

No time to lose? Stable partnership as a prerequisite to childbearing across ages.

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Short abstract (250-300 words)

European countries are witnessing a rise in the age at parenthood, combined with a progressive decline in birth rates. People tend to wait to have children until they find the right partner. However, as women's reproductive capacity declines with age, older women may approach this requirement with more flexibility, potentially having children in shorter or less stable relationships, or without a partner. Specifically, 1) older single women may accelerate childbearing when entering a union; 2) older partnered women may end a relationship shortly after having a child; and 3) older women may be more likely to have children without a partner. This research explores this idea using longitudinal data from the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). By pooling different countries and time periods, this database allows cross-country comparisons and analyses over time. We use linear probability models to analyse the above aspects. Preliminary results indicate remarkable temporal and geographical variations in waiting time to childbearing by age. First, the probability of having a child quickly after entering a co-residential relationship has become more prevalent at older ages over time. Second, in countries where fertility is not so late, there is no clear age pattern of acceleration after entering a union. Conversely, in late-fertility countries, women appear to "rush" childbearing starting at age 30. It is only in countries where fertility is strongly delayed that older women tend to lower their partnership requirements for childbearing, possibly because they take stock of the constraints imposed by biological factors.

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