

Low fertility in Europe: Regional contrasts and policy responses

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Background: new challenges of low fertility

Low fertility perceived with mixed feelings

+ *Reflection of efficient control over reproduction*

+ *Women's empowerment*

+ *Parental resources invested into health, wellbeing, skills and education of the (fewer) children*

- **Worries about the consequences for societies and individuals: depopulation, accelerated aging, threat to national identity?**
- **Loneliness and limited care later in life?**

Debates about the causes of low fertility: structural conditions, economic & labour market factors vs cultural / ideational changes, gender inequalities

- Policy reactions: the rise of *pronatalism*

Background: the diversity of low fertility

Global scale:

- The disappearing distinction in fertility and fertility preferences between the middle income and the rich countries

Countries & broader regions: Europe and the developed world

- The diversity of low fertility: The “Great divergence” in fertility (Billari 2018)?
- The instability of period fertility: rapid and unexpected changes in fertility levels in many countries after 2010
- The continuity of a two-child family norm
- The long-term shift to a late parenthood and diverse family forms
- Diverse policy responses

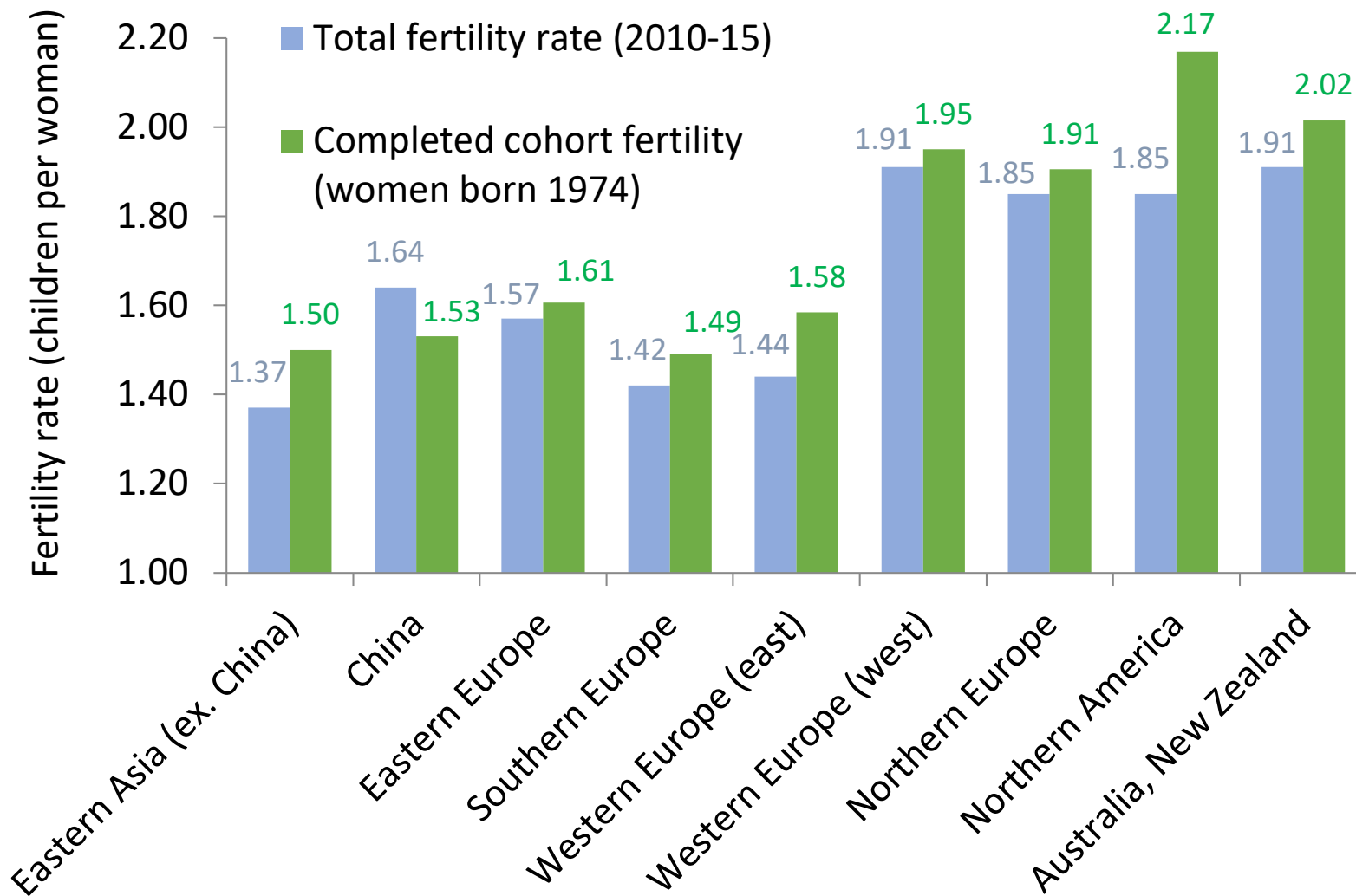
The new fertility divide?

A broad stabilisation in cohort fertility and childlessness in most countries (Myrskylä et al. 2013)

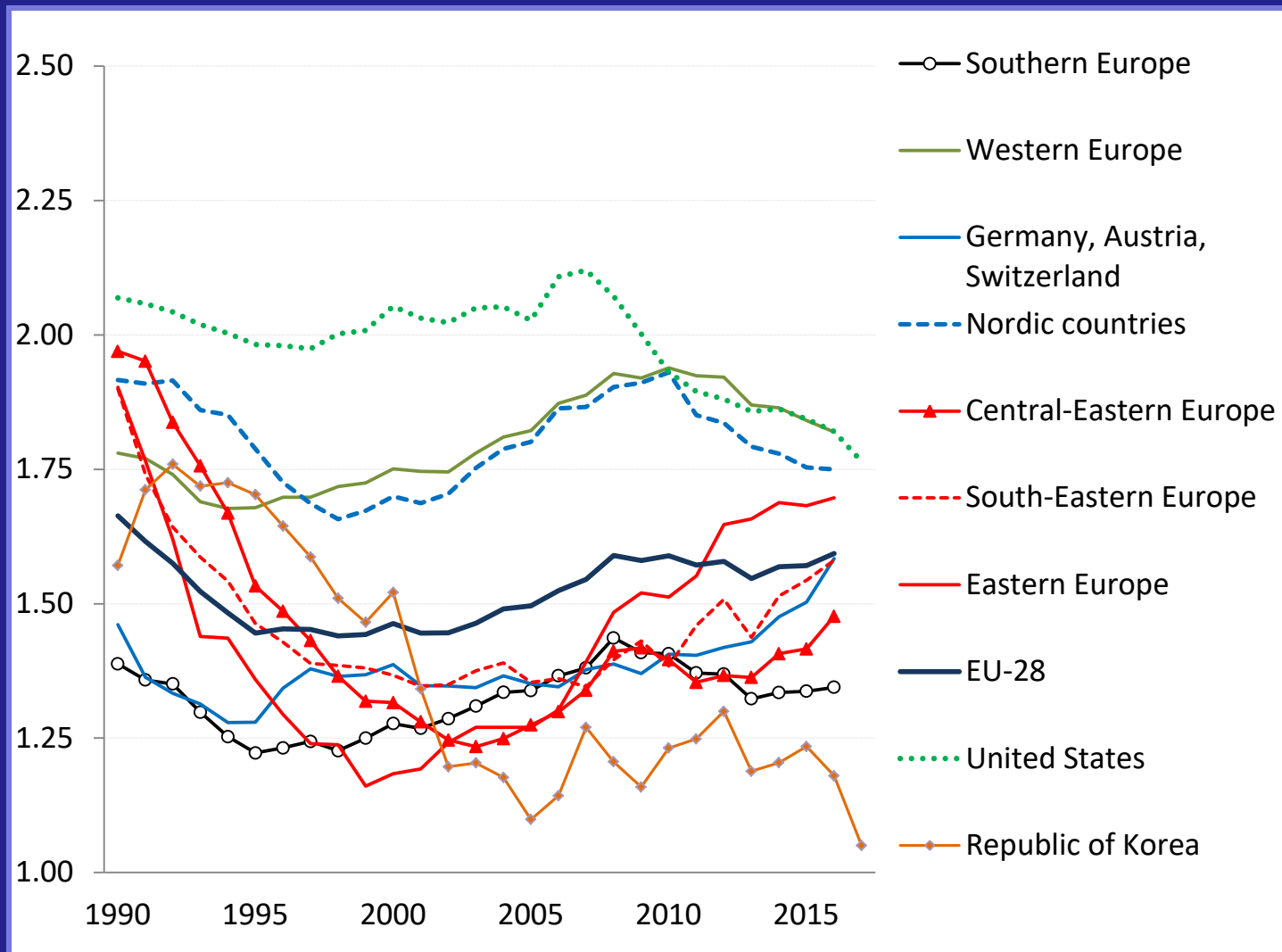
Regional differentiation: Very low fertility in East Asia, Southern, Central and Eastern Europe

- **McDonald (2006):** cultural/regional divide in fertility between countries; the role of policies and gender inequalities

Period TFR (2010-15) and completed cohort fertility; women born 1974

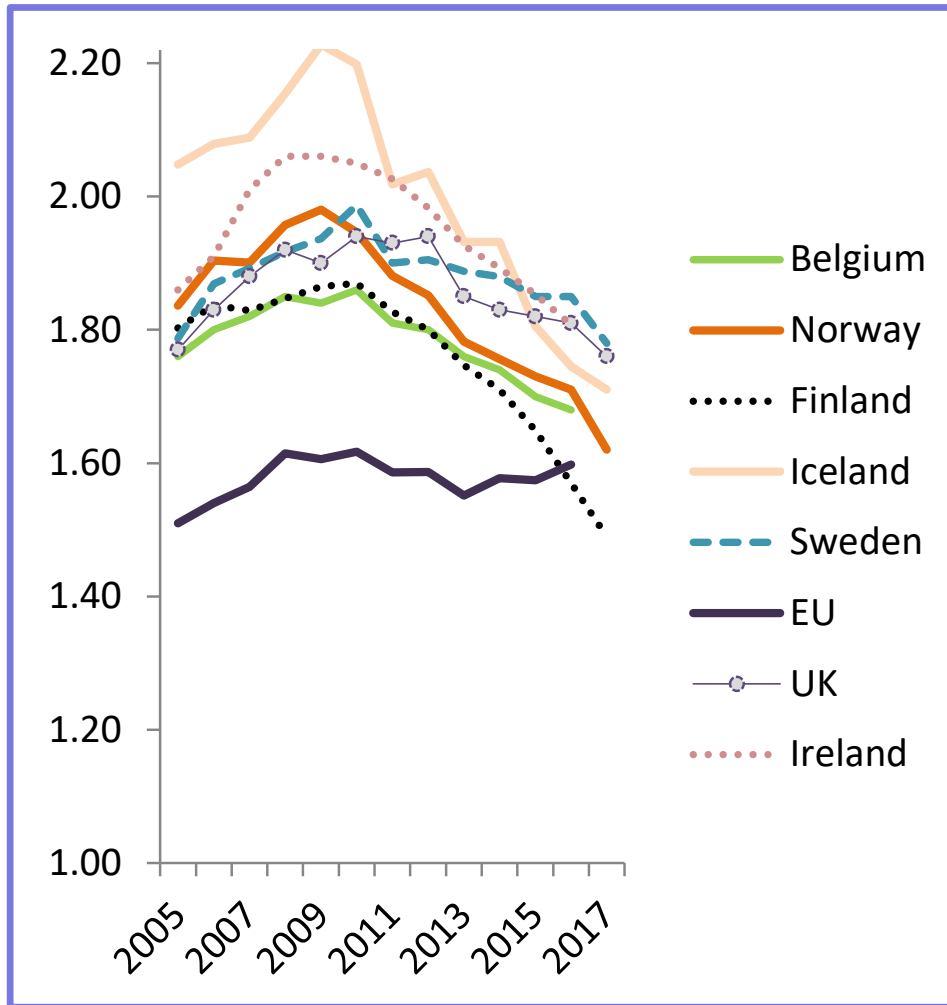


Period fertility rates: the end of the „Great divide“?



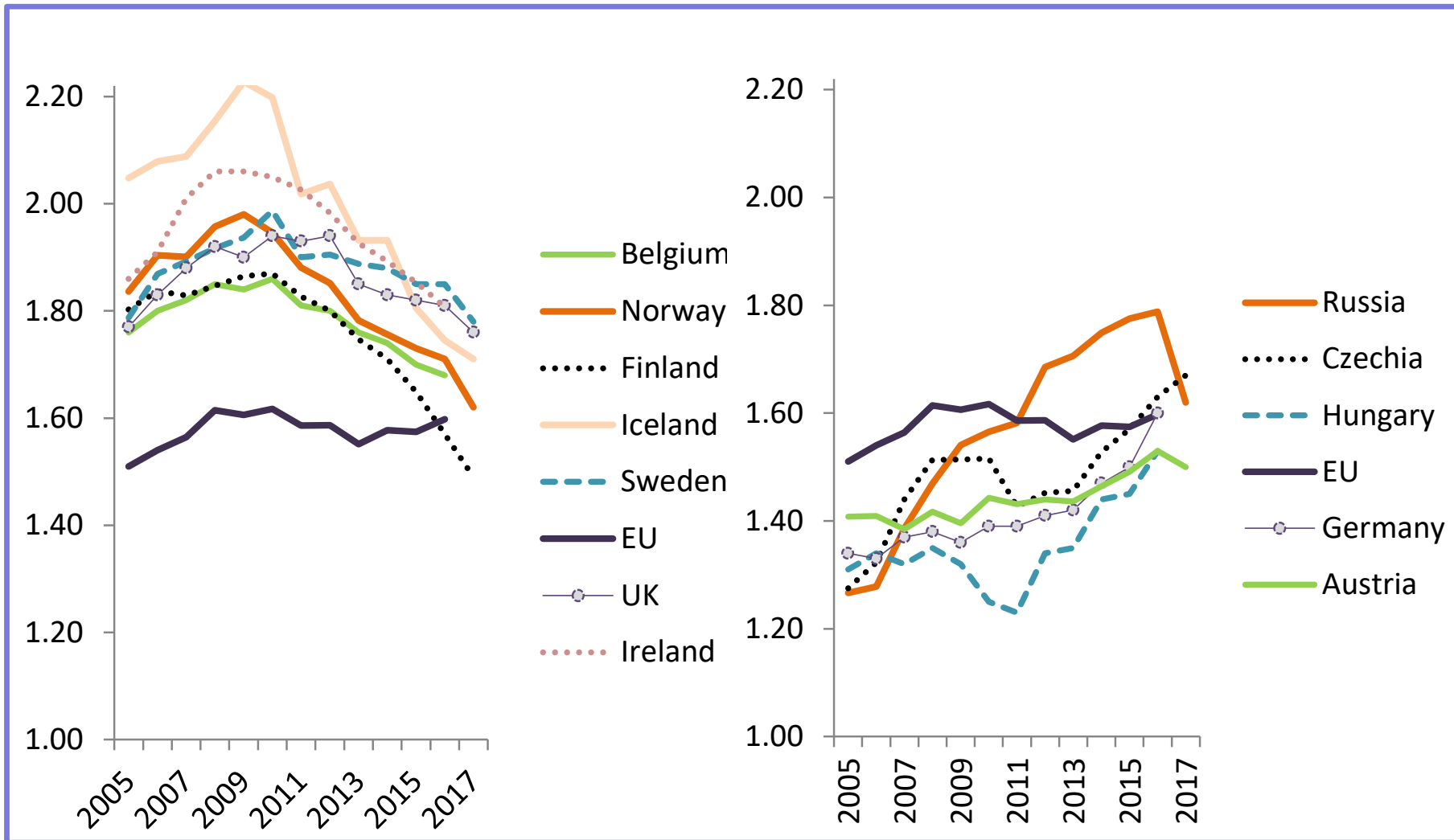
Period
TFR,
European
regions, US
and Korea,
1980-2016
or 2017

Contrasting period fertility trends in selected countries, 1980-2017



Source: Human Fertility Database, Council of Europe 2006, Eurostat, national statistical offices

Contrasting period fertility trends in selected countries, 1980-2017



Source: Human Fertility Database, Council of Europe 2006, Eurostat, national statistical offices

Instability in period fertility trends

- Modern contraception allows couples to react to changing period conditions, economic and labour market trends, family policies, expanding education and other factors
- Planned or intended births can be – to some extent –flexibly “postponed”, “advanced” or “given up”
- Cohort fertility shows much more stability

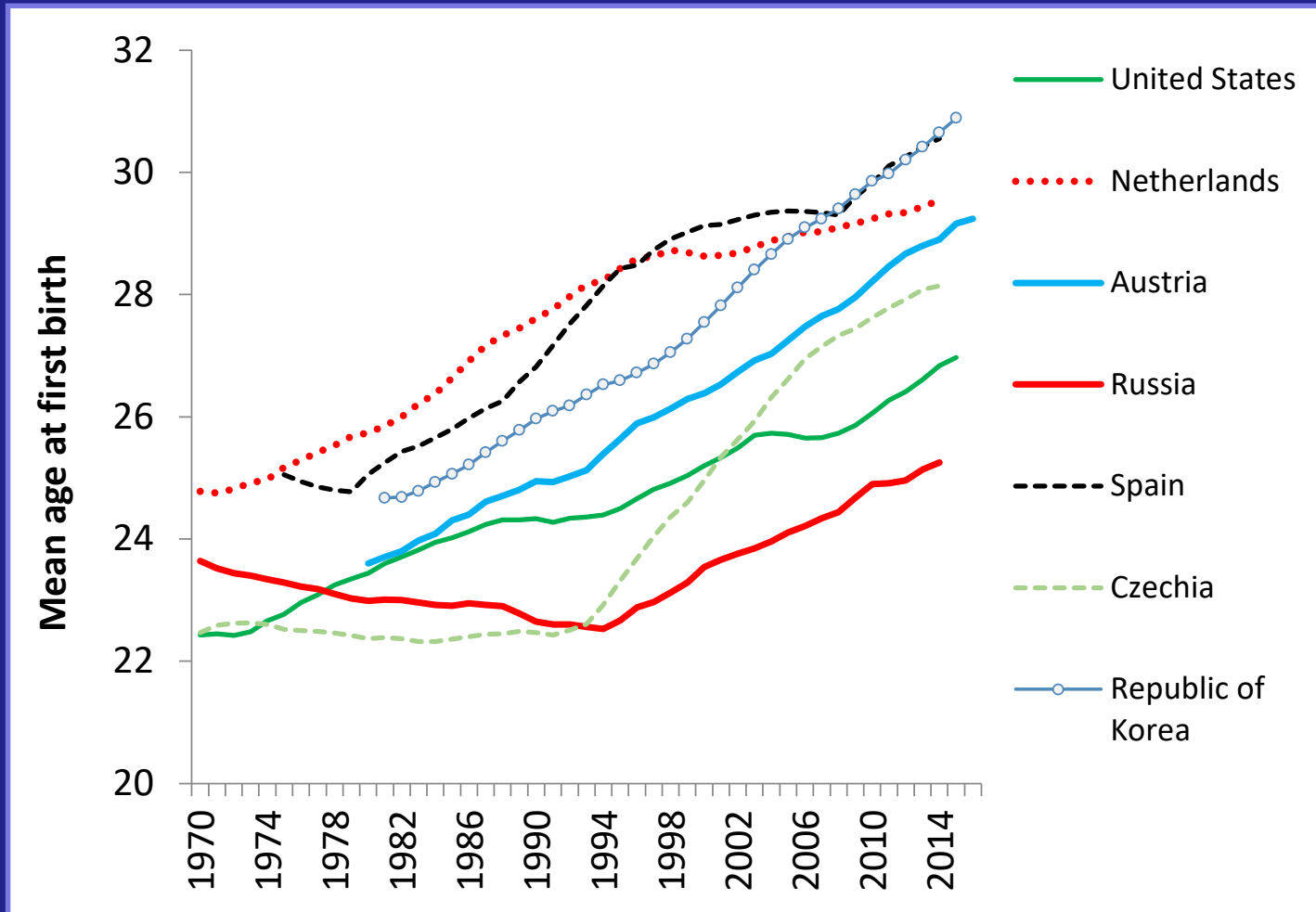
What explains the unexpected fertility declines?

Was the decline in TFR driven mainly by the shift in fertility timing?

A renewed postponement of childbearing: continuing trend post-recession

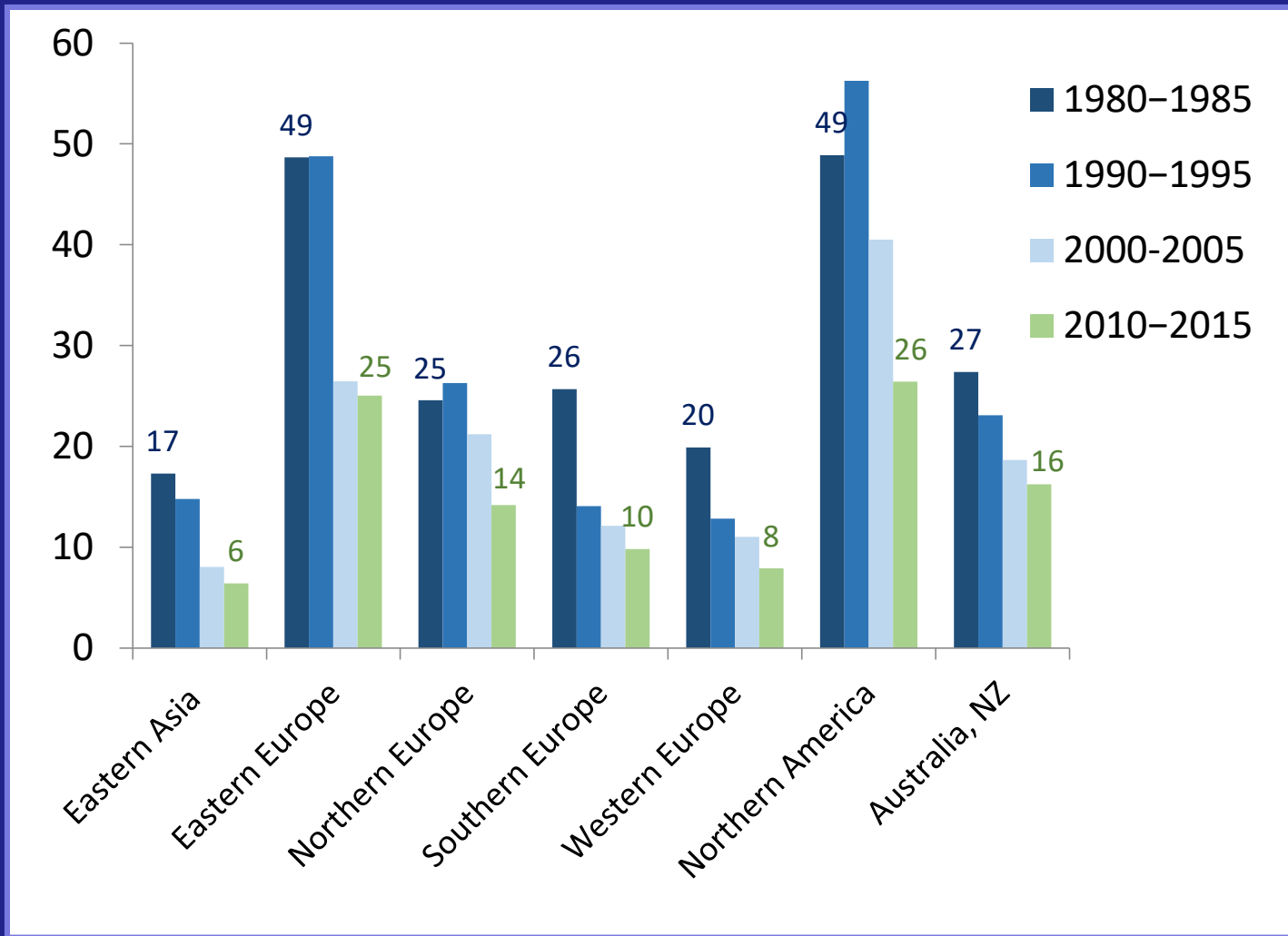
- Fertility declines especially strong among young women below age 25
- Fertility decline also among migrant women
- Later onset of dating and sexual activity? (Twenge 2017 for the US)

The continuing postponement of first births



Mean age at first birth, selected European countries, South Korea and the US, 1970-2016

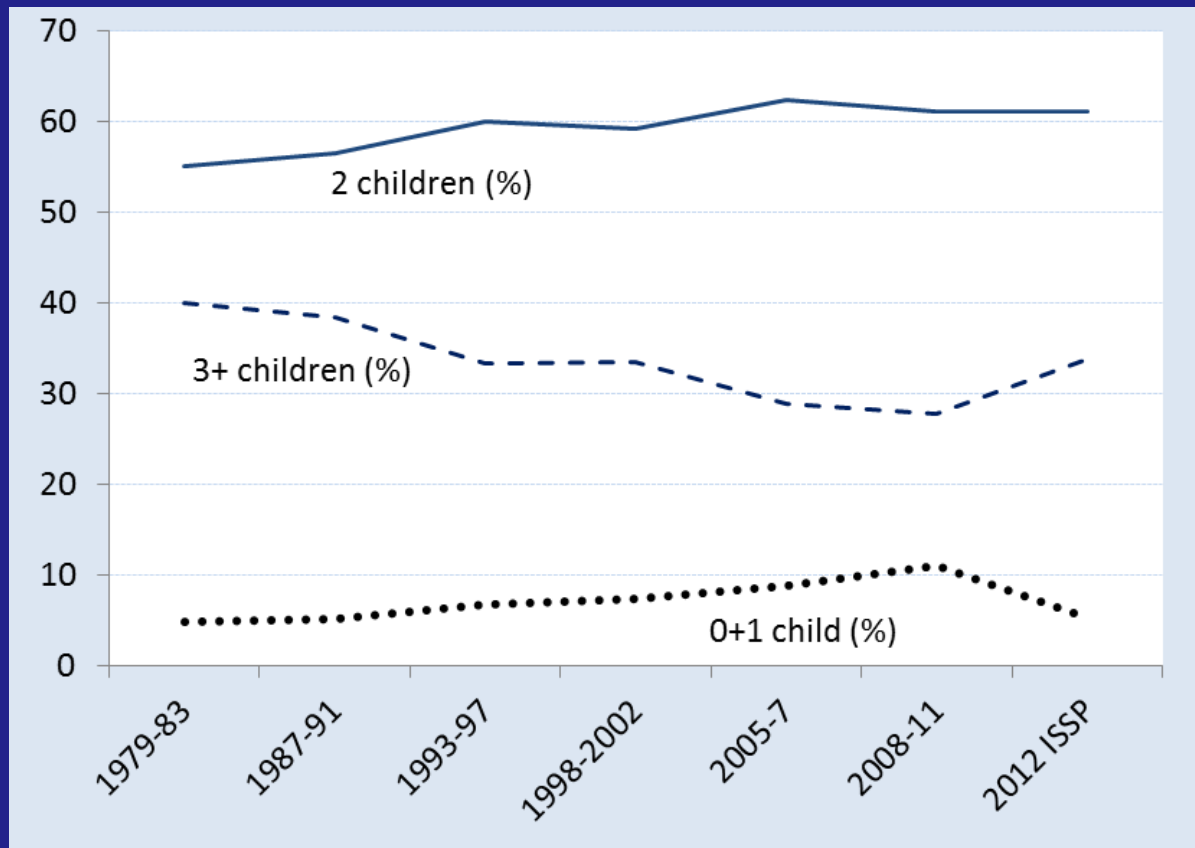
Early childbearing out of fashion



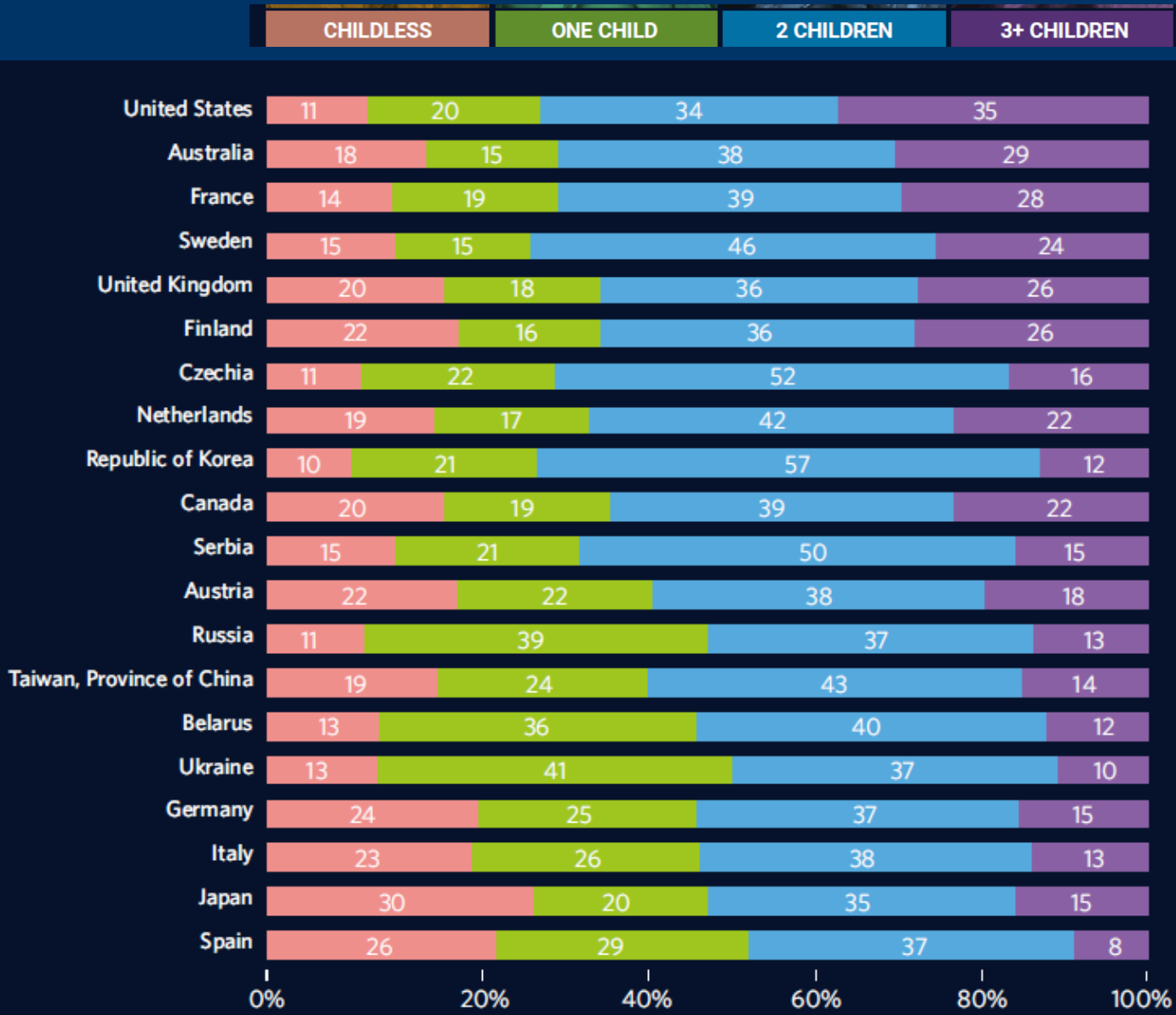
Births per
1,000
women
aged 15-19,
1980-2015

Stability in fertility ideals and preferences

Ideal family size in Europe: mean % distribution across analysed countries



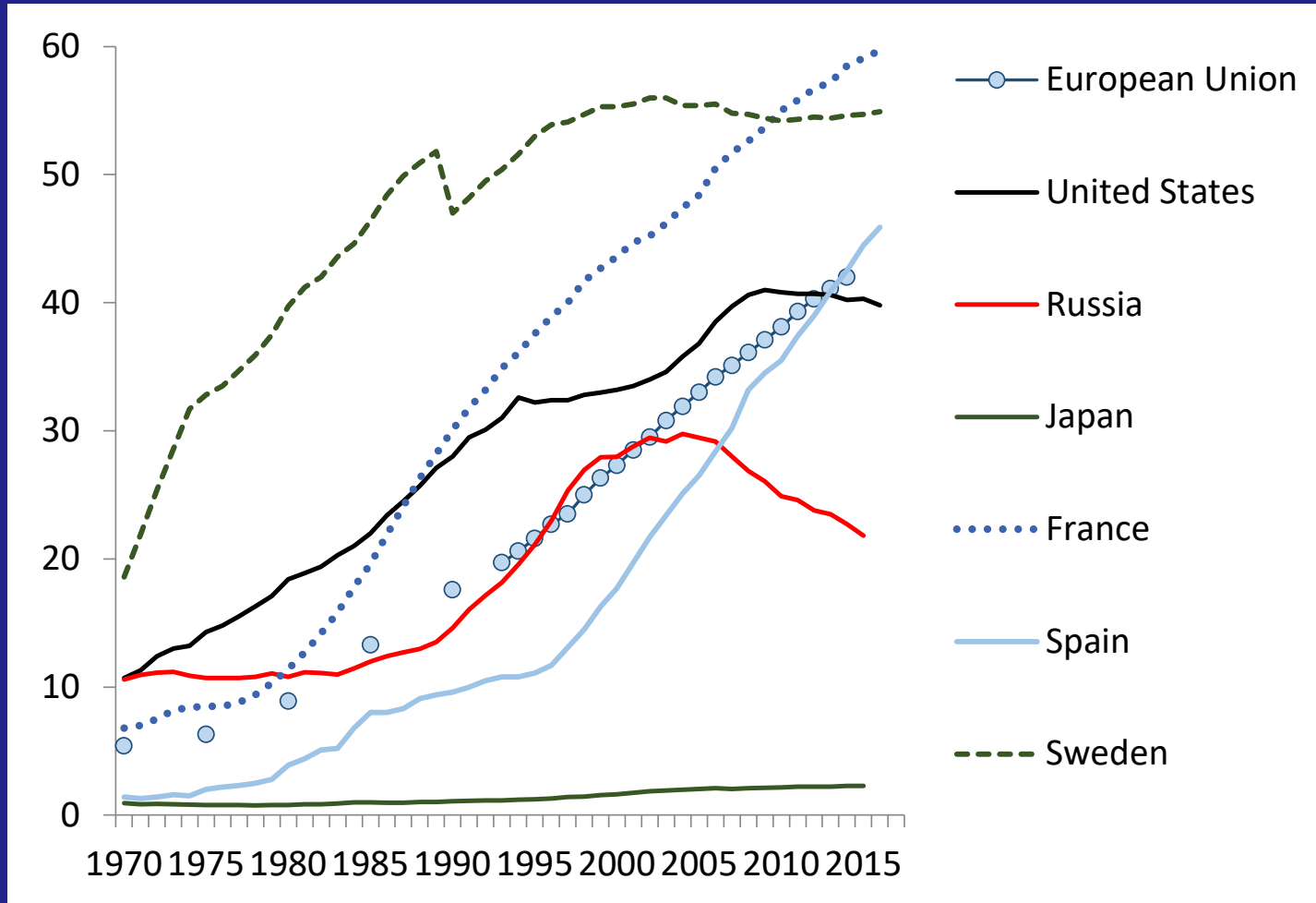
Source: Sobotka, T. and E. Beaujouan. 2014. Two Is best? The persistence of a two-child family ideal in Europe. *Population and Development Review*, 40(3), pp.391-419.



Family size distribution, women born 1974 (in %)

Source: State of the World Population 2018, Figure 32

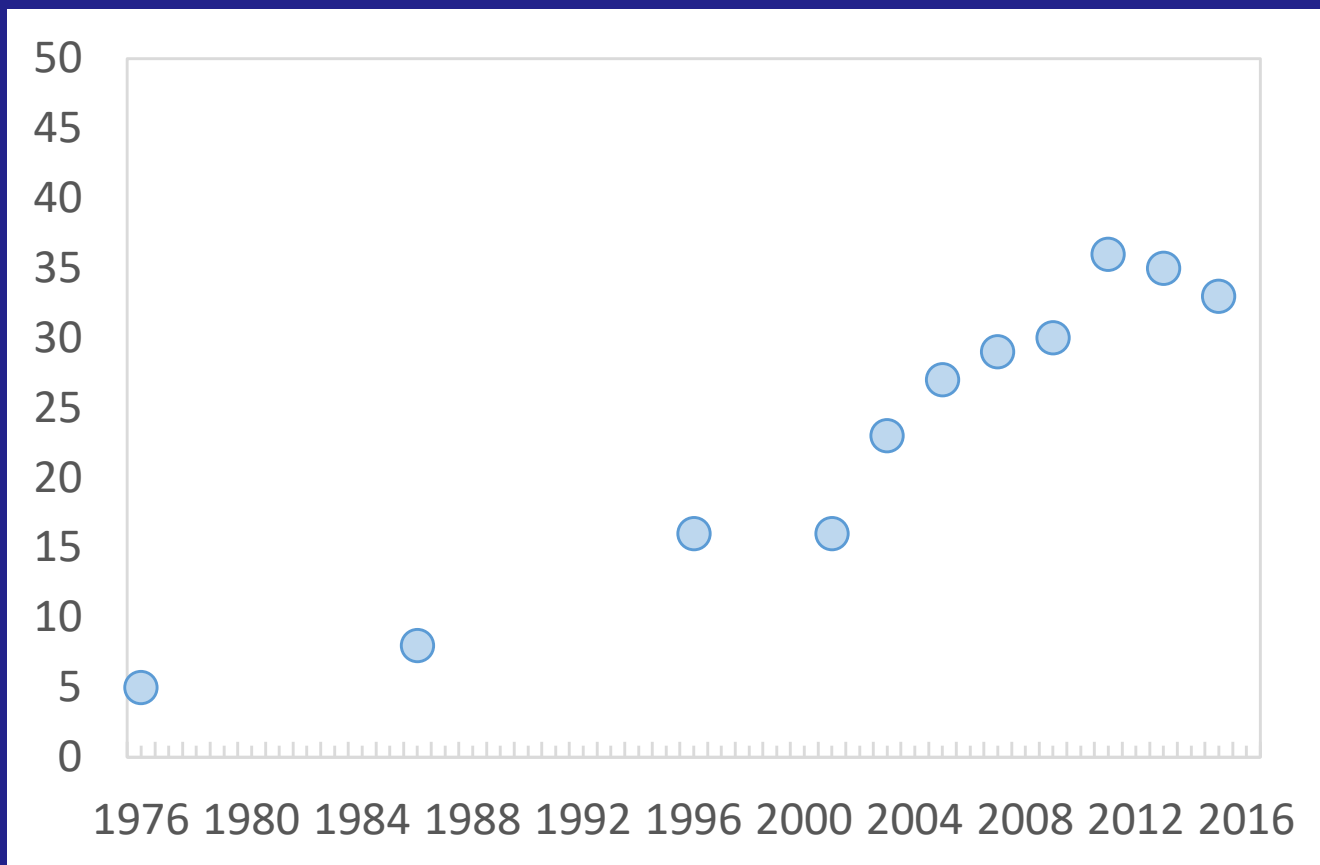
Shifting childbearing away from marriage: contrasting trends



Percentage of births outside marriage

Policy concerns: the global rise of pronatalism

Number of countries that aim to increase their fertility rate, out of 50 developed low-fertility countries globally

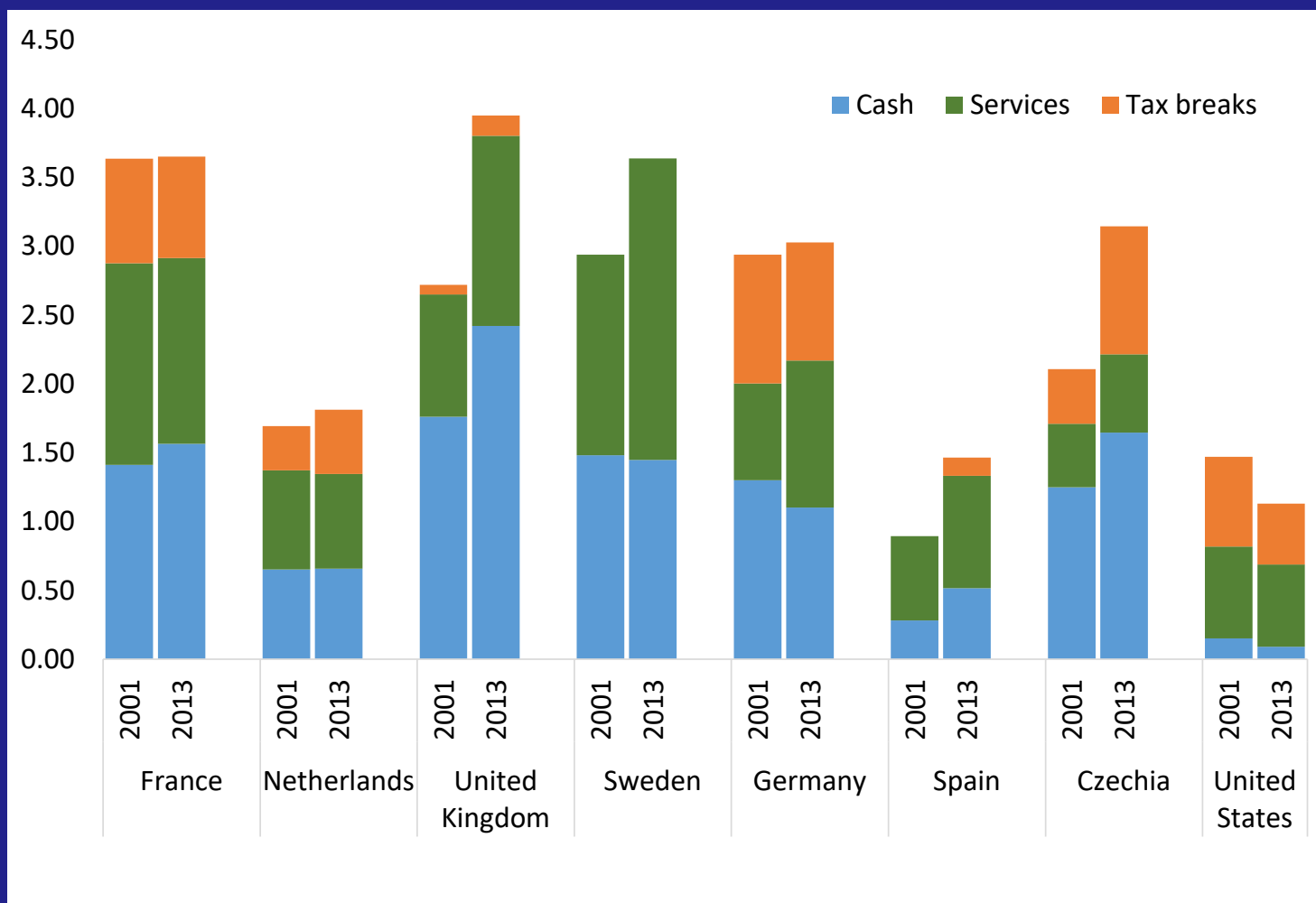


*UN World
Population
Policies
Database,
1976-2015*

Key family policy trends

- Better paid and more flexible parental leave (Czechia, Austria, Germany, Estonia)
- Provision of paternal leave (short) and bonus “daddy months” during parental leave (Austria)
- Expansion of public childcare (Germany)
- Financial incentives, especially for larger families (maternal capital in Russia, Poland, Hungary)
- Tax deductions
- Support to part-time work and flexible working conditions (Netherlands, Germany)
- Widening provision of assisted reproduction

Diversity in family policy support and spending (public spending in % of GDP)



Family policy checklist

- A need for comprehensive, compatible, and stable policies
- Range of support for parents important: Allowing different options to combine work, leisure, childbearing
- Respect for reproductive rights (non-coercive policies) and reflecting diversity in individual preferences
- Reflecting diversity in family forms
- Broader concept of reproductive rights includes policies supporting men and women in their decision to have kids
- Wider context matters: role of economic uncertainty, labour market stability, gender inequality, housing and resources