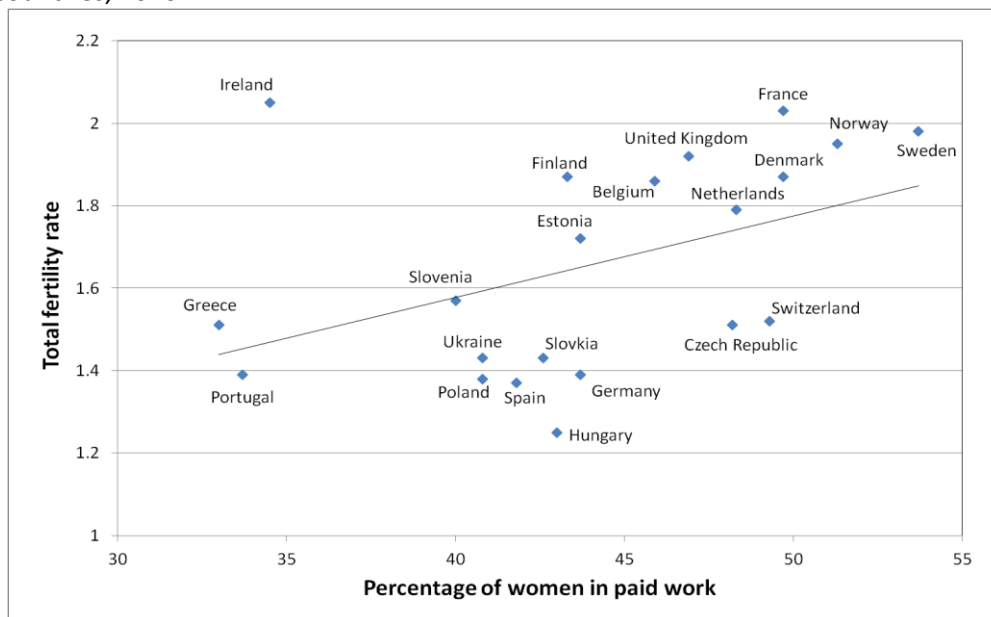


What Changing Family Life tells us about Europeans?

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The low fertility level in developed countries has been in spotlight of demographers for decades. However, full understanding of this phenomenon has been still far away. This paper aims to assist clarification of the issue of low fertility focusing on changes in family structure and family life in selected European countries in recent years. Data of the European Social Survey, which is one of the largest surveys measuring the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour pattern in more than thirty European countries, are examined. The survey is conducted each two years from 2001, however not all countries joined immediately at the beginning of the survey existence. Therefore only 21 countries which attend rounds in 2004 and 2010 enter for the comparability reason into our research. The sample for the cross-country comparison involves states located both at the north and south Europe as well as west and east Europe, what enables us to capture variation in family structure and differences in attitudes to family lives, different social and economic conditions, traditions and norm, etc. and so to answer our research question, what the changes in family life tell us about Europeans.

Fig. 1: Total fertility rate versus percentage of women in paid work, selected European countries, 2010



Source: ESS 2010, Eurostat 2010

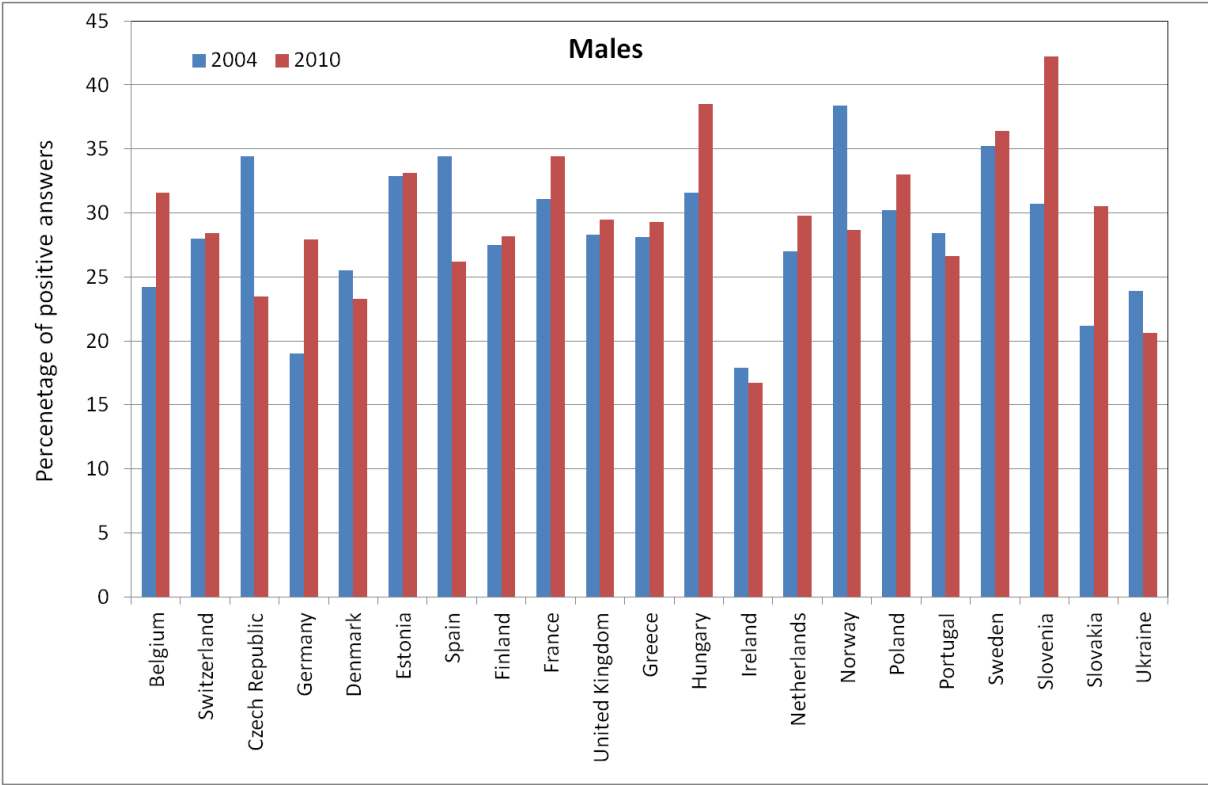
Fertility decline below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman is possible to trace in western European countries back to 1960's. The fall in fertility was unexpected that time and one of the first concept which tries to explain this change is well known concept of the Second demographic transition (van de Kaa 2002) which stress besides other changes in values and attitudes. The concept underwent profound inspection, but still has its defenders and opponents. In the post-communist countries fertility decline is documented mainly after switch to political regime and economic organisation now. The fall in fertility was more intense within

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a short period in those countries, and in comparison with the western European countries explanations were more often related to economic downturn. Fig. 1 shows the total fertility rate taking into account the percentage of woman in paid work in 2010. It is obvious that 19 of 21 studied countries have still the total fertility rate below the replacement level and that the simple division into the western and post-communist does not hold anymore. In the first group of countries (Eastern, Central and Southern Europe), there the TFR is very low without any relation to percentage of employed women. The second group of countries consist of Western and Northern European countries typical by their high employment rate of women as well as by relatively high fertility level. Ireland seems to be a specific case highly determined by long-term traditions and social norms.

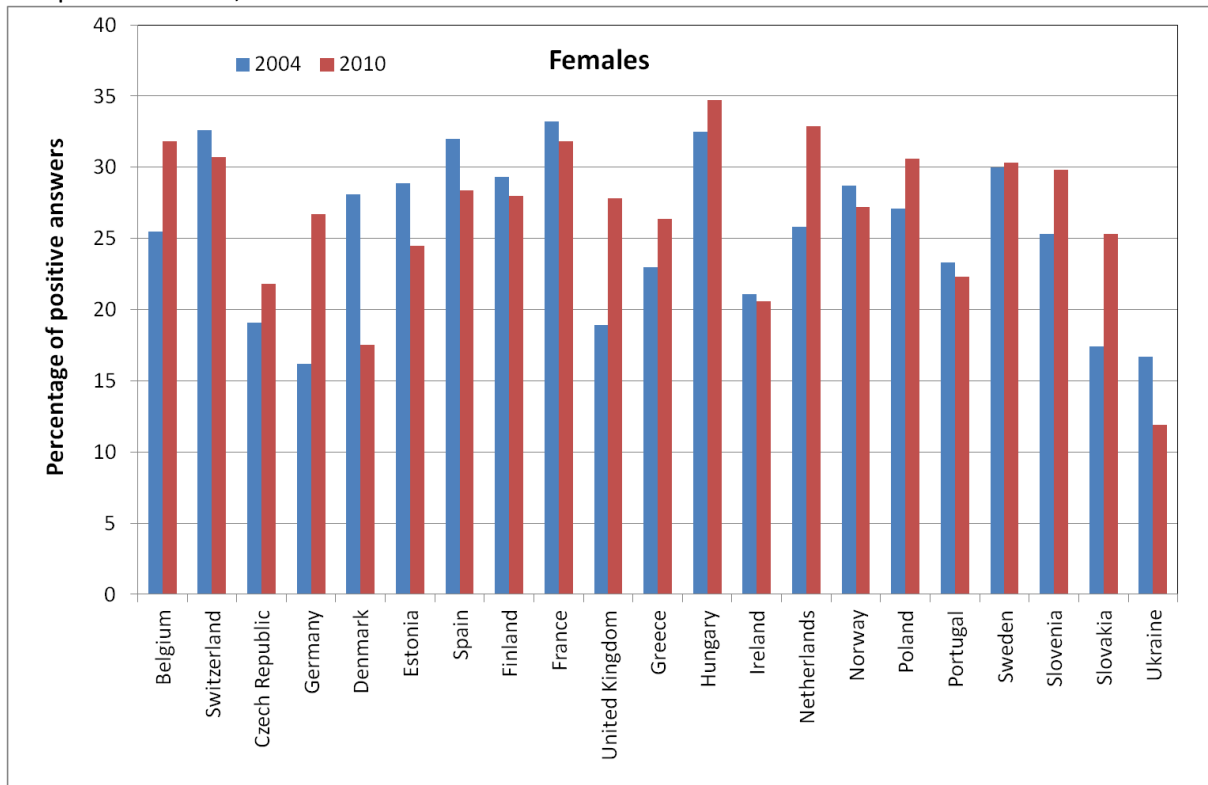
The labour market conditions are considered to be one of the most important factors determining the fertility level in Europe. Women have almost the same opportunities in labour market and in education as men these days, but these opportunities are severely curtailed by having children what influences the decision on childbearing. Economic approaches claim that the opportunity costs of childbearing are substantial in comparison with the past and therefore the fertility remain at low levels.

Fig.2: Percentage of males in paid work who plan having child within next 3 years, selected European countries, 2004 and 2010



Note: Include categories probably yes and definitely yes.
 Source: ESS 2004 and 2010

Fig.3: Percentage of females in paid work who plan having child within next 3 years, selected European countries, 2004 and 2010



Note: Include categories probably yes and definitely yes.
 Source: ESS 2004 and 2010

Figure 2 and 3, utilizing ESS data for two comparable rounds 2004 and 2010, present respondent's intention to have a child within following three years. The respondents are differentiated by gender and all of them are in paid work. The variation among the countries is apparent. Quite remarkable are also differences comparing the years 2004 and 2010, because it can be surprising, that more than half of countries regardless gender have higher percentage shares of those planning a child within following three years in 2010. In our mind the year 2010 is related to global economic downturn what could results in negative expectations of people about their near future. The results lead to the idea that respondent's prospect of future is more optimistic in 2010 what could be good news to economies, but it is not necessarily true. In case of Germany and Slovakia the significantly higher share of those women who plan having a child within three years in 2010 is influenced by the age structure. Fertility in those countries was postponed to higher ages and it is reasonable to assume, that higher percentages of people panning having a child within next 3 years are caused by populous generations born in the 70's of the 20th century. Those women do not have a change to postpone their fertility anymore.

The main objective of the article is to capture how the selected European countries vary with respect to family work and well-being. The aim is not only the comparison among countries, but also the comparison in time which is possible due to two rounds of European Social Survey including the same questions.

From the results it is clear, that the fertility intentions as well as its realization are influenced by many factors of the individual, family and also society character. Specifics which do not change significantly in time could be tied more to traditions or common personal values – what is typical for example for Ireland. In the rest of the countries the economic characteristics play a crucial

role – above all in relation to working life and career. In Europe the inverse relation between employment rate of women and the total fertility rate could be observable – the reasons of it could be found in the labour market itself and in the applied tools of population and family policy in the countries. Nowadays the question of possibilities of the work- and family-life combination arose significantly. It could be supposed, that in the countries with relatively higher levels of fertility this issue is solved sufficiently. On the other side, in low fertility countries women often feel the problem of coordinating their career and family-life. Among other reasons the lack of support in this area stood behind the rapid fertility decline and its stable low level. However, in the recent years the intentions to have a baby increased also in these countries (e.g. in Germany or Slovakia). In contrast to favourable conditions in the Northern and Western Europe, in the low-fertility countries the increase of fertility plans could be more related to the fertility postponement of latest years which cannot continue forever.

Here we illustrated only briefly the width of questions rising in connection to family-life in Europe and its changes, questions which could lead to better understanding the prevailing norms, problems and intentions in Europe. Still holds that the family-life in its heterogeneity is one of the most important characteristics of contemporary Europeans.

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