

Home

About the Institute

Research

Staff

VID Publications

News & Events

Job vacancies

Information for the Public

Links

SEARCH

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Childbearing preferences and family issues in Europe: evidence from the Eurobarometer 2006 survey

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of major findings described in the report on “Childbearing Preferences and Family Issues in Europe” written at the request of the European Commission, Directorate-General Communication, Opinion Polls (Testa 2006). The report confirms the emergence of below-replacement family size ideals in Europe: Austrian women aged 25-39 show indeed a mean value of 1.7 children. As expected, ideals are higher than actual or intended fertility, and when we add up the number of children already born with those people still intend to have in the future, several other countries show an average ultimately intended family size of less than two children. The presence of a supportive partner is the most important circumstance in childbearing decisions, and consistently, the lack of the right partner for raising children is the most frequent reason given for not meeting the fertility desires formulated at the beginning of the reproductive career. The contribution of both partners is considered necessary for a good family life, but the role of mothers is judged to be the more crucial one. Countries more liberal in terms of gender roles in family life also show preferences for larger families.

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