

Policies of parenthood and fertility in the Nordic countries:

Tentative conclusions and issues for further research

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Nordic network project – three questions:

1. Common Nordic fertility regime?
2. Can similarities and differences in fertility trends be explained by similarities and differences in family policies?
3. Nordic model - a sustainable road with regard to social and demographic development within Nordic societies?

Nordic network project – special analyses:

1. Period fertility rates 1970-2000

- Parity specific analysis
- Hazard rate models
- Effects of education and labour market attachment

2. Cohort fertility - Women born 1935-1969

- Differences across
 - countries
 - cohorts
 - educational level



Nordic model of family welfare

- **Common platform:** commitment to gender equality and opportunities for both parents to reconcile parenthood and employment
- **Trend 1970-2000:** more similar parental leave systems and more equal coverage of day-care facilities - but still differences
 - *Sweden:* Forerunner with regard to generous parental leave systems and most pronounced supporter of the dual earner model
 - *Norway:* Latecomer with regard to generous parental leave systems- strong expansion from the late 1980s. Norway still has the most "double – track" oriented family policy regime of the Nordic countries. The dual earner model: an option, but not a norm
 - *Parental choice:* an increasingly influential political metaphor at the political agenda. Norway/Finland: cash-for-care/home-care allowance

Gender equality in the Nordic countries

Considerable progress – but still an unfinished project:

- High female labour force participation
- High levels of part-time work (especially Norway and Sweden)
- Gender-segregated labour markets
- Considerable gender differences in average hours of work and wage levels
- Unequal division of household work between mothers and fathers

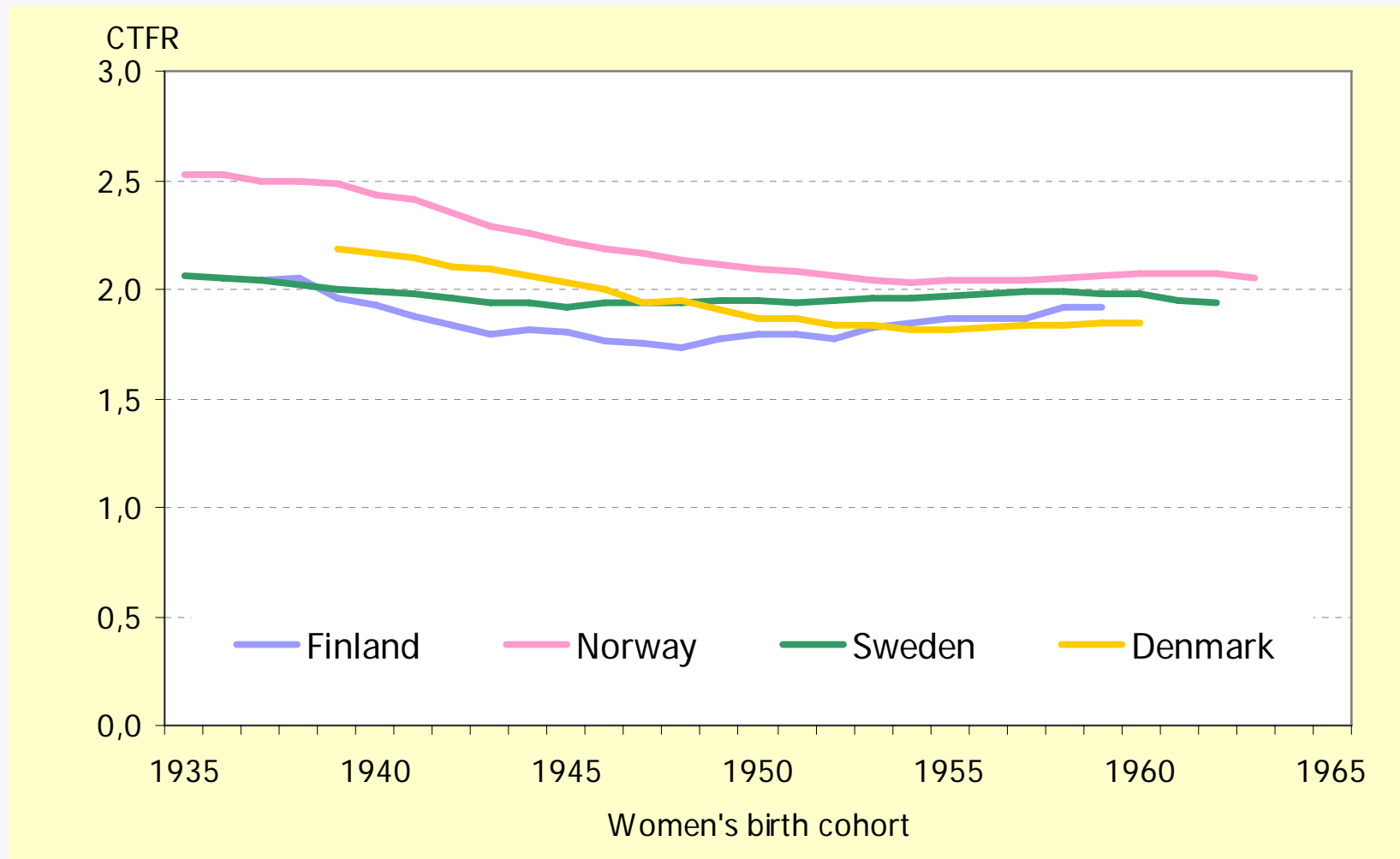
Policy impacts on fertility?

- Policy not pro-natalistic – positive fertility effects a demographic bonus
- Possible effects
 - *Indirect*: broader context of economic, social and political development
 - *Direct*: country specific policies

Possible indirect effects of the Nordic model

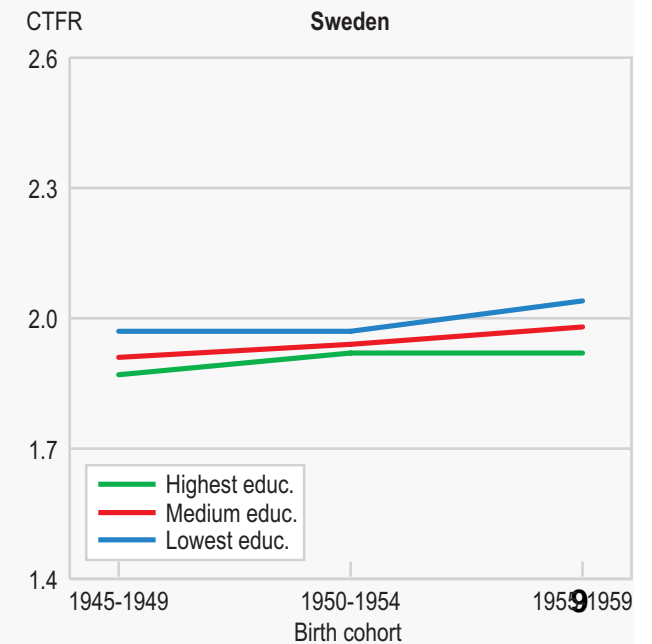
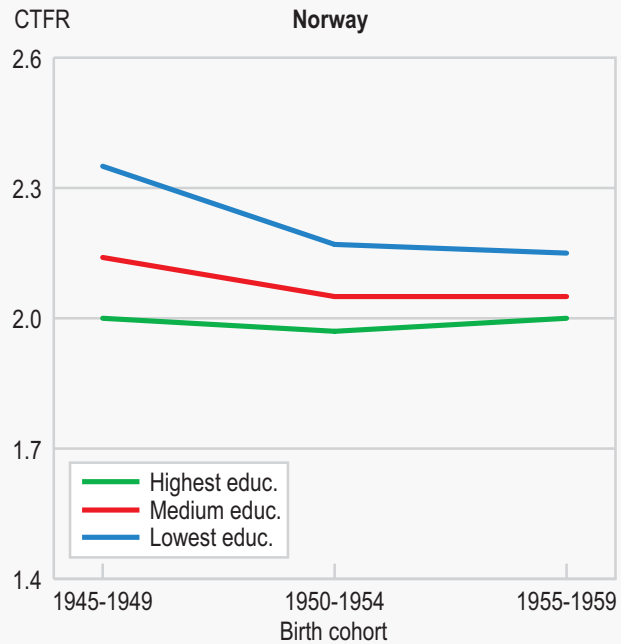
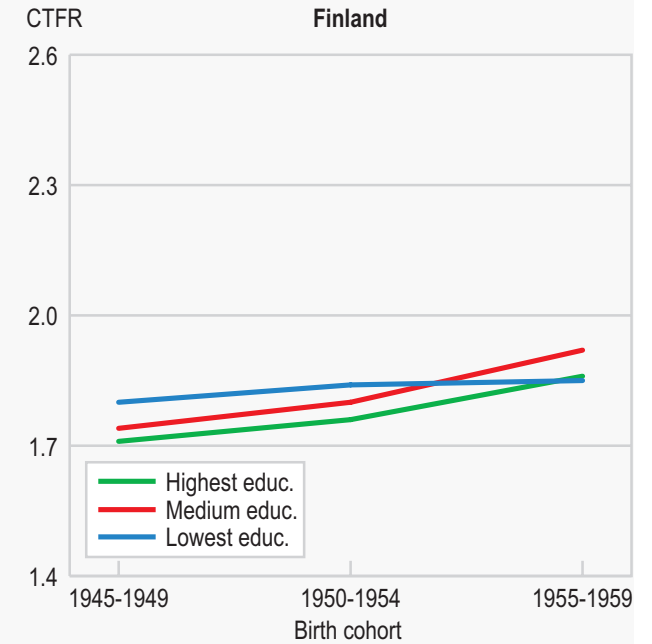
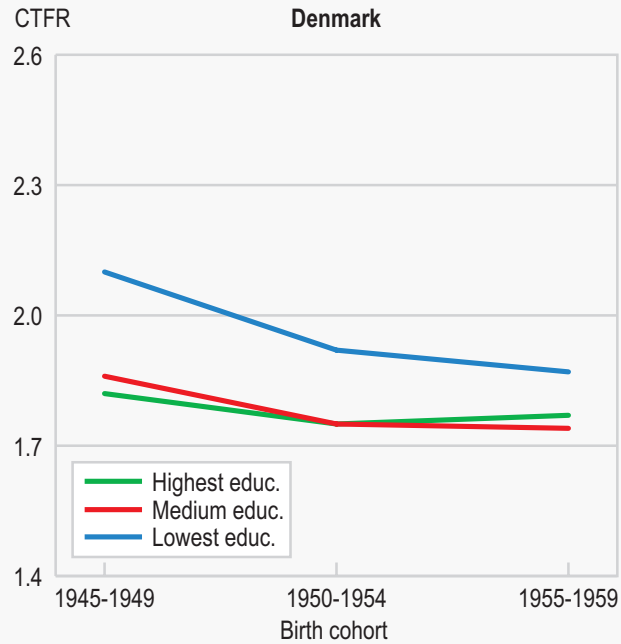
- Stable or slightly rising completed fertility in younger cohorts
 - Good recuperation in spite of increasing age at first birth
 - Cohort fertility close to reproduction level
- Decreasing country differences in completed cohort fertility
- Small or declining educational differences in completed fertility across cohorts
- Converging fertility patterns among highly educated women across countries
 - Final number of children
 - Age at first birth
 - Childlessness

Cumulated fertility at age 40



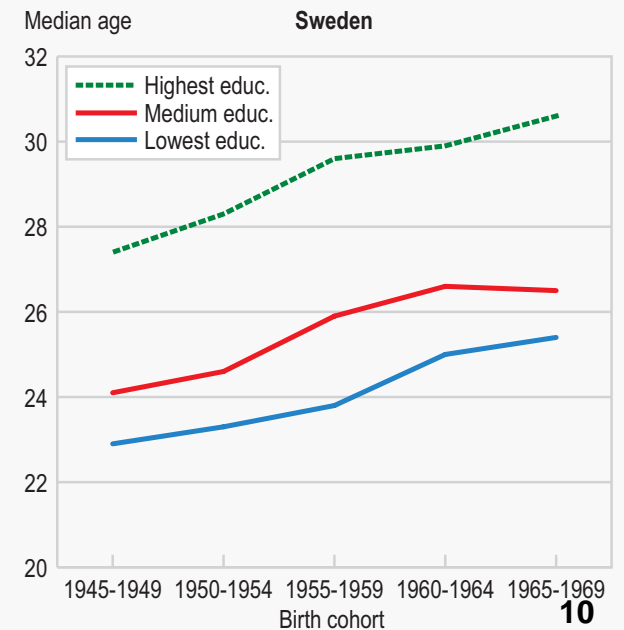
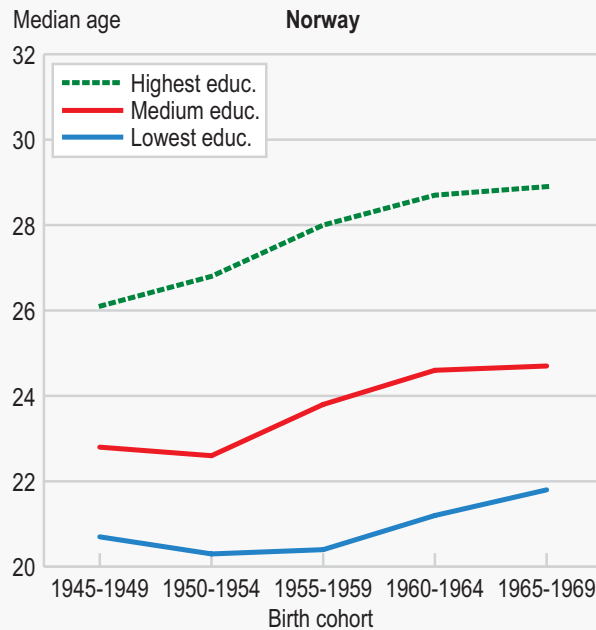
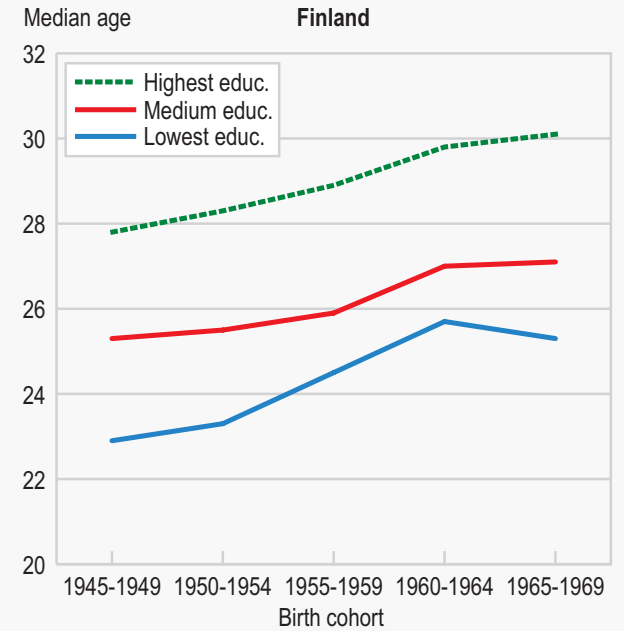
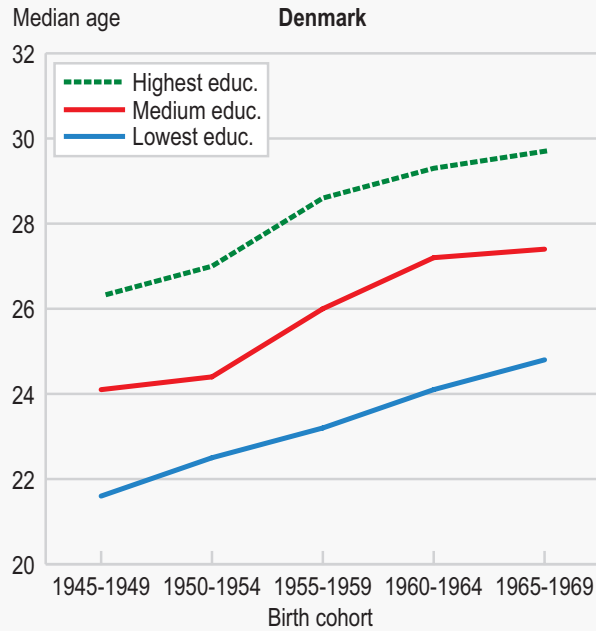
Cohort total fertility

- at age 40 by educational level at age 30, female cohorts 1945-1969



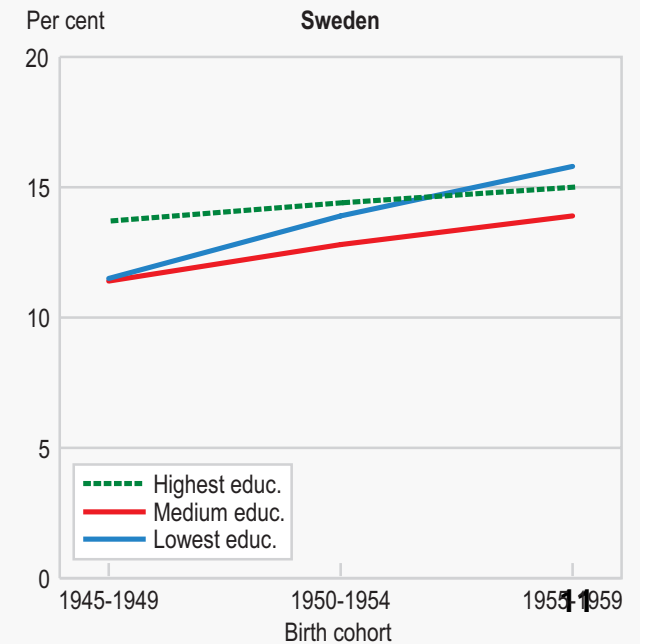
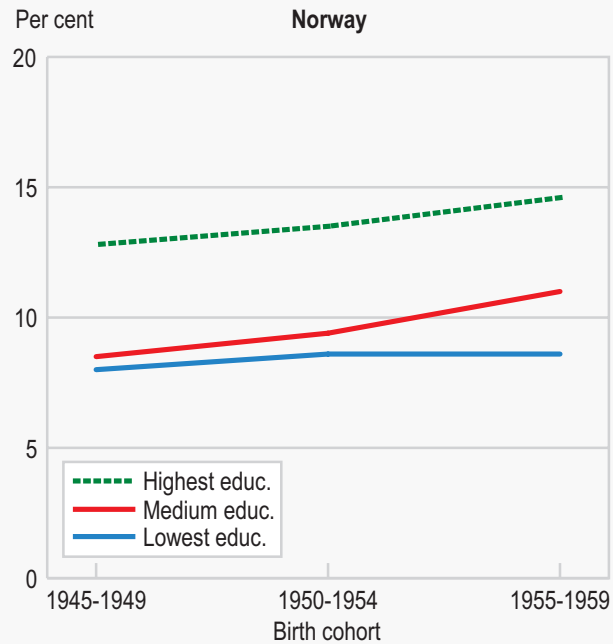
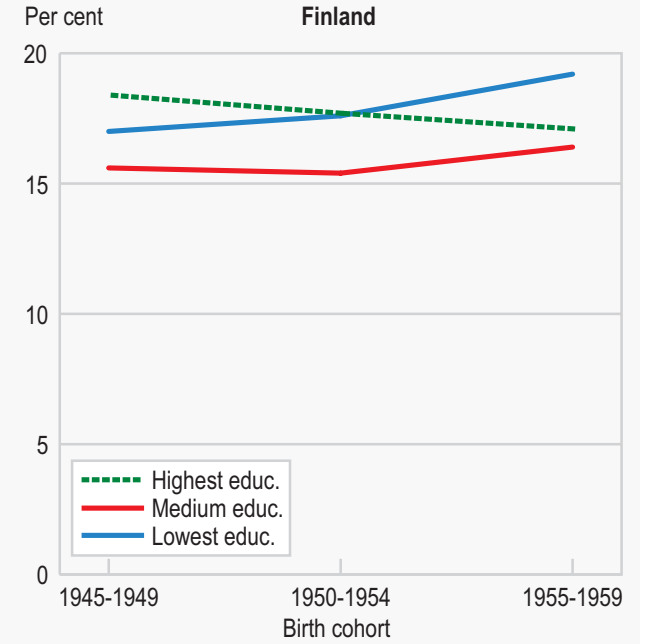
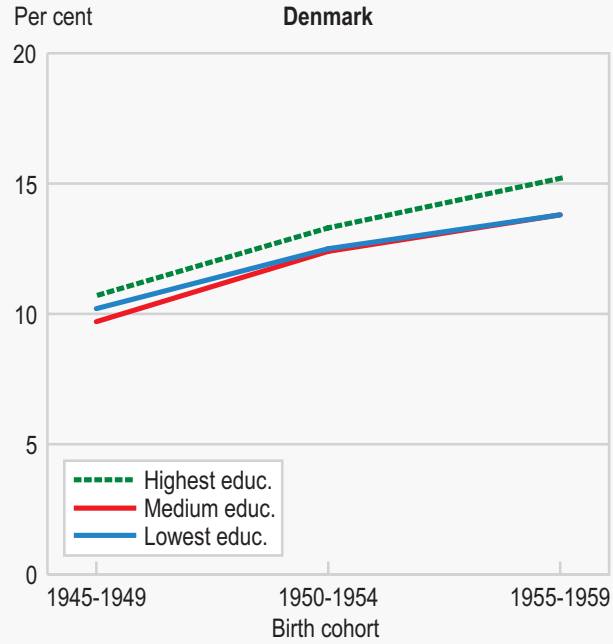
Median age at 1st birth

- by educational level at age 30, female cohorts 1945-1969



Childlessness

- at age 40
- by educational level
at age 30 , female
cohorts 1945-1969



Possible *direct* effects of specific policies

Sweden

- Speed premium (Hoem, Andersson, Oláh)
- Father's use of parental leave (Oláh, Duvander & Andersson)

Finland

- Extensions of parental leave (Rønsen)
- Home-care allowance (Vikat)

Norway

- Child care coverage (Kravdal, Rindfuss et al.)
- Extensions of parental leave? (Rønsen)
- Father's use of parental leave (Duvander, Lappegård & Andersson)
- Mother's use of cash-for-care benefit (Aasve & Lappegård)

Family policy – necessary, but not sufficient

- Sweden 1990s: Drop in TFR between 1992 and 1997 from 2.1 to 1.5
 - Sharp rise in unemployment. Young people and people with low education hit particularly hard
 - Cutbacks in the financial support to families
- Economic cycles and economic prospects clearly important
 - Poorer income prospects
 - Greater feeling of insecurity

Different policies – different fertility behaviour?

Finland 1990s: Also high unemployment, but fertility quite stable

- No cut-back in support to families
- Home-care allowance fully implemented
- Family policy less closely linked to prior employment activity (lower income replacement, higher minimum amount)

Norway: Few effects of unemployment in early 1990s and higher first-birth rates (whole period)

- Transitional benefit to lone parents
- High cash benefit at birth for non-working mothers
- Generous support for students who give birth

How sustainable is the Nordic model?

- A "gender equality deficit" in birth patterns?
 - Women in female-dominated professions in the public sector have higher fertility than women in male-dominated sectors
 - Selection of women with stronger family preferences into "family-friendly" occupations and part-time jobs?
 - Long parental leaves and generous family benefits fit better with work in such sectors?
- Fathers who work in the public sector take a larger share of the parental leave

Signs of a "gender-equality deficit" in Norway

- Increasing diversity in completed fertility
 - Increase in childless women and one-child mothers
 - Decrease in women with two children
 - Increase in higher order births
- Men's family formation
 - Strong increase in childlessness in younger cohorts
 - Socio-economic selection into fatherhood
 - Concentration of fatherhood (co-parentship with more than one woman)
- Employer attitudes
 - Negative reactions to active fatherhood against men in career jobs in private sector


Why worry about "gender equality light"?

- Positive aspects

- Increased economic autonomy
- Foothold in the labour market for part-time workers

- Pitfalls

- Continued gender segregation in the labour market
- Persisting gender wage gap

 Current fertility pattern not compatible with gender equality in the long run?

Challenges

- A more balanced sharing of the costs of social reproduction
 - Between women and men
 - Between the public and private sector

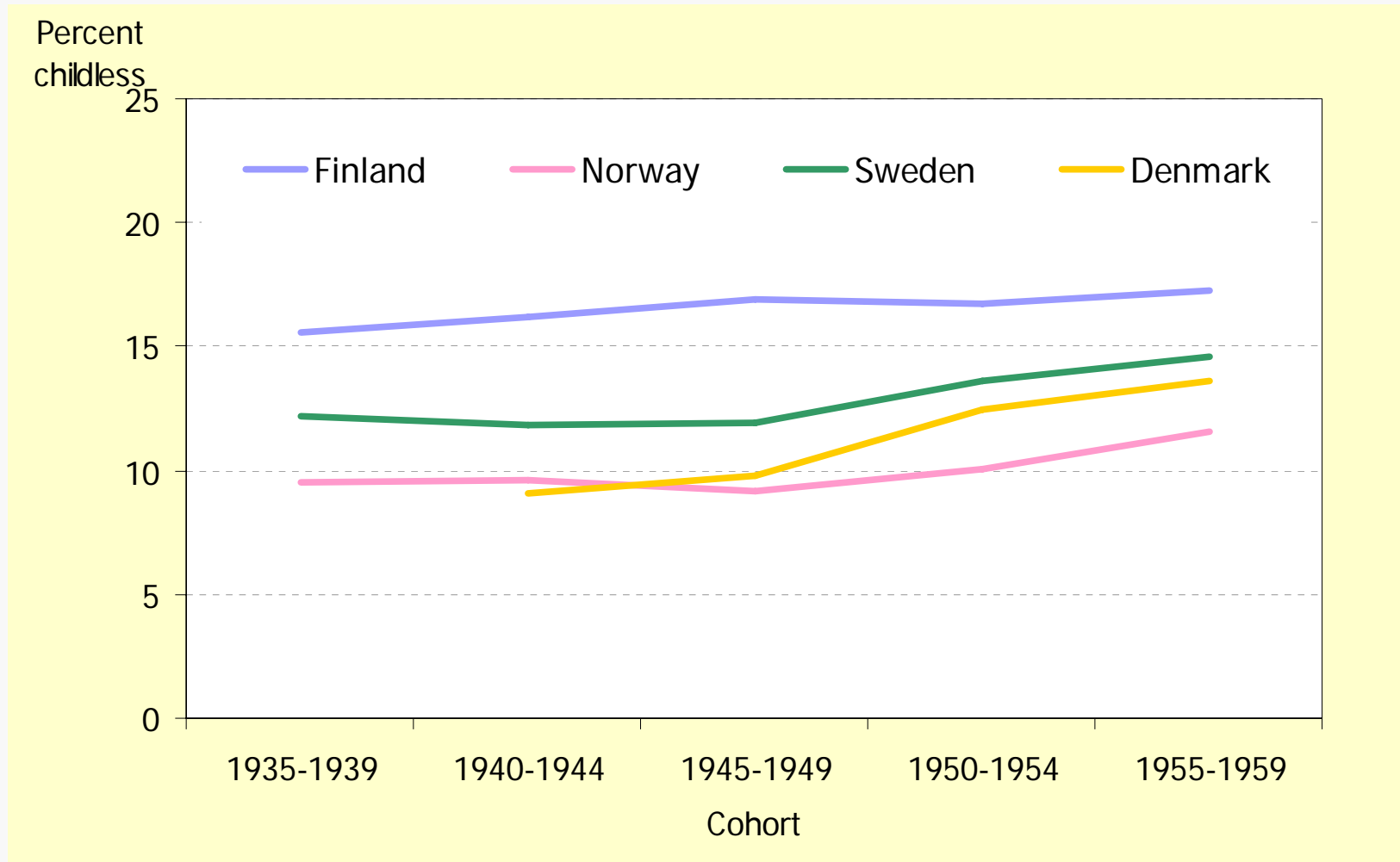
- Search for future sustainability should include issues related to the gender division of paid and unpaid work

- Need for stronger incentives and revision of policies?

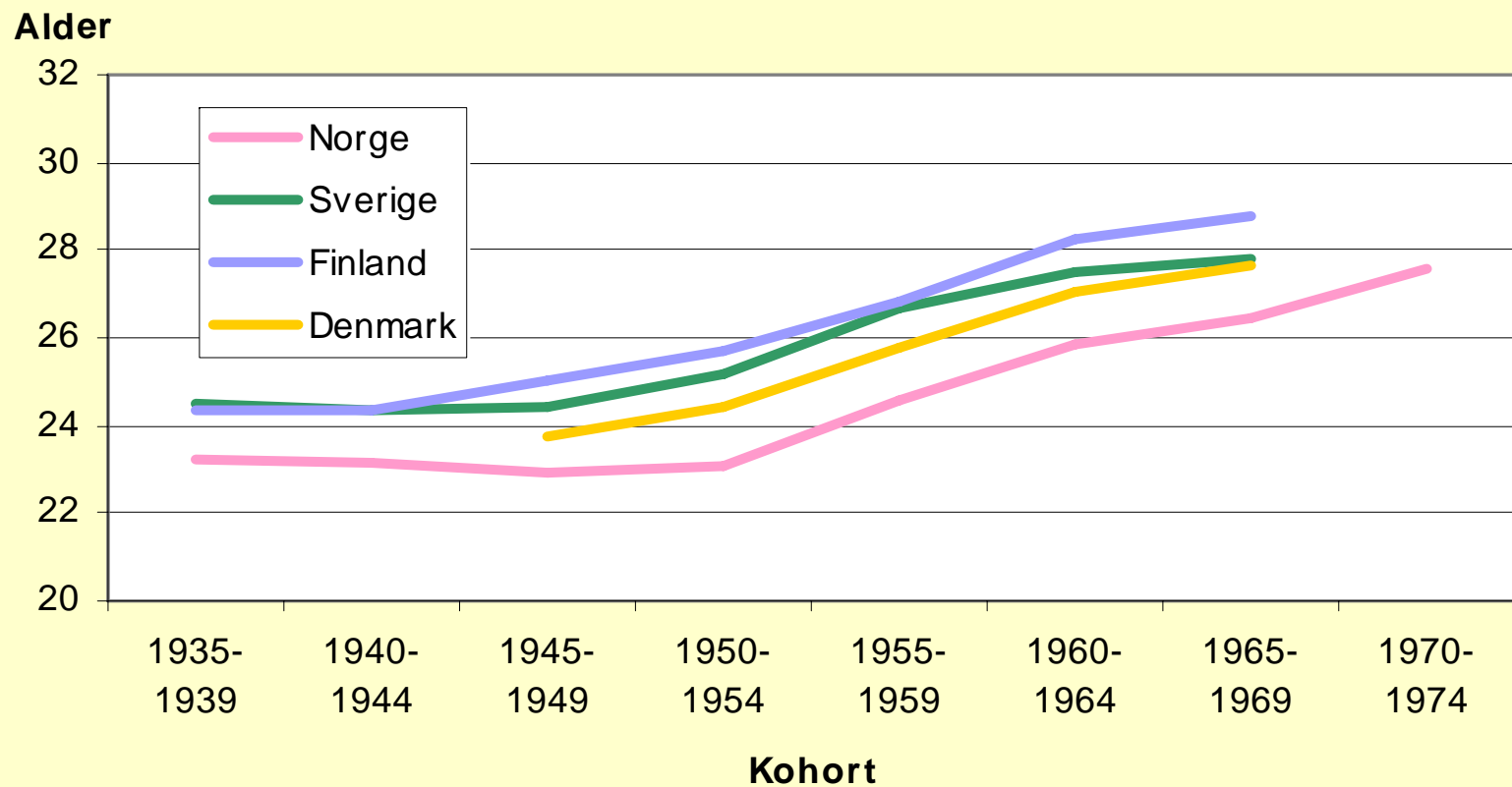


Thank you for your
attention

Proportion childless at age 40



Median age at first birth



Standardiserte førstefødselsrater 1971-2001

(barnløse kvinner 15-29 and 30-44 år)

