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Reflexion

**Preface:
Childbearing Trends and Policies in Europe**

Jan M. Hoem

This publication is part of Special Collection 7: Childbearing Trends and
Policies in Europe (<http://www.demographic-research.org/special/7/>)

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Preface: Childbearing Trends and Policies in Europe

Jan M. Hoem¹

The editors of the present Special Collection of the electronic journal *Demographic Research* take pleasure in making the Collection available to the research community and the general public. The Collection's principal focus is the demographic analysis of European fertility trends, their determinants, and public policies modifying childbearing. The collection is the outcome of an international comparative project. It includes nineteen country studies, eight topical overview chapters, and a summary.

Tomas Frejka has acted as the project's *primus motor* and main editor. Tomáš Sobotka, Jan M. Hoem, and Laurent Toulemon have supported him as co-editors. The Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research has provided organisational support. Initial discussions about this project began in the summer of 2005. By the fall of that year the rationale for the project had crystallised. The following premises served as our point of departure:

- Throughout Europe fertility had reached below-replacement levels;
- Demographers and policy makers were increasingly becoming concerned about possible long-term deleterious consequences;
- A considerable number of investigations concerning fertility trends and their determinants within countries had been undertaken, as well as some international comparative research;
- Comparative surveys on changes in family and fertility attitudes and behavior have been conducted in many countries, and the resulting datasets have been made available.

Despite the value of existing work, we thought that a meaningful contribution could be made if a large number of country studies of childbearing trends and policies were to be executed in a coordinated fashion. This would facilitate international comparability and provide a basis for updating a continent-wide understanding of the situation. We also envisioned that countries might learn from each other's experiences in determining which policies can be applied to reach desired goals.

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Another reflection was instrumental in our decision to embark on this project. We believed that the mechanisms generating childbearing trends in Western European countries, including the Nordic and Mediterranean ones, were reasonably well understood. By contrast, knowledge about the transformations of family formation and childbearing in the formerly socialist countries of Europe was uneven and fragmentary. Our obvious goal was to contribute to a better documentation and understanding of developments across Europe. Thus a project proposal was developed in the fall of 2005, and the project was launched.

The selection of countries was based on the following considerations: We did not strive for complete coverage of all countries in Europe, but rather aimed for a reasonable geographical representation and attempted to include all countries with more than 15 million inhabitants. Our collection contains chapters for countries for which we have managed to find qualified authors who would commit themselves to the demanding task of writing a chapter on the country's recent fertility and family developments at short notice.

The overview chapters cover the following topics:

1. Contemporary levels and trends of fertility in Europe
2. Changing ultimate-parity distribution and family size
3. Birth regulation (contraception and induced abortion)
4. Changing family and partnership behaviour
5. Childbearing during the societal transition in Central and Eastern Europe
6. The diverse faces of the Second Demographic Transition in Europe
7. The rising importance of migrants for childbearing in Europe
8. The impact of public policies on European fertility.

Each of these chapters summarises findings of the country chapters, is set in the framework of the general literature on the given topic, and includes additional analyses.

We adopted a strict regime of peer review with the following elements. First drafts of the country chapters were pre-reviewed by the editors, revised by the authors, submitted to reviewers selected from the journal's Scientific Review Board, revised again, language edited, and were revised once more by the original author(s). Each overview chapter was written by one or two editors, pre-reviewed by other editors, revised, submitted to reviewers, and finally revised again in the light of their comments. (A list of all peer reviewers for the project can be found at the end of this preface.) This whole process was conducted under the time pressure caused by my imminent retirement, which occurred at the beginning of 2008, and the editing work progressed under Tomas Frejka's unflagging supervision throughout. Renee Flibotte-Lüskow has managed the project firmly and with her usual sense of humour. Technical support,

language editing, and layout services were organized by staff at the Max Planck Institute.

Because *Demographic Research* has an arrangement with Special Collections, it has been possible to publish this collection in one go in mid-2008, as the first part of Volume 19. The editors chose to use this medium because it gives free online access to all the chapters, because it is unusually cost-effective, and because this was the optimal way to get the material into print so quickly, i.e., within less than three years of the project initiation in the fall of 2005. The material is therefore available fully integrated into the journal from the day of publication, and can be easily accessed at no cost to the reader using the journal's search engine. The Special Collection can be downloaded as open access material, and bound versions are available through a print-on-demand service. We have donated such books to some 50 depository libraries and research centres.

The editors are impressed by the loyalty with which authors and collaborators have followed instructions and kept deadlines. We want to express our profound gratitude to the country teams of authors and to the reviewers for their collegial spirit and ability to get the job done under very strict time constraints. As emeritus director of the Max Planck Institute, I want to express my great appreciation to Tomas Frejka for initiating the project and firmly leading the work. The editorial team wants to thank the Max Planck Institute for making the resources of the electronic journal available, and for its general organizational support.

Rostock, 1 July 2008.

Jan M. Hoem

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