Is childbearing postponement ending?
An historical and cohort perspective

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Background

Postponement of childbearing key feature of fertility in developed countries in the 1970s-1990s

- Western societies – progressing fast in the 1970s-1990s
- Central and Eastern Europe – started in the 1990s, then progressing fast in Central Europe
- Period mean age at first birth surpassed 30 in some countries
- Fertility rates among teenage & young adult women reached extreme low levels

- How late can first births be postponed?
- Are the limits to postponement reached?
- Are there signs of fertility postponement coming to an end?
1) Data and methods

2) Cross-country analysis of cohort trends: Is childbearing postponement coming to an end?

3) Which factors driving the slow-down or ending of fertility postponement?

➢ Discussion and future outlook: Ending, stalling or continuing postponement?
Data & Methods

Methodology:

- Cohort measures: age-specific cohort fertility rates, cumulated cohort fertility rates by age
  - True reflection of childbearing postponement or advancement
  - Completed fertility not affected by changes in timing

- International comparative analysis:
  - 14 Western societies (Western Europe, Nordic countries, Southern Europe, US, Canada, Japan)
  - 11 former state-socialist countries in Central & Eastern Europe

Data sources:

- Human Fertility Database (fertility) and other (factors)
Cohort age patterns of childbearing

NETHERLANDS

UKRAINE
Comparing cumulated cohort fertility rates with *moving benchmark* cohorts
Comparing cumulated cohort fertility rates with *moving benchmark* cohorts
Changes in the cohort mean age at first birth

Netherlands CMAB40_1

Annual change of CMAB1 in years

Czech Republic CMAB40_1

Annual change of CMAB1 in years

Canada CMAB40_1

Annual change of CMAB1 in years

Russia CMAB40_1

Annual change of CMAB1 in years
Cohort cumulative fertility rates

WESTERN EUROPE: age 26 (C 1930-95)

Age 22 (C 1955-95)
Cohort cumulative fertility rates

CENTRAL EUROPE: age 26 (C 1930-95)

Age 22 (C 1955-95)
Why did childbearing postponement stall?

Western countries (cohorts born 1965/70 to 1985)

- Slowing expansion of higher education?
- Economic prosperity, more stable labour market conditions in the 1990s and 2000s
- Very low rates of early childbearing: not much scope for further declines in early childbearing
- Compositional effects: Persistently higher early fertility among migrants and ethnic minorities
- Gender equality & improved work-family balance in some countries
Why did childbearing postponement stall?

Central and Eastern Europe (cohorts born 1980+)

- Economic and labor market stabilisation since the late 1990s
- Economic growth and labour market expansion since 2000
- Early childbearing reached very low levels compared with the initial values
- The impact of family-friendly and pronatalist policies, better housing availability
- Widespread effective contraception prevalence
Higher education attainment slowdown?

WESTERN EUROPE: Share of women aged 25-29 with higher education attainment; cohorts born ca. 1943 – ca. 1988

Ambiguous results: Slow-down in the share with secondary+ edu among the early 1970s cohorts, but accelerating share with post-secondary edu

Source: Wittgenstein Centre Data Explorer Version 1.2.
High early fertility among migrant women?

NETHERLANDS:
Fertility rates per 1,000 women aged <25

AUSTRIA:
Fertility rates per 1,000 women aged <25

Source: CBS StatLine, Statistik Austria
Key findings

Continuing, stalling or ending fertility postponement?

- Broad stabilisation in fertility rates at younger ages among women born after 1965/1970 in Western countries and after 1980 in Central & Eastern Europe

- Cumulative cohort fertility rates below age 26 at very low levels (excl. East Europe and USA)

- A mixture of factors – difficult to pinpoint a dominant driver, but as a whole, a diminished potency for postponement

- The factors fueling postponement are (more or less) running out of steam
Future outlook

BUT: renewed trend towards gradual postponement in many Western countries among women born after 1985

- Especially in countries with historically higher early fertility
- Early fertility further declining among higher-fertility groups (migrant women and lower-educated women)
- Trend reversal for cohorts affected by recession 2008-2012
- NEW TRENDS: Possible role of social media, emergency contraception
  - Further childbearing postponement likely…
  - …but moderate