

Trends of second birth rates in Eastern Europe after 1990: a comparative study of four selected countries

Most post-socialist countries have experienced a demographic change together with the changes of the political and economic systems. As fertility is concerned, most of the changes are described as a postponement of entering marriage and starting reproductive life, lower TFRs, an increase of out-of-wedlock births, and the emergence of new trends in family formation. Generally, the trends are very similar in the different countries of Eastern Europe, but the timing and the tempo are still different. In Tables 1 and 2 we have plotted the TFRs and the mean age of first birth for Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Russia. It is visible that in each of the countries the trends of the changes follow the same directions, although in some countries the fluctuations are stronger than in others, or the levels are somewhat higher or lower.

Table 1. Total fertility rate for the period 1990 – 2004 in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Russia

	Bulgaria	Hungary	Romania	Russia
1990	1,82	1,87	1,84	1,9
1991	1,66	1,88	1,6	1,75
1992	1,55	1,78	1,52	1,56
1993	1,46	1,69	1,44	1,36
1994	1,37	1,64	1,41	1,39
1995	1,23	1,57	1,34	1,34
1996	1,23	1,46	1,3	1,28
1997	1,09	1,38	1,32	1,23
1998	1,11	1,32	1,32	1,25
1999	1,23	1,28	1,3	1,17
2000	1,26	1,32	1,31	1,21
2001	1,24	1,31	1,24	1,25
2002	1,21	1,30	1,26	1,3
2003	1,23	1,27	1,27	1,31
2004	1,29	1,28	1,29	1,33

Source: GGP contextual database; Council of Europe 2005

In the beginning of the 1990s in all four countries the levels of the TFR was very similar, during the 1990s, there is a universal drop, but with different speed and strength, and in 2004, the levels are again very similar. For instance, the TFR in Bulgaria has seen much more ups and downs compared to the nearly linear trend in Hungary, but in the meanwhile both countries have reached very similar levels.

Also, the rise of the mean age of first birth in Romania and Russia follows very similar speed, while in Bulgaria the rise starts later and is steeper. In 2004, the mean age of first birth in Bulgaria is very similar to the one in Romania and slightly higher than the one in Russia.

Table 2. Mean age of first birth for the period 1990 – 2004 in Bulgaria, Romania and Russia

	Bulgaria	Romania	Russia
1990	22,2	22,7	22,6
1991	21,8	22,6	22,6
1992	21,8	22,7	22,6
1993	21,9	22,8	22,6
1994	22,1	22,9	22,5
1995	22,2	23	22,7
1996	22,4	23,1	22,9
1997	22,7	23,3	23
1998	22,9	23,4	23,1
1999	23	23,5	23,3
2000	23,5	23,6	23,5
2001	23,7	23,8	23,7
2002	23,9	24,1	23,8
2003	24,3	24,3	23,9
2004	24,4	24,6	24

Source: GGP contextual database; Council of Europe 2005

Most of the demographic studies that either separately deal with eastern European countries or are comparative across several countries deal with the postponement of births and the influence of changing economic, political,

educational systems, or the labor market. However, not much attention has been given to the contribution of the decreasing number of second births to the overall fertility. There are some studies that study the drop of second births within the counties (Muresan 2007, Koytcheva 2006, Riek 2006, etc.) and analyze the trend depending on different settings. Less is done in the direction of comparing the decrease of second birth rates across the countries.

In our study, we want to compare the trends of second birth developments since the beginning of the 1990s across four ex-socialist countries: Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and Russia. We want to examine if changes proceeded along the same steps; if the intervals between births are comparable and how they change through time; if the drop of second birth rates developed similarly across the countries. We also want to study the influence of education, economic situation and employment of the mothers on the timing of the second births and how these influence differ in their strength across the four counties.

We consider that comparing Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Russia will reveal interesting results. The four countries have a lot in common, but they also differ in many respects. All of them have been in the socialist block, but the development after 1990 was very different. Hungary advanced better in economic respect, and Romania and Bulgaria are considered to develop very similarly. Also, the most popular religion in Hungary is catholic, while in the other countries it is orthodox. The countries differ also in the spoken languages: the Bulgarian and Russian languages are Slavic, the Romanian language belongs to the group of Romance languages and the Hungarian language is a Uralic language. Presumably, the countries differ in their

cultures, so we can somewhat judge how much the culture differences matter in the observed demographic changes.

The data that we want to use stem from the Gender and Generation Programme¹. The available information allows us to use individual level data and apply multilevel event history analysis to study the changes in the second birth trends for the four countries.

We expect that our results show that there is a significant and steady drop, as well as delay, in the second births in each country. We assume that in Hungary and Bulgaria this decrease has started earlier than in the other two countries (possibly due to economic situation, contraceptive policies and emergence of new trends). Our expectation is also that the level of second birth rates is highest in Russia. We suggest that in each country, less educated women will have higher propensity of having second child, in line with the economic theories. The influence of new trends in the family formation possibly would also differ across the countries. Also, we expect that the interval between births would differ in each country and will be highly dependent on the newly introduced demographic policies and the social benefits for the families. However, we believe that there will be an increase in the intervals in all the countries.

References:

- Council of Europe (2005) *Recent Demographic Developments in Europe*, edn. Council of Europe Publishing.
- Koytcheva, E. (2006) Social-Demographic Differences of Fertility and Union Formation in Bulgaria, *Doctoral Thesis*, Rostock: University of Rostock.
- Muresan, C. (2007) Educational Attainment and Second Births in Romania, *MPIDR Working paper WP- 2007-028*, Rostock
- Riek, D. (2006) Transition to second birth – the case of Russia, *MPIDR Working paper WP- 2006-036*, Rostock

¹ More information about the study on: <http://www.unece.org/pau/ggp/Welcome.html>