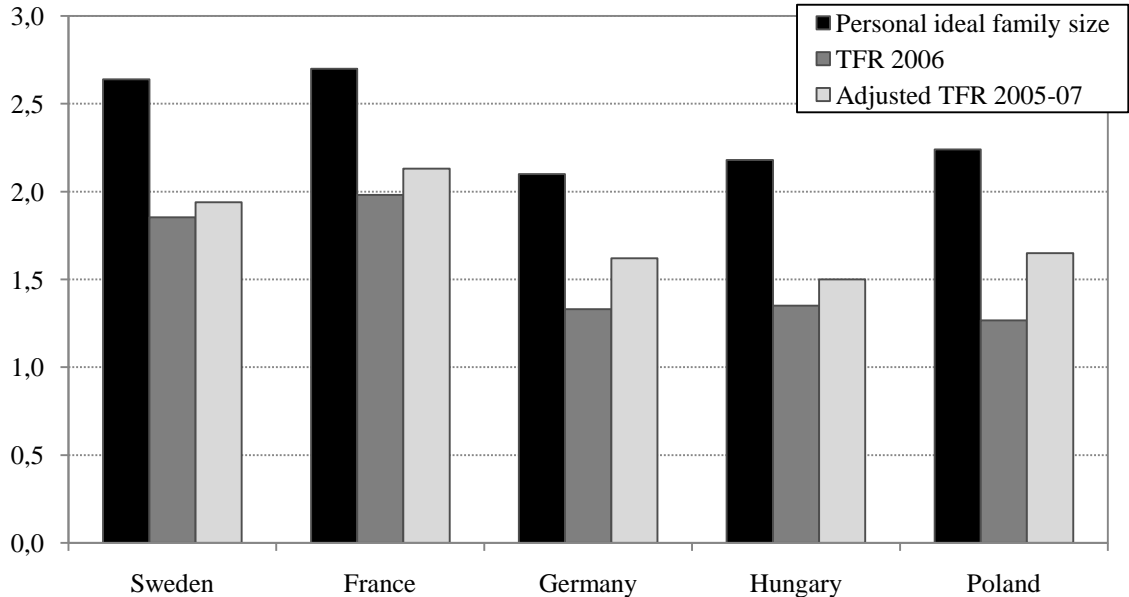
Figure 1.2.1 Total fertility rates in five European countries, 1960–2010



Source: Eurostat, 2012a (years 2000–10); INED, 2012 (years 1960–99).

In our two high-fertility regime countries, Sweden and France, women in the main childbearing and childrearing ages also have especially high family size ideals, around 2.6 children per woman or more (see Figure 1.2.2). Childbearing ideals in the three low-fertility societies vary at or slightly above the replacement level of 2.05 children per woman, with Germany displaying the lowest level. Period fertility rates and tempo-adjusted fertility rates are much below the ideal family sizes in all five countries. However, while the latter rates vary around the replacement level in the high-fertility societies, even the tempo-adjusted rates are at or only slightly above the critical level of low fertility in Germany, Hungary and Poland. Their much lower family size ideals compared with those in France and Sweden may even be considered as providing some support to the low fertility trap hypothesis, and their fertility rates, even the adjusted rates indicating reasons for concern about future fertility and sustainable development in these societies.

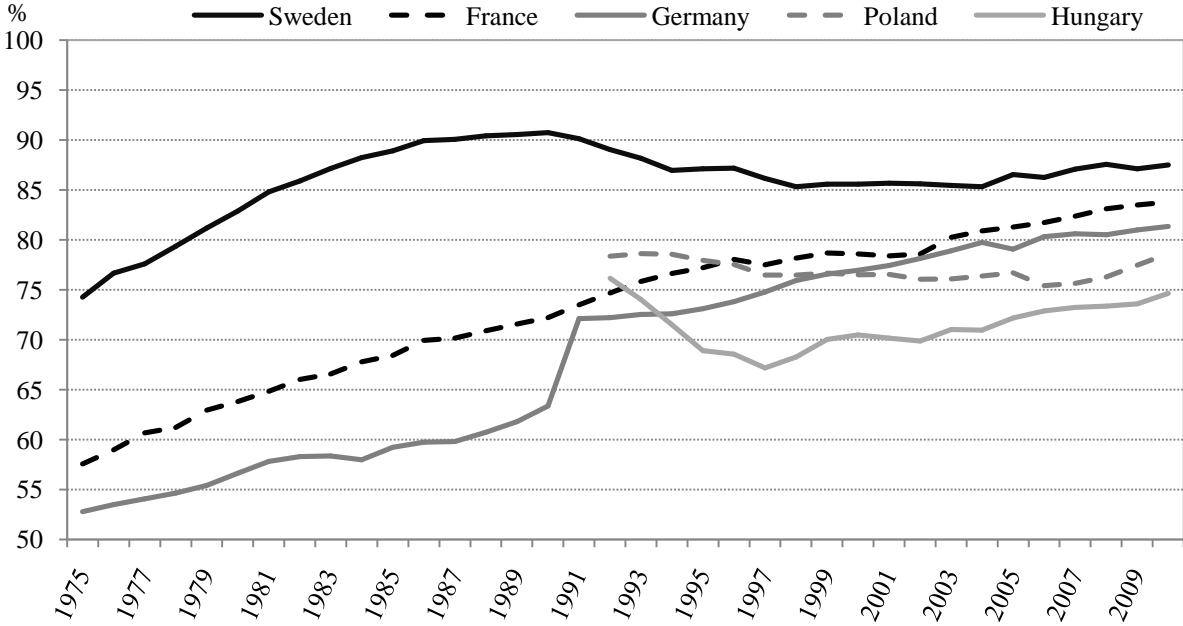
Figure 1.2.2 Ideal family size (women aged 20-49 years), total fertility rate in 2006 and adjusted total fertility rate 2005-07 in five European countries



Source: Eurobarometer 65.1, 2006 (authors' own calculations); OECD, 2006; Vienna Institute of Demography, 2010.

In addition to childbearing trends, women's labour market activity is of special importance for our topic of interest. In Figure 1.2.3, we focus on women in the main childrearing ages (25–54 years), mapping cross-country differences since the mid-1970s, when such data are available by age groups. Sweden has displayed the highest rates throughout the period, with the next highest rates seen for France. Although the gap between them was quite considerable in the 1970s and 1980s, it diminished greatly, especially in the past ten years, as female employment rates increased in France. Labour market activity for this age group of women was very modest in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, increasing substantially at the German unification given high employment rates for East-German women. In the first decade of the 21st century, the German female labour force participation rates for the age group of interest approached but did not reach the rates seen for France notwithstanding much lower fertility level in Germany. In the 1990s (unfortunately we do not have comparable data for these countries before then), women's labour market activity declined greatly in the former state-socialist countries, but more modestly in Poland than in Hungary. These countries had the lowest labour force participation of women in the main childrearing ages among the countries studied here, accompanied by very low fertility in the past fifteen years. All in all, this brief overview suggests that high levels of female labour force participation are not an impediment of childbearing, while low activity rates of women are hardly accompanied with high fertility, rather the opposite, as is also discussed earlier in this chapter.

Figure 1.2.3 Female labour force participation rates in five European countries, 1975-2010. Women aged 25–54 years



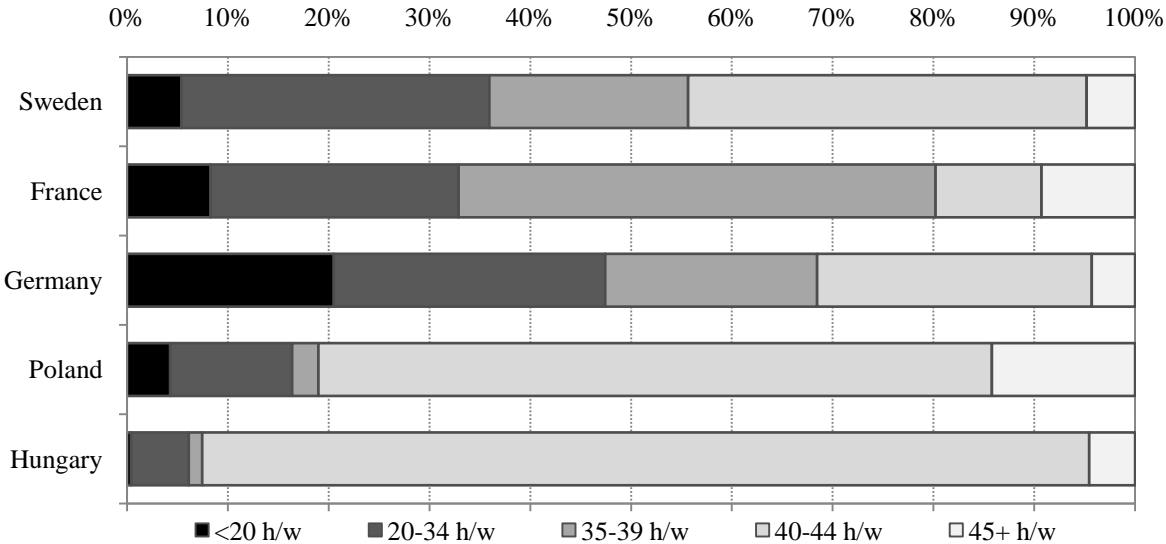
Note: Data for Hungary and Poland are available from 1992 onwards.

Source: OECD, 2011b (data for France 1975–82); OECD, 2012.

However, women’s labour force participation per se may not provide sufficient information for possible implications on fertility, but if combined with work-time patterns obstacles or difficulties to achieve work-life balance can be revealed. As indicated by Figure 1.2.4, the overwhelming majority of women work full-time or even overtime in the very low fertility regime societies where female activity rates have been quite modest in the past decade, so reconciling childrearing and paid work may indeed be a challenge there. In contrast in Germany, despite reasonably high female employment rates about one-fifth of women have marginal labour force attachment working less than 20 hours a week, and nearly half of women work at most short part-time. This is also likely to indicate difficulties to combine motherhood and paid work suppressing fertility, as seen in the low level of childbearing in Germany. Our high-fertility societies on the other hand display a small share of women with

marginal labour force attachment (less than eight per cent) while at least 60 per cent working long part-time or more, without this pattern having any negative implications for fertility. This again, confirms our earlier discussion.

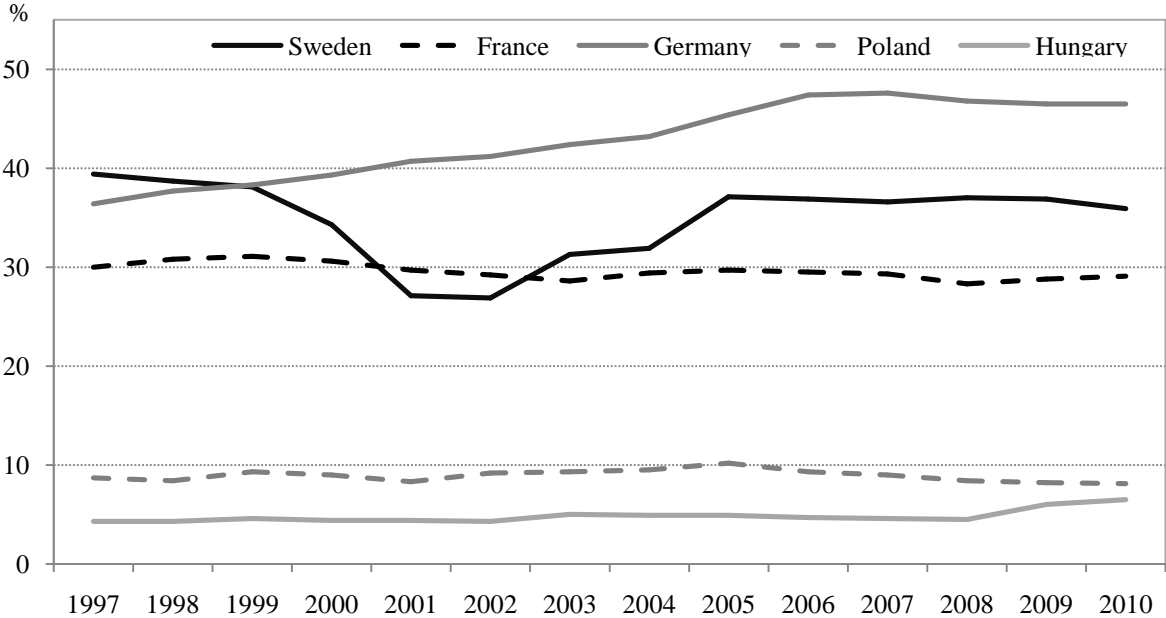
Figure 1.2.4 Women’s usual work hours a week (h/w) in five European countries in 2007



Source: OECD, 2009.

In line with these patterns, we see in Figure 1.2.5 that among women aged 25–49 years part-time employment is extremely rare in Poland and Hungary, but is very common in Germany, with all three countries displaying fertility rates below the critical level. In contrast, in the high-fertility regime societies of Sweden and France we find 30–40 per cent of women in this age group working part-time. Hence, both rigid labour market structures with almost none other but full-time positions and large share of women having weak labour market attachment may be equally suppressive for fertility levels in a country, while flexible structures and the majority having reasonably strong labour force attachment seem to facilitate work-life balance enhancing childbearing.

Figure 1.2.5 Part-time employment (per cent of total employment) in five European countries, 1997–2010. Women aged 25–49 years

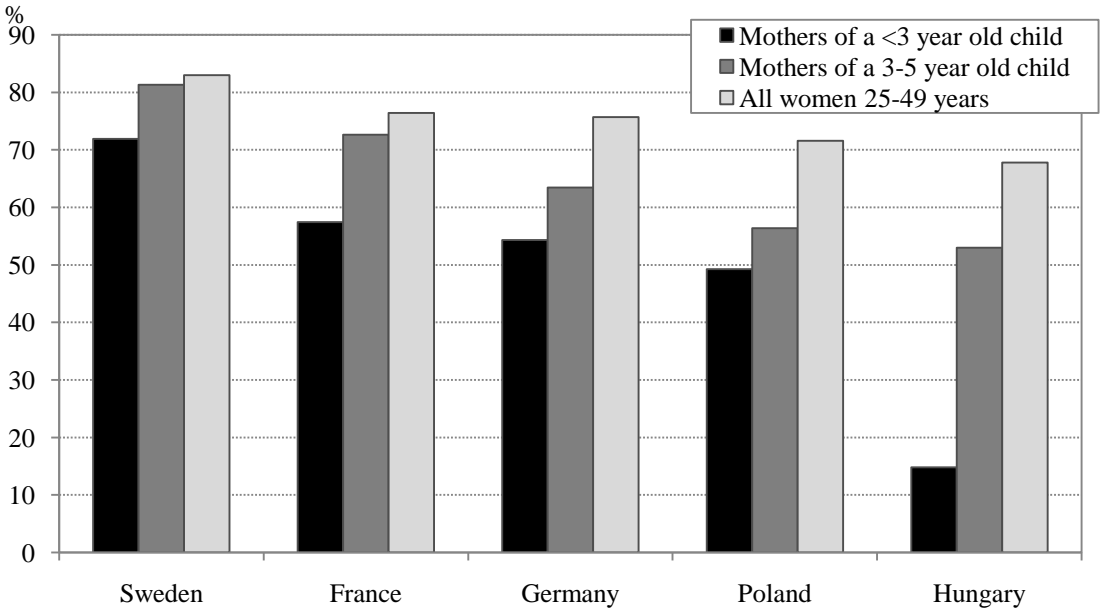


Source: Eurostat, 2012b.

Moreover, we find strong cross-country variations in maternal employment rates displayed by the age of the youngest child (see Figure 1.2.6). Among mothers with very young children, Swedish women have the highest activity levels, which can be at least partly explained by extensive provision of high quality public childcare even for children below age three. The German rates are not much lower than the French, and even Polish mothers with small children have an employment rate of around 50 per cent. In contrast, in Hungary only a small fraction of mothers with very young children return to the labour market given rather generous childcare leave policies (ensuring long, paid leaves) there. For the two high-fertility regime countries, Sweden and France, there is little difference between the employment rates of mothers with children aged three and above and of women in the main childbearing and childrearing ages (25–49 years), unlike in the three low-fertility countries, where the presence

of a preschooler reduces women’s labour force engagement noticeably. This indicates obstacles in the institutional context and/or limited normative support for mothers to reconcile paid work and childrearing in the latter group of countries.

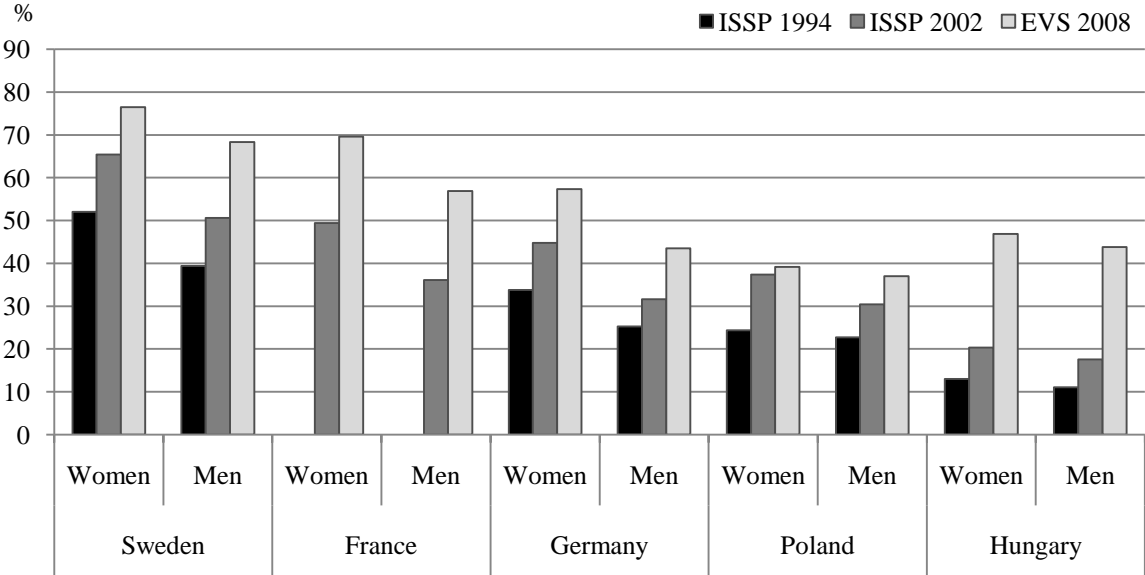
Figure 1.2.6 Maternal and female employment rates in five European countries in 2007



Source: OECD, 2010a; Eurostat, 2011.

As indicated by Figure 1.2.7, maternal employment has become more and more accepted (or less and less questioned) across Europe over the past decades. Among the countries studied here, it is viewed most positively by women and men in Sweden and by French women, while Polish as well as Hungarian women and men, and men in Germany remaining the most sceptical. Women in Germany resemble similar attitudes as men in France in this question. This cross-country pattern observed here provides indications with respect to the concept of incoherence in the country chapters, which has turned out to be highly relevant for four out of the five countries studied. The exception is Sweden, with apparent limited levels of incoherence, as the high acceptance of mothers working suggests.

Figure 1.2.7 Attitudes towards working mothers in five European countries. Proportion who disagree/strongly disagree to the statement ‘A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works’ (age 18–65 years)



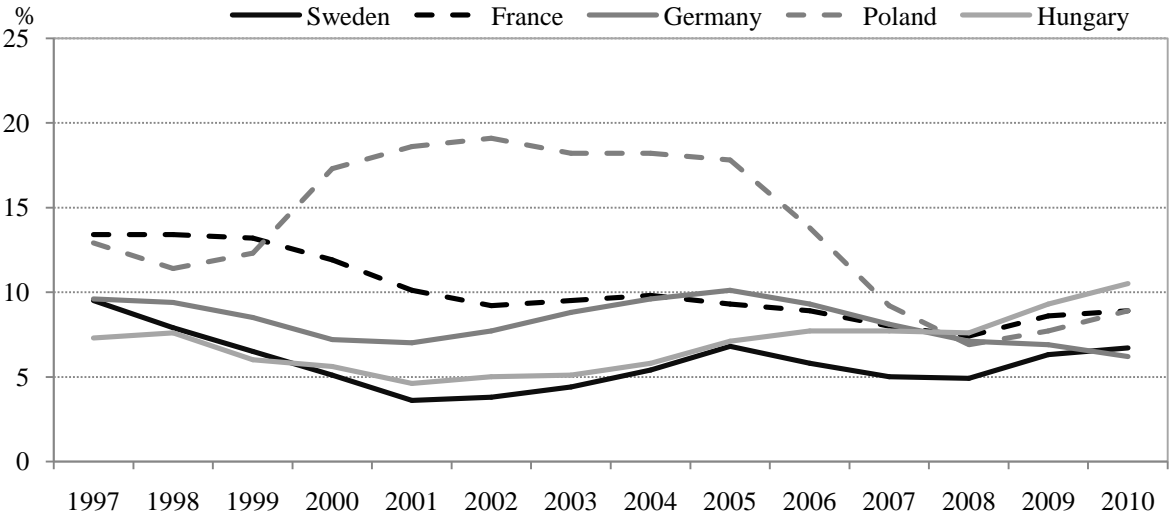
Note: France was not included in ISSP 1994.

Source: ISSP 1994, 2002; EVS, 2008 (authors’ own calculations).

Next we look briefly at two aspects related to economic uncertainty, our other main concept, namely unemployment and temporary employment, among women in the main childbearing and childrearing ages (25–49 years). As seen in Figure 1.2.8 for the past 15 years, unemployment reached relatively high levels for this age group in Poland, and has been less negligible even in France, except for the last few years. Also temporary employment (see Figure 1.2.9) was less of an exception in France, and in Sweden in the late 1990s. From being nearly non-existent in Poland, it increased strongly over the years of the 2000s, surpassing the French and Swedish levels, and plateaued at the level of 25 per cent over the past three to four years. The trends are increasing also in Germany and Hungary, but much more slowly. All in all, there are clear indications of economic uncertainty in the countries studied here, even at

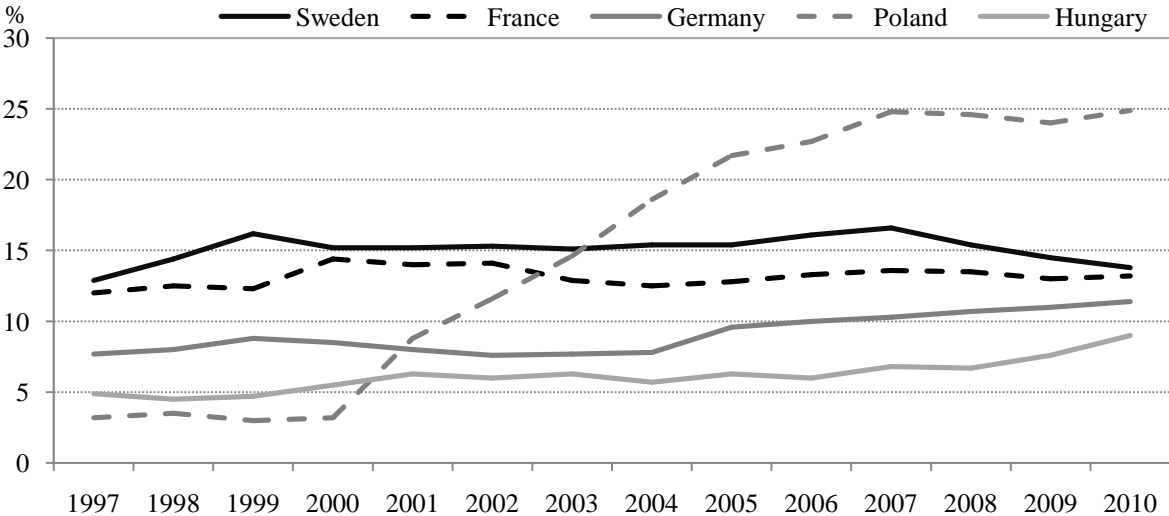
ages well beyond the (early) years of labour market establishment, enhancing the importance of a deeper insight into the employment, fertility choice and public policy nexus.

Figure 1.2.8 Unemployment rates in five European countries, 1997–2010. Women aged 25–49 years



Source: Eurostat, 2012c.

Figure 1.2.9 Temporary employment (per cent of the total number of employees) in five European countries, 1997–2010. Women aged 25–49 years



Source: Eurostat, 2012d.

The policy settings are discussed in detail in each country chapter, so we address here only two measures essential to ensure work-life balance for families with children. These are the maternity/paternity/parental leave programmes and public childcare services. There are large variations across the five countries we study even in these aspects. For the sake of comparability notwithstanding differences in duration and replacements levels as well as eligibility to leave in order to care for a child, we refer here to full-rate equivalent of paid leaves, for the year 2006 (see Moss and Korintus, 2008; OECD, 2010b). We find the longest maternity leave for Poland (18 weeks), somewhat shorter leave for Hungary and France (16 weeks), followed by Germany (14 weeks) and finally Sweden with only about half as long maternity leave as for Poland (9.6 weeks). The order changes for the paternity leave as Sweden offers the longest leave (9.3 weeks) there, Poland providing half as long leave (four weeks), France (two weeks) and Hungary (one week) even less and Germany none. As for parental leave, Hungary provides the longest leave (about 73 weeks), followed by Sweden (about 53 weeks), Germany (nearly 35 weeks), France (31 weeks) and finally Poland (16 weeks). Taking all three leaves offered to parents together, Hungary ranks first (89.6 weeks), followed by Sweden (62.4 weeks), Germany (48.8 weeks), France (47.1 weeks) and finally Poland (34.1 weeks). Hence, the very low fertility regime countries are placed at the two ends of this scale with the most and the least generous leave programmes. Sweden is the next generous, while we find little difference between France and Germany despite them representing different fertility regimes.

As for public childcare enrolment rates, clear targets have been formulated for Member States at the Barcelona summit in 2002 to be achieved by 2010 (European Council, 2002).

Accordingly, public childcare should be provided for 33 per cent of children below three years of age and 90 per cent of children between age three and the mandatory school age. In

order to get a comparable picture, we rely on information about childcare attendance presented as the full-time equivalent enrolment rates with respect to the proportion of children receiving formal childcare for at least 30 hours a week (OECD, 2011c). Only our high-fertility regime countries, Sweden and France have achieved the targets for the youngest children (with 44 and 43 per cent enrolment rates respectively), while enrolment rates remained modest in the three low fertility societies Germany, Hungary and Poland (ten per cent in each). For children aged three and above, that is the preschoolers, we find 100 per cent enrolment rate for France as this is already part of the school curriculum, Germany displays 89.3 per cent enrolment rate, Hungary 86.8 per cent, Sweden 85.6 per cent, while Poland has a very low enrolment rate, even for this age group of children, 40.7 per cent. Hence, in line with the literature (for an overview see OECD, 2011a) also for our group of countries we see that fertility levels are most strongly influenced by childcare availability for children below age three, while leave programmes to care for children as well as public childcare enrolment of preschoolers have rather limited impact.

Before turning to specific details of the chapters, it is important to highlight their linkages which make this volume a consistent and coherent research product. In the book, case studies of this carefully selected group of countries are joined via a comparative framework based on the key concepts, especially on uncertainty and risks, with more subtle links to incoherence. Our research team has sought to identify and provide a better understanding of the multiple tensions between work life, family life and welfare systems/policy configurations, to facilitate the efforts of policy makers on developing strategies to manage and resolve them. All chapters address the tensions between fertility choices (intentions/desires), female labour force participation and work-life balance policies, while also focusing on specific problems that are most prominent for the country concerned, a clear advantage of this research design.

The structures of the chapters are harmonised beyond the main research questions in terms of the aspects studied at each national context, the analytical design including the methods used as well as the variables included in the models, and the ways the findings are discussed with respect to the tensions. There is a dialogue between the chapters; they ‘speak’ to each other. Four of the country chapters focus on childbearing intentions based on quantitative analyses of recent survey data from the early 2000s. In addition, the Hungarian chapter provides further insights addressing fertility desires by relying on a rich qualitative data set of 100 working parents (fathers and mothers) with young children. In the first three country chapters data extracted from nationally representative surveys are analysed, while the Polish and Hungarian chapters rely on data material collected in large cities. Our research design enables us to identify the more general processes that shape the relationship between childbearing choices, women’s employment and work-life balance policies beyond the national contexts analysed, and highlight cross-country variations in addition to matters specific for a country, allowing for a modest contribution to the conceptual development of further research on this complex relationship.

3 Structure of the book

Below we present the main research questions along with the specific theoretical frameworks, data and methods applied in the different chapters.

Fahlén and **Oláh** in Chapter 2 examine the interrelation between institutional context, employment situation and childbearing intentions among young women in Sweden, a country with extensive policy support for women and men combining work and family responsibilities and widespread egalitarian gender norms, hence this chapter does not address the issue of incoherence. Relying on a multi-layered theoretical framework based on the Capability

Approach, developed by Amartya Sen (1992, 1993), the authors focus on both general and short-term childbearing intentions, the former without any time limitation and the latter defined as intending to have a first or additional child within the next five years, considering birth intentions as indicators of a person's capability to have and care for children. Fahlén and Oláh argue that childbearing-related capabilities derive from multiple dimensions, more specifically individual resources, work-related factors and institutional factors, the latter including work-life balance policies and services. These factors together influence people's sense of risk and security, which in turn shapes their childbearing plans. The chapter explores to what extent women's labour force attachment and working hours impact on their childbearing intentions in contemporary Sweden, also controlling for the partner's employment status and/or work hours in some of the models. The data analysed are extracted from the Swedish panel survey *Family and Working Life among Young Adults in the 21st century* (YAPS), based on a nationally representative sample of women and men born in Sweden in 1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980, conducted in 1999 and 2003. Logistic regression is the tool of analysis.

In Chapter 3, **Pailhé** and **Solaz** study the parity-specific impact of employment uncertainty on women's and men's short-term childbearing intentions, that is to have a first, second or third child within three years in France, a country with strong social norms regarding fertility and a rather generous welfare state. The aim is to gain a deeper insight in how economic factors influence people's childbearing decisions. The issues addressed are whether comprehensive family and employment policies in France constitute a framework of stability that diminishes the negative impacts of economic uncertainty on fertility choices, and whether the pro-natalist social norms can counterbalance economic constraints. The authors examine, for women and men respectively, whether and how individual level unemployment and having a non-

permanent job themselves and/or their partner affect the intention to have a(nother) child in the next three years. The impact of economic uncertainty is addressed taking neoclassical economic reasoning of opportunity cost versus income effect as the point of departure, also relating to the concept of incoherence. Logistic regression is the tool of analysis. Separate models are estimated by the number of children one already has. The empirical analysis is based on data extracted from the *Familles et employeurs survey* (Families and Employers Survey) conducted by the French National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED) and the French National Institute of Statistics (INSEE) on a representative sample of the French population between November 2004 and March 2005.

In Chapter 4, **Lutz, Boehnke, Huinink and Tophoven** explore the tensions between female employment and fertility intentions and their links to work-life balance policies in Germany, a country with a policy setting that promotes traditional family arrangements such as the male breadwinner model. The authors focus on women's intentions to have a first or additional child within two years, arguing that such short-term fertility intentions are particularly suitable to observe first tensions regarding economic insecurity and problems of incoherence (prospective) parents perceive. The authors examine East and West Germany separately as the female occupational behaviour and attitudes towards mothers' engagement in paid work and care differ considerably between these regions. The chapter relies on a theoretical framework consisting of the Theory of Social Production Function complemented by the Life Course Approach and the New Home Economics Theory. Lutz and others argue that procreation and becoming a parent is one of the goals embedded in individual well-being, but the ability to pursue this goal depends on individual resources. The empirical analysis is based on data extracted from the first wave of the German Family Panel (Pairfam), conducted in 2008–09. This is a nationwide representative survey designed as a cohort study for three cohorts who

were at very different stages of their family and labour market careers at the time of the data collection. Logistic regression is the tool of analysis. The effect of the male partner's employment status is controlled for in some of the models.

Frątczak and **Ptak-Chmielewska** in Chapter 5 argue that social capital, lifestyle preferences, and gender equality in the family and society are likely to be important for fertility-related decision-making and behaviour in societies facing economic uncertainty along with a transformation of values and norms, like Poland, a Transition Post-Socialist country. The authors focus on fertility intentions in general, without time limitations, relying on a theoretical framework consisting of the Preference Theory, Gender Equity Theory and Social Capital Theory. The empirical analysis is based on data extracted from the *Late fertility diagnosis survey*, conducted in 2007 on a representative sample of women aged 19, 23, 27 and 31 years in two large cities in Poland. Descriptive and logistic regression methods are used as analytical tools. Frątczak and Ptak-Chmielewska argue that changes in fertility and female employment can be linked to cultural factors such as lifestyle preferences and values. With regard to gender equity, there are no formal barriers against women acquiring higher education and participating on the labour market to the same extent as men in Poland, but the division of household labour is still highly gendered, indicating incoherence in the levels of gender equity in the family and in the public sphere. The authors emphasise that during the transition period, the costs of having children increased significantly due to reductions in state transfer payments and social benefits, and due to greatly increased labour market uncertainties. In such a context, social networks (family members, relatives, friends, neighbours and colleagues) can help reduce insecurity and influence childbearing intentions in a positive way. Frątczak and Ptak-Chmielewska argue that the three theories together promote

a better understanding of the processes shaping childbearing intentions in contemporary Poland than the economic approach.

In Chapter 6, **Takács** addresses the issue of weak capabilities for having and caring for children in Hungary as being reflected by the views of 100 working parents in Budapest on their fertility-related desires. The analysis is based on the Hungarian part of the *Tensions between Rising Expectations of Parenthood and Capabilities to Achieve a Work Family Balance* survey, conducted in Budapest in 2008. In the chapter, desired and realised fertility as well as perceived obstacles are interpreted in a framework based on the Capability Approach. Capabilities are understood as the freedom to achieve valued functionings, that is the parents' notions on the *real opportunities* they have to be a working parent with as many children as they would like to have. Takács argues that fertility desires reflect people's assessment of their personal, interpersonal and social conditions, as well as internalised norms, and that desired fertility is influenced by how people see their freedom to achieve various lifestyles in their specific social settings, where work-family policies can act as capability expansions or limitations. She emphasises that capabilities are especially important to address in relation to childbearing decisions in the context of economic uncertainties and risks. The chapter highlights the multiple ways in which Hungarian parents' fertility-related capabilities are constrained, which can be detected in their achieved fertility as well as the level of their desired family size.

Finally in Chapter 7 **Oláh** and **Fahlén** summarise and synthesise the findings of the five country studies, illuminating more general processes linked to uncertainty and risk and to incoherence, and the ways these shape the tensions between childbearing choices, women's paid work and work-life balance policies in contemporary Europe. The insights highlighted

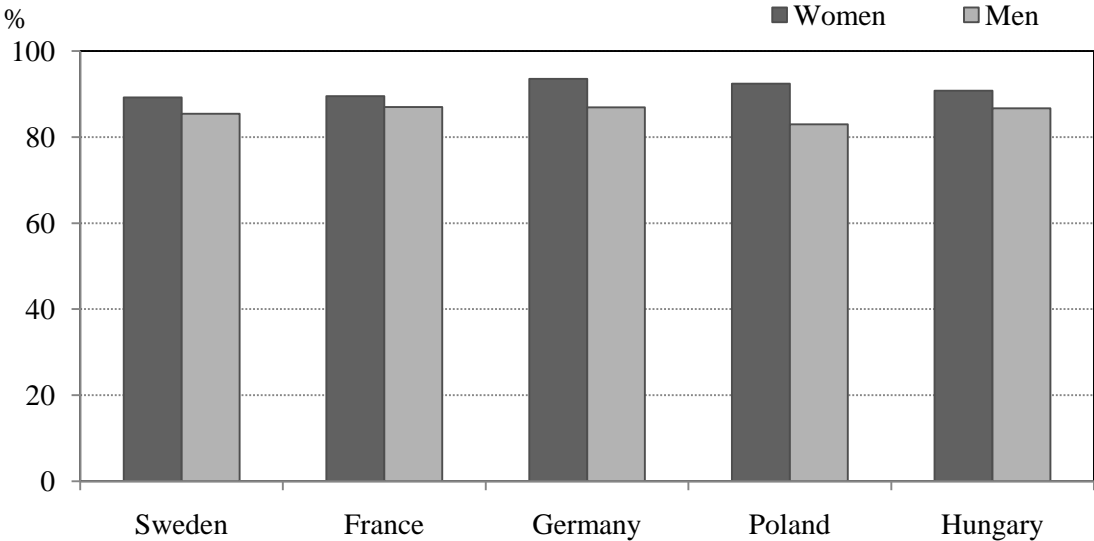
are this volume's contribution to a conceptual development of research on the relationship of the fertility, paid work and public policy nexus and to the knowledge base of policy-making aiming to promote sustainable societal development.

2. Concluding thoughts on childbearing, women's work and work-life balance policy nexus in Europe in the dawn of 21st century

This book has addressed the interplay between childbearing and work and welfare, more specifically female employment and work-life balance policies, in contemporary Europe. Along with increasing scholarly interest in the topic, demographic and economic sustainability has been high on the agenda in European policy-making given substantial cross-country variations in fertility levels in the past decades, (well) below what is necessary for the replacement of the population (that is 2.05 children per woman) and not speeding up societal ageing. Focusing on childbearing choices (intentions mainly, but even desires), considered as influential predictors of future fertility, our research team has examined the importance of labour force participation on young women's fertility plans in the context of increasing labour market flexibility in various work-life balance policy settings. We have studied five countries, two high-fertility and three low-fertility societies representing different welfare regime/policy configuration types. Our two high-fertility societies, Sweden and France belong to different policy regimes, the former being the prime case of the dual-earner, and the latter belonging to the General Family Support policy configuration type to which even Germany, a low-fertility regime country belongs. The other two low-fertility societies we have studied, Poland and Hungary, represent the Transition Post-Socialist cluster. While both countries have displayed very low rates of childbearing in the early 21st century, previously they belonged to different fertility regimes given high fertility rates in Poland up until the late 1990s, unlike in Hungary. Thus these five country cases demonstrate that there is no clear-cut association between fertility level in a country and which welfare regime/policy configuration cluster it belongs to, but we need to look more carefully to understand the processes at stake. What seems to apply

generally to working-age adults, independently of gender and country context, is that they have high aspirations to combine paid work and family life, as seen in Figure 7.1 below.

Figure 7.1 Proportion of men and women aged 20–60, in five European countries, who find it important/very important to be able to combine work and family life when choosing a job



Source: European Social Survey 2010/11 (authors’ own calculations).

Our overall theoretical framework in the book has been built upon two key concepts: uncertainty and risk, and incoherence. As for the former, young people in modern societies have been shown to have high economic aspirations while being rather reluctant to accept a decline in their living standard due to family formation. Hence childbearing has increasingly become a choice in which a high level of uncertainty and risk of economic hardship for a family is embedded. In the context of growing job insecurity which is an increasingly common feature of modern economies, risk-averse individuals/couples are likely to postpone

irreversible decisions such as having a first or additional child and invest instead in improving their labour force positions. The risk and uncertainty can however be mitigated by policies that facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life. As for the second concept, childbearing choices are influenced by incoherence with respect to a high level of gender equity in the educational system and the labour market but continuously low gender equity in the family, where women continue to bear the lion's share of care and household duties. As the latter tasks multiply in the case of a birth constraining women's opportunities beyond the family sphere, fertility aspirations may diminish greatly unless such constraints are counterbalanced by the policy context. Our findings have shed more light on the ways these concepts matter in the decision-making about family formation and employment within and across societies. The Swedish, French, German and Polish chapters have focused on childbearing intentions, based on quantitative analyses of recent survey data. In addition, the Hungarian chapter has addressed fertility desires based on a comprehensive qualitative data set of 100 working parents. All five country chapters have shown convincing evidence of uncertainty and risk being taken into account in women's (and as the French chapter has shown, also in men's) childbearing choices, while we have found somewhat more subtle links to incoherence for these countries. Below we discuss the findings and their implications in detail.

1 Tensions related to uncertainty and risk

Relying on the concept of *uncertainty and risk*, when addressing the fertility, paid work and public policy nexus, has provided us with a better understanding of the increasing importance of continuous labour market participation among (prospective) parents, both women and men, and its link to childbearing decisions. To have a stable job matters, especially for those who

have not yet entered parenthood. Parents on the other hand seem to have better social protection in most countries and are thus less vulnerable to labour market uncertainties. Here we present the relevant results for each country chapter.

1.1 Entering parenthood

In Sweden, unemployment and unspecified activities (the latter indicating a lack of, or at best weak labour force attachment) have been shown to suppress childless women's intentions in general as well as in the short term (that is the next five years) to become mothers, as uncertainty and the risk of economic hardship may be linked most strongly with such a situation. Compared to the permanently employed we have seen much reduced short-term first birth intentions also for women in temporary employment, for students and for those working very short part-time (less than 17 hours a week). As the qualifying condition for income-related parental benefit is closely linked to labour force participation prior to the birth which is more difficult for these women to meet, a sense of risk and uncertainty is likely to apply to them reducing their motherhood aspirations in the short run. Those with marginal labour force attachment are constrained by not being able to qualify for a reasonably high benefit as the amount is based on previous earnings, linking motherhood for them with the risk of economic hardship and insecurity.

In France, the intention to have a first child within the short term (that is three years) is driven by one's professional position and its stability. In this chapter both women's and men's intentions have been analysed, taking into account the respondent's own and her or his partner's labour force situation. Unemployment has been shown to reduce fertility intentions

for men, not having any clear impact on women for whom having an unstable job, that is a position with a fixed-term contract that clearly weakens intentions to have a first child. For unemployed men, fertility intentions are constrained by the fear of deterioration of their living standard along with a kind of 'breadwinner norm' they seem to have integrated compelling them to signal being a good provider before planning to become a father. For women who do not have a permanent job, it is their anticipation of higher opportunity cost of childbearing that constrains their intentions, hence they wait until they have stable employment before planning to enter motherhood. Being a student also suppresses motherhood intentions, but not that of fatherhood, which may be related to women with children facing greater difficulties to enter the labour market than fathers do and thus experiencing a higher level of uncertainty than men.

In East and West Germany, childless women in precarious labour market positions and students have greatly reduced intentions of starting a family as uncertainty and risk of economic hardship apply most strongly to them. Also part-time work seems to be considered as inadequate labour market integration linked to greater uncertainty suppressing motherhood intentions in the short run (that is two years). However, the impact of own employment situation on women's childbearing intentions is weakened when the partner's employment status is taken into account, especially in West Germany where men's integration in the work force is a precondition of childbearing due to the persistent male-breadwinner/female part-time carer model. There are also differences with respect to tensions to combine work and family life in the two regions. One such feature with respect to planning a first child is that having a fixed-term contract greatly increases motherhood intentions in the Eastern region where obtaining a permanent position is more difficult, while the type of employment contract matters little for women in West Germany. As the financial conditions for becoming a parent

are fulfilled by having full-time employment, the sense of uncertainty seems to diminish independently of the type of the job contract and women feel more confident to consider having a first child.

The Polish chapter has addressed childbearing intentions without time limitations, and their linkages to labour force attachment and reconciliation policies in the context of three theories: preference theory, gender equity theory, and social capital theory. It has revealed that work-oriented women are more likely to intend to have a first child than home-centred and adaptive women. As a much smaller proportion of the latter groups are highly educated than of the work-oriented, their reduced intentions are likely to reflect a higher level of uncertainty and greater risk of economic hardship if having a birth compared to work-oriented women.

Although labour market uncertainties may matter more for them, the work-oriented group may also be more confident to cope with these given their greater prospects at the labour market as being more educated. Employed women have been shown to be more likely to intend to have a first child than are 'inactive' women who may fear the risk of economic hardship if entering motherhood. Also women who value gender equality in their household have been found to have stronger intentions to become mothers, probably being more confident to be able to combine work and family responsibilities given more equal share of tasks with their partners, which in turn can reduce the prospects of labour market uncertainties for them.

1.2 Having another child

The relationship between labour force attachment and childbearing choices of parents display a different pattern across our countries than what we have seen for the childless. In the Swedish and French contexts, mothers' intentions to have an additional child have been shown to be hardly affected by their labour force participation, except for reduced short-term intentions among Swedish mothers with little links to the labour market but increased intentions if they are in temporary employment. The vast majority of mothers in Sweden have established their eligibility to generous social provisions prior to the birth of their youngest child, and can more easily keep such eligibility, for example via the speed-premium rules in the parental leave scheme. For those who for some reason do not qualify for reasonably high income-related parental benefit, it is important to earn eligibility before further extending their family. Those in a fixed-term position are likely to do just that, also planning to have another child. The mothers with weak labour force links may face greater uncertainties and risk of economic hardship if further extending their family. Hence they refrain from that at least in the short run. In France no such exceptions have been seen as the generous family and employment policies successfully mitigate economic uncertainties for parents planning to have a second or even a third child. Third-child intentions are even strengthened by specific policy measures, especially the tax system providing extensive tax deductions for large families. These rules benefit mostly those with high incomes who also tend to be highly educated.

In Germany, we have found clear differences with respect to the impact of unemployment on mothers' second birth intentions in the new versus the old federal states. In the East, unemployed mothers have been shown to be less likely to intend to have another child. In

contrast, unemployment seems to strengthen intentions of family enlargement in the West, at least if the father is employed full-time. Such diverse patterns are likely to be related to different expectations regarding work and family life in the Eastern and Western parts of the country. In the East, unemployment is linked to substantial uncertainty and greater risk of economic hardship not being integrated in the labour market, and thus not being able to fulfil financial preconditions of childbearing. In West Germany, unemployment is an indicator of the mother's family orientation and reduced ambitions to re-enter the labour force. If her partner can provide a reasonable living standard for the family, a mother not being employed does not imply automatically a greater risk of uncertainty and economic hardship, but it rather signals her intentions to have further children. Moreover, while women in the East perceive themselves as working mothers and due to better availability of public childcare can manage to live that way, in the West family and career are more difficult to reconcile given limited provision of non-family childcare as well as social norms about young children should be cared for by their mothers. Thus women in West Germany are increasingly selected into a family- and a work-oriented group, having either long family break and several children or no break and no children, respectively.

As for the transition post-socialist countries, the Polish chapter has revealed findings similar to what we have seen for West Germany with respect to unemployed mothers being most likely to intend to have another child and in terms of the importance of social norms, especially religiosity (both attitudes and behaviours) for childbearing choices. Religious mothers have been shown to have stronger intentions to further extend their families than non-believers, as the sense of economic uncertainty may be counterbalanced for them by a greater social pressure related to traditional norms and values to have more than a single offspring. Stronger intentions about family enlargement have been seen not being limited to traditional

values. Also mothers who enjoyed greater gender equity in their home have been found to be more likely to intend to have a second child in Poland, as they may have felt more certain about being able to combine work and family responsibilities, which reduces economic uncertainties, even if having another child.

In addition, the Hungarian chapter has demonstrated, based on the personal accounts of 100 working parents with young children, how economic uncertainties inhibit parents from achieving an ideal balance between work and family life, influencing their fertility desires. As the necessity to earn enough hinders them spending enough time with their family, it also constrains parents' capabilities with respect to their parenting aspirations beyond having a certain number of children. Labour market uncertainties and the fear of economic hardship suppress fertility desires and prevent the parents to achieve their ideal family size.

2 Tensions related to incoherence

The other major component pointed out in the literature to be likely to shape childbearing choices in modern societies is the *incoherence* of for the most part equal access for women and men to education at all levels and work for pay, but unequal share of domestic tasks with women continuing to perform the lion's share, especially as they become mothers. When childbearing is seen as severely constraining women's opportunities beyond the family sphere due to greatly increased domestic burdens, childbearing plans will be reduced, perhaps rather substantially, depending on the institutional context. The country chapters have indeed provided support to incoherence influencing childbearing choices, as discussed in the following.

The Swedish chapter has not specifically addressed the impact of incoherence, as being both earner and carer independently of gender has been an agreed-upon norm there for several decades, reflected in gender neutral policies regarding work and care, employment and parenting. Yet, one of the findings may indicate that increased domestic gender equity strengthens childbearing intentions even in Sweden, as mothers with partners who combine paid work and childcare leave have been most likely to intend to have another child.

In France, the effect of incoherence has been found especially pronounced for students. Women in education have been shown to have strongly reduced intentions to become mothers and/or to have further children. In contrast, male students' intentions to have a first child have not differed from those of permanently employed men. Yet, men with a female partner still in education have shown reduced intentions to become fathers independently of their own labour force position. They have apparently expected the women to bear most of the childrearing responsibilities understanding though that this would delay them finishing their studies. Moreover, the concept of incoherence has appeared to be relevant also with respect to highly educated women having strongest third birth intentions. As the gender division of domestic tasks is much less unequal in their families, highly educated women, although more likely to be career- than family-oriented, are most confident to be able to combine their work and fertility aspirations and thus are most likely to intend to have a third child.

In Germany, the concept of incoherence seems to apply especially to the Western part of the country as the different policy settings before the unification have led to different norms and

expectations regarding women's roles as mothers and labour force participants, still present in East and West Germany. While women in the East see themselves as working mothers, supported by and relying on quite extensive public childcare provision, West German women are constrained by strong norms compelling mothers to care for their children themselves accompanied by an institutional setting effectively preventing the combination of career and family aspirations as seen for example in low prevalence of non-family daycare, the half-day school and the lack of school lunch provision. Hence West-German women may feel compelled to choose between having children and participating in the labour market.

Also the Polish case shows the relevance of incoherence for childbearing choices. During the transition period, gender equality has been promoted in the educational system and on the labour market, while traditional gender relations remained at the family and household level. In line with the concept of incoherence, stronger intentions to have a first and a subsequent child have been seen among women experiencing higher gender equity in their partnership than other women. The lack of a significant effect for interactions between work-family orientation and the gender equality measures in the analysis has in turn indicated that the incoherence effect equally applies to women in their fertility intentions regardless of their lifestyle preferences.

The Hungarian chapter has identified the incoherence between rising awareness about women having aspirations beyond the family sphere given more gender equal opportunities, yet little changes in the gendered division of household and care work in the family, as one of the main aspects reducing fertility desires among working parents. It has also pointed at competing norms of working versus stay-at-home mothering and the numerous demands to be met in

parallel as generating tensions that can endanger the achievement of an optimal work-life balance, hence suppressing women's aspirations about further childbearing.

Thus the empirical findings presented in our five country studies have clearly shown that both uncertainty and risk, and incoherence are taken into account in childbearing choices in modern Europe, in relation to one's labour market position and relevant work-life balance policies.

3 Future research

A synthesis of our findings are presented below to provide useful suggestions for further research and to contribute to the knowledge-base of informed policy-making aiming at demographic and economic sustainability in Europe.

Our first conclusion is that weak labour market position constrains plans to enter motherhood, as reconciliation policies are likely to provide weak if any protection to women in such situation against the risk of economic hardship unlike those in (more) stable employment situation. We have found convincing evidence for this conclusion across our countries. First of all, being in education reduced the intentions to have a first child in Sweden (at least in a shorter term), France, East and West Germany, as economic uncertainties are anticipated due to difficulties to enter the labour force and acquire a stable position if being a mother.

Unemployment, not having significant impact in the other countries, has been shown to clearly reduce motherhood intentions in general and in shorter term in Sweden where social provision is most strongly linked to employment and earnings prior to a birth. Women in

temporary employment have been found much less inclined to plan to become mothers than those in permanent position in Sweden and France, at least in a shorter term as they anticipate greater uncertainties related to difficulties to re-enter the labour market as mothers. Marginal labour force attachment in form of short part-time work or labour market inactivity has been shown to suppress motherhood intentions in Sweden, Germany and Poland, being linked with pronounced risk of economic hardship and uncertainty. Indeed, the country chapters have illuminated processes of uncertainty and risk, related to insecure labour force attachment taken into account in childless women's childbearing decisions.

In addition, we have found diverse patterns of the relationship between mothers' labour force attachment, economic uncertainty and childbearing choices across our countries. While women's employment situation have mattered little in France for second- and third-birth intentions as generous family and employment policies reduce uncertainty and the risk of economic hardship for families with children there, Swedish mothers with weak labour force attachment have been seen to be less inclined to extend their family not qualifying for the generous social provisions to working parents. Greater uncertainties also suppress unemployed mothers' intentions to have another child in East Germany, unlike in West Germany and Poland where mothers' unemployment is linked to them planning to enlarge their families. Stronger intentions have been found also for Swedish mothers in temporary employment who seek this way to qualify for reasonably high parental benefit (based on income prior to a birth). Our second conclusion is then that policies matter, both as we have seen for intentions to enter parenthood, but also for intentions to have further children.

Furthermore, social norms about parenting seem to have a strong impact on plans about further childbearing, especially in low-fertility countries. Such norms may mitigate the negative effect of economic uncertainties on childbearing choices (like for unemployment in West Germany, and Poland), in other cases they even strengthen them (like for unemployed mothers in East Germany, working parents in Hungary, or for unemployed men in France, the latter with respect to first birth intentions). Hence our third conclusion is that social norms matter providing further nuance to the fertility, female work and public policy nexus.

The empirical findings have also demonstrated that even though childbearing choices are formed at the individual level, they are strongly influenced by macro-level conditions of labour market structures and opportunities and the institutional and policy settings. Our fourth conclusion is thus that context matters, and we need to pay attention to the interrelationship of micro- and macro-level processes to better understand current fertility decisions and future childbearing trends. For such ambitions, the concepts of uncertainty and risk and of incoherence are likely to prove useful conceptual tools, which is our fifth but crucial conclusion.

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