

## CHAPTER 5

# PARTNERSHIP, CHILDBEARING AND PARENTING: TRENDS OF THE 1990S

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### Introduction

The patterns of partnership formation and dissolution, childbearing and parenting in the UNECE during the 1990s are often heterogeneous, with fundamental differences between nations. However, if we want to characterise the unifying direction, we can use a single keyword: *postponement*. In general, with some exceptions, key demographic events, and more specifically events leading to the formation of new households and families, have been increasingly postponed in the lives of women and men. In the new millennium, leaving the parental home, forming a new union, getting married and becoming a parent are being experienced on average later than ever before. Although there is a convergence across the region in terms of postponing key demographic transitions in early adulthood, some countries (mostly in Southern Europe) have been characterised by extreme levels of postponement, experiencing the so-called *latest-late* pattern of transition to adulthood.

This general trend towards postponement had been foreseen by scholars who have talked of the existence of a *Second Demographic Transition* pervading demographic change; a transition which started in Northern Europe and has diffused to the whole area of industrialised countries. Other authors have focused more specifically on the timing of events and have spoken of a *postponement transition*, which is likely to be irreversible. Some of the events, like the transition to motherhood, have been postponed to ages that have never been observed in the past, and becoming a mother above age 40 is now an issue. Within reproductive ages, the general trend towards postponement is being accompanied by an increasing *de-standardisation* of life courses, with varying speeds of change in different cultures.

Nevertheless, diversity is still pervading fertility and family patterns in the UNECE region: there are marked differences between nations in terms of childbearing and parenting. The number of children per couple, although at below replacement levels in almost all countries, has begun fluctuating, generally around relatively low levels,

though in some countries not far below the replacement level. In other countries, fertility has reached levels that can be defined as very low, i.e. below 1.5 children per woman. During the 1990s, lowest-low fertility - below 1.3 children per woman - has emerged in a number of countries of Southern, Central and Eastern Europe. The *emergence of lowest-low fertility* is thus one of the most significant novelties of the 1990s in the UNECE area. This new phenomenon has also been accompanied by the *reversal* of several well-established inter-country relationships between fertility levels and related behaviour: labour force participation rates for women are no longer negatively correlated with total fertility rates, while the correlation between marriage indicators and total fertility is either weakening or reversing. *Adolescent childbearing is decreasing in the whole area*, but it still exhibits great differences between countries.

The role and prevalence of cohabitation is still remarkably dissimilar among countries, as is the link between partnership form and fertility. During the 1990s, the proportion of extra-marital births to all births increased in virtually all UNECE countries. In terms of partnership dissolution, levels of divorce rates are still very different across countries, but the general trend is towards *less stable unions*. As a consequence, *unions of higher order have become more widespread* in women's and men's lives. In addition, the divorce rate is no longer inversely correlated with total fertility at a cross-country level. The differences in the types of partnerships, and in dissolution rates, translate to significant heterogeneity in parenting experiences and in the lives of children, who experience living with their parents in different ways across countries. As an example, the length of parenting itself is markedly different from one country to another according to the years spent by young adults in their parental home.

Several 'families' of explanations can be used to discuss trends and differences. At the macro level, *economic trends and socio-economic policies* have often changed during the 1990s, sometimes in an unpredictable way. After the fall of socialist regimes at the beginning of the decade, *institutional settings* - for instance the main features of the welfare state - have become relatively

stable, though with marked exceptions in areas of conflict; institutional heterogeneity may explain significant international differences in behaviour. *Long-term, stable cultural factors* also contribute to reinforcing differences which then determine the path followed by different societies, even when they follow common trends. However, *ideational change* may also affect demographic change in the shorter run, as in the developments of the Second Demographic Transition. These societal-level dynamics interact with micro-level factors which determine international differences and trends in behaviour.

Micro-level factors also underpin trends in partnering, childbearing and parenting behaviour. What is most relevant for an international perspective are the *micro-macro interactions*: factors at the micro (individual or household) level have a potentially different impact on behaviour within different macro contexts. Equality in *gender* relationships - for instance, in the labour market (at the macro level) as well as in the household (at the micro level) - has an important role in shaping family behaviour. The influence of *economic factors* at the micro level (such as income, economic security and housing circumstances) is buffered by the welfare state, which varies markedly from one country to another. The opportunity cost of time dedicated to the family, and the quality and quantity of time spent parenting within a family, are also affected by the interaction between micro- and macro-level opportunities and constraints. Social and economic policies may vary over time within a society and also vary in their impact on different societal strata. For these reasons, for almost no micro-level factor is it possible to assess its 'true' role in shaping partnering, childbearing and parenting, without taking the macro-level situation into account. Social interactions, in addition, contribute to maintaining the persistent diversity of behaviour between countries, even when the original differences have been removed.

This background paper is structured as follows. Section 2 deals with the situation and trends in the UNECE region during the 1990s for partnership formation and dissolution, childbearing, and parenting.<sup>1</sup> Reference to comparative data is a crucial ingredient for this section, with the Fertility and Family Surveys project being an important new comparative data source for the decade (although most surveys of this series took place too early to track the trends during the 1990s).<sup>2</sup> In section

3 we selectively review the literature which aims to explain the trends and differences outlined in section 2, with an emphasis on the different schools of thought existing in the literature. Section 4 contains an outlook for the future.

## Situation and trends in the UNECE region during the 1990s

### Partnership formation in an era of spreading cohabitation and the emergence of 'latest late' transition to adulthood

At the beginning of the third millennium, marriage is no longer as central to the formation of co-residential and long-term partnerships as it was in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is undoubtedly a consequence of ideational change, with the relaxation of social norms pushing young adults towards marriage. Although marriage is still experienced by the vast majority of individuals living in the UNECE region at some stage during their life, in most countries it is less and less common to experience marriage without premarital cohabitation. Moreover, in several countries, being married is no longer seen as a precondition for becoming a parent.

We first of all focus on partnership formation during early adulthood. Partnership formation is indeed a crucial point in the process of transition to adulthood, and in general it is being increasingly postponed. Is this part of the general shift of the transition to adulthood towards ages that were considered as 'late' in the past, to a so-called *latest late* pattern of transition to adulthood (Billari et al., 2002)?

When we wish to study the timing of union formation, we have access to the official statistics for marriages, but data on cohabitation is not yet provided in official comparative statistics (United Nations, 2002). In table 1, we report the mean age for women at first marriage in 1980, 1990 and 2000 for countries belonging to the Council of Europe, plus Canada and the United States. The postponement of first marriage is clearly visible in the 1990s for all UNECE countries. In 1980, in most countries, first marriage was experienced on average before age 25 for women: only a few exceptions existed. This pattern completely changed in the next 20 years: by 2000, in only a small minority of countries is the mean age at first marriage lower than 25. Later (and less frequent) marriage has become the rule in the Nordic countries, following their unique pattern. Late marriage has also spread in all Western European countries. Within Europe, as far as East-West differentials are concerned, the 'Hajnal' line (Hajnal, 1965) seems to still hold its separation power. To the east of this imaginary

<sup>1</sup> Given the scope of this paper, we focus on nations as the relevant macro-level unit. Although it is clear that in many specific situations the choice of the national level for both describing trends and explaining behaviour is not adequate, such a focus remains the most straightforward in terms of information available and usefulness when studying a large group of countries and the changes in their cross-country relationships over a period of time.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper we generally focus on the experience of women. This choice was only affected by the desire to be concise and to use the best and most relevant statistical sources, in order to give an overview of the

complex issues. When trends for men and women are different, or gender interactions need to be discussed, then we use data on both genders.

TABLE 1  
Mean age at first marriage (women)

	1980	1990	2000
Albania <sup>a</sup>	22.2	23.2	23.5
Armenia	..	22.4	23.1
Austria	23.2	24.9	27.2
Azerbaijan	..	24.0	23.7
Belarus	22.9	22.0	22.6
Belgium	22.2	24.2	26.3
Bosnia and Herzegovina	22.0	23.3	..
Bulgaria	21.3	21.4	24.1
Canada	23.4	26.0	27.6
Croatia	22.1	23.1	25.3
Cyprus	23.7	24.1	26.4
Czech Republic	21.5	21.6	24.5
Denmark	24.6	27.6	29.5
Estonia	22.6	22.5	24.8
Finland	24.3	26.0	28.0
France <sup>a</sup>	23.0	25.6	27.8
Georgia	26.1	23.5	24.6
Germany	22.9	25.2	27.0
Germany - former GDR	21.8	23.3	..
Germany - former FRG	23.3	25.7	..
Greece <sup>a</sup>	23.3	24.6	26.6
Hungary	21.2	21.9	24.6
Iceland	23.7	26.7	29.9
Ireland	24.6	26.6	..
Israel	22.4	23.9	..
Italy <sup>a</sup>	23.8	25.5	27.0
Kazakhstan <sup>b</sup>	22.9	22.4	23.3
Kyrgyzstan <sup>c</sup>	22.7	22.4	22.9
Latvia	22.8	22.3	24.5
Liechtenstein	25.6	..	..
Lithuania	23.0	22.3	23.5
Luxembourg	23.0	25.3	27.1
Malta	24.7	..	..
Netherlands	23.2	25.9	27.8
Norway	23.5	26.2	28.2
Poland	22.7	22.6	23.9
Portugal	23.2	23.9	25.3
Republic of Moldova	25.6	22.3	21.5
Romania	21.5	22.0	23.4
Russian Federation	22.4	21.9	..
San Marino <sup>a</sup>	24.1	27.1	28.4
Serbia and Montenegro	22.5	23.4	25.0
Slovakia	21.9	21.9	24.0
Slovenia	22.5	23.7	26.7
Spain	23.4	25.3	27.8
Sweden	26.0	27.5	30.2
Switzerland	25.0	26.8	27.9
Tajikistan <sup>d</sup>	..	21.8	..
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	22.3	22.6	23.5
Turkey	20.7	21.5	22.3
Ukraine	..	..	..
United Kingdom	23.0	25.0	27.2
United States <sup>e</sup>	24.1	25.1	26.6
Uzbekistan <sup>d</sup>	22.8	21.6	..

Source: Council of Europe (2002), UN (2002), UNECE Gender Statistics Database, UNECE/PAU Demographic Database, Schoen and Standish (2001).

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> Last figure is for 1999.

<sup>b</sup> Second figure is for 1995.

<sup>c</sup> First figure is for 1982; last for 1998.

<sup>d</sup> Second figure is for 1991.

<sup>e</sup> Second figure is for 1988; last for 1995.

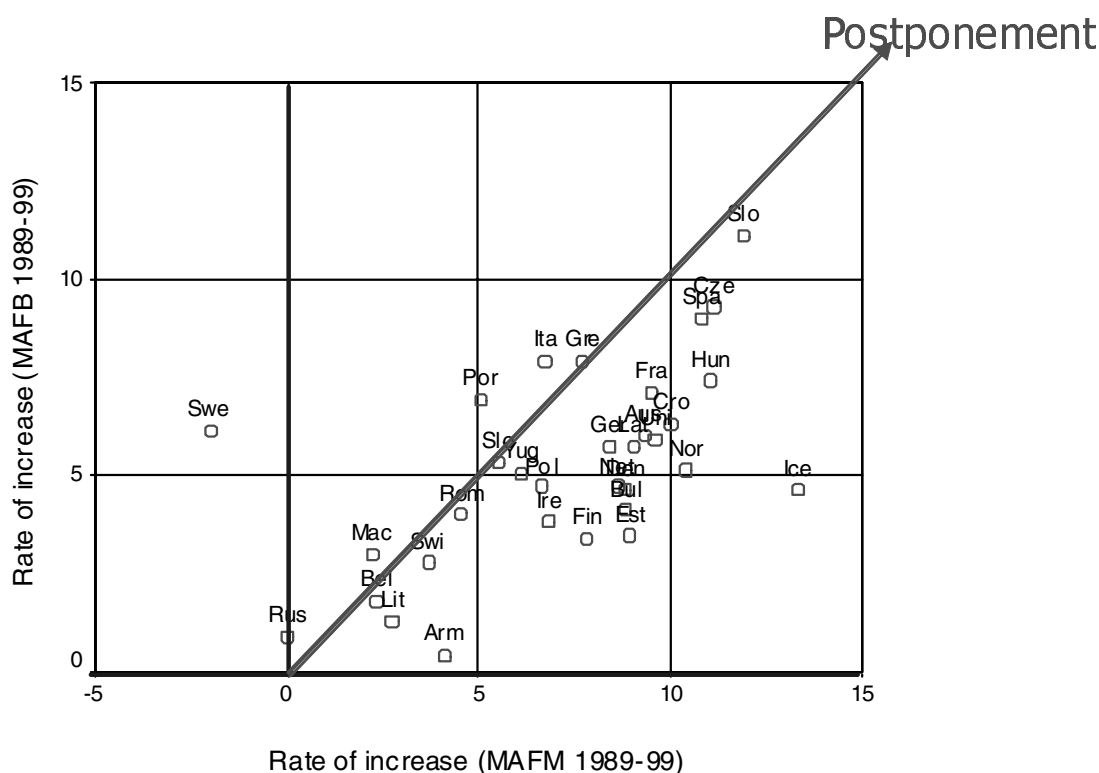
line connecting Saint Petersburg and Trieste, earlier and more universal marriage still prevails (Monnier and Rychtarikova, 1992), though perhaps it could be refined as the 'Philipov' line (an imaginary line connecting St Petersburg with Dubrovnik) (Philipov, 2001). Central European countries all occupy intermediate positions and some of them (Croatia and Slovenia) are clustered with the West. The postponement of marriage is accompanied, as we shall see in detail below, by a postponement of first births - although the links between marriage and fertility show some surprising trends, which we shall discuss later in Section 3. In figure 1 we plot the increase in mean age at first marriage and at first birth during the 1990s in the countries of the Council of Europe; the postponement of first marriage (on the horizontal axis) is usually stronger than the postponement of first births, with only Sweden and the Russian Federation as exceptions.<sup>3</sup>

The postponement of marriage is part of a more general increase in postponement in the transition to adulthood that is not likely to be reversed in the near future. The concept of a 'postponement transition' has been discussed for fertility by Kohler et al. (2002) who present the idea that the pace of postponement of first birth develops in a similar manner in different countries even if the postponement starts in different years. Mamolo (2004), in analysing European countries, defines the year of onset of the postponement transition for first marriage similarly to Kohler et al., as the first year of three consecutive years during which the mean age at first marriage increases by more than 0.2 years (figure 2). After the onset of postponement, the pattern is similar for almost all countries, although with some exceptions, e.g. Serbia and Montenegro and Croatia. The postponement of marriage strongly influences period measures of the quantum of marriage, such as the total first marriage rate, TFMR (table 2): these measures are simultaneously depressed by the lower lifetime probability of ever marrying and the postponement of marriage. For the same reason, during periods when marriage timing becomes earlier, TFMRs may reach levels higher than 100 per cent. Looking at cohort data can give us better insights on the actual prevalence of union formation at different ages.

If we use data from a targeted comparative survey project like the series of Fertility and Family Surveys (FFS) coordinated by the UNECE, it is possible to look at more detailed data for cohorts. Before doing this, we should alert the reader to the fact that the FFS is a set of retrospective surveys, mostly carried on during the first half of the 1990s. The FFS thus provides retrospective information on the period before the 1990s and cross-sectional information for the 1990s. Most of the changes

<sup>3</sup> Similar analyses on a wider range of indicators related to fertility and partnership in Western and Eastern Europe are presented in Macura et al. (2002).

FIGURE 1  
The postponement of first marriage and motherhood during the 1990s in Europe



Source: Billari (2004c), data from Council of Europe (2001).

we are thus describing compare the 1990s to the preceding decades.

With FFS data, it is possible to focus more generally on union formation and not only on formal marriage. In table 3, we report the share of women who had experienced the key demographic transitions into adulthood (leaving the parental home, entering their first co-residential union, becoming a mother) by their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, in two birth cohorts born 10 years apart. The rate of postponement can be seen for the different countries by looking at the rate of change (figure 3). With the exception of some Nordic and Eastern European countries, union formation has been postponed to a significant extent. Southern European countries in particular are the 'leaders' of this postponement.

The role of cohabitation is highly variable between countries, as well as changing over time. Many authors have provided portraits on the diffusion of non-marital cohabitation. Looking at Sweden, one of the first countries in terms of the spread of cohabitation, Hoem and Hoem (1988) provided an outline of its historical phases. First, cohabitation spread to incorporate a small 'deviant' group of the population. It later emerged as a pre-marital probationary period, a gradual way of moving into a union. In its third phase, cohabitation became a

real substitute to marriage. Finally, any distinction between cohabitation and marriage has tended to disappear. A more complex typology, useful for international and inter-temporal comparisons, and based on the findings of the FFS, has been devised in a recent paper by Heuveline and Timberlake (2003). They distinguish six typical roles of cohabitation, further developing the four-way classification by Hoem and Hoem (Heuveline and Timberlake, 2003, table 1):

- A) *Marginal* ("Cohabitation is not prevalent and is discouraged by public attitudes and policies");
- B) *Prelude to marriage* (Cohabitation "exists as a pre-reproductive phase for adults. Unions tend to be brief and non-reproductive, but end in marriage");
- C) *Stage in marriage process* (Cohabitation "exists as a transitory phase in reproduction. Unions tend to be longer, and children more likely to be born into a cohabitation than in (B), but with short duration of exposure");
- D) *Alternative to singleness* ("Cohabitation is primarily for brief, non-reproductive unions that end in separation instead of marriage");

TABLE 2  
Total first marriage rate (women)

	1980	1990	2000
Albania .....	0.77	0.99	..
Armenia .....	..	0.92	0.34
Austria .....	0.68	0.58	0.54
Azerbaijan .....	0.98	1.04	0.54
Belarus .....	..	..	0.65
Belgium .....	0.77	0.72	0.51
Bosnia and Herzegovina .....	0.69	0.67	..
Bulgaria .....	0.97	0.90	0.52
Canada .....	0.70	0.63	..
Croatia .....	0.79	0.70	0.65
Cyprus .....	0.78	1.18	1.41
Czech Republic .....	0.90	1.02	0.50
Denmark .....	0.53	0.60	0.73
Estonia .....	0.94	0.79	0.39
Finland .....	0.67	0.58	0.62
France .....	0.71	0.56	0.63
Georgia .....	0.99	0.80	0.41
Germany .....	0.69	0.64	0.59
Germany - former GDR .....	0.81	0.64	0.46
Germany - former FRG .....	0.66	0.64	0.62
Greece .....	0.87	0.72	0.52
Hungary .....	0.89	0.77	0.49
Iceland .....	0.55	0.45	0.70
Ireland .....	0.84	0.70	..
Italy .....	0.78	0.69	0.61
Kazakhstan <sup>b</sup> .....	0.96	1.07	0.66
Kyrgyzstan <sup>c</sup> .....	1.02	1.07	0.59
Latvia .....	0.97	0.92	0.40
Liechtenstein .....	..	..	..
Lithuania .....	0.94	1.06	0.54
Luxembourg .....	0.66	0.64	0.54
Netherlands .....	0.68	0.66	0.59
Norway .....	0.65	0.58	0.51
Poland .....	0.90	0.91	0.63
Portugal .....	0.89	0.88	0.74
Republic of Moldova .....	1.11	1.19	..
Romania .....	1.02	0.92	0.64
Russian Federation .....	0.96	1.00	..
San Marino .....	..	0.90	0.94
Serbia and Montenegro .....	0.82	0.78	0.68
Slovakia .....	0.87	0.96	0.52
Slovenia .....	0.79	0.51	0.45
Spain .....	0.76	0.69	0.63
Sweden .....	0.53	0.55	0.53
Switzerland .....	0.66	0.74	0.64
Tajikistan <sup>d</sup> .....	..	1.08	..
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia .....	0.92	0.87	0.83
Turkey <sup>a</sup> .....	..	0.84	0.76
Ukraine <sup>c</sup> .....	1.06	1.07	0.65
United Kingdom .....	0.76	0.62	0.54
United States .....	0.81	..	..
Uzbekistan <sup>e</sup> .....	1.08	1.09	..

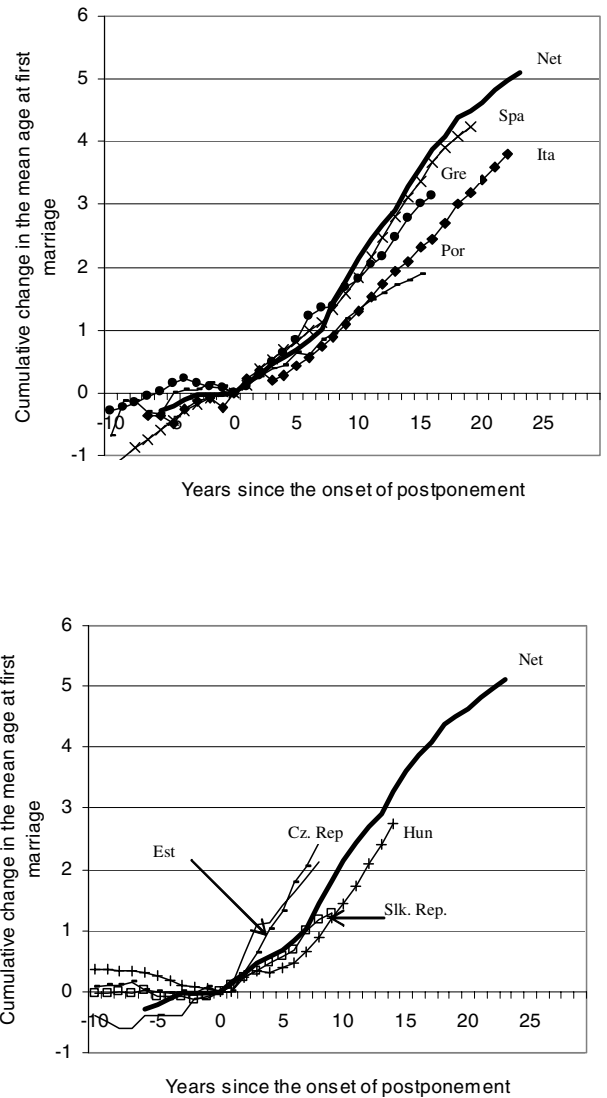
Source: Council of Europe (2002), UNECE/PAU Demographic Database, INED (La Conjoncture des pays développés en chiffres)

Notes:

- <sup>a</sup> Last figure is for 1999.
- <sup>b</sup> First figure is for 1982; last for 1999.
- <sup>c</sup> First figure is for 1982; last for 1998.
- <sup>d</sup> Second figure is for 1991.
- <sup>e</sup> First figure is for 1983.

FIGURE 2

The “postponement transition” for first marriage in some European countries with reference to the Netherlands



Source: Mamolo (2003)

- E) Alternative to marriage (Cohabitation “is a discrete component of the family system. Adult cohabitation is prevalent, and for longer duration than in (C). A low proportion lead to marriage; there is more exposure to cohabitation during childhood than in (C) and for longer duration”);
- F) Indistinguishable from marriage (“Little social distinction between cohabitation and marriage. Children more likely than in (E) to experience the marriage of their parents, because cohabitation is not seen as an alternative to marriage”).

TABLE 3

Per cent of women who have experienced demographic events by their 25th birthday; two cohorts 10 years apart; estimates from the FFS

	Cohorts	Have left the parental home	Have entered a coresident union	Have become mothers
Austria .....	1956-1961	86.1	74.8	52.5
	1966-1971	83.0	70.2	43.4
Belgium (Flemish speaking) ....	1951-1956	89.3	86.1	47.1
	1961-1966	82.3	75.7	26.3
Bulgaria .....	1958-1962	..	75.6	69.6
	1968-1972	..	71.9	69.4
Canada .....	1945-1949	87.8	81.5	52.5
	1955-1959	83.4	80.6	44.6
Czech Republic .....	1958-1962	84.2	68.8	76.6
	1968-1972	86.9	78.0	72.4
Estonia (native born) .....	1954-1958	79.1	73.2	68.2
	1964-1968	76.0	79.0	69.1
Finland .....	1950-1954	90.2	75.7	49.1
	1960-1964	91.0	77.8	36.1
France .....	1954-1958	88.8	81.7	57.5
	1964-1968	86.6	76.1	36.4
Greece .....	1960-1964	83.3	75.5	54.5
	1970-1974	72.8	54.9	34.8
Hungary .....	1953-1957	80.4	85.9	71.8
	1963-1967	80.6	83.8	66.0
Italy .....	1956-1960	67.7	61.2	44.3
	1966-1970	64.7	40.7	23.5
Latvia .....	1955-1960	71.3	81.4	70.6
	1965-1970	58.8	80.8	68.6
Lithuania .....	1955-1960	74.4	77.5	62.4
	1965-1970	63.7	76.9	70.4
Netherlands .....	1953-1958	92.6	81.1	32.3
	1963-1968	88.9	71.3	19.8
Norway .....	1950	88.7	78.0	58.1
	1960	90.7	78.5	44.2
Poland .....	1952-1956	66.8	73.0	64.2
	1962-1966	62.3	74.0	65.4
Portugal .....	1967-1972	72.1	70.6	61.8
	1957-1962	60.7	58.5	43.5
Slovenia .....	1956-1960	82.0	84.9	80.5
	1966-1970	77.4	83.8	69.7
Spain .....	1955-1960	73.3	71.2	50.0
	1966-1970	56.6	53.3	33.2
Sweden .....	1954	95.0	82.2	47.6
	1964	96.7	79.8	36.9
Switzerland .....	1950-1954	95.0	68.1	34.7
	1940-1964	93.9	66.2	27.1

Source: UNECE FFS Standard Country Tables  
([http://www.unece.org/ead/pau/ffs/ffs\\_standtabframe.htm](http://www.unece.org/ead/pau/ffs/ffs_standtabframe.htm))

What is crucial for our analysis is that in the UNECE region (at least among those who participated in the FFS comparative program) it is possible to find countries exhibiting each type of role (table 4). For instance, the role of cohabitation is marginal (A-type) in countries like Belgium, Hungary, Poland, Italy and Spain, but it is more important in other countries. In a country like Sweden, cohabitation is now clearly the primary and almost only pathway to union formation, and marriage is likely to follow parenthood rather than vice-versa - this

does not imply that marriage has disappeared, but that if it is experienced, it happens at a later stage of the life course.

The alternatives of cohabitation and marriage do not necessarily exhaust all possible partnership choices. In fact, there are increasingly diverse possibilities, and observed choices, in living arrangements and partnerships. In terms of opportunities, some countries have introduced new forms of relationships that are legally recognised. An important example is the PACS (Civil Solidarity Pact) in France. This legalised form has become a sort of 'competitor' to marriage which, however, has not prevented marriages from being formalised as well (Pison, 2002). In 2000, the first full year of PACS, the number of contracts signed amounted to almost 8 per cent of marriage contracts. Numbers have since decreased; nevertheless, this type of non-marital union is a new option, opening the space for additional choice in partnership formation. Further research and data collection are necessary to assess the role of formalised non-marital partnerships from an international perspective. A linked issue relates to same-sex partnership (the PACS for instance can also be subscribed to by two individuals of the same sex); few data are available on this issue, although there are estimates (e.g. about 1 per cent of men and the same percentage of women were estimated to be living in same-sex partnerships in the United States in 1990; Black et al., 2000).

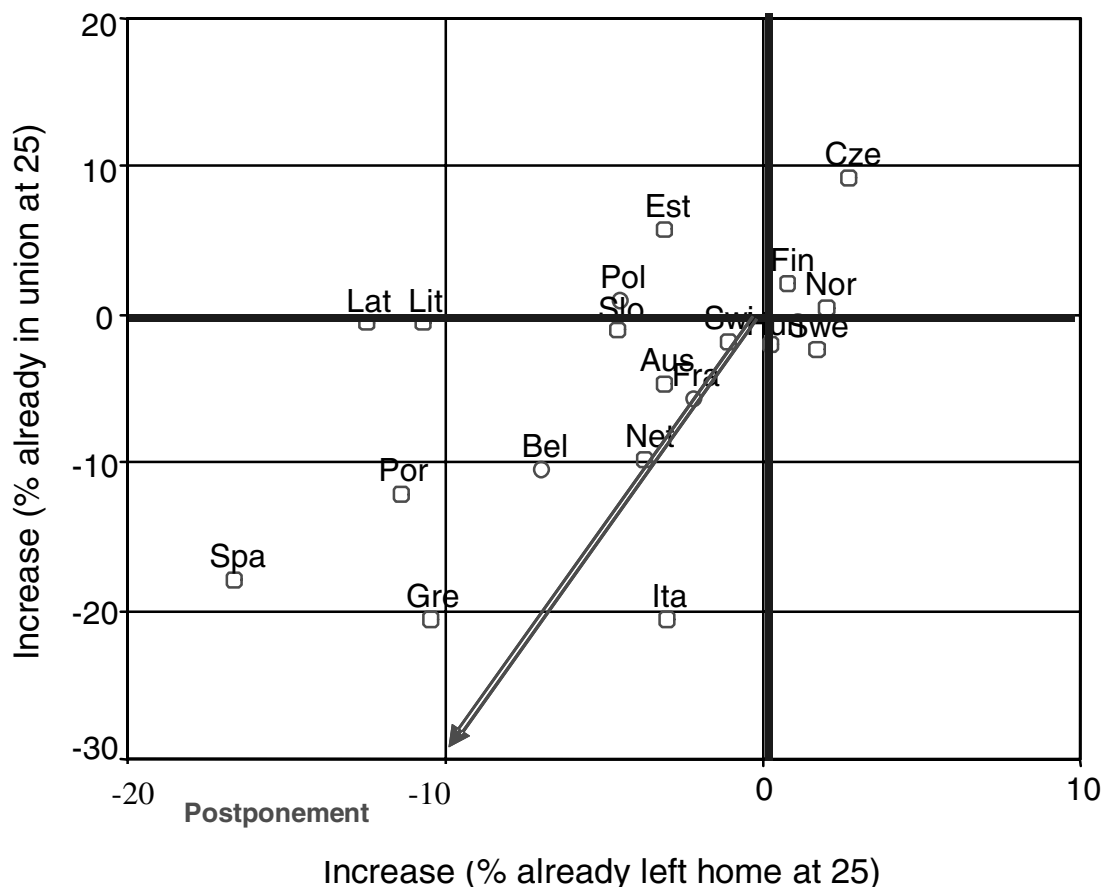
Living apart together (LAT) is often a stage towards the formation of a more stable co-residential union, or marriage. It can also become a medium- or long-term choice for a flexible type of living arrangement. Furthermore, living apart together can be forced upon couples by their life course situation (e.g. the necessity to work in different cities). Using FFS data, Kiernan (2002) has analysed, among other issue, the role of LAT in the life of never-partnered women aged 20-39. We report part of Kiernan's results in table 5. The heterogeneity of countries with respect to LAT is clearly visible. For instance, in Germany (in particular, in the part formerly constituting the Federal Republic of Germany), half of the women who have never co-resided with a partner are in a LAT relationship. Of them, three-quarters declare that they want to live separately. Figures are very different for other countries (e.g. in France where only one quarter of women in a LAT relationship say they want to live separately). The emergence of LAT as a generalised long-term choice is not foreseeable; however it constitutes an additional partnering choice that may be becoming increasingly common.

### Trends and variations in partnership dissolution

Partnerships have become increasingly less stable all over the UNECE area during the 1990s. Nevertheless, within this general trend towards greater union instability, there is a wide variation between nations. The variation

FIGURE 3

## The postponement of leaving the parental home and first union in Europe



Source: Billari (2004c), data from FFS.

can be decomposed into two main components. First, the stability of marriage (as measured for instance by total divorce rates) varies widely between countries. Second, as cohabiting unions are subject to higher dissolution rates, the varying prevalence of cohabitation, that we just outlined, influences the average stability of co-residential partnerships for a given society.

We first focus on the dissolution of marriages. Total divorce rates (table 6) have increased in the 1990s in almost all countries, with a few exceptions of countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former USSR (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Serbia and Montenegro), as well as Switzerland. The variation in divorce rates is, however, of great magnitude, with the lowest values being in Turkey, Azerbaijan, the Southern European countries and Poland. The highest levels in 1980 were observed in the United States.<sup>4</sup> There is no

apparent upper limit to total divorce rate, although it is logically difficult to foresee levels close to 100 per cent.

Analysing FFS data, it is possible to compare dissolution rates of different types of union across countries. The analysis by Andersson (2002) on 17 countries of the UNECE area shows that - without exception - cohabiting unions are less likely to survive compared to unions that started directly as marriages. This is visible even in Sweden, a country in which, according to Heuveline and Timberlake (2003), marriage and cohabitation are indistinguishable. The varying prevalence of cohabitation is thus linked per se with higher union instability: countries with higher shares of cohabiting unions will also experience a higher share of unstable, dissolving unions. In addition, among married people, those who experienced pre-marital cohabitation have higher risks of divorce (see figure 4 and table 7). The causal links are, however, not easy to grasp. Recently, Dourleijn and Liefbroer (2002) have used FFS data to test the hypothesis that the differences in dissolution rates are linked to the diffusion of non-marital

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately it is not possible, with current available data, to track the trend for the United States in a comparative fashion.

TABLE 4

## Countries by their different roles of cohabitation and related indicators

Role	Country	Incidence of cohabitation (per cent)	Median duration (years)	Per cent ending in marriage
Marginal .....	Belgium	19.9	..	..
	Hungary	19.8	..	..
	Italy	7.0	..	..
	Poland	4.7	..	..
Prelude to marriage .....	Czech Republic	33.4	..	..
	Switzerland	58.5	2.11	80.3
Stage in marriage process .....	Austria	49.4	2.47	83.0
	Finland	53.6	1.92	85.0
	Germany	38.4	2.10	74.2
	Latvia	37.5	0.94	91.2
	Slovenia	35.5	1.97	90.4
Alternative to single .....	United States	45.4	1.15	51.5
Alternative to marriage .....	Canada	35.9	3.51	47.4
	France	58.2	3.62	69.5
Indistinguishable from marriage .....	Sweden	82.6	3.56	54.7

Source: Heuveline and Timberlake (2003), data from the FFS.

TABLE 5

## Proportion of women aged 20-39 "living apart together" among never partnered women

	Per cent living apart together	Of which "wanted"
Austria .....	47	48
France .....	48	27
Germany – former FRG .....	48	74
Germany – former GDR .....	39	42
Hungary .....	38	42
Italy .....	49	43
Latvia .....	44	..
Spain .....	36	27
Switzerland .....	51	66

Source: Kiernan (2002), analyses of FFS data.

Note: This is the proportion of never-partnered women who have an intimate relationship with someone who lives in a separate household. The last column reports the proportion among those saying that they live apart together because they want to.

cohabitation within a population. However, in fact, they found evidence of a selection effect (individuals who cohabit are more likely to experience union dissolution because of their individual characteristics), but also there is evidence of a general stabilising role of marriage (getting married has a causal impact in improving union stability). It thus seems that marriage as an institution protects against instability (Brines and Joyner, 1999) across a number of countries.

Rising rates of union dissolution are contributing to the growth in numbers of unions subsequent to the first union. This includes not only the remarriage of divorced women and men, but also of second and subsequent

TABLE 6

## Total divorce rate (female)

	1980	1990	2000
Armenia .....	0.17	0.18	..
Austria .....	0.26	0.33	0.43
Azerbaijan .....	..	..	0.10
Belarus .....	..	..	0.53
Belgium .....	0.21	0.31	0.45
Bosnia and Herzegovina .....	..	0.05	..
Bulgaria .....	0.18	0.16	0.21
Canada .....	0.33	0.38	..
Croatia .....	0.13	0.15	0.15
Cyprus .....	0.04	0.07	0.21
Czech Republic .....	0.31	0.38	0.41
Denmark .....	0.40	0.44	0.45
Estonia .....	0.50	0.46	0.47
Finland .....	0.28	0.42	0.51
France .....	0.22	0.32	0.38
Georgia .....	..	..	0.07
Germany .....	0.25	0.29	0.41
Germany - former GDR .....	0.32	0.24	..
Germany - former FRG .....	0.23	0.31	..
Greece <sup>a</sup> .....	0.10	0.09	0.16
Hungary .....	0.25	0.27	0.38
Iceland .....	0.28	0.34	0.40
Italy .....	0.03	0.08	..
Kazakhstan <sup>b</sup> .....	0.35	0.38	0.34
Kyrgyzstan <sup>b</sup> .....	0.27	0.29	0.22
Latvia .....	0.54	0.44	0.34
Lithuania .....	..	..	0.39
Luxembourg .....	0.26	0.36	0.47
Netherlands .....	0.25	0.30	0.38
Norway .....	0.25	0.43	0.45
Poland .....	0.14	0.15	0.17
Portugal .....	0.07	0.12	0.26
Republic of Moldova .....	..	..	0.28
Romania .....	0.19	0.19	0.19
Russian Federation .....	0.42	0.40	..
San Marino .....	..	..	0.13
Serbia and Montenegro .....	0.14	0.14	0.13
Slovakia .....	0.18	0.23	0.27
Slovenia .....	0.16	0.14	0.21
Spain .....	..	0.10	..
Sweden .....	0.42	0.44	0.55
Switzerland .....	0.27	0.33	0.26
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia .....	0.06	0.05	0.09
Turkey .....	0.05	0.06	0.06
Ukraine .....	0.36	..	..
United Kingdom .....	0.38	0.42	..
United States .....	0.59	..	..
Uzbekistan <sup>c</sup> .....	0.22	0.24	..

Source: Council of Europe (2002), UNECE/PAU Demographic Database, INED (La Conjoncture des pays développés en chiffres).

## Notes:

<sup>a</sup> Last figure is for 1999.

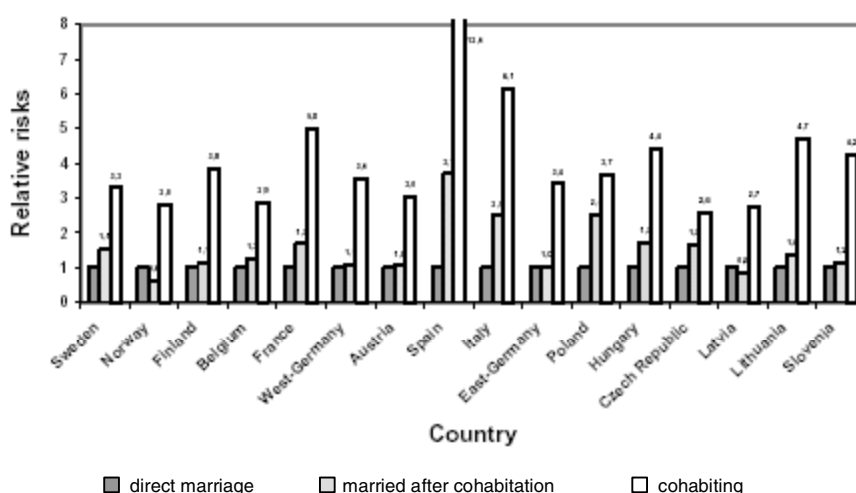
<sup>b</sup> First figure is for 1982; last figure for 1998.

<sup>c</sup> First figure is for 1982; second for 1989.

cohabiting unions, as well as cohabiting unions after divorce. Again, FFS data from the 1990s have enabled us to evaluate international differences and trends in birth cohorts. A study by Fürnkranz-Prskawetz et al. (2003) analyses the pathways to stepfamily formation for 19 European countries. Their analysis indicates that, within



FIGURE 4  
Relative risk of union dissolution for women in different types of union



Source: Dourleijn and Liefbroer (2002), analyses of FFS data

the birth cohort 1952-59, the likelihood of starting a second union before age 35 - for women who had experienced a first union - was as high as 28 per cent in Sweden and 25 per cent in Estonia. In almost all the countries examined by Frnkranz-Prskawetz and colleagues, the majority of women who dissolved a first union had actually entered a second union. The only exceptions to this were Italy, Lithuania and Spain. The experience of a second union is thus becoming increasingly common in the lives of Europeans: the share of women having ever experienced a second union by age 35 has risen from the birth cohort 1952-55 to the birth cohort 1956-59, even while we have seen first unions in

general being postponed (table 8). This indicates that an *expansion of unions of higher order* has taken place during the 1990s and is likely to continue.

#### Childbearing in the 1990s: postponement and the emergence of lowest low fertility

Over the last decade, fertility levels have fallen substantially and they have reached extremely low levels in a number of countries in the UNECE region. For simplicity, we will speak of *low* fertility levels when fertility is below replacement (see for instance United Nations, 2002). We will speak of *very low* fertility when

TABLE 7  
Cumulative per cent separated, by exact time since union formation

Country	Period	Begun as marriage				Begun as cohabitation			
		After 1 year	After 3 years	After 7 years	After 15 years	After 1 year	After 3 years	After 7 years	After 15 years
Austria	1990-96	2	7	16	26	4	19	33	45
Belgium (Flemish speaking)	1985-92	1	2	7	15	4	13	25	38
Czech Republic	1992-97	1	6	14	26	7	19	29	39
Finland	1983-92	1	5	12	21	6	18	32	42
France	1988-94	1	3	8	16	8	20	36	48
Germany - former GDR	1984-89	1	5	13	24	8	21	37	49
Germany - former FRG	1986-92	0	7	16	24	5	23	38	51
Hungary	1988-93	2	6	12	20	10	26	40	53
Italy	1990-95	0	2	4	8	18	29	36	43
Latvia	1989-95	2	10	24	35	13	29	47	57
Lithuania	1989-95	1	3	11	19	8	20	41	55
Norway	1983-89	0	5	13	23	8	22	34	45
Poland	1986-91	1	2	5	8	5	12	15	21
Slovenia	1989-95	1	1	3	7	3	11	16	22
Spain	1989-95	0	1	4	7	21	33	47	55
Sweden	1985-93	3	5	8	20	8	26	43	55
United States	1989-95	5	14	25	38	25	46	60	72

Source: Andersson (2002), analyses of FFS data.

TABLE 8

## Percentage of women who entered a second union by age 35

	Cohort 1952-1955	Cohort 1956-1959
Austria .....	14.5	14.9
Belgium (Flemish speaking) .....	7.7	6.3
Czech Republic .....	14.9	15.9
Estonia .....	23.0	2.4
France .....	13.4	11.7
Germany - former-GDR .....	14.6	14.8
Germany - former FRG .....	12.6	14.8
Hungary .....	14.9	12.8
Italy .....	1.7	2.4
Latvia .....	18.8	20.4
Lithuania .....	9.1	7.6
Poland .....	3.3	3.7
Slovenia .....	7.8	8.2
Spain .....	3.0	4.8
Sweden .....	20.6	26.7
Switzerland .....	15.2	17.2

Source: Fürnkranz-Prskawetz et al. (2003), analyses of FFS data.

fertility is below 1.5 children per woman (see for instance Lesthaeghe and Willems, 1999; Caldwell and Schindlmayr, 2003). We will speak of *lowest low* fertility when fertility is below 1.3 children per woman (Kohler et al., 2002). In table 9, we report the total period fertility rates for the countries of the UNECE area in five-year intervals for the period 1980-2000. In 1980, only a few cases of 'low' fertility levels were recorded (for the former Federal Republic of Germany, Luxembourg and San Marino). By 2000, 11 countries have 'lowest low' fertility and 11 have 'very low' (but not lowest low fertility). At the beginning of the new millennium, very low fertility is pervading the UNECE area, and lowest low fertility is present in a substantial group of countries. In fact, very few countries, which belong to quite different regions, have fertility above two children per woman (Iceland, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, the United States and Uzbekistan).<sup>5</sup>

A critical issue at low fertility levels is the impact of even small differences in fertility on overall population dynamics: differential levels between lowest low and very low fertility levels may appear small, but in fact these small differences have a significant effect (as outlined in Kohler et al., 2002). When fertility is below replacement, a *difference* of 0.2 births is not ignorable for population dynamics, as it becomes more significant in relative terms. By simple calculations using standard stable population theory, one finds that, if total fertility stabilises at 1.3, the long-term growth rate will be 1.57 per cent, which translates into the population halving in 44.3 years. If total fertility stabilises at 1.5, the rate

TABLE 9

## Total period fertility rates

	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
Albania .....	3.62	3.21	3.00	2.62	..
Armenia .....	2.33	2.56	2.63	1.63	1.11
Austria .....	1.65	1.47	1.45	1.40	1.34
Azerbaijan .....	3.23	2.94	2.62	2.30	1.71
Belarus .....	2.04	2.08	1.90	1.38	1.31
Belgium .....	1.68	1.51	1.62	1.55	1.66
Bosnia and Herzegovina .....	1.93	1.89	1.71	..	..
Bulgaria .....	2.05	1.98	1.82	1.23	1.26
Canada .....	1.68	1.61	1.71	1.67	1.60
Croatia .....	1.92	1.81	1.67	1.50	1.40
Cyprus .....	2.46	2.38	2.42	2.13	1.83
Czech Republic .....	2.10	1.96	1.90	1.28	1.14
Denmark .....	1.55	1.45	1.67	1.80	1.77
Estonia .....	2.02	2.12	2.04	1.32	1.39
Finland .....	1.63	1.64	1.78	1.81	1.73
France .....	1.95	1.81	1.78	1.71	1.89
Georgia .....	2.26	2.27	2.19	1.69	1.35
Germany .....	1.56	1.37	1.45	1.25	1.38
Germany - former GDR .....	1.94	1.74	1.50	0.84	1.22
Germany - former FRG .....	1.45	1.28	1.45	1.34	1.38
Greece .....	2.23	1.67	1.39	1.32	1.29
Hungary .....	1.91	1.85	1.87	1.57	1.32
Iceland .....	2.48	1.94	2.30	2.08	2.08
Ireland .....	3.24	2.48	2.11	1.84	1.88
Israel .....	3.10	..	3.00	2.88	2.95
Italy .....	1.64	1.42	1.33	1.20	1.24
Kazakhstan a .....	2.90	3.00	2.70	2.13	1.83
Kyrgyzstan a .....	3.98	3.98	3.69	3.30	2.80
Latvia .....	1.90	2.09	2.01	1.26	1.24
Liechtenstein .....	1.75	1.50	1.45	1.20	..
Lithuania .....	1.99	2.09	2.02	1.49	1.33
Luxembourg .....	1.49	1.38	1.60	1.69	1.76
Malta .....	1.98	1.99	2.04	1.82	1.66
Netherlands .....	1.60	1.51	1.62	1.53	1.72
Norway .....	1.72	1.68	1.93	1.87	1.85
Poland .....	2.26	2.32	2.05	1.62	1.34
Portugal .....	2.25	1.72	1.57	1.40	1.55
Republic of Moldova .....	2.41	2.75	2.39	1.74	1.30
Romania .....	2.43	2.32	1.84	1.34	1.31
Russian Federation .....	1.86	2.05	1.90	1.34	1.21
San Marino .....	1.46	1.14	1.31	1.11	1.24
Serbia and Montenegro .....	2.29	2.22	2.10	1.89	1.66
Slovakia .....	2.31	2.26	2.09	1.52	1.29
Slovenia .....	2.10	1.71	1.46	1.29	1.26
Spain .....	2.20	1.64	1.36	1.18	1.24
Sweden .....	1.68	1.74	2.13	1.73	1.54
Switzerland .....	1.55	1.52	1.58	1.48	1.50
Tajikistan b .....	..	..	5.16	3.61	..
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia .....	2.47	2.31	2.06	2.13	1.88
Turkey .....	4.36	3.59	2.99	2.62	2.52
Turkmenistan c .....	..	..	3.80	..	..
Ukraine .....	1.95	2.02	1.89	1.38	..
United Kingdom .....	1.89	1.79	1.83	1.71	1.65
United States .....	1.85	1.84	2.08	1.98	2.06
Uzbekistan c .....	4.74	4.70	4.13	3.54	3.08

Source: Council of Europe (2002), Frejka and Sardon (2003), UNECE/PAU Demographic Database, UNECE Gender Statistics Database.

## Notes:

a First figure is for 1982; last figure is for 1998.

b Fourth figure is for 1994.

c Third figure is for 1989; fourth figure is for 1994; last figure is for 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Among countries for which official comparative estimates of the period TFR were not available when drafting this paper, Albania, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are likely to have a period TFR greater than 2 in 2000.

TABLE 10  
Mean age at first birth

	1980	1990	2000
Armenia .....	22.1	22.8	23.0
Austria .....	..	25.0	26.3
Azerbaijan .....	..	..	24.7
Belarus .....	..	22.9	23.4
Belgium .....	24.7	26.4	..
Bosnia and Herzegovina .....	23.3	23.6	..
Bulgaria .....	21.9	22.2	23.5
Canada .....	26.5	28.5	29.9
Croatia .....	23.4	24.1	25.5
Cyprus .....	23.8	24.7	26.2
Czech Republic .....	22.4	22.5	24.9
Denmark .....	24.6	26.4	..
Estonia .....	23.2	22.9	24.0
Finland .....	25.6	26.5	27.4
France * .....	25.0	27.0	28.7
Georgia .....	..	..	24.2
Germany .....	25.0	26.6	28.2
Germany - former GDR * .....	23.5	24.6	27.6
Germany - former FRG * .....	25.5	27.0	28.0
Greece * .....	24.1	25.5	27.3
Hungary .....	22.4	23.1	25.1
Iceland .....	21.9	24.0	25.5
Ireland .....	25.5	26.6	27.8
Italy .....	25.0	26.9	..
Latvia .....	22.9	23.0	24.4
Lithuania .....	23.8	23.2	23.8
Luxembourg .....	..	..	28.4
Netherlands .....	25.7	27.6	28.6
Norway .....	..	25.6	26.9
Poland .....	23.4	23.3	24.5
Portugal .....	24.0	24.9	26.5
Romania .....	22.4	22.7	23.6
Russian Federation .....	23.0	22.6	..
San Marino .....	24.1	26.7	30.2
Serbia and Montenegro .....	23.3	23.9	25.0
Slovakia .....	22.7	22.6	24.2
Slovenia .....	22.9	23.7	26.5
Spain .....	25.0	26.8	29.1
Sweden .....	25.3	26.3	27.9
Switzerland .....	26.3	27.6	28.7
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia .....	23.2	23.4	24.3
Turkey .....	20.8	..	..
United Kingdom .....	..	27.3	29.1
United States .....	22.7	24.2	24.9

Source: Council of Europe (2002), Mathews and Hamilton (2002), UNECE Gender Statistics Database.

Note: \*Last column is for 1999.

becomes 1.07 per cent, with a population halving time of 64.7 years. Moving 0.2 children downwards from 1.3 to a total fertility of 1.1, the rate becomes 2.14 per cent, with a population halving time of 32.4 years<sup>6</sup> (Billari, 2004a).

The most important issues concerning childbearing in the UNECE area are now related to lowest low fertility levels. These extreme cases are the focus of researchers' attention insofar as they signal a path that might well be

TABLE 11  
Total cohort fertility rates

	Cohort 1940	Cohort 1950	Cohort 1960	Cohort 1965
Austria .....	2.125	1.869	1.686	1.607
Belgium .....	2.157	1.830	1.834	..
Bosnia and Herzegovina .....	2.747	2.171	..	..
Bulgaria .....	2.083	2.067	1.954	1.829
Canada .....	2.671	1.928	1.818	1.723
Croatia .....	1.959	1.864	1.967	1.856
Czech Republic .....	2.066	2.095	2.025	1.913
Denmark .....	2.241	1.908	1.895	1.913
England and Wales .....	2.348	2.057	1.960	1.862
Estonia .....	..	1.974	2.034	1.827
Finland .....	2.039	1.857	1.954	1.898
France .....	2.410	2.109	2.103	1.982
Germany - former GDR .....	1.968	1.693	1.594	1.481
Germany - former FRG .....	1.982	1.791	1.795	1.561
Greece .....	2.095	2.019	1.924	1.717
Hungary .....	1.921	1.951	2.018	1.958
Italy .....	2.115	1.863	1.680	..
Latvia .....	..	1.870	1.940	1.757
Lithuania .....	1.989	2.008	1.880	1.695
Netherlands .....	2.221	1.889	1.849	1.756
Norway .....	2.450	2.095	2.086	2.063
Portugal .....	2.666	2.078	1.900	1.826
Romania .....	2.392	2.433	2.163	1.909
Russian Federation .....	1.946	1.884	1.829	1.655
Serbia and Montenegro .....	2.377	2.281	2.278	2.132
Slovakia .....	2.545	2.308	2.177	2.036
Slovenia .....	2.008	1.897	1.874	1.756
Spain .....	..	2.160	1.753	1.565
Sweden .....	2.049	2.001	2.037	1.953
Switzerland .....	2.082	1.793	1.772	1.641
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia .....	3.058	2.347	2.290	2.195
United States .....	2.729	2.028	2.014	2.038

Source: Frejka and Sardon (2003).

followed by other societies. Lowest low fertility levels were recorded at a national level for the first time in Spain and Italy in 1992/1993 (Kohler et al., 2002), and have subsequently spread to Central and Eastern Europe. Broadly speaking, we can distinguish two 'patterns' of lowest low fertility (Billari and Kohler, 2004): a Central and Eastern European pattern and a Southern European pattern. In most of the transition economies, fertility declined very steeply during the 1990s, in some cases immediately after the fall of socialist regimes, in other cases a few years later (UNECE, 2000; Macura and MacDonald, 2003; Philipov and Dorbritz, 2003). We shall see later that childlessness is not necessarily more prevalent in lowest low fertility countries but that each family tends to be very small. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe differ from Southern Europe with respect to the onset and extent of the postponement of motherhood: the possibility of further postponement has led Kohler et al. (2002) to foresee a longer-term persistence of lowest low fertility in countries that have not yet been sharply affected by the postponement of births (most of them in Eastern Europe). This feature is indeed the main characteristic of lowest low fertility in

<sup>6</sup> Calculations assume that the mean age at childbearing is 29 years and the net reproduction rate is 0.4886\*TFR.

Southern Europe. In 2000, the mean age at first birth in Spain (see table 10) is similar to that now observed in the United Kingdom and higher than the one observed in the Netherlands. The Netherlands, in particular, used to be seen as 'the example' country for high age at first birth before the emergence of lowest low fertility in Southern Europe.

The *postponement transition* in fertility (Kohler et al., 2002) is clearly visible, with few exceptions, most of those being states belonging to the former USSR: the transition to motherhood is generally being postponed (table 10). Women still become mothers much earlier in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet states, and in some countries of that area the postponement of motherhood is more limited (in Armenia, for instance), although there are clear signs that other countries are heading towards western-type levels, especially among such Central European countries as Slovenia and Croatia (see also Macura and MacDonald, 2003; Philipov and Dorbritz, 2003). The mean age of entering into motherhood is, in any case, very variable between western countries, while the United States also differs substantially from Western Europe, being earlier.

Measuring the postponement of fertility is crucial for studying very low and lowest low fertility because of its analytical consequences: in the presence of a widespread postponement of births, traditional period fertility measures have to be interpreted with great care. Period measures are, however, essential when we want to study what is currently happening and grasp changes in trends (Ní Bhrolchain, 1992): these changes of trends are also the reason why fluctuations in fertility measures are of substantial magnitude. Period total fertility rates, which have been used to define the threshold of lowest low fertility, are correctly criticised in the literature for being subject to various types of distortion. Different proposals have been made over the years for how to compute a distortion-free measure of period fertility, which can give a better interpretation of behavioural choices (see the review in Ortega and Kohler, 2002). No single measure has yet been accepted. Total period fertility is in any case crucial because it is strictly linked to the number of births in a given period, and thus it tells us about the expected consequences of fertility change. Calot (2001) for instance advocates the use of the period total fertility rate only as a measure of the ratio of the size of the newborn generation to the generation of mothers. The connection with the number of births, and thus with the age structure of the population, and, on the other hand, to the ageing of population and cohort replacement, leave a central role for period fertility measures. For instance, ageing of the population as a whole is affected by fertility postponement (Lutz et al., 2003). In addition, in a future of low and lowest low fertility populations, homeostatic reactions *à la* Easterlin (1980), with a reversal of trend, could be triggered by the diminishing relative size of cohorts entering the labour market and

reproductive ages. Having said that, relying only on the period total fertility rate as a starting point for a general theory of fertility dynamics can be dangerous, especially when fertility is fluctuating widely. We thus also look at cohort fertility.

Frejka and Sardon (2004) have recently completed a comprehensive study of cohort fertility in low fertility countries for women who have effectively reached the end of their reproductive life. Summary data extracted from Frejka and Sardon's analyses concerning total cohort fertility rates are reported in table 11. Looking at cohort fertility, the lowest limits of completed fertility have been reached by the former Federal Republic of Germany and Austria, with the former crossing the boundary into 'very low' cohort fertility (that is, below 1.5 children per woman). This observation has led some researchers (e.g. Caldwell and Schindlmayr, 2003) to conclude that analyses and explanations of very low fertility should be directed at explaining the patterns of these two largest German-speaking countries. We can, however, foresee that the persistence over the last 10 years of lowest low period fertility in countries like Spain and Italy will imply cohort rates that will be below the levels of Austria and Germany. The main fact that can be derived from the 'cohort fertility story' of Frejka and Sardon is the *lack of variation of cohort fertility*. However, an oscillating trend has been observed, with highest levels for the birth cohorts of the 1930s, before a decline which has been continuous, at least for western countries. It has been suggested that "cohort fertility trends tend to react to, or change as a consequence of, fundamental structural changes of the political, economic and social systems" (Frejka, personal communication). In the case of the transition economies, the fundamental structural changes were concentrated in the early 1990s. As a rule, completed fertility was declining from one cohort to the next in almost all low fertility countries among the cohorts that will conclude their childbearing during the first decade of the 21st century (women born in the late 1950s and early 1960s). The exceptions in Frejka and Sardon's analysis are the United States, Denmark and Lithuania.

In addition to general patterns of fertility, it is important to focus on fertility at the lower and upper end of the reproductive age span. There were distinct trends both in adolescent childbearing and in fertility at higher ages during the 1990s. In a major comparative effort on the topic, Singh and Darroch (2000) analyse trends in adolescent birth rates across a number of industrialised countries, up to 1995. Some of their key findings are reported in table 12. The results are clear in terms of direction: in no single country or geographical area out of the 40 with available data has adolescent childbearing risen between 1990 and 1995. We can thus conclude that *declining adolescent childbearing* has been a feature of childbearing during the 1990s. Notwithstanding this, levels are extremely heterogeneous between countries.

TABLE 12  
**Adolescent birth rates and abortion rates**  
*(Per thousand women aged 15-19)*

	Birth rates			Abortion rates		
	1980	1990	1995	1980	1990	1995
Albania .....	21.9	15.4	..	..	..	..
Armenia .....	45.0	70.0	56.2	..	..	..
Austria .....	34.5	21.2	15.6	..	..	..
Belarus .....	31.4	43.8	39.0	..	..	..
Belgium .....	20.3	11.3	9.1	..	..	..
Bosnia and Herzegovina .....	36.8	38.0	..	..	..	..
Bulgaria .....	81.2	69.9	49.6	..	43.5	33.7
Canada .....	27.2	25.6	24.2	16.9	20.3	21.2
Croatia .....	45.4	27.4	19.9	..	..	..
Czech Republic .....	53.1	44.7	20.1	..	24.6	12.3
Denmark .....	16.8	9.1	8.3	20.9	16.9	14.4
England and Wales .....	29.6	33.2	28.4	18.1	22.8	18.6
Estonia .....	44.6	53.6	33.4	..	..	..
Finland .....	18.9	12.4	9.8	21.2	15.2	10.7
France .....	25.4	13.3	10.0	11.8	9.9	10.2
Georgia .....	45.0	60.2	53.0	..	..	..
Germany .....	19.5	16.8	13.2	5.2	1.8	..
Greece .....	53.1	21.6	13.0	..	..	..
Hungary .....	68.0	39.5	29.5	26.5	30.2	29.6
Iceland .....	57.7	30.6	22.1	23.9	16.7	21.2
Ireland .....	23.0	16.8	15.0	..	4.0	4.2
Israel .....	35.3	24.7	18.0	..	11	9.8
Italy .....	20.9	9.0	6.9	..	4.9	5.1
Latvia .....	39.9	50.0	25.5	..	..	..
Lithuania .....	28.0	41.6	36.7	..	..	..
Netherlands .....	9.2	8.3	5.8	5.3	3.6	4
Northern Ireland .....	30.5	..	23.7	..	..	..
Norway .....	25.2	17.1	13.5	22.6	19.8	18.7
Poland .....	32.9	31.5	21.1	..	..	..
Portugal .....	41.0	24.1	20.9	..	..	..
Republic of Moldova .....	34.7	58.7	53.2	..	..	..
Romania .....	72.3	51.5	42.0	..	..	..
Russian Federation .....	43.6	55.6	45.6	..	..	..
Scotland .....	32.6	31.8	27.1	..	..	..
Serbia and Montenegro .....	52.7	41.0	32.1	..	..	..
Slovakia .....	48.2	45.5	32.3	..	14.9	11.1
Slovenia .....	56.3	24.6	9.3	..	13.9	10.6
Spain .....	25.8	11.9	7.8	..	3.1	4.5
Sweden .....	15.8	14.1	7.7	22.2	23.9	17.2
Switzerland .....	10.2	7.1	5.7	..	..	..
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ....	49.3	43.1	44.1	..	..	..
Ukraine .....	49.4	57.4	54.3	..	..	..
United States .....	53.0	59.9	54.4	44.4	40.6	29.2

Source: Singh and Darroch (2000).

The highest levels of adolescent childbearing in 1995 were recorded in the United States and in some of the Eastern European countries with traditionally early fertility (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine); these countries had levels above 50 per 1000 women aged 15-19. The lowest levels are just above one tenth of the highest levels, that is between 5 and 7 per 1000 women; these levels are seen in Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland. According to Singh and Darroch (2000), the reasons underlying the decline in adolescent childbearing are broader than single-country factors, and relate to the increased importance of education and motivation to achieve higher education and training levels, as well as the importance of goals that compete with family formation and motherhood in young women.

The postponement of union formation that we have already described partially explains the decline in adolescent childbearing. The mixed evolution of adolescent rates, also reported in table 12, indicate that in some countries this delay in union formation translated into a lower prevalence of undesired pregnancies, while in other countries the fall in adolescent childbirth has been reflected in rising abortion rates during the same period.

Let us now consider the upper end of the reproductive age span. The postponement of fertility implies that, at constant total fertility levels, the share of fertility that is realised at higher ages rises over time (or for successive birth cohorts). It is possible to analyse

trends by birth cohort, thanks to the work of Frejka and Sardon (2004). In table 13, we report their results concerning the share of total fertility due to childbearing after the 27<sup>th</sup> birthday. For western countries, the general trend is towards the realisation of more than 50 per cent of all births at age 27 or older. Some countries, from various regions of the Western part of the UNECE, are already high up on that scale; these have a tradition of late childbearing (e.g. the Netherlands, with 71 per cent for the 1965 birth cohort, Switzerland, with 66 per cent, Denmark with 64.5 per cent and Spain with 62.9 per cent). For transition economies, childbearing after age 27 is still relatively rare. In some cases, lower overall fertility is accompanied by a marked reduction of fertility at later ages; for instance in Romania the percentage recorded for the 1940 cohort was 40.9, while the percentage recorded for the 1965 cohort was 22.3 per cent. In societies in which childbearing is increasingly being postponed, fertility may be pushed to higher and higher ages. In fact, one can hypothesise a scenario of *latest late* fertility, and a *rectangularisation* of fertility, with births taking place in a concentrated period at relatively high ages (Billari et al., 2003). This scenario is clearly not foreseeable as a generalised trend for the UNECE area as a whole, but the rectangularisation of fertility may start becoming an issue in the new millennium for some of the western countries.

### Choices in parenting – childlessness

Parenting has changed significantly during the 1990s in the UNECE area. First of all, the prevalence of *not* parenting, i.e. childlessness, has generally increased, although at varying paces, and there is some evidence that both childlessness as a *choice* and undesired childlessness have increased. Secondly, the ‘length’ of parenting - that is the period that children spend in their parental home - has also changed and varies between societies. Thirdly, from the point of view of children, the type and combination of parents they live with during their childhood has changed over time and varies across contexts.

Childlessness has generally been decreasing in industrialised countries for cohorts born after 1920 (Rowland, 1998). A first issue is whether there can be a ‘naturally low’ base level of childlessness, and to what extent becoming a parent is still central in our lives (Hobcraft and Kiernan, 1995). This is questionable, as in some societies childlessness is virtually absent. A second issue is to what extent childlessness is chosen per se, i.e. staying ‘voluntarily childless’. In fact recently this choice has attracted the attention of researchers. Foster (2000), drawing on evidence from several disciplines, concludes that the ‘need to nurture’ of humans ensures that the majority of women will want to become mothers in all societies. On the contrary, drawing on sociological theory, Hakim (2003) builds a ‘preference theory’; according to her, lifestyle preferences determine the

TABLE 13

#### Percentage of the total fertility cumulated after the 27th birthday Birth cohorts 1940, 1950, 1960 and 1965

	Cohort 1940	Cohort 1950	Cohort 1960	Cohort 1965
Austria .....	37.6	33.9	42.7	48.2
Belgium .....	39.8	38.8	49.2	..
Bosnia and Herzegovina .....	41.2	34.2	..	..
Bulgaria .....	27.7	22.5	20.2	18.5
Canada .....	32.6	43.8	54.2	57.6
Croatia .....	35.0	33.7	34.4	38.7
Czech Republic .....	28.4	26.7	25.4	25.9
Denmark .....	35.3	39.0	59.1	64.5
England and Wales .....	38.2	43.1	53.0	55.7
Estonia .....	..	37.5	31.2	28.6
Finland .....	38.3	48.5	60.2	64.0
Germany - former FRG .....	39.0	41.3	55.0	61.2
Germany - former GDR .....	28.5	26.7	22.9	25.9
France .....	40.2	41.1	50.7	57.9
Greece .....	53.5	39.7	37.7	46.0
Hungary .....	34.1	28.3	31.8	33.3
Italy .....	51.9	44.1	54.3	..
Latvia .....	..	38.8	32.1	28.1
Lithuania .....	51.4	40.4	34.9	32.5
Netherlands .....	47.1	47.5	66.0	71.7
Norway .....	39.3	38.9	55.9	58.8
Portugal .....	52.3	43.1	42.8	50.2
Romania .....	45.6	30.7	26.0	22.3
Russian Federation .....	40.9	37.6	29.4	24.5
Serbia and Montenegro .....	37.7	36.1	37.2	37.9
Slovakia .....	33.2	31.0	28.1	21.1
Slovenia .....	41.1	33.1	29.7	35.7
Spain .....	..	47.4	53.6	62.9
Sweden .....	41.0	46.7	60.9	58.8
Switzerland .....	43.9	48.4	61.1	66.0
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia .....	41.8	36.3	33.4	35.4
United States .....	28.7	39.6	47.3	48.0

Source: Own elaboration on Frejka and Sardon (2003).

incidence of childbearing. For preference theory it is plausible that individuals (the theory focuses particularly on women, but aims at being gender-neutral) who are more oriented towards child-rearing have a lower probability of staying childless. More specifically, Hakim states that “The appearance of voluntary childlessness after the contraceptive revolution, raising childlessness to around 20 percent in most modern societies, has generally been ignored by demographers. It disproves the unstated assumption that women will always want to have and rear children. Some do not” (p. 369). The most recent changes in childlessness can be seen by comparing the 1950 birth cohort with the 1960 birth cohort (table 14), as analysed by Frejka and Sardon (2004). There is no clear trend towards an increase in childlessness, although the level in some areas (e.g. England and Wales) is growing and is much higher than the level for other countries. The 20 per cent of childless women in England and Wales for the 1960 birth cohort corresponds to the percentage of women suggested by Hakim (2003) as being fully work-oriented. For the same cohort, levels are still below 5 per cent in countries like Slovenia and Croatia. In general, childlessness is much

TABLE 14  
Percentage childless, birth cohorts 1940, 1950 and 1960

	Cohort 1940	Cohort 1950	Cohort 1960
Austria *	15.0	17.0	..
Belgium *	13.0	14.0	..
Bosnia and Herzegovina	11.6	10.4	16.1
Croatia	8.6	6.1	4.9
Czech Republic	7.6	6.7	6.5
Denmark	..	10.9	10.0
England and Wales	10.6	14.5	20.5
Germany - former FRG *	12.0	17.0	..
Germany - former GDR	11.0	7.3	7.8
Greece	11.4	9.7	10.7
Hungary	9.1	9.1	7.6
Italy	14.6	12.7	14.8
The former Yugoslav Republic of			
Macedonia	4.0	5.7	5.7
Netherlands	11.2	14.6	17.7
Norway	9.5	9.4	..
Romania	..	6.3	8.1
Russian Federation	..	..	5.8
Slovenia	8.3	4.4	4.7
Spain	..	..	10.5
Sweden	..	..	13.3
United States	9.9	15.6	15.4

**Source:** Own elaboration and selection from Frejka and Sardón (2003) and Rowland (1998).

**Note:** \*First column is for birth cohort 1940-1944; second column is for birth cohort 1950-1954.

rarer, and even declining, in countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The most recent trends for other countries and areas with a high prevalence of childlessness (Austria and the Western part of Germany) are not yet visible. In general, there seems to be little evidence for any major changes in the propensity to becoming a parent.

### Choices in parenting – the child's perspective

We now take a different perspective and look at parenting by examining data on the lives of children. In table 3 and figure 2, we have already introduced the issue of the length of stay of young adults in their parental home. In some countries, notably Italy and Spain, young adults stay much longer with their parents, and this constitutes an important characteristic of their *latest late* pattern of transition to adulthood. For the cohorts born during the early 1960s, the median age of leaving home for Italian men was above 27, and for Spanish men close to the same figure (Corijn and Klijzing, 2001). A similar pattern can be observed for women. Levels are much lower in Northern and Western Europe. Furthermore, for subsequent cohorts, leaving home has become even later, in Southern Europe in particular (figure 2). This long period of young adults staying in their parental home imposes an unavoidable economic burden on their parents, and this has been linked by some scholars (e.g. Livi-Bacci, 2001; Dalla Zuanna, 2001) to the lowest low fertility levels observed in Italy and Spain. Nevertheless, the direct link is questionable: for instance lowest low

fertility co-exists with early home-leaving in Eastern Europe (Billari and Kohler, 2002). Nevertheless, different parenting practices and changes of these over time are extremely variable between countries due to the different patterns of co-residence of young adults with their parents.

To grasp the meaning of parenting it is of paramount importance to understand the kind and configuration of parents that children experience. On the one hand, one could take the perspective of the parents and illustrate how the presence of shared children influences the decision to stay together rather than terminate partnerships (we shall discuss this point further in Section 3). On the other, one could take the perspective of their children, looking at what types of parents they experience in their early years. The FFS again provides important insights into both international differences and trends with respect to the experience of children. Heuveline et al. (2003) have estimated for the first 15 years, the average time spent by a child living in specific family structures, specifically with a single mother, in a maternal stepfamily, without their mother and with both biological parents (table 15). International differences are remarkable: a child from the United States will, on average, live two-thirds of his/her first 15 years with both biological parents, but 2.70 years with a single mother (a woman without a husband or a cohabiting partner), 1.87 years in a maternal stepfamily and 0.56 years away from their biological mother. Many other countries are close to this order of magnitude, with more than three years lived on average without the presence of both biological parents in Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia and Sweden. A 'traditional' parenthood model is still visible (with about one year on average without the presence of both biological parents) in Italy, Spain and Slovenia. We can thus say that looking at FFS evidence, parenting has changed significantly as a consequence of dissolution rates, and the experience of different types of parents in children's lives is a part of everyday life in several UNECE countries.

Heuveline et al. (2003) have also examined the trends in types of parental living arrangements experienced by children (table 16). The decline of the traditional living arrangement (with both biological parents) is mostly due to the decrease of time spent with both biological parents as married persons: only in Sweden (where marriage plays a less important role) has the share of time spent with both biological parents as a married couple increased. The decrease, however, is particularly small for a country like Italy. In general, the time spent with both parents as cohabiting parents has increased. What has increased substantially, with the only exception of Spain, is the time spent with a single mother. Looking at these tables, we can understand that family structures have changed in parallel with changes

TABLE 15

**Childhood expectancy***(Average number of years lived by a child in selected family structures)*

	<i>With a single mother</i>	<i>In a maternal stepfamily</i>	<i>Not with biological mother</i>	<i>With both biological parents</i>
Austria .....	2.32	1.36	0.26	11.06
Belgium .....	0.82	0.53	0.06	13.59
Canada .....	2.38	0.93	0.08	11.61
Czech Republic .....	1.35	1.71	0.12	11.82
Finland .....	1.44	0.76	0.31	12.50
France .....	1.55	0.76	0.13	12.56
Germany .....	2.69	1.20	0.10	11.01
Hungary .....	1.46	0.68	0.26	12.60
Italy .....	0.52	0.16	0.13	14.19
Latvia .....	2.14	1.57	0.26	11.03
Poland .....	1.41	0.34	0.28	12.97
Slovenia .....	0.61	0.55	0.09	13.75
Spain .....	0.72	0.35	0.07	13.86
Sweden .....	2.08	0.75	0.33	11.84
Switzerland .....	1.03	0.36	0.31	13.30
United States .....	2.70	1.87	0.56	9.88

*Source:* Heuveline et al. (2003) and own elaboration; children of female respondents of FFS surveys.

TABLE 16

**Changes in the average number of years lived by a child in selected family structures over a 9- to 15-year interval**

	<i>With married parents</i>	<i>With cohabiting parents</i>	<i>With a single mother</i>	<i>In a step-family</i>
Austria .....	-2.17	0.83	0.54	0.64
Belgium .....	-0.20	0.13	0.04	0.06
Canada .....	-2.60	1.12	0.91	0.47
Czech Republic .....	-0.38	0.33	0.09	-0.07
Finland .....	-0.66	0.25	0.56	-0.06
France .....	-2.35	1.16	1.23	-0.16
Germany .....	-0.16	0.00	0.29	-0.12
Hungary .....	-0.23	0.18	0.09	0.00
Italy .....	-0.10	0.01	0.21	-0.06
Latvia .....	-2.40	0.35	2.05	-0.03
New Zealand .....	-2.30	0.58	1.78	-0.18
Poland .....	-0.52	0.22	0.28	0.01
Slovenia .....	-0.49	0.51	0.16	0.02
Spain .....	-0.28	0.30	-0.24	-0.16
Sweden .....	0.14	-0.42	0.27	-0.06
Switzerland .....	-0.03	-0.01	0.16	-0.08
United States .....	-0.33	0.01	0.34	-0.08

*Source:* Heuveline et al. (2003) and own elaboration; children of female respondents of FFS surveys.

in partnering and in the propensity to dissolve partnerships.

### Family formation and its interrelationships

Partnering, childbearing and parenting, although independent choices in individual lives, are closely interrelated. They are also closely linked with other life course trajectories of individuals and couples (e.g. with their working lives), which may be sources of constraint, but also opportunities. The strength and direction of relationships in general are also potentially changing over time; it is thus important to touch upon some of the changes that have taken place in the countries of the UNECE area during the 1990s. We can investigate the interrelationships and their changes at two levels. First, at the micro level, we shall examine the diverse and changing relationships between partnership status and fertility. Second, at the macro, cross-national level, we will investigate the changes of the links between fertility and some fertility-related behaviour.

#### Micro-relationships between partnering and childbearing

In this section we focus more specifically on the relationship between partnering and childbearing. Recalling the trends outlined in section 2, we know that cohabiting unions have become more widespread during the 1990s. However, the prevalence and status of cohabitation varies substantially across countries, and so does fertility. We need to deal with two issues here. First, to what extent has the expansion of cohabitation affected fertility in the UNECE area? Secondly, what is

the effect on fertility of the general postponement of the timing of first unions, and of the postponement of marriage in particular?

The expansion of non-marital fertility in the UNECE area during the 1980s and the 1990s is clearly visible (table 17). In all countries for which data are available (with the sole exception of Denmark where non-marital fertility was already at levels close to 50 per cent in 1980), *non-marital childbearing rose during the 1990s*. It is not clear whether there will be any upper limit to the share of extra-marital births in the long run; marriage may continue to lose centrality in its role with respect to childbearing. In Iceland in 2000, only slightly more than one third of all births were to married parents. International variability in this basic indicator on the relationship between partnering and childbearing is very marked. Nevertheless, in only six countries for which data are available was the share of non-marital births below 10 per cent in 2000 (Azerbaijan, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Macedonia and San Marino); moreover, the trend for the majority of countries is towards a higher proportion. Rising levels of cohabitation, and transitions in the status of cohabiting unions, as we discussed in section 2.1, are the most significant factors underlying the rise in the share of non-marital births. The share of unplanned births to single mothers might potentially also contribute to this rise, but the decline in adolescent rates of childbearing suggests that this trend is in exactly the opposite direction.

At the individual level most studies report that cohabitation has a depressing effect on fertility. De Rose and Racioppi (2001), for instance, in analysing FFS data, show that expected fertility in European countries is



lower for cohabiting couples compared to married couples. We report the results of an analysis by Pinnelli et al. (2002) in table 18. From these descriptive results, we see that at the time of a second birth there is a higher share of individuals who started their unions directly as a married couple, although for Sweden the difference is least significant. The causal relationships between partnership status and fertility are, however, not necessarily simple to isolate, even having access to micro-level retrospective information. For instance, although the vast majority of births take place in a union (but see the exception of the United States in table 18), some of the countries with the highest proportions of cohabiting couples and earlier ages at first union formation also have the highest levels of fertility in Europe (Kiernan, 1999).

This inverse correlation between fertility and age at first union formation may reflect a trend to a general postponement of events in the transition to adulthood, in which case the transition to any kind of partnership and the transition to parenthood are both delayed due to common underlying factors. For instance, using United States data, Brien et al. (1999) show that the timing of partnership formation and of non-marital conception may depend on common unobserved factors. If this is the case in general, such events have to be addressed as a whole. Alternatively, each pathway of union formation (cohabitation or marriage) may have a causal (and potentially different) effect on fertility (Baizán et al., 2003). In a comparative study between West Germany and Sweden (confirming a study of Spain), for instance, Baizán et al. (2004) found that in the propensity to have a child and to start a union there are common factors (for instance social background, personality traits and others) that are usually unobserved in standard demographic surveys such as the FFS. The distinction between marriage and cohabitation as triggering events is not significant in Sweden (figure 5), in accordance with the status of cohabitation in Sweden as classified by Heuveline and Timberlake (2003). As a consequence, *if cohabitation reaches the same status as marriage, the only issue that counts in terms of fertility impact is the timing of union formation and not the type of union*; earlier union formation would then be associated with higher fertility. In fact, even in Italy, a country where cohabitation has a 'marginal' role, in the Northern part the fertility levels of cohabitants who had had at least one birth, and who had entered their first union at the same time as married couples with the same characteristics, are not clearly distinguishable (Billari and Rosina, 2004).

Let us also consider the relationship between the number of unions and fertility: table 18 shows interestingly that at second birth there is a greater proportion of individuals who have already experienced a second union, which is somehow in contrast with the hypothesised and intuitive 'clearly negative effect on fertility' of separation and/or divorce (see e.g. Pinnelli et

TABLE 17  
Percentage of non-marital births

	1980	1990	2000
Armenia .....	4.3	9.3	14.6
Austria .....	17.8	23.6	31.3
Azerbaijan .....	3.0	2.6	5.4
Belarus .....	6.4	8.5	18.6
Belgium .....	4.1	11.6	..
Bosnia and Herzegovina .....	5.4	7.4	..
Bulgaria .....	10.9	12.4	38.4
Canada .....	13.0	25.5	..
Croatia .....	5.1	7.0	9.0
Cyprus .....	0.6	0.7	2.3
Czech Republic .....	5.6	8.6	21.8
Denmark .....	33.2	46.4	44.6
Estonia .....	18.3	27.2	54.5
Finland .....	13.1	25.2	39.2
France .....	11.4	30.1	42.6
Georgia .....	4.7	18.2	34.4
Germany .....	11.9	15.3	23.4
Germany - former GDR .....	22.8	35.0	51.4
Germany - former FRG .....	7.6	10.5	18.6
Greece .....	1.5	2.2	..
Hungary .....	7.1	13.1	29.0
Iceland .....	39.7	55.2	65.2
Ireland .....	5.0	14.5	31.8
Italy .....	4.3	6.5	9.7
Kazakhstan <sup>a</sup> .....	9.4	13.2	21.8
Kyrgyzstan <sup>a</sup> .....	9.1	13.0	27.4
Latvia .....	12.5	16.9	40.3
Liechtenstein .....	5.3	6.9	..
Lithuania .....	6.3	7.0	22.6
Luxembourg .....	6.0	12.8	22.1
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia .....	6.1	7.1	9.8
Malta .....	..	1.8	10.9
Republic of Moldova .....	7.4	11.1	20.5
Netherlands .....	4.1	11.4	24.9
Norway .....	14.5	38.6	49.6
Poland .....	4.8	6.2	12.1
Portugal .....	9.2	14.7	22.2
Romania .....	2.8	4.0	25.5
Russian Federation .....	10.8	14.6	28.0
San Marino .....	3.3	2.6	8.6
Serbia and Montenegro .....	10.1	12.7	20.4
Slovakia .....	5.7	7.6	18.3
Slovenia .....	13.1	24.5	37.1
Spain .....	3.9	9.6	17.7
Sweden .....	39.7	47.0	55.3
Switzerland .....	4.7	6.1	10.7
Tajikistan .....	..	6.9	..
Turkey .....	2.9	4.5	..
Ukraine .....	8.8	13.0	..
United Kingdom .....	11.5	27.9	39.5
United States .....	18.4	28.0	33.2
Uzbekistan <sup>b</sup> .....	2.0	4.4	..

Source: Council of Europe (2002), National Center for Health Statistics (FastStats), INED (La Conjoncture des pays développés en chiffres).

Notes:

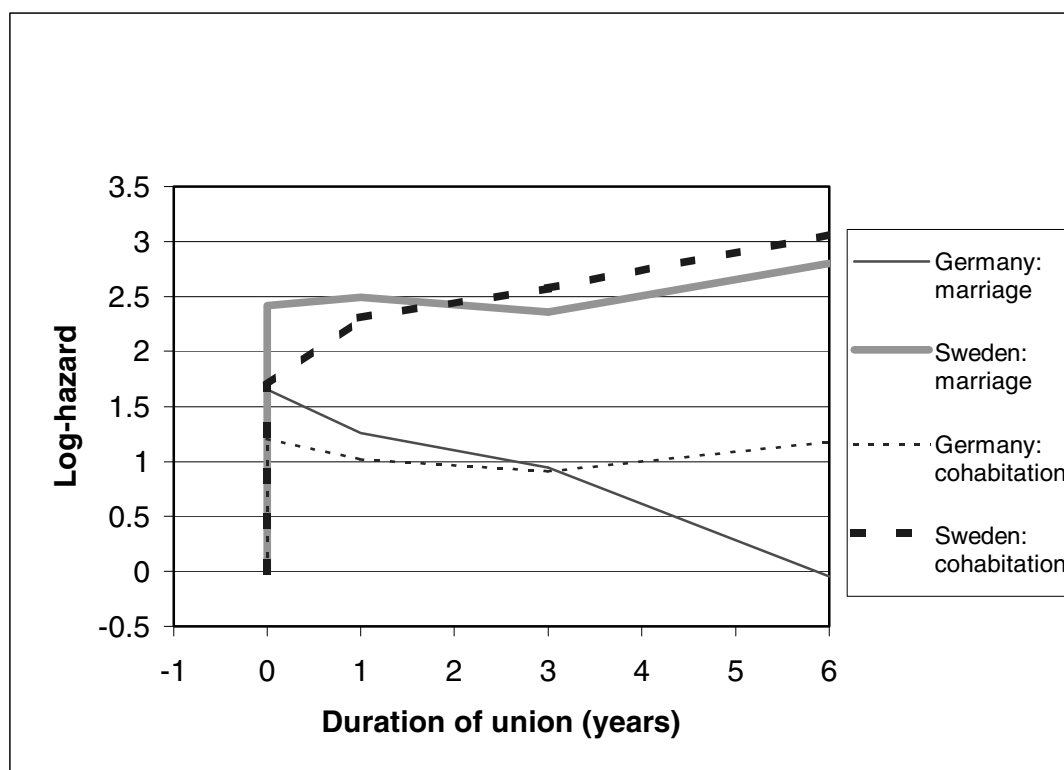
<sup>a</sup> First figure is for 1982; last figure is for 1998.

<sup>b</sup> First figure is for 1982.

al., 2002, p. 79). Although the results of table 18 may in part be the outcome of an age effect, the counter-intuitive idea that in some specific situations the dissolution of a union may have a positive impact on fertility - that is

FIGURE 5

The impact of entering a union on instantaneous rates of transition to first birth, controlling for common unobserved factors: a comparison between West Germany and Sweden



Source: Baizán et al. (2004), analyses of FFS data.

union dissolution may trigger fertility - may be justified. We can consider a simple, paradoxical, example. In a case like the one observed in lowest low fertility countries, childlessness is relatively rare, and so is the situation of living as a single forever, but the progression to higher parities is also at particularly low levels. This implies that almost all couples have one child, but not very many progress to a second child. *If the rule is 'one child per couple', the only way to reach replacement is to have individuals experience two couple relationships!* Children may be, in fact, union-specific capital, as symbols of the partners' commitment to their relationship (Griffith et al., 1985). Single-country analyses have shown that the first 'shared' birth of a couple has a major commitment value (Vikat et al., 1999), although the effect tends to disappear with higher parities (Buber and Fürnkranz-Prskawetz, 2000). Evidence for the commitment value of a first shared birth has also been detected in the FFS analysis by Thomson et al. (2002). We shall come back to this point in the next section in relation to the changing relationship between total fertility and total divorce rates.

It is also important to consider the impact of childbearing on union dissolution. On this issue, there is

mixed evidence in the literature. The majority of papers, using single-country analyses, show that the presence of shared children tends to stabilise marriages and non-marital unions (these papers mostly focus on North-Western Europe and North America: e.g. Andersson, 1997; Diekmann and Engelhardt, 1999; Jalovaara, 2001; Weiss and Willis, 1997 among others). Nonetheless, specific studies on the United Kingdom have documented that, during the 1990s, children had a de-stabilising effect on unions (Böheim and Ermisch, 2001; Chan and Halpin, 2001). With respect to this issue, there is a need for more comparative research.

### Macro-relationships: changing cross-country correlations over time

In the demographic-economics literature, a great deal of attention has been given to the fact that the cross-country correlation between total fertility rates and the share of women participating in the labour market has changed from negative to positive for OECD countries. Billari and Kohler (2004) argue that this is one of the several cross-country correlations that have changed in correspondence with the emergence of lowest low fertility in Europe during the 1990s.

TABLE 18  
Selected women's characteristics at the birth of the first child and the  
birth of the second child in five countries  
(Per cent)

	France	Italy	Hungary	Sweden	United States
<b>BIRTH OF THE FIRST CHILD</b>					
Number of unions					
Never in union .....	6.1	3.7	3.0	3.6	16.8
One union .....	88.3	92.7	96.2	79.0	73.3
More than one union .....	5.5	3.6	0.8	17.4	9.9
Type of union					
Direct marriage .....	37.6	81.6	90.3	8.9	49.8
Indirect marriage .....	27.0	10.0	4.3	32.1	20.5
Cohabitation .....	26.0	3.2	2.0	51.1	7.0
Out of union .....	9.4	5.1	3.4	7.8	22.7
<b>BIRTH OF THE SECOND CHILD</b>					
Number of unions					
Never in union .....	0.2	0.1	0.1	-	4.4
More than one union .....	11.8	7.7	1.0	21.8	15.9
Type of union					
Direct marriage .....	44.1	84.7	93.2	9.7	54.8
Indirect marriage .....	30.2	10.8	5.2	51.6	23.6
Cohabitation .....	21.6	3.0	1.0	35.5	8.7
Out of union .....	4.1	1.5	0.6	3.2	12.9

Source: Pinnelli et al. (2002).

The negative sign of the correlation between total fertility rates and rates of female labour force participation in the 1960s and 1970s was consistent with the 'new home economics' theories, which predicted that fertility would fall as a consequence of the massive entry of women into the labour market (Becker, 1981). The sign of the observed correlation for OECD countries then changed (see figure 6) during the mid- to late 1980s. Since then the correlation has been relatively stable and positive: *during the 1990s total fertility is higher in countries with higher female labour force participation*. Several studies have discussed this changing correlation (Ahn and Mira, 2002 and Engelhardt et al., 2004, among others). The importance of the role of Southern European countries - in which lowest low fertility emerged in the early 1990s - in shaping this correlation is underlined in these studies. Kögel (2004) challenges any causal meaning of these results, although he states that, in any case, the negative correlation becomes weaker after controlling for fixed country-specific effects.

The attention given to the study of the relationship between total fertility and labour force participation has been much more meticulous than the any dedicated to the changing relationships between fertility and other related behaviours. An exception is Dalla Zuanna (2001), who documents the change in the correlation between total fertility rates and the share of non-marital births in 16 Western European countries from 1981 to 1996. Billari and Kohler (2004) have systematically documented, for the countries of the Council of Europe, the changing cross-country correlations between fertility and 1) total

first marriage rates (the positive correlation has become weaker and weaker); 2) total divorce rates (a negative correlation has become positive); and 3) the share of non-marital births. In figure 6 and figure 7 we show analyses for countries of the Council of Europe, including the correlation of total fertility rates and 1) mean age at first marriage; 2) the percentage of non-marital births; and 3) total divorce rates. As we can see from these figures, *for all three indicators the correlation with total fertility rates changes to become positive during the 1990s*.

To sum up, cross-country analyses show that the correlation has recently reversed between levels of fertility and indicators that were traditionally negatively correlated with fertility. In some case this may be due the impact of unobserved factors that are typical of those countries where fertility has declined more quickly, where labour force participation was at a lower level and did not change as quickly as in other countries (Kögel, 2004). Nevertheless, changing correlations may be linked to micro-level choices: the importance of job attachment may affect the decision to have a child and this will be linked to female labour force participation but may be different between countries; the flexibility of unions may be associated with the mean age at marriage to a greater or lesser degree; and the percentage of non-marital births, and the role of stepfamily fertility may be associated with total divorce rates to a greater or lesser extent.

## Different families of explanation

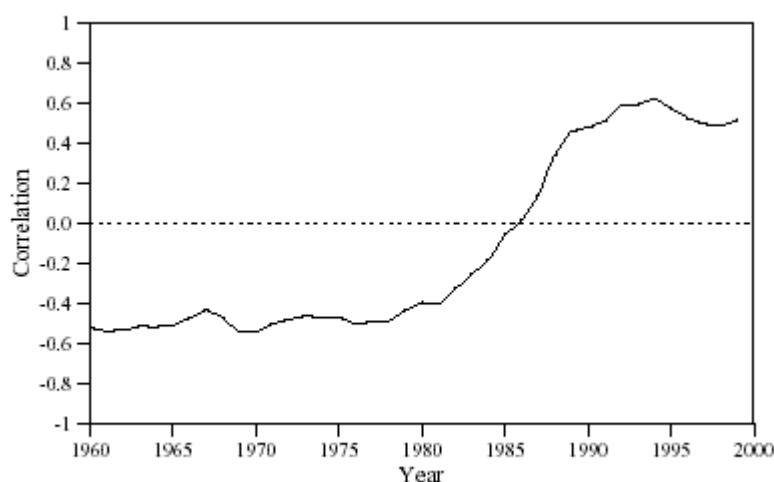
The complex web of changes and ongoing differences that we have described in Sections 2 and 3 cannot be easily accounted for by a single explanatory factor. In fact, even if in the literature the discussion of alternative theories is often portrayed as an "interdisciplinary soccer game" (Lesthaeghe, 1998), there is usually no clear winner in the quest for explaining the realities of family dynamics. We prefer to portray here 'families' of explanations. Each different avenue may be fruitful in understanding the evolution of a specific dimension, the persistence of international differences, or the presence of a common trend. Each is a valid toolkit for understanding the patterns of partnering, childbearing and parenting observed in the UNECE area during the 1990s. We will limit ourselves to ideas that aim to explain either international differences or trends over time. For the sake of simplicity, we distinguish between those focusing on the macro-level and those which focus on the importance of the interaction between macro-level and micro-level factors (see also Billari, 2004b).

## Macro-level factors

Macro-level factors affecting family dynamics can, in a simplified way, be viewed as a 2x2 table. On one dimension of the table we can put the traditional 'culture vs. economy' dichotomy (where we take a broad view of

FIGURE 6

The correlation between total period fertility rates and female labour force participation (OECD countries)



Source: Engelhardt and Prskawetz (2002).

'economy', including institutional settings and the welfare state); along the other axis we can put the historical stability of macro-level factors (slowly changing factors that can be considered essentially constant over several decades vs. rapidly changing factors changing potentially on a yearly basis or so). Different approaches that aim to explain family dynamics in the 1990s have tended to put their primary emphasis on one or other of these four factors.

As far as *institutional factors* - simply speaking, political-economic factors that do not change quickly - are concerned, they are of primary interest to scholars interested in studying the welfare state and its impact on the life course, and they are traditionally associated with long-term differences in family dynamics between countries. In fact, researchers interested in the political economy of life courses are not directly interested in explaining international and inter-temporal differences; such differences are used mostly in order to test hypotheses on the role of institutions in shaping life courses. In particular, the idea that different *welfare regimes* exist is at the heart of the work of Esping-Andersen (1999) and Mayer (2001). The basic assumption is that the life course - and for our purpose more specifically family dynamics - is strongly influenced by the welfare regime prevailing in a given country. The welfare regime cannot be modified in the short run; the type of welfare regime thus creates long-standing international differences.

One of the main issues is how many welfare regimes one should use to describe current institutional settings; so far, a principal focus has been on Western Europe and North America, with the transition countries as a 'residual category'. A three-way categorisation was

first proposed by Esping-Andersen, who also suggested its refinement into a four-way categorisation<sup>7</sup>, including 1) Social democratic (Nordic) welfare regimes oriented to individuals; 2) Liberal market welfare regimes (again oriented to individuals), with the United States and the United Kingdom as typical examples; 3) Conservative continental welfare regimes oriented to the family (Germany and France are examples), and 4) Southern European or Familistic<sup>8</sup> welfare regimes.<sup>9</sup>

Each of the welfare regimes shapes in a completely different way the whole 'life course package', from the transition to adulthood onwards. In fact, the emergence of the modern welfare state is one of the main factors that has contributed to the *institutionalisation* of the life course, and such institutionalisation has mostly concerned the transition to adulthood and subsequent demographic behaviour (Mayer and Müller, 1986). McDonald (2000) points to the significance of the rigidity of the European welfare system in shaping family choices: a labour market based on a strong insider-outsider divide is bound to delay and increase the avoidance of family formation. The influence of institutional settings at the national level is also expected to continue for the foreseeable future: Blossfeld (2000),

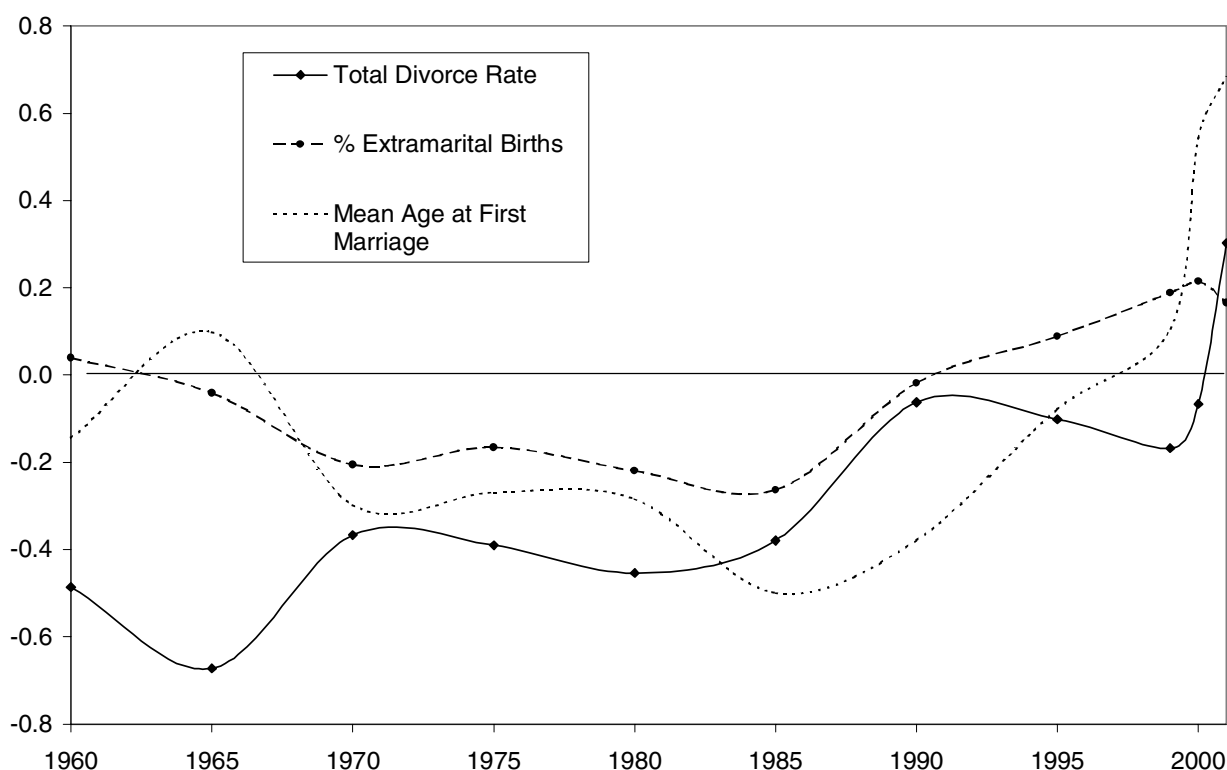
<sup>7</sup> Esping-Andersen (1999, p. 94) states: "a simple 'three worlds' typology may suffice for most of the purposes that this book pursues. The final judgment is not yet in, and we shall in fact see that the distinctiveness of the Southern European countries does make its mark on issues such as post-industrial employment adaptation".

<sup>8</sup> "Familialistic" according to Esping-Andersen (1999).

<sup>9</sup> This four-type categorisation is consistent with Mayer (2001). The typologies outlined have been criticised by feminists for their lack of 'genderisation', and other groupings of countries have been proposed (see the review of Neyer, 2003).

FIGURE 7

The correlation between total period fertility rates and other family-related behaviour (countries of the Council of Europe)



Source: Own elaboration on data from Council of Europe (2002).

for instance, has argued that country-specific institutions will channel the way through which the globalisation of economic life will affect life courses of individuals in developed countries, thus preventing life courses from becoming more similar.

As a caveat and to get back to the economy (or institution) vs. culture debate, prominent scholars focusing on this approach note that welfare regimes cannot be taken as purely exogenous in the long run (Mayer, 2001). For instance, whether a society encourages young adults to attend higher education at universities with on-campus accommodation (thus implying that parenting is limited to the period when children are below 18 or so) as opposed to having a number of similar universities all over a country (in which case young adults and their parents will tend to co-reside for a longer period) depends on the prevailing views of inter-generational relationships. The causal link would then be from the cultural framework to the making of institutional settings, which would mean that in the longer causation chain, long-term cultural differences explain a substantial part of the differences in family policies (Pfau-Effinger, 1999) and social policies. In addition, transition economies pose specific problems, as in principle it might well be that each one of them will

evolve into one of the Western types of welfare regimes, or perhaps new ones will be created.

*Economic trends and socio-economic policies* that are in place during a specific time period also significantly shape family dynamics.<sup>10</sup> This is also true of specific economic trends that are not explicitly under the control of national policy-makers; the most important example is the economic crisis in transition economies, which has been hypothesised as the main factor driving family change in Central and Eastern Europe (UNECE, 2000). Economic trends and socio-economic policies are so closely interrelated that it is often not possible to identify their separate effects on demographic behaviour. The adoption - or the discontinuation - of new family policies, e.g. maternity benefits, parental-leave entitlement, the provision of childcare services and child benefits, as well as policies on housing subsidies or even regulations concerning down-payments for mortgages are clearly important determinants of family formation.

Changes in such policies may also be triggered by population trends as they are perceived by policy-makers.

<sup>10</sup> The analysis of policies is only briefly sketched here, as it is the topic of the background paper prepared by Anne Gauthier, see elsewhere in this volume.

It is hard to disentangle whether such policies belong to the welfare state per se (and thus are stable from a mid-term historical perspective) or whether they belong to political choices that are continuously subject to revision. In any case, changes in such policies modify the opportunities that individuals face in their choices, and they can be understood in classic demographic terms as 'period effects'. The spread of uncertainty in young adulthood, such as the case of increasingly difficult access to the labour market, as well as other factors, such as increases in the return to education, may explain period trends and international differences in family formation (Bernardi, 2000). In fact the latter type of factors have been used by Kohler et al. (2002) to argue that postponement of the transition to parenthood may arise as a rational response to socio-economic dictates. The evidence for this in relation to the sharp fertility decline in Eastern Europe is, however, still ambiguous (Kohler and Kohler, 2002). A whole set of coinciding socio-economic factors may explain sudden changes in patterns in a country or set of countries (e.g. the emergence of lowest low fertility), and they may constitute triggering macro-events for changes which then have long-term consequences. Such factors are, however, unlikely to explain long-term stable differences between societies or long-term trends within the same society.

We now turn to *long-term cultural differences* that form the basis of current differences in behaviour. The scientific literature concentrates on this issue either as a north-south or as an east-west divide. Of course, these divisions are necessarily simplistic (as are divisions according to welfare regimes). Hajnal (1965)<sup>11</sup> traced the history of an east-west divide in family systems in Europe: the *Hajnal line* runs along an imaginary line connecting Trieste and St. Petersburg. To the west of this line the 'European pattern' leans towards a neo-local nuclear family with relatively late marriage and a significant proportion of people who never marry. To the east of the line, marriage is generally early and universal, and the family is often extended. A great heterogeneity has been shown by studies focusing on the countries to the west of the Trieste-St. Petersburg line. Specific demographic, economic and cultural factors used to determine family and household systems in Hajnal's time (just as they do today), including considerable regional variations of attributes such as the welfare capability of the family, the functioning of the household as a working unit, the role and status of women, marriage patterns and co-residence of kin, among others (Wall, 1995).

The presence of long-term cultural continuities, in particular concerning the strength of inter-generational ties within societies, has been emphasised by scholars looking at differences between north-western and south-western Europe (Reher, 1998; Micheli, 2000; Dalla

Zuanna, 2001). Reher (1998), for instance, systematically and comprehensively compares historical and current family patterns in Europe, west of the Hajnal line. He explores the two European styles of household formation, relating the split between the two patterns to the times of the late Roman Empire and the early Middle Ages. According to Reher, in Southern Europe the influence of Muslims raised the importance of kinship and vertical relationships between generations so that the prolonged stay of children in their parent's home and the caring work of children towards their parents are two faces of the same coin, the '*strong*' family. In the North, a Germanic tradition and the Reformation contributed to the development of a '*weak*' family, which is typical of the Anglo-Saxon world. Such differences have contributed to shape institutional frameworks at the societal level, with advantages and disadvantages for both types of living arrangements (Holdsworth, 2000). For instance, besides differences in the actual timing of life course transitions, it is interesting to note that the share of young adults who declare themselves to be dependent on parents and/or family members for their income (now the majority in the EU-15) is far larger in 'strong' family societies with respect to 'weak' family societies. This dependence also translates into larger *inter vivos* transfers from parents to children and with a closer geographical proximity after residential independence (Glaser and Tomassini, 2000). The different levels of strength of the family can contribute to the explanation of the long-term persistence of international variations (e.g. concerning the centrality of marriage or the strength of parent-child relationships) even in the presence of common trends.

Interpretations based on *ideational change*, clearly connected to sociological theories of modernisation, have almost become a paradigm for the interpretation of demographic change in western societies, with the key idea of a *Second Demographic Transition* starting in North-Western Europe during the 1960s (Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa, 1986; Van de Kaa, 1987). The main factors advocated by the proponents of ideational change as the motor of demographic change are the accentuation of individual autonomy, the rejection of institutional control and the rise of values associated with 'higher order needs' (see e.g. Surkyn and Lesthaeghe, 2002). The emergence of 'new' family behaviours (like cohabitation and non-marital childbearing) have been considered as one of the signs of the process of individualisation of life courses which is used to depict the evolution of Western European and North American societies towards a 'new modernity' (Buchmann, 1989; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990). The individualisation hypothesis implies that the normative control of life courses has become more lenient than in the past, and this applies particularly to the period of the 1990s. We can see this hypothesis as somewhat opposed to the hypothesis that life courses are increasingly becoming institutionalised by the welfare state.

<sup>11</sup> See also Monnier and Rychtarikova (1992).

The ideational change point of view can be within a 'developmental' idea of societies that is common among demographers analysing long-term trends: societies are assumed to develop through a sequence of stages leading in a certain direction. This concept, intertwined with the notion of 'transition', has had an impressive impact on demographic research (Thornton, 2001). Of course, cross-country analyses for a specific period do not necessarily provide perfect tests for transition processes, because if transitions follow specific sequences, different societies can be found in different stages of that sequence (Van de Kaa, 1997). During a transition, there may also be a widening of differences between societies. Explanations based on ideational change have been shown to be useful in accounting for the common trends of the 1990s (e.g. general postponement of family formation, rising prevalence of cohabitation, rising share of non-marital births). However, they are less useful for explaining persistent differences and sudden changes.

Some scholars do a combined analysis of the four families of explanations we have discussed to develop data-based clusters of countries (with a general emphasis on Europe). Mellens (1999a; 1999b) models the clustering of European countries based on demographic and socio-economic variables. These clusters are used to define the 'diversity' of European countries and can be the basis for various scenarios for population projections (De Beer and Van Wissen, 1999). Five clusters are identified, according to their dominant 'culture':

1) The *maternalistic* cluster includes the 5 Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). It has as a main characteristic "the relatively high level of female participation in the labour market, the high level of childcare facilities and the fact that female values like cooperation are emphasised", together with a "relatively low level of individualism and conservatism" (Mellens, 1999b, p. 34);

2) The *pragmatic* cluster includes Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. These have a high emphasis on economic performance and 'not extreme' scores on the equality of gender roles and conservatism;

3) The *paternalistic* cluster includes the Southern European countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain). They have "the prevalence of traditional family values, the lack of female emancipation and the low level of childcare facilities" (p. 36), with high scores on conservatism and low scores for gender equality;

4) An *intermediate* culture, in Central Europe (Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic, and Slovenia). This characterises the more westernised of the former communist countries;

5) The *post-totalitarian* cluster (Belarus, Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Russia and Ukraine). They exhibit an "incomplete transition to a capitalist structure" (p. 37).

In building population scenarios, it is assumed that the differences between clusters will persist, although convergence within-cluster will be observed.<sup>12</sup>

To sum up, no single family of explanations is in principle satisfactory per se when one wants to explain international differences or common trends; nevertheless, each family contributes to part of our understanding. The challenge for future research, and especially for policy-makers interested in enabling individual choices, is to evaluate the *relative weight* of the different factors for each type of choice in a given situation. Present comparative data sources are not, however, fully adequate for such an evaluation, and future data collection ventures will have to consider this issue as a primary task. We shall come back to this issue in a later section.

### Micro-macro interactions

Differences between countries in behaviour can also be due to differences in the population composition according to micro-level determinants. At one extreme, differences can be due simply to compositional effects. For instance, lower incomes for individuals means more limited possibilities to access housing at a given market price, or to bear the costs of child-rearing; a lower per capita income at the national level implies that there will be more individuals with limited possibilities to form a family or to bear a child. Income inequality, besides income per capita, may also be of crucial importance in determining average fertility levels (Demeny, 2003). Compositional variations may partially account for some differences in the timing of family formation. Another possible source of compositional effects is education. Educational attainment and educational enrolment are indeed linked to family dynamics.

Micro-macro interactions are more interesting for the purpose of explaining national differences. Some factors at the macro level channel the impact of micro-level characteristics on partnering, childbearing and parenting choices. In particular, we shall discuss two types of such interactions: 1) interactions between individual-level factors and the political-economic context; and 2) social interactions that may shape family choices, and which imply persisting national differences, even when the underlying factors are no longer active. This type of interaction can fuel macro-level responses and contribute to perpetuating differentials both between and within societies (see also Fux and Baumgartner, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> A similar approach is adopted by Pinnelli et al., 2001.

The importance of micro-level *gender* factors in shaping family dynamics can be examined from the viewpoint of micro-macro interactions. Bernhardt (1993) maintains that greater equality between men and women at the micro-level may lie behind the higher fertility, among European countries, of the Nordic area. McDonald (2000) sees low gender equity within the family as a key component on the pathway to very low fertility. The second aspect of gender equity is with regard to individual-oriented institutions, such as the labour market; the clash between the individual aspirations of women (which may be heterogeneous: Hakim, 2003) and the possible gender inequity within the family gives rise to very low fertility: "When gender equity rises to high levels in individual-oriented institutions while remaining low in family-oriented institutions, fertility will fall to very low levels" (McDonald, 2000, p. 437). The degree of equity in individual-oriented institutions (e.g. the labour market) is defined at the macro-level, while the degree of equity within the family, although subject to influence from the macro level, is defined at the level of the couple. *This macro-micro interaction in gender equity is, according to McDonald, the basis for explaining the emergence of very low fertility.*

Among scholars interested in evaluating the impact of welfare regimes on life courses, there has been a long-term interest in comparing the impact of micro-level factors among different societies. A discussion of the *interaction between individual-level factors and institutional context*, in the context of leaving home, can be found for instance in Aassve et al. (2002). They argue that income differentials can partially explain the postponement of leaving home in several European societies, but what is most important is that the *effect of income is different according to the welfare regime*. Earning one's own income is more important for young adults living in Southern European and in Liberal Market Welfare Regimes (e.g. the U.K) than for those living in Continental and Social Democratic welfare Regimes. This implies that 1) individual-level differences in income are more important in accounting for differences in age at leaving home in countries where leaving home happens at later ages (consistent with predictions from Mayer, 2001, for instance); 2) potential policies targeted at increasing the income of young adults may propitiate independent living more in countries where such independent living is commonly postponed; 3) small differences in average income (e.g. per capita income in Southern Europe being slightly lower than in Northern Europe) may become amplified by institutional arrangement and thus account for national differences because of this interaction. Not only is income important, but also its stability; income stability is a component of general *economic security*, which constitutes a key factor in shaping household decisions. In addition to the macro-level dimensions of income volatility (especially in former Socialist countries),

micro-level dimensions such as employment stability can in part explain trends in postponement (Gustafsson, 2001). As in the case of income, economic stability may have stronger effects where less insurance is provided by the welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1999): this is the case, for instance, with unemployment in Southern Europe (e.g. Ahn and Mira, 2001).

*The housing situation* is also an important factor. First, it may lock families in to situations that do not allow them to realise their choices, especially with housing markets that are not flexible: in societies with a low share of rental properties, housing choices - and family choices that require modifications in housing circumstances - may be made more difficult for individuals who are 'outsiders' and who do not own a home. In addition, housing transaction costs, together with access to mortgages and other instruments to finance housing, may be important factors for deciding whether to initiate a family or household change which would imply a move. In former socialist countries, the housing shortage has had an important impact in shaping living arrangements in young adulthood (Billari et al., 2001). Since the economic transition they remain important, as in the whole UNECE area, but their impact depends on national and regional-level policies.

Income is just one of the important micro-level constraints that underpin partnering, childbearing and parenting behaviour and interacts with macro-level factors. *Time* constraints are also crucial. The opportunity cost of childbearing depends crucially on the number of working hours that have to be spent on childcare. Choosing a part-time jobs for instance, where childcare is not generally available full-time, is a micro-level strategy to overcome macro-level constraints. This micro-macro interaction on time constraints might explain why, for instance, the impact of childcare on fertility has contrasting results when compared across different nations (Gauthier, 2003). The use of time is also closely connected with the issues we discussed earlier concerning gender equity (Apps, 2003). Time may also be important in other ways, as emphasised in the literature of population economics: individuals derive utility from 'togetherness', that is time spent with their partner and children. Hamermesh (2002) discusses this issue and argues that the synchronisation of work schedules between partners is diminishing, and this translates into a loss of togetherness. In addition, time spent parenting has a positive effect on children's development. In the literature, which mostly focuses on the United States, the impact of increasing maternal employment on time spent with children is not clear; some experts have warned against the tendency to exaggerate the negative effects (Bianchi, 2000). Using comparative time-use analysis, Gershuny (2000) suggests that time spent on childcare activities by both fathers and mothers has increased since the mid-1980s. Further



comparative research is needed on issues concerning time.

Another example of interaction is between *individual-level factors and (potentially) time-varying socio-economic factors and policies*. Not only can policies affect family dynamics, but socio-economic or family policies may affect different social strata (as defined by income or educational attainment) in a different way. Aassve et al. (2003) analyse the impact of the transition from a universal to a means-tested type of family allowance in Hungary during the mid-1990s. The impact of the policy change was to broaden the age gap in the transition to motherhood between high and low social strata (as represented by educational levels). As soon as the family allowance became universal again, the differences returned to their initial level. Interactions between micro-level and macro-level are also present in the interrelationships between events in the transition to adulthood: as we have already mentioned, Baizán et al. (2004) have shown that out-of-union conceptions lead more often to marriage than to cohabitation in West Germany compared to Sweden. This could be explained by the presence of differences in both the fiscal treatment and the social acceptability of pre-marital births in the two societies.

The lesson we can learn from micro-macro interactions on the determinants of family dynamics is that we really cannot define the *true effect* of a micro-level factor in a setting like the UNECE area. The institutional and cultural variables we discussed in Section 4.1 are always - to a greater or lesser extent - modifying the impact of micro-level factors, although one could suggest groups of societies where similar outcomes may be predicted (e.g. those with similar welfare regimes).

As far as *social interactions* are concerned, they have been the primary interest in some recent demographic literature on fertility decline (e.g. Bongaarts and Watkins, 1996; Montgomery and Casterline, 1996; Kohler, 2001); they have also been used as a possible explanation of lowest low fertility (Kohler et al., 2002). Social interaction effects refer mainly to 'social influence' and 'social learning'. These may entail: 1) *social multiplier effects* (similar to the ones we have described on the interaction between income and institutional settings), where overall behavioural impact is larger than what was initially triggered; 2) *multiple equilibria*, with more than one stable regime (e.g. early home-leaving, such as in the Nordic countries, together with late home-leaving as in Southern Europe); 3) *status-quo enforcement and path dependence*, where the present situation continues to exert a long-term impact. The main importance for our discussion here is the consequence on national-level differences. We suggest two such consequences. First, the presence of multiple equilibria and path dependence imply the potential for much stronger stability of long-term differences (based on long-

term family models or on institutional settings), which remain independent of the convergence of other factors. Secondly, social interaction effects typically give rise to transitions that continue independently of the factors that originated such transitions.

## Outlook

In this paper we have documented that, within the countries of the UNECE, major changes in family dynamics have taken place during the last decade of the second millennium, following other periods of change and the fall of the Iron Curtain. Most of these changes have moved in the same direction, within a set of common trends. Will these trends continue during the first decade of this century and beyond? We conclude this background paper with an outlook for the future, including some reflections on the information needs and on the link with some of the objectives of the United Nations.

First of all, we shall discuss the issue of whether a general *convergence* of demographic behaviour can be expected within the UNECE area. This general convergence could be expected as an outcome of global trends towards an increasing similarity in socio-economic and institutional systems, as well as common directions of ideational change. Some authors have emphasised that convergence is to be expected on these grounds (e.g. Roussel, 1992; Jones, 1993). Other authors have investigated the actual convergence at the global level, e.g. towards low fertility (Wilson, 2001). Persistent differences within Western Europe, a setting which is relatively homogeneous from an economic point of view, have led some researchers to emphasise the lack of convergence, or even a divergence of family formation (Kuijsten, 1996; Billari and Kohler, 2002), as well as of family policies (Gauthier, 2002). Looking at past decades, and at studies reviewing several indicators and using different notions of convergence, the most cautious conclusion we can draw is that while there are signs of convergence for some behavioural indicators, other indicators consistently show persistent diversity (Billari and Wilson, 2001; Coleman, 2002; Mamolo, 2004). In our outlook for the future of family dynamics in the UNECE area, then, it is not safe to assume a general convergence of behaviours. We will thus consider separately the domains of partnering and parenting on the one side, and the domain of childbearing on the other.

The key issues on *partnering and parenting* are related to the types of partnership and their stability, as well as to the relationship between partnership status and childbearing. The breakdown of strict gender roles, lower social and religious pressure towards marriage, and the general developments of the 'Second Demographic Transition' lead us to foresee that the recently observed trends are not going to stop (see also Furstenberg, 2003). The postponement of marriage is likely to continue,

although it is not clear whether this will coincide with a postponement of co-residential unions in general. The latest late pattern of transition to adulthood observed in Southern Europe does not necessarily indicate the direction in which most other countries will head. On the other hand, the prevalence of cohabitation is likely to further increase in the UNECE area. In addition, the diffusion of cohabitation will unavoidably contribute to a rise in the instability of co-residential partnerships; this adds to the increasing instability of marital unions. Parenting will thus become less and less linked to partnership status; not only is partnership status likely to be increasingly less important at the moment of birth of the child, but also dissolution and re-partnering will increasingly change the configuration of parents commonly experienced by children in their everyday life.

In this scenario, we have to take into account three components. First, policy measures may accompany, interfere with, redirect and sometimes even reverse societal trends. Examples of such measures include modifications in the legal framework of partnerships (including new forms of recognised non-marital partnership) and the role of partnership status in other policy-related domains (e.g. the tax system, housing and child allowances). Secondly, even in the presence of common trends, the levels are unlikely to become similar in all UNECE countries. As we have discussed, long-term and deeply-rooted cultural differences on the one side, and the heterogeneity of institutional settings on the other, ensure that evolution will be path-dependent and that differences are likely to persist. Thirdly, the short- and long-term implications of the evolution of partnership forms, both on individuals who experience insecure partnerships and their dissolution, and even more importantly on their children, will need to become key concerns in all countries of the UNECE area.

As far as *childbearing* is concerned (and thus, parenting in general), the chief question is whether fertility will continue to be low - that is, below replacement - over almost all the UNECE area, and whether countries that are not yet below the replacement level will move on to experience low fertility as well. We can speculate a positive answer to this question; in general, we think low fertility is here to stay. This is now the general consensus, even by observers who seemed, in the past, to see replacement-level as an equilibrium (Bongaarts, 2002). It is also consistent with the observation that desired family sizes, which usually exceed actual total fertility in a low fertility context, have dropped below replacement in several European countries (Goldstein et al., 2003). It is also relatively safe to foresee that adolescent fertility will continue to drop. More questionable is the future of very low, and even more of lowest low, fertility. According to Caldwell and Schindlmayr (2003), the Southern European pattern may spread to other societies which are based on strong intergenerational ties: "if the explanations provided by

the Mediterranean, largely the Italian model, centred on patriarchy and the breadwinner, are correct, then the tendency to fall below replacement-level fertility as incomes rise will eventually occur throughout much of the rest of the world because patriarchy is widespread throughout Asia and Africa".

Within societies presently experiencing very low and lowest low fertility, the impact of the postponement of childbearing is crucial (Kohler et al., 2002). If births can be postponed further - as is the case of countries where the mean age at first birth is still relatively low - then very low, and even lowest low, fertility is likely to persist. The postponement of births then gives a central role to fertility at ages which are increasingly closer to the end of the reproductive life span of women. New reproductive technologies, health care, and the compatibility of child-rearing with other roles during mid-adulthood will shape the possibilities of reaching desired family size, as fertility starts later than in the past. In this scenario, we should mention three principal components that have to be taken into account. First of all, changes in socio-economic policies, and in particular welfare reforms, may change the picture in the future; it is not clear, however, whether or not the foreseeable changes will favour a return to higher levels of fertility. Secondly, the implications of very low and lowest low fertility will have to become a key part of the public debate. At the micro level, kinship networks will shrink with successive generations and societies in which there are significant flows of care from children to their elderly parents are likely to experience friction from a burden that may possibly be too heavy. At the macro level, rapid population ageing will be the main consequence of very low and lowest low fertility and it will call for major adaptations in societies. Thirdly, the increasing flexibility of unions, both in terms of formation and dissolution, may create the conditions for a rise in fertility, although this might come at a high price for the long-term implications on children.

The evolution of partnering, parenting and childbearing is relevant to meeting UN goals. The Programme of Action adopted at the ICPD of Cairo in 1994 (United Nations, 1996) includes in particular objectives on 'Gender Equality, Equity and the Empowerment of Women' (chapter IV), on 'The Family, Its Roles, Rights, Composition and Structure' (Chapter V), and on 'Population Growth and Structure' (chapter VI). The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women also constitutes the UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) No. 3; some MDG countries of the UNECE region have already been scrutinised with respect to gender issues (Albania, Armenia, Lithuania and Poland; see UNDP, 2003). In relation to the behaviours analysed in this paper, the issue is also relevant to partnering and, indirectly, to childbearing and parenting. 'Investing in women' may be a key to overcoming the present trends that can have

negative implications for society (e.g. lowest low fertility). Chapter V of the ICPD Programme of Action is concerned with policies related to family issues, with a special emphasis on policies directed at single parents and on the promotion of compatibility between 'labour force participation and parental responsibilities'. As we have seen, the changing correlation between fertility and labour force participation at the cross-country level indicates that such compatibility (which is then also a gender issue) is one of the keys to moderate below-replacement fertility in the UNECE area. The present levels of adolescent childbearing, which are still highly heterogeneous across the UNECE area, indicates that there are still weaknesses with respect to young people in the provision of 'information, education and communication activities and services concerning reproductive and sexual health' (United Nations, 1996, p. 38; chapters VI, VII of the Programme of Action).

This paper has benefited substantially from the availability of standardised comparative data; of particular relevance for depicting the trends in the 1990s has been the series of Fertility and Family Surveys carried under the coordination of the Population Activities Unit of the UNECE. As we look to developments in the first decade of the 21st century, we need to emphasise that the collection of comparative data at the micro-level is of enormous importance. Not only is this consistent with the proposals of the Programme of Action of the ICPD (chapter XII), two further aspects should also be mentioned here. First, in order to be able to monitor the situation, and to describe the trends about ten years from now, we need to have access to figures supplementary to the data that are routinely collected in official statistics. In other words, it is important to be able to replicate the description of trends reported in Section 2, which were mostly based either on official statistics or on FFS data. However, as the FFS data-taking was carried out mostly in the middle of the 1990s, the retrospective information we used could not adequately describe patterns of change *during* the decade of the 1990s (for instance, the demographic consequences of the economic transition in former Socialist countries). New comparative and retrospective data need to be collected to be able to fully grasp patterns of behaviour. Secondly, it is crucial to "move beyond elaborate description" towards understanding choices, opportunities and constraints concerning partnering, parenting and childbearing in an international perspective (Hobcraft, 2002). The families of potential explanations, as reviewed in section 3, require interdisciplinary types of studies and data collection ventures, which are not yet in place at the moment of this European Population Forum. The realisation of an ambitious comparative program, which combines survey data and macro-level data collection, such as the Generations and Gender Programme currently being promoted by the PAU of the UNECE (UNECE and UNFPA, 2000), is an essential precondition to reach a better understanding of family

dynamics, and to try and evaluate the relative weight of each family of explanations of international differences in the next decade and beyond.

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