

Fertility patterns among foreign-origin population: the evidence from Estonia

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With the persistence of high immigration and low fertility, there is a growing recognition of the importance of migrants for childbearing in the receiving countries of Europe. Most of the analyses on the topic have focused on the countries of Western, Northern and Southern Europe, which have received relatively large numbers of migrants during the last decades (for recent overviews, see Coleman 2006 and Sobotka 2008). Studies focusing on immigrant fertility in Eastern Europe have been rare, mainly because a larger-scale immigration constitutes a relatively recent phenomenon in most countries of the region.

The present study aims to contribute to the body research on this topic by analyzing fertility patterns of foreign-origin population in Estonia, against the background of native population. In the European context, Estonia experienced a relatively early demographic and mobility transition (Coale et al 1979; Coale and Watkins 1986; Katus et al 2002). The switch from emigration to immigration was abrupt and took place immediately after the end of WWII when the country was incorporated into the Soviet Union. The large flows persisted for more than four decades and left the country with a large population of foreign origin that accounted for more than a third of the total at the turn of the 1990s. Although these migrations occurred within a larger political entity, their characteristics are similar to international migrations, including a considerable demographic, socio-economic and cultural distance between the sending and receiving country, the need for adaptation to new societal environment, young age structure of migrants, their concentration in specific areas and sectors of economy, low rates of intermarriage etc (Sakkeus 1996; Katus and Puur 2006). These features allow to draw parallels with the experience of immigrant countries in other parts of Europe.

The data for the study come from several sources. Census and vital statistics are complemented by the evidence from national surveys carried out in the framework of FFS and GGS programmes. The analysis addresses the contribution of migrants to the total number of births and compares the fertility rates of migrant and native women. The analysis primarily applies a cohort approach and addresses the quantum as well as timing of childbearing, the classical demographic methods are complemented with event history models. Whenever the data allows, the definition of foreign-born and foreign-origin populations applied in the study builds on the country of birth/country of origin, irrespective of other characteristics (citizenship, self-ascribed ethnicity etc). The foreign-origin population is defined as consisting of persons none of whose parents and grandparents originate from Estonia, i.e. the descendants from mixed marriages are included in the native population.

The analysis reveals a remarkably strong contribution of foreign-origin population to the total number of birth. In the 1970s and 1980s it accounted for more than a third of births registered in the country, leaving a long-term imprint on the ethnic and linguistic composition of the population. The cessation of massive inflow after the turn of the 1990s has somewhat reduced the proportion of births to women of immigrant background. In the recent years it has accounted for less than 30% of the total.

The comparison of completed cohort fertility rates allows to distinguish between two different patterns among women of immigrant origin born during the 20th century. In older cohorts, born in the first quarter of the century, the foreign-

origin population shows noticeably higher fertility, reflecting the later onset of fertility transition in the regions from which the immigrants originate. The progression of fertility transition in the latter resulted in the continuous decline and the convergence of levels with the native population in the birth cohorts of the late 1920s. However, the state of convergence proved temporary and in the generations born in the 1930s and later, the levels diverged again with foreign-origin women having a systematically lower fertility compared to their native counterparts.

The examination of parity progression ratios and the ultimate parity distribution reveals that the lower completed fertility stems mainly from the less frequent progression to a second, and in particular, to a third birth among the foreign-origin population. Compared to the native population, the corresponding measures have been twice or even more than twice lower, demonstrating the largest difference across parity distribution. On the other hand, the proportion of women with one-child has been markedly higher among immigrants. At the same time it is interesting to note that childbearing has typically occurred at an earlier age among the foreign-origin population.

The comparatively early onset of immigration has rendered Estonia with numerous second (and emerging third) generation of immigrants which currently dominate the cohorts of foreign-origin population in reproductive age. From an analytical point of view, this allows to trace fertility patterns among from the intergenerational perspective which has been relatively little explored in the literature. Our results show a considerable similarity in behavioural outcomes in the first and second generation.

From a theoretical point of view, our findings lend support to the socialisation hypothesis, which emphasises the importance of culture, norms and values inherited from the regions of origin, and to the selection hypothesis that points to distinct social characteristics of immigrants that may contribute to departures from the patterns that prevail in the sending populations. It is likely that both mechanisms have operated in tandem. On the one hand, the persistence of norms and values can explain the higher fertility of immigrants in the cohorts born early in the 20th century after their arrival to the host country. On the other hand, the selectivity of migrants has evidently contributed to systematically lower levels of fertility, compared to the average of the sending countries, in particular the Russian Federation. The socialisation hypothesis seems also applicable to the second generation, whose reproductive patterns display no convergence with the native population.

In a broader framework, our results indicate that the demographic integration to host society has been relatively slow in Estonia. The second generation has largely followed fertility patterns characteristic to their parental generation/host country. The evidence based on the examination of fertility intentions suggests that systematic difference between the foreign-origin and native population may well extend to the third generation of immigrants.

Unlike the common experience of immigration countries, in Estonia the net effect of migrants on completed cohort fertility is assessed negative since the birth cohorts of the 1930s. Moreover, the cessation of large inflows and the downsurge of fertility in the beginning of the 1990s turned also negative the natural growth rates of the foreign-origin population. For the recent decade and a half, the foreign-origin population has been experiencing a steeper decrease than the native population in Estonia. It remains to be discussed whether the latter situation should be regarded a product of the exclusively country-specific circumstances or does it involved some

broader relevance to other receiving countries, which have fertility transitions completed in their sending populations and migrations inflows decreasing.

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