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Charlotte Höhn
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Editors

People, Population Change and Policies

Lessons from the Population Policy
Acceptance Study – Volume 1



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People, Population Change and Policies

Lessons from the Population Policy
Acceptance Study Vol. 1: Family Change

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Chapter 9

Attitudes and Intentions Toward Childlessness in Europe

Tomáš Sobotka and Maria Rita Testa

Abstract This study uses the IPPAS data for 13 European societies to analyse attitudes related to childlessness and intentions to remain childless. We combine descriptive analysis of all analysed countries with logistic regression of intentions to remain childless in Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Italy and Poland for respondents aged 18–39. We observe that attitudes toward children and childlessness are similar for men and women, but depict a wide cross-country differentiation, with respondents in the Netherlands and Belgium (Flanders) showing the most positive attitudes towards childlessness. The survey indicates that a significant proportion of younger childless respondents in each country intend to remain childless or are uncertain about parenthood. Germany stands out by the overall high levels of intended childlessness, as well as by a high proportion of uncertain and undecided respondents. Our analysis has documented a high degree of correlation between intended childlessness and preferences for less traditional living arrangements; as well as a strong association between respondents' positive attitudes toward family life and their fertility intentions.

Keywords: Childlessness · Attitudes towards fertility · Fertility intentions · Parenthood

9.1 Introduction

Substantial changes in family-formation patterns in European countries during the last decades have been accompanied by a gradual increase in permanent childlessness. Parenthood has lost much of its centrality in people's lives, and has become increasingly perceived as a matter of personal choice. Most societies have experienced a growth of less traditional and less permanent living arrangements, in particular informal unions and single-person households (Kuijsten 1996; Lesthaeghe and Moors 2000a).

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The recent increase in childlessness is closely linked with an intensive postponement of union-formation and parenthood. Much of the existing research suggests that several features differentiate contemporary childlessness from its characteristics in the past. First, despite the fact that a clear distinction between voluntary and involuntary childlessness is impossible, it is generally recognised that a considerable share of men and women are childless by choice rather than due to adverse life circumstances (Qu et al. 2000; Tanturri and Mencarini 2004). Second, the diminishing importance of family life is linked to a growing reluctance and ambiguity about parenthood. This inability to decide is an important factor contributing to late family-formation and increasing childlessness. Third, marital and partnership status are becoming less important “determinants” of permanent childlessness. An increasing proportion of extra-marital births, in excess of 40% in many European societies, clearly indicates that marriage has ceased to be the only widely-accepted arrangement for childbearing and, conversely, that permanent non-marriage (traditionally labelled as “celibacy”) does not necessarily imply permanent childlessness. In many advanced societies, cohabitation is frequently linked to childbearing (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004) and even a significant proportion of single women eventually become mothers (Heuveline and Timberlake 2003).

The shifts in family behaviour have proceeded in parallel with diminishing normative pressure to follow socially-prescribed pathways, and, consequently, an expanding range of lifestyle options is available to individuals at various stages of their life course (Lesthaeghe 1995; Inglehart 1990). The rising importance of individual choice in the domains of sexuality, partnership behaviour and parenthood has resulted in a “pluralisation” of private living arrangements, where “the trend is not towards a world of singles, but towards a variety of forms of private life among which those with children form a specific sample” (Schulze and Tyrell 2002, 75). The rapid spread of modern contraception, especially the pill, gives women very good control over their reproduction, and further facilitates changes in values and behaviour (Presser 2001; van de Kaa 1994).

These general observations do not apply to all societies to the same extent. Diverse institutional settings and cultural traditions, as well as differences in the onset and progression of recent family transformations imply a great diversity in the levels and character of childlessness across Europe. Whereas the countries of Western and Northern Europe experienced the start of interrelated changes in demographic behaviour and family values as early as in the late 1960s and early 1970s, most post-communist societies in Central and Eastern Europe have experienced comparable changes only since the early 1990s (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2002; Sobotka 2004).

The increasing importance of “choice biographies” implies that attitudes and intentions are of paramount importance for understanding non-parenthood, as well as fertility trends, in contemporary Europe. Although general trends indicate an increasing societal acceptance of the choice to remain “childfree”, parenthood still constitutes a highly-valued and normatively-supported part of most individuals’ biographies. Thus, negative fertility intentions among childless men and women are of particular interest. Rovi (1994) proposed that those who do not intend to have a

child form a distinct group whose intentions are at odds with the normative parental imperative and, possibly, also with the established social and gender relations. Furthermore, Rovi (1994, 347–48) also argued that the “no” answer to the question on parenthood intentions makes it possible to make a distinction between voluntarily and involuntarily childless, and that “negative” fertility intentions are considerably more permanent than positive ones. This fairly large degree of reliability of negative fertility intentions among childless people has been confirmed by several studies (Noack and Østby 2002; Schoen et al. 1999) and questioned by some others (Qu et al. 2000; Rindfuss et al. 1988).

This contribution addresses a number of issues outlined above. We use the data from the International Population Policy Acceptance Survey (IPPAS) to analyse attitudes related to childlessness and intentions to remain childless in 13 European societies.¹ Although countries (or regions in the case of Flanders in Belgium and Eastern and Western Germany) are our primary units of analysis, we also inspect aggregated data for Eastern and Western parts of Europe, distinguishing between the former state-socialist countries and other regions. We look at attitudes among the respondents of all age groups surveyed (typically, 18–65), but we investigate intentions to remain childless only among respondents aged 18–39. We analyse separately the results for men and women, focusing on the differences in intended childlessness, as well as on selected factors associated with it, such as age and partnership status. Although parenthood attitudes and intentions among men have been frequently overlooked, research into the link between fertility intentions and subsequent behaviour suggests that men’s influence on couples’ fertility decision-making may equal the influence of women. Indeed, several studies found that in case of disagreement between partners, man’s intentions have a very similar influence on subsequent childbearing and that their resistance against having another child usually prevails (Thomson 1997; Thomson and Hoem 1998; Voas 2003). This effect may be, however, much weaker when a woman is childless (Berrington 2004). A separate analysis by gender is motivated not only by some expected differences in the factors influencing intentions to remain childless for men and women, but also by the hypotheses on the increasing tendency among men to withdraw from binding commitments, and parenthood in particular (Goldscheider and Kaufman 1996; Jensen 1995; Lesthaeghe 1995).

The IPPAS survey also makes it possible to distinguish between respondents who do not intend to become parents and those who are uncertain. Morgan (1981, 283) has argued that uncertainty is “an inherent part of fertility intentions” and, consequently “adequate understanding and analysis must incorporate this uncertainty”. Although the group of “uncertain” or “undecided” may share many characteristics with the respondents having “negative” intentions, we find this distinction useful as uncertainty may be more situational and temporary, i.e. may be more condi-

¹ There are several studies based on the IPPAS data analysing childbearing intentions (see also Fokkema and Esveldt elsewhere in this monograph), but only Miettinen and Paajanen (2005) have focused solely on reproductive intentions of childless respondents.

tioned by respondents' current partnership, health or socio-economic status. For countries with a larger sample size and a sufficient number of childless respondents (more than 400 childless men and 400 childless women) – Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Italy and Poland – we use logistic regression to identify the main factors associated with intended childlessness. The results provided by the regression analysis are complemented by a brief overview of the main reasons for intended childlessness and uncertainty selected by the respondents as important and very important.

A part of our analysis is structured alongside the following research hypotheses:

- H1. As a result of a low prevalence of childlessness in the recent past, general attitudes toward childlessness in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe may be less permissive than in other European countries. However, we also expect to find major differences in attitudes towards childlessness by age in the former group, as the recent societal transformation has particularly affected younger birth cohorts that have been more receptive to profound social and cultural changes.
- H2. In line with the concept of the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe 1995; van de Kaa 1987) and the hypotheses of increasing individualisation and declining normative pressures for parenthood, we expect to find in every society a significant minority of men and women who do not intend to become parents.
- H3. A substantial proportion of respondents, especially at younger ages, will express uncertainty about parenthood. This may be related to a growing ambiguity about parenthood in people's lives, but also to rising, multifaceted uncertainty in young adulthood (Mills and Blossfeld 2005).
- H4. Men are expected to display a higher rate of intended childlessness and uncertainty, which is in line with the hypothesis on their lower commitment to parenthood.
- H5. Out of the basic demographic characteristics, age would be of primary importance for women's intentions as women's fecundity is closely linked with age. We expect that for men a current partnership status may be more important for their intentions than age, since men's intentions may rely to a greater extent on having a stable partner.
- H6. The educational level, isolated from other factors, may have a different impact on men's and women's intentions. Specifically, a high level of education is associated with low levels of intended childlessness among men (Weston et al. 2004). Furthermore, both men's and women's intentions are expected to be closely related to their preferred living arrangements: Respondents who express a preference to live without a partner or for a partnership with a low level of commitment, such as a "living apart together" (LAT) relationship, would more frequently intend to remain childless.

Our article is structured as follows: The following section reviews the data and methods used, and gives an overview of variables selected for multivariate analysis. Then we provide a comparative analysis of attitudes towards childlessness. The subsequent part examines intentions to remain childless, providing first a cross-country

overview, followed by a regression analysis for the four selected countries and a brief review of the main reasons for intended childlessness and uncertainty. The last section summarises and discusses major findings.

9.2 Data

9.2.1 *Selected Countries and Sample Size*

With the exception of Cyprus, our comparative analysis utilises data for 13 countries that participated in the IPPAS: Austria, Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Slovenia. In addition, the data also allow us to distinguish between Eastern and Western Germany, which are characterised by persisting marked differences in family and fertility patterns (Adler 2004a; Konietzka and Kreyenfeld 2002). Although not all European regions are equally represented in the survey, the data contain a sufficient number of the former state socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (seven plus Eastern Germany) to enable a broad comparison between “Eastern” and “Western” Europe. We use weighted data for the comparative as well as multivariate analyses.

The sample size and age composition of the survey varies between countries and in combination with other factors, such as different proportions of the childless in younger age groups, produces sizeable differences in the number of childless respondents below the age of 40. Table AN1 in the Appendix lists the sample size for respondents aged 18–39 by sex and childlessness status for each country. It is apparent that the small number of childless respondents in many countries limits the reliability of our findings related to fertility intentions.

9.2.2 *Limitations of the Survey*

The IPPAS survey provides a rich source of information on attitudes and intentions toward childbearing in contemporary Europe, as well as on different factors and subjective reasons influencing these intentions. Besides the limited sample size of childless respondents, the survey has, however, further limitations hindering our comparative research:

- Some of the questions have not been asked in all the countries participating in the survey.²

² For instance, the Austrian, Belgian (Flemish) and Romanian surveys did not include a question on preferred living arrangements, and the Romanian survey also did not contain a question on the number of the respondent’s children. In the latter case, we used the information on the number of the respondent’s children still living at home to identify childless respondents below the age of 40.

- Many of the questions have been modified to an extent which may affect respondents' answers. One such modification concerns the range of pre-defined answers. For instance, the questionnaire for Austria and Hungary did not offer the option "do not know/uncertain" on the question on fertility intentions. The questionnaire for Italy frequently provided a more limited range of reply options for the questions on attitudes than the questionnaires for all the other countries. Furthermore, the exact wording of the question often differed between countries.
- The time horizon for childbearing intentions was not specified in the survey. Although we generally interpret the data as reflecting "permanent" (life-long) intentions, some respondents might have understood the question differently and expressed their intentions as related to their life circumstances at the time of the survey.
- Finally, it is apparent that in questions where respondents were free to choose multiple answers, the instruction on how to deal with these options must have differed widely between countries. In our analysis, this was particularly the case with regard to the reasons why respondents with negative fertility intentions did not want to have a(nother) child (see Section 9.3.4 below).

We comment on some of these problems and limitations throughout the paper. In order to provide a comprehensive yet meaningful cross-country analysis, we occasionally had to modify the data and make inferences based on results that are not fully comparable.

9.3 Methods

9.3.1 *Comparative Overview of Attitudes Towards Childbearing*

This analysis is based on four questions that capture respondents' attitudes towards children and childlessness. To study the responses by age and sex and analyse the overall prevalence of more "traditional" or negative attitudes towards childlessness, we also construct indicators that summarise responses across countries and combine responses to different questions. The aggregate indicators are computed by assigning equal weight to each country (or to each question), and treating Eastern and Western Germany as distinct regions. An alternative approach – weighting results by population size – would give results mostly mirroring the experience of the three most populous countries represented in our analysis, namely Germany, Italy and Poland.

9.3.2 *Logistic Regression Analysis of Intended Childlessness in Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Italy and Poland*

We use logistic regression models to analyse the main factors influencing intentions to remain childless. The question on fertility intentions was worded as follows: "Do

you intend to have a(nother) child in the future?” The response options were: “No,” “Don’t know, uncertain,” “Yes,” “I am/my partner is pregnant,” and “I cannot have any more.” Our analysis contrasts childless respondents who have chosen the “No” answer with those replying “Yes”; the dependent variable is coded 1 if people intend to remain childless, 0 otherwise. We also ran a model that contrasts uncertain respondents with those who intend to have children. Those who are pregnant or cannot have a child are excluded from the analysis.

Only countries with a sufficient sample size were selected for this analysis, namely Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Italy and Poland. In these countries the selected sub-sample of childless respondents below the age of 40 exceeds 400 for men and women alike. Although this selection does not sufficiently represent different European regions, and over-represents countries with a Catholic tradition, it contains the most populous countries participating in the PPAS survey and ensures a sufficient sample size for a multivariate analysis. For Poland and Germany, where individual records were weighted to achieve representativeness on a national level, we have run an additional model with unweighted data. The results have remained very similar for Poland, whereas for Germany the size of several coefficients has changed to a large extent. Thus, the results for Germany are not robust and should be interpreted with caution.

9.3.3 Selected Variables for the Regression Analysis

Our model includes demographic, socioeconomic and attitudinal explanatory variables. Tables 9.9 (for women) and 9.10 (for men) show the distribution of respondents in each country across different levels of the analysed variables. The basic demographic variables include age (age groups 18–24, 25–29 and 30–39), sex and current partnership status (distinguishing between “single” without a partner, “married” and “with partner”). The baseline category “with partner” includes all unmarried respondents in a co-residential partnership or reporting a “living-apart-together” relationship. The category “single” includes those who have never married, as well as those who are separated, widowed or divorced and do not have a partner.

The socio-economic variables include employment, type of place of residence (distinguishing between “urban” and “rural” settlements, where the latter includes the categories “rural area”, “small village” and “small town”), educational enrolment (where available), level of education achieved and income. Employment status is coded as “employed”, either full- or part-time and “not employed”; the latter group also includes those working occasionally.³ The covariate education includes three categories “low”, “medium” and “high” educational level. The first category groups people with primary (either completed or not completed) and lower

³ The categorization of employment is problematic since it does not make it possible to distinguish between respondents who are unemployed and those who are not seeking a job (students, housewives and persons on maternity, parental, sickness and disability leave).

secondary education; the “medium” category comprises upper secondary and post-secondary non-university education; and the “high” category represents university education. In the analysis for Germany and Poland, we were able to distinguish respondents who were still in education (category “studying”) from those who had completed their education. The covariate “household income” is not available for Italy, and has not been used for Poland due to different coding. For respondents with partners we also included information about their partner’s educational attainment and labour market participation; these variables are coded in the same way as for the respondents.

Respondents’ values and attitudes are captured by their subjective religiosity, their evaluation of two statements related to children and parenthood and preferred living arrangement (irrespective of the respondent’s current marital status or type of living arrangement). The religiosity covariate reflects the importance religion plays in respondents’ lives rather than the intensity of the religious practice, or particular religious affiliation. Respondents claiming that religion plays a “very important role” or an “important role” are coded as “religious”.

The following two statements are used for evaluating attitudes towards childbearing: “The only place where you can feel completely happy and at ease is at home with your children” and “It is your duty towards society to have children”. Whereas the former reflects a personal orientation towards childbearing and family life, the latter constitutes a normative statement which makes it possible to distinguish respondents with more traditional family values and negative attitudes towards childlessness. The other two statements concerning attitudes towards childbearing, and which are analysed in the descriptive part, are not included in the regression analysis due to co-linearity (see also Fig. 9.1). The covariate “preferred living arrangement” is based on the following question: “Which living arrangement do you personally prefer?” We distinguish between “marriage” (i.e. marriage without previous cohabitation), “cohabitation followed by marriage”, “cohabitation” (without subsequent marriage), “living apart together” (denoted as LAT) and “single”; this last category also includes those who chose flat-sharing and other living arrangements.

Among other important factors that are commonly associated with family size preferences, we had no information about respondents’ number of siblings (Axinn et al. 1994; Fernández and Fogli 2005; Rovi 1994) and about partners’ intentions (Berrington 2004; Thomson 1997; Thomson and Hoem 1998; Voas 2003).

Some of the covariates in our selection may potentially be endogenous. In particular, an individual’s attitudes may influence his or her intentions to remain childless, but may also be equally strongly affected by his or her intention to have or not to have children. It can even be argued that the current partnership status reflects in part a respondent’s parenthood intentions. In reality, attitudes and intentions often evolve simultaneously and are likely to influence each other in a reciprocal fashion. Consequently, our findings related to attitudes and parenthood intentions should not be interpreted as causal relationships.⁴

⁴ However, models estimated without the covariates potentially affected by endogeneity provided

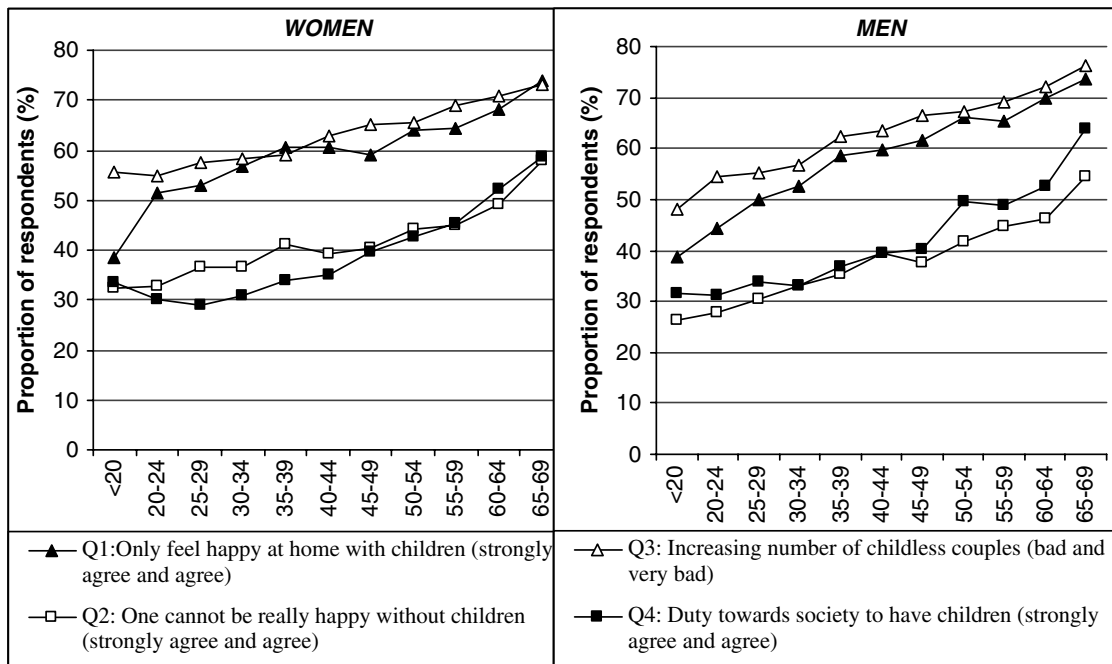


Fig. 9.1 Proportion of respondents (%) giving a more “traditional” or family-oriented response to selected statements by age and sex (mean age profile for 12 countries)

Source: IPPAS

Notes: The data represent mean values of age and sex-specific proportion of respondents providing indicated answers. All the countries participating in the IPPAS survey were included except Cyprus and Romania; each country was assigned an equal weight. Eastern and Western parts of Germany were considered separately. The full wording of the questions is given below Table 9.1. Question 3 was not asked in Austria and Italy.

9.3.4 Analysis of the Subjective Reasons for Intended Childlessness

Our final overview of the main reasons for “negative” intentions is based on eleven pre-defined questions in the IPPAS survey listing various reasons suggested to respondents who indicated that they do not intend to have a(nother) child or who are uncertain. The exact wording of all the reasons is summarised in Table 9.5 below. We look at the proportion of childless respondents aged 18–39 who selected particular reasons as “important” or “very important” for their intentions to remain childless. To reduce instability related to the small sample size, the answers of respondents who do not intend to have a child and who are uncertain were combined. The respondents could choose multiple reasons for their intentions; this choice resulted in a huge cross-country variability in the mean number of reasons labelled as important. For instance, Italians chose on average 4% of suggested reasons as important or very important (i.e. fewer than half of respondents selected at least one reason as important), whereas respondents in Austria and Slovenia chose on average

results similar to the “full” models shown in our analysis. Therefore, we may assume that endogeneity is not strong enough to bias the other estimated coefficients.

more than 50% of all the reasons offered. We had to standardise country-specific data in order to create a summary indicator for all the countries. We computed relative weights for every reason in each country⁵ (Eastern and Western Germany are considered separately), and then combined country-specific results in order to create an overall mean weighted rate for each reason in all the countries analysed. This enabled us to rank the reasons according to the weighted proportion of respondents considering a given reason as important. We did not include the Italian data because the results for Italy differed most markedly from the other countries.⁶

9.4 Attitudes Toward Childlessness

Table 9.1 lists the proportion of men and women (all ages considered) with negative attitudes toward childlessness or a strong family orientation. The statements capture different aspects of attitudes, ranging from an expression of family orientation and home-centeredness (Q1, see Note for Table 9.1) up to a relatively strong normative statement about duties toward society (Q4). The remaining two statements are related to a general perception of childless people as unhappy (Q2) and to a negative evaluation of an increasing proportion of childless couples (Q3).

Table 9.1 reveals considerable cross-country differences, including some contrasts between the “Eastern” and the “Western” part of Europe, fairly strong family orientation of respondents in many countries and a relatively high level of support for the “normative statements” (Q2 and Q4), especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

A majority of Europeans negatively evaluated an increasing number of childless couples (Q3); the mean value for all countries was 63% for men and women alike, and surpassed 50% even among childless respondents below the age of 40. Estonia, Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands were the only countries where less than half of the population perceived this trend as bad or very bad. Except for Hungary, childless persons aged 18–39 assessed that trend less negatively than the total population.

⁵ The weights are built up as follows: The number of positive answers (i.e. listed as “important” or “very important”) is divided by the maximum number of respondents replying to any of the selected reasons. The computation of these ratios is needed because respondents in many countries did not reply to all the reasons, especially if these reasons were not related to their situation (e.g. respondents who have a partner did not reply to the question of whether the lack of a suitable partner was important for their intention). A mean positive response rate per question was calculated. This mean positive response rate served to compute the weighted positive response rate to each particular reason with the mean value of 1 for every region considered. Reasons with a relative weight above 1.0 were cited as “important” or “very important” more frequently than the average reason.

⁶ Most of the pre-defined reasons were selected as important by a tiny fraction of Italian respondents, and the only reason that emerged as relatively important was the lack of a steady partner (10% among women and 21% among men). The peculiar results for Italy are probably related to the survey method. Differently from other countries, where face-to-face interviews were conducted, the Italian survey was conducted by phone.

Table 9.1 Proportion of respondents expressing negative or “traditional” attitudes towards childlessness by sex and childlessness status (in %)

Countries	Q 1: Only feel happy at home with children (strongly agree or agree)*			Q 2: Cannot be really happy without children (strongly agree or agree)*			Q 3: Increasing number of couples remaining childless (bad or very bad)**			Q 4: Duty towards society to have children (strongly agree or agree)*		
	Women (18–65)	Men (18–65)	Childless (18–39)	Women (18–65)	Men (18–65)	Childless (18–39)	Women (18–65)	Men (18–65)	Childless (18–39)	Women (18–65)	Men (18–65)	Childless (18–39)
AT	61.2	62.6	31.8	48.8	–	–	67.6	69.6	52.2	39.5	45.5	15.6
B (FI)	42.1	45.7	23.3	29.7	13.7	10.1	31.0	40.2	25.7	6.7	9.4	3.2
CZ	76.4	69.1	60.0	50.9	50.8	44.8	70.0	65.7	65.0	64.3	57.7	59.5
DE-E	62.1	57.1	42.2	31.0	53.8	45.8	76.8	73.1	70.9	47.6	51.1	32.5
DE-W	42.5	41.9	31.3	29.1	37.4	32.0	69.5	65.4	56.1	43.4	45.7	31.6
EE	48.8	60.4	31.0	35.7	57.1	53.8	35.8	37.1	19.9	47.2	58.9	43.5
FI	50.2	48.1	19.0	24.6	24.0	20.5	67.2	70.7	53.5	16.6	23.9	7.9
HU	64.2	62.3	47.5	45.8	65.9	59.8	85.4	84.1	81.4	38.7	38.8	31.6
IT	80.0	80.7	74.3	73.1	–	–	55.7	62.0	50.0	46.3	51.0	42.5
LT	85.8	80.6	76.3	59.1	52.8	29.1	86.7	82.7	76.3	52.2	55.0	27.3
NL	22.7	22.9	10.5	9.0	5.5	3.5	20.9	28.8	12.0	4.8	7.2	1.0
PL	76.8	72.0	59.3	56.5	51.7	48.3	66.2	63.2	58.7	56.9	55.8	40.5
SI	73.4	76.0	52.1	61.7	44.9	41.5	83.1	82.9	70.5	36.4	36.7	28.4
Mean (“East”)	69.6	68.2	52.6	48.7	53.8	49.8	72.0	69.8	63.2	49.1	50.6	36.6
Mean (“West”)	43.7	44.2	23.2	28.3	20.2	19.3	52.0	56.1	41.6	26.2	30.4	24.7
Mean (all countries)	60.5	60.0	43.0	42.7	41.6	38.7	62.8	63.5	53.2	38.5	41.3	31.1

Source: IPPAS

* the percentage of respondents who (strongly) agree.

** the percentage of respondents who evaluate that change as bad or very bad.

Notes: The full wording of the questions is given below. The exact wording differed in some countries.

Q1: “The only place where you can feel completely happy and at ease is at home with your children.”

Q2: “You cannot be really happy without having children.”

Q3: “Opinion on the increasing number of couples who decide to remain childless.”

Q4: “It is your duty towards society to have children.”

Interestingly, most respondents also agreed with the statement that they only feel completely happy and at ease at home with children (Q1). These responses were more differentiated by parenthood status: All countries considered, around 60% of all men and women, but only 43% of childless people below the age of 40, agreed with this statement. Given that younger childless people frequently live single or in childless households, this proportion is still surprisingly high. A relatively stark contrast exists among childless individuals between the former communist countries, where about one-half of childless respondents only feel completely happy at home with children, and the group of “Western” countries, where 23% of childless women and 28% of childless men agree with this statement. This contrast is not, however, clear-cut, because childless Italians express the highest home and child orientation (73–74%), while among all the respondents, Italy ranks second after Lithuania. These figures reflect a persistence of strong family orientation among Italians, which is deeply rooted in Italian culture (e.g. Dalla Zuanna 2001; Micheli 2004).

Fairly sizeable contrasts between the “Eastern” and the “Western” part of Europe are found in responses to two statements with a normative connotation (Q2 and Q4). Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands displayed the most libertarian attitudes towards childlessness: Well below one-tenth of respondents agreed that having children is a duty towards society, and the proportion agreeing that a person cannot be happy without having children was similarly low in the Netherlands (5% among all and only 1–2% among the childless) and slightly higher in Flanders (13%). A strong accentuation of individual freedom of choice and the absence of negative views on voluntary childlessness in the Netherlands was also documented in the Population and Policy Attitudes survey in 1990 (e.g. several contributions in Palomba and Moors 1998). The similarity of Flanders to the Dutch pattern may be surprising insofar as we consider the influence of the Catholic cultural tradition there, which is markedly more collectivist than the Protestant tradition. Around one-half of respondents in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were of the opinion that one cannot be happy without children, and with the exception of Hungary and Slovenia, a similar proportion of respondents agreed that having children is a duty towards society. This proportion was fairly high also in Austria and Italy. The evidence presented so far indicates that childless younger respondents hold a considerably more positive view of childlessness than the overall population, and that the views of men and women are widely in agreement. Are the more positive attitudes towards childlessness among younger childless respondents linked to their “childfree” status, or are these merely effects of the age or birth cohort? Figure 9.1 shows the proportion of respondents who expressed more “traditional” or family-oriented attitudes to the analysed statements. The data are stratified by age and sex; all countries where a given question was asked in a given age group are assigned an equal weight. Age turns out to be a very important factor: The proportion of individuals with more negative attitudes towards childlessness increases almost linearly with age; at the age of 65–69, a majority of people expresses the “traditional” view with respect to all the questions concerned. There are only marginal differences between men and women. Overall, the proportion of more “traditional” responses to Q1 and Q3, on the

one hand, and to the more normative Q2 and Q4 on the other, are almost identical, suggesting that respondents replied to these questions in a systematic way. Among men below the age of 35, there are almost no age differences in the proportion agreeing that having children is a “duty towards society”; among women, the lowest proportion agrees at the age of 25–29.

Figure 9.2 combines the age profiles of “traditional responses” to all four statements in each country. Former state-socialist societies are plotted separately. The figure confirms that the attitudes towards childlessness in Central and Eastern Europe remain less permissive and more traditional than in most other parts of Europe. With the exception of Estonia, where people hold less negative views of childlessness and responses are sharply differentiated by age, all countries of this region have a remarkably similar profile of attitudes towards childlessness, and also a relatively pronounced age differentiation. In contrast, there is considerable heterogeneity across Western, Northern and Southern Europe, with the Austrian and Italian populations having fairly negative attitudes towards childlessness, the inhabitants of the Netherlands and Flanders being characterised by the most positive view, and Finland and Western Germany falling in between. A comparison of Eastern and Western Germany indicates that Eastern Germans remain more family-oriented and less positive about childlessness, but that this difference is only slight among younger respondents. Thus, Eastern Germany does not constitute an exception from the pattern found for other post-communist countries.

9.5 Intentions to Remain Childless and Uncertainty

9.5.1 Overview of Major Findings

Table 9.2 provides an overview of intentions to remain childless among men and women below the age of 40. It ranks countries according to the proportion of childless women who are either uncertain or do not intend to have a child. In contrast to the large degree of homogeneity found among the former communist societies re attitudes towards childlessness, they differ widely in terms of intended childlessness and uncertainty as to intentions. Despite huge differences between countries, the analysis reveals that a substantial proportion of currently childless men and women did not intend to become parents, or expressed uncertainty. Negative fertility intentions among childless women ranged from 6% in Slovenia and Lithuania up to 21% in Austria and 25% in Western Germany. Interestingly, Eastern German childless women were much keener on starting a family than their Western German counterparts, and only 11% expressed negative intentions. The proportion of uncertain persons mostly surpassed the proportion with the negative intentions, although the results varied by country. For instance, Lithuania, with a very low proportion of women saying “no”, had a high proportion of uncertainty (24%). One-third of childless women in Finland and Poland expressed uncertainty.

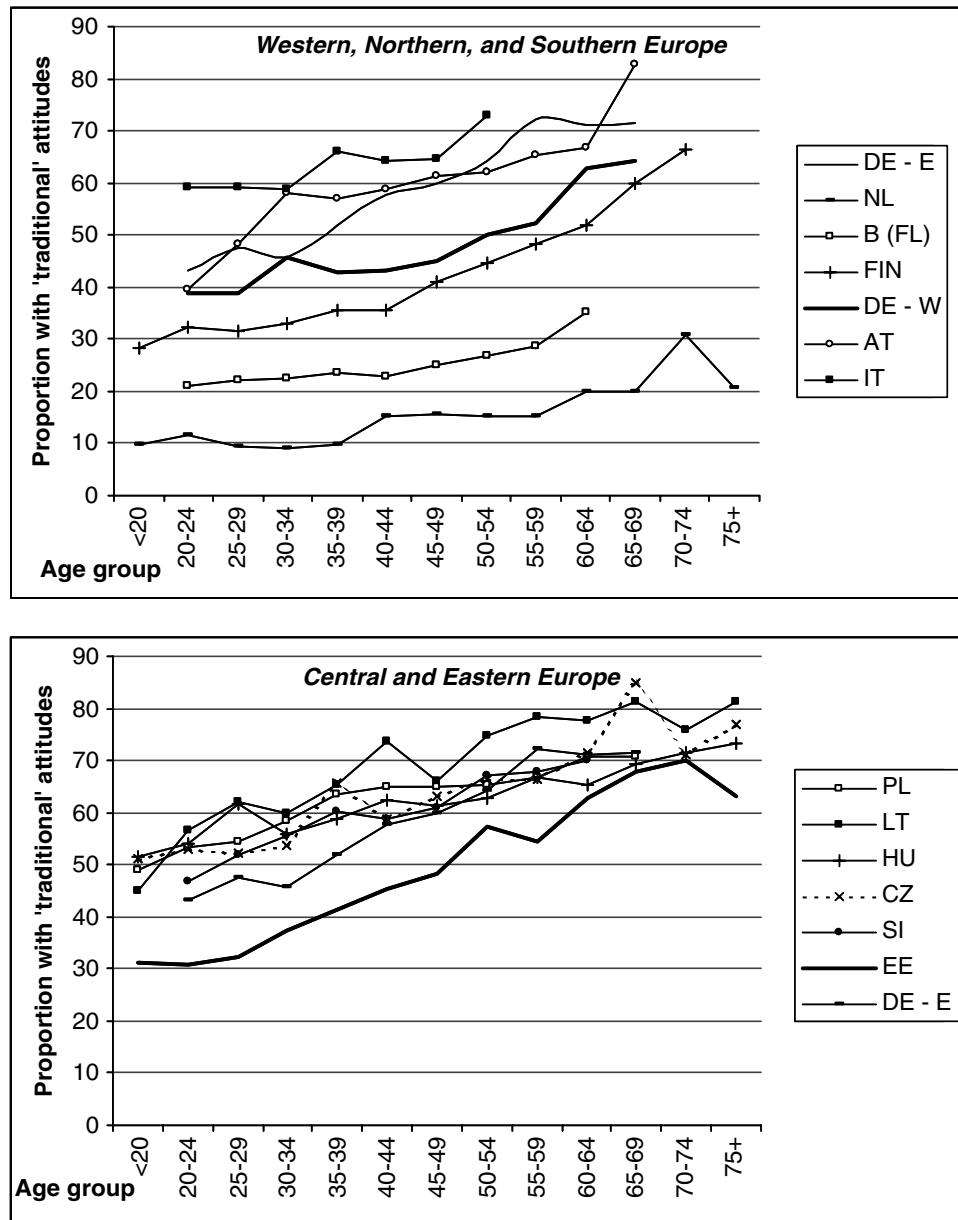


Fig. 9.2 Age profile of the proportion of respondents expressing more “traditional” or negative attitudes to childlessness by country, in % (average for four statements)

Source: IPPAS

Notes: For each country the mean age profile of the proportion of respondents expressing more “traditional” attitudes towards childlessness was computed as a mean proportion of respondents who “agree” or “strongly agree” with questions Q1, Q2 and Q4 and who evaluated the increasing number of couples who decide to remain childless as “bad” or “very bad” (Q3). The responses of men and women were weighted equally for each age. The profile for Austria and Italy is based on Q1, Q3 and Q4 only, as Q2 was not included in the survey there.

Table 9.2 Proportion of men and women aged 18–39 who do not intend to have a child or are uncertain (in %)

Countries	Intentions of childless women			Intentions of all women ²	Intentions of childless men			Intentions of all men ²
	“No”	Uncertain	“No” + uncertain		“No”	Uncertain	“No” + uncertain	
HU	6.9	0.9 ¹	7.8 ¹	2.8 ¹	12.9	1.8 ¹	14.8 ¹	6.5 ¹
EE	3.2	10.3	13.5	6.7	2.1	16.2	18.3	10.8
IT	9.1	6.2	15.3	7.6	11.8	8.1	19.9	12.8
RO	10.2	8.6	18.8	7.9	10.2	17.0	27.2	13.9
SI	5.7	14.9	20.6	8.0	8.2	12.1	20.3	11.0
AT	21.2	— ¹	21.2 ¹	6.8 ¹	22.6	— ¹	22.6 ¹	11.7 ¹
NL	9.9	19.7	29.6	16.2	15.4	25.3	40.7	28.4
LT	6.3	23.8	30.0	7.4	6.4	16.5	22.9	9.1
CR	19.3	12.0	31.3	10.6	9.4	24.4	33.9	21.2
DE-E	10.6	22.5	33.1	13.9	24.9	26.2	51.1	33.6
BE(FI)	14.5	19.3	33.8	14.8	18.3	25.9	44.2	23.7
FI	8.0	32.7	40.7	20.0	7.2	38.9	46.1	29.0
PL	8.5	32.7	41.2	15.8	13.5	40.3	53.8	29.5
DE-W	24.9	21.0	45.9	23.1	29.5	29.8	59.3	39.8
Mean	9.1	17.8	26.9	10.0	10.7	21.8	32.5	18.4
(“East”)								
Mean	13.3	19.8	33.1	16.3	16.4	25.6	42.0	26.7
(“West”)								
Mean (all countries)	12.6	18.6	31.2	13.2	15.0	23.4	38.4	22.9

Source: IPPAS

Notes: ¹ In Austria and Hungary the questionnaire did not offer the option “do not know/uncertain”, so that the total proportion of both categories is not fully comparable with other countries and is likely to be underestimated. In Hungary, the figure in the “uncertain” category refers to respondents who explicitly stated that they do not know whether they intend to have a child or how many children they intend to have. These two countries were excluded from the computation of regional mean values.

² Proportion of all men and women aged 18–39 intending to remain childless or uncertain, irrespective of their actual parity status

Results for men typically paralleled those for women, but with higher levels of both negative intentions and uncertainty. Childless men in Germany appeared to be the most unwilling and reluctant to have a child – one-quarter of childless men in Eastern Germany and 30% of those living in Western Germany did not intend to have a child, and very similar levels were found with respect to uncertainty. Uncertainty among childless men reached around 40% in Finland and Poland. These data provide evidence that many young Europeans do not perceive parenthood as an inevitable part of their life course. When we consider negative intentions and uncertainty together, childless people of reproductive age in Finland, Poland (mostly due to a very high uncertainty) and Germany appeared the least family oriented: In Western Germany, 46% of childless women and as many as 59% of childless men did not have a clear intention to become

parents. The data lend support to the hypothesis that men are generally more reluctant to have children; this was the case in all countries except Lithuania and Slovenia.

The contrast between men and women becomes even stronger if we consider the intention to remain childless and uncertainty about parenthood relative to the total population below the age of 40, including those who already have children. This seemingly contradictory analysis may be indicative of the level of voluntary childlessness among the total population, irrespective of the actual proportion of childless people in each age group of reproductive age. Then the overall male-female difference increases to the factor of 1.8 and reaches 2.4 in Eastern Germany. This is explained by a higher share of childless men in younger age groups, linked to their later entry into parenthood. When the total population is considered, Western German men and women below the age of 40 remained the least enthusiastic about parenthood, with 23% of women and 40% of men being ambiguous or not wanting to establish a family. In the light of these results, it is no coincidence that Western German women have the highest childlessness rates in Europe, with about one-quarter of all women born in the second half of the 1960s remaining permanently childless (Dorbritz 2003; Sobotka 2005).

Figure 9.3 features the mean profile of intended childlessness by age and sex in twelve countries. Until around the age of 30, intended childlessness among men surpasses the levels found among women; around 20% of childless women and 30% of childless men did not intend to have a child or were uncertain. Uncertainty was more common than the negative intention until the mid-thirties, and it increased most markedly after the age of thirty, when many people probably realised that their partnership situation or socioeconomic position might not become sufficiently favourable for parenthood in the foreseeable future. Close to one-half of childless men and women aged 30–34 expressed negative intentions or uncertainty. The intention not to have a child increased most sharply among women after the age of 35 and surpassed intended childlessness among men. This is partly a selection effect – most of the women who planned to have children realised their intention before reaching this age, and the share of people who were voluntarily childless increased as a result. But it appears to be also an effect of a “reality check”: Many women, facing a “deadline” posed by approaching biological infertility, realised they would never become mothers. At the age of 35–39, only one-quarter of childless women and one-third of childless men expressed an unambiguous intention to become parents.

One of our main research interests lies in exploring how the preferences for specific living arrangements are linked with intended childlessness. We assume that a preference for living arrangements that are generally characterised by lower partnership commitment reveals a respondent’s underlying family orientation and is in turn reflected in the high level of intended childlessness and uncertainty as to intentions. This section provides a brief overview of preferred living arrangements among childless respondents and the extent to which these arrangements are preferred with or without children. Subsequently, we address this relationship in a multivariate analysis.

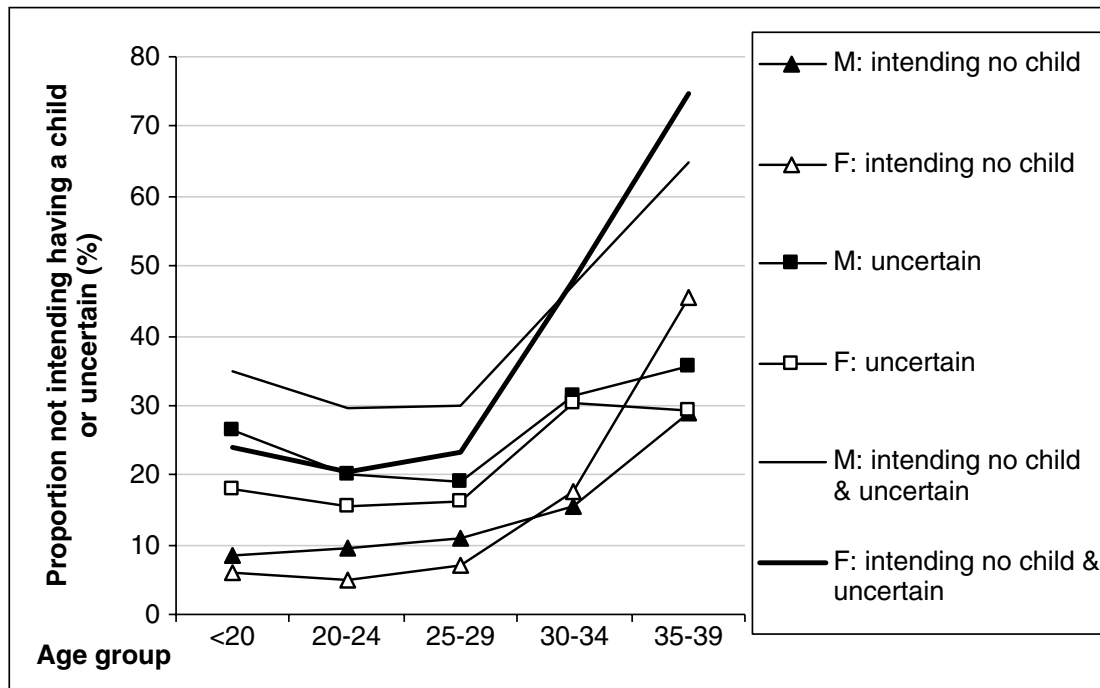


Fig. 9.3 Age-specific proportion of childless women and men below the age of 40 who do not intend to have a child or who are uncertain. Mean values for 12 countries (in %)

Source: IPPAS

Notes: Figure is based on the average values of age-specific proportions for childless respondents for all countries except Hungary and Austria; Eastern and Western Germany are treated as separate units.

Figure 9.4 features preferred living arrangements among childless women below the age of 40 in ten countries.⁷ The patterns are very similar for men, although they expressed on average slightly higher preferences for less traditional living arrangements. The graph includes results for childless Eastern German men, who have the most untypical preferences found in the survey.

The greatest contrast was found between countries where “direct” marriage remained the most frequently preferred living arrangement (Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia) and all the other regions, where cohabitation followed by marriage constituted the most frequently preferred option. Cohabitation without subsequent marriage was not particularly popular, and was preferred by more than 15% of childless German women and Dutch men only. Single living, non-co-residential partnership (“LAT”) or flat-sharing with friends and other less traditional arrangements were preferred by about one-tenth of childless respondents. Younger Germans constituted the only notable exception: 23% of Eastern German and 28% of Western German childless women preferred to live single, live separately from a partner or share a flat with friends. German men expressed even less traditional preferences, and childless Eastern German men served as an example of the most “post-modern” preferences found: Whereas only 3% preferred “direct” marriage,

⁷ This question was not asked in Austria, Belgium (Flanders) or Romania.

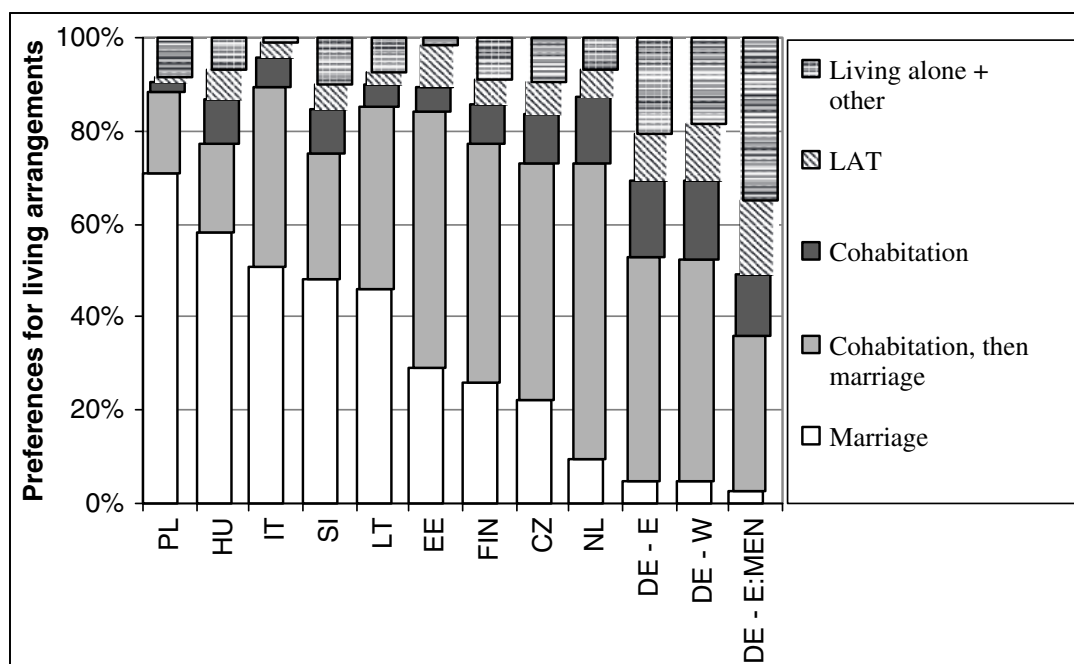


Fig. 9.4 Preferences for living arrangements among childless women aged 18–39 (in %)

Source: IPPAS

Notes: The last column displays preferred living arrangements among childless Eastern German men aged 20–39.

45% preferred to live single, share a flat with friends or have an “LAT” relationship. In Eastern Germany, such preferences correspond with the actual high prevalence of non-traditional living arrangements and more than one-half of children being born to cohabiting or single women (Konietzka and Kreyeneld 2002). However, it appears puzzling that similar preferences were also found among young Western Germans

Besides asking about their preferred living arrangements, the IPPAS also asked respondents whether they preferred to live with or without children. On average, more childless respondents expressed a preference to live without children than would correspond to the findings on intended childlessness. Some respondents probably replied to the question on living arrangements in relation to their current preferences (which may reflect a particular stage in their life-course), whereas they responded to the question on childbearing intentions bearing their long-term plans in mind.

The combination of preferences for particular living arrangements and childlessness is depicted in Fig. 9.5. These data are available only for seven countries and regions. In line with the finding on childbearing intentions, more childless men than women prefer a living arrangement without children. The graph shows an expected gradient, where a preference for legal marriage not preceded by cohabitation is linked with the strongest preference for children and a preference for single living, or a non-co-residential partnership is linked with the strongest preference for childlessness. Cohabitation followed by marriage was associated with a higher preference for childlessness (18%) than “direct” marriage (9–10%). However, a starker contrast was found for respondents preferring unmarried cohabitation not followed by marriage: Almost half of men and 37% of women who preferred this type of

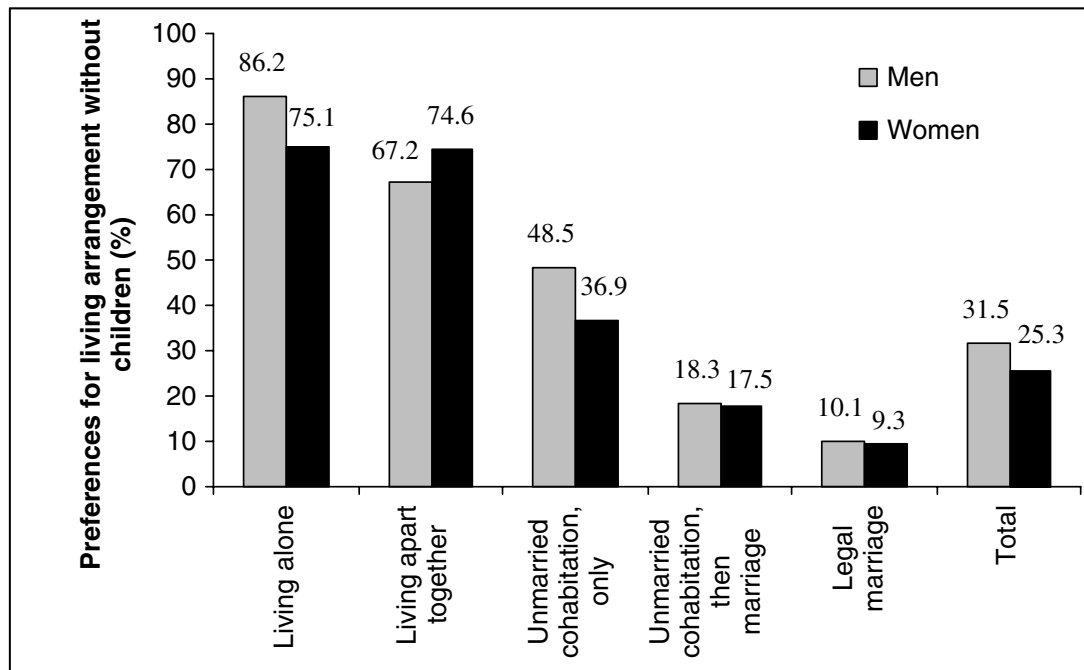


Fig. 9.5 Proportion of childless men and women saying they that prefer a living arrangement without children (out of the total respondents preferring a given living arrangement, in %). Mean values for seven countries

Source: IPPAS

Notes: The figure is based on the average values of the following countries and regions: the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany (Eastern and Western regions are considered separately), Italy (does not include single living), Lithuania, the Netherlands and Poland.

living arrangement also expressed a preference for childlessness. In this case, the differences between men and women were notable and many men with a weak family orientation appeared to favour “settling for” childless unmarried cohabitation. A quarter of women who preferred single living still preferred to have a child while being single; this proportion was the same for women who preferred LAT.

9.5.2 Results of Logistic Regression Analysis

The results for the models of the “negative” intention to become a parent as contrasted to the “positive” intention (odds ratios) are summarised for women in Table 9.3 and for men in Table 9.4. The tables do not feature results for the type of residence and income level, which turned out to be not significant for any of the countries analysed. We have performed the analysis separately for Eastern and Western Germany, but the models were unstable due to the small sample size,⁸ and consequently we display results only for Germany as a whole. We also run the model contrasting “uncertainty” versus “positive intentions” to have children; these results

⁸ Our descriptive analysis shows that there are considerable differences in intentions to remain childless between Eastern and Western regions of Germany. A more in-depth investigation of these differences will be the object of our future research.

Table 9.3 Odds ratios of intended childlessness among childless women aged 18–39

	B (FL)		DE		IT		PL	
Age								
Age 18–24	0.86		0.29	+	0.53		0.43	
Age 25–29	1		1		1		1	
Age 30–39	17.21	***	3.18	*	3.38	*	4.79	+
Partnership status								
Single, no partner	1.69		1.09		2.55	+	1	
With partner	1		1		1			
Married	0.58		9.98	**	0.43		0.81	
Own education								
Low	3.13	+	6.69	**	2.25		4.08	+
Medium	1		1		1		1	
High	0.80		3.49	+	1.03		0.92	
Still studying			1.27				1.44	
Partner's education								
Low	7.12	*			1.47		2.07	
Medium	1		1		1		1	
High	1.06		0.19	*	0.13	*	0.16	
Employment								
Employed	1		1		1		1	
Not employed	1.18		0.77		1.28		2.39	+
Partner's employment								
Employed	1		1		1		1	
Not employed	1.22		0.58		0.63		1.62	
Religiosity								
Not religious	1		1		1		1	
Religious	0.74		0.24	**	0.72		0.83	
Only feel happy at home with children								
Agree	1		1		1		1	
Indifferent	0.74		1.64				1.12	
Disagree	3.56	*	2.52		2.47	*	0.64	
Duty towards society to have children								
Agree	1		1		1		1	
Indifferent	0.65		1.72				1.95	
Disagree	0.56		1.12		1.14		1.50	
Preferred living arrangement								
Marriage			5.26		0.84		1.82	
Cohabitation, then marriage			1		1		1	
Cohabitation only			36.35	***	4.05	*	14.83	+
LAT			31.47	***	14.07	***		
Single, flat-sharing			48.18	***	2.04		20.38	***
Log likelihood	−90.7		−85.3		−114.3		−82.0	
N	302		267		541		293	

*** p <= 0.001; ** p <= 0.01; * p <= 0.05; + p <= 0.10

Source: IPPAS

are briefly summarized in the text and displayed in tables AN-2 and AN-3 in the Appendix.

As evidenced in the regression analysis, negative fertility intentions and uncertain intentions are closely related to the status of being “single” and age. Men and women below the age of 25 intend to have a child more often as compared to respondents who are 25–29 years old; results for uncertainty vary by country. However, young adults do not always display higher levels of uncertainty than older respondents. Quite to the contrary, Belgian (Flemish) women and Italian and Polish men below the age of 25 show significantly lower levels of uncertainty than their older counterparts aged 25–29. In line with the findings of the descriptive analysis, the likelihood of not intending to have a child or being uncertain increases sharply after the age of 30, and this increase is particularly pronounced among women. Many of these women have probably adjusted their fertility intentions downwards when confronted with adverse circumstances that unfolded during their life course (see Berrington 2004; Rindfuss et al. 1988; van de Kaa 2001; Weston et al. 2004).

The age-related increase in the frequency of intentions to remain childless is in agreement with a view that the option for voluntary childlessness results from a gradual series of postponing decisions (Rindfuss et al. 1988). Having no partner seems to be one of the main obstacles for the desire for children. Single respondents without a partner express “negative” intentions or uncertainty more often than respondents who have a partner, as well as married respondents. Germany seemingly constitutes an important exception: Married men and women alike intend to remain childless markedly more often than other respondents. This suggests that childlessness within marriage is broadly accepted in Germany and that married childless Germans form a select group of people who have not entered parenthood soon after the marriage, and do not intend to do so in the future. However, this effect disappears if we exclude the preferred living arrangement from the regression model. Then the model comes much closer to the “common sense” results: Women without a partner show elevated levels of intended childlessness, whereas men without a partner show the same level of intended childlessness as their married counterparts.⁹

The intentions of unmarried respondents with a partner do not differ significantly from married respondents ones in most cases. However, Flemish men and women with a partner display greater uncertainty than those who are married, and unmarried German women display a peculiar pattern of markedly less frequent “negative intentions” in comparison with their married counterparts (see also footnote 9). Contrary

⁹ These results show that the stated preferences for living arrangements are tightly linked to childbearing intentions (see also below). Respondents who intend to have a child frequently select living arrangements that are commonly perceived as favourable for childbearing (marriage and cohabitation followed by marriage), whereas respondents who do not intend to have a child commonly select less traditional living arrangements. This effect is so strong as to produce the peculiar positive association between being single and an intention to have a child. The impact is smaller for respondents who have a partner. However, it is important to note the limited robustness of these results: When unweighted data are used in the model, the preferred living arrangement does not show such a pronounced association with intentions to remain childless.

Table 9.4 Odds ratios of intended childlessness among childless men aged 18–39

	B (FL)		DE		IT		PL	
Age								
Age 18–24	0.33	*	0.67		0.82		0.40	
Age 25–29	1		1		1		1	
Age 30–39	7.66	***	1.18		2.35	*	3.07	*
Partnership status								
Single, no partner	4.77	**	1.90		3.12	**	1	
With partner	1		1		1			
Married	1.12		7.60	**	1.18		0.68	
Own education								
Low	1.27		1.88		1.15		2.70	*
Medium	1		1		1		1	
High	0.41	*	0.86		0.46		0.06	**
Still studying			0.29	*			1.62	
Partner's education								
Low	1.32				0.43		9.04	
Medium	1		1		1		1	
High	0.47		2.07		0.18		1.78	
Employment								
Employed	1		1		1		1	
Not employed	0.87		0.50	+	0.84		1.31	
Partner's employment								
Employed	1		1		1		1	
Not employed	1.86		2.54		1.84		1.01	
Religiosity								
Not religious	1		1		1		1	
Religious	1.89		0.39	+	0.99		0.60	
Only feel happy at home with children								
Agree	1		1		1		1	
Indifferent	1.63		3.47	**			1.85	
Disagree	4.08	**	2.55	+	1.34	*	0.26	*
Duty towards society to have children								
Agree	1		1		1		1	
Indifferent	0.97		1.48				0.96	
Disagree	4.15		1.45		1.40		1.23	
Preferred living arrangement								
Marriage			1.84		1.90	*	2.47	
Cohabitation, then marriage			1		1		1	
Cohabitation only			6.11	**	6.09	***	1.82	
LAT			8.83	***	5.80	**	32.59	***
Single, flat-sharing			22.20	***	28.27	***	68.47	***
Log likelihood	–110.8		–152.3		–208.7		–110.3	
N	296		343		699		318	

***p <= 0.001; **p <= 0.01; *p <= 0.05; +p <= 0.10

Source: IPPAS

Notes: The models in Tables 9.3 and 9.4 also check for urban-rural residence and income. The variable “Preferred living arrangement” is not available for Belgium. The “indifferent” response option in the attitudinal covariates is not available for Italy. We excluded “Low education” of the partner for Germany and “Single with a partner” and “Living apart together” for Poland because of a too small number of cases.

to our expectations, men's partnership status is not more important than age for intended childlessness.

Our description of the effects of socio-economic covariates focuses especially on the effects of education. Among women, low educational level is linked with a high frequency of "negative" intentions, especially in Germany (odds ratio of 6.7). However, with the exception of Poland, women with a low educational level do not express a significantly higher level of uncertainty. There is no consistent pattern among highly-educated women in comparison with women with a "medium" level of education. Interestingly, highly-educated women in Germany show an elevated frequency of intentions to remain childless, which indicates a U-shaped pattern of intended childlessness by education. For men, we find a weak negative effect of low educational level on parenthood intentions (more pronounced and significant only in Poland), and we do not find any consistent results for uncertainty. However, highly-educated men in all analysed countries have both low preferences for intended childlessness and, with the exception of Belgium, also low levels of uncertainty.

Being a student strongly reduces intentions to remain childless among German men, but not among women. A similar interaction effect between gender and educational participation is found in the analysis of the determinants of ideal family size in Europe (Testa and Grilli 2006). Among Polish men, on the other hand, students express higher levels of uncertainty. For respondents with a partner, the effect of their attained education is further corroborated by their partner's educational level. This appears particularly important for intentions to remain childless among women: Women with highly-educated partners are markedly less likely to intend to remain childless (odds ratios below 0.2 in Germany, Italy and Poland) than women who have a partner with middle- or low-level education. Only in Belgium (Flanders) does the main difference lie between women with partners with a low educational level (high levels of intended childlessness) and partners with a medium educational level.

The strong negative association between attained educational level and intentions to remain childless, evidenced in some countries for women and in all countries for men, may come as a surprise. It is possible that low intentions to remain childless among highly-educated women, as depicted by the model, are an outcome of checking for many factors that are typical of this group, and are associated with higher levels of intended childlessness, such as being single, or having less traditional attitudes towards childlessness. However, a bivariate analysis shows similar results, albeit with a less marked polarisation between educational categories: Women with a low level of education intend to remain childless considerably more often than women with a medium level of education. If we do not check for other factors, Poland, Germany, and to a small extent also Belgium (Flanders), show a U-shaped pattern of intentions to remain childless among women, with women with both a high and low educational level having higher levels of intended childlessness than those with a medium educational level. For men, a strong association between low educational attainment and intentions to remain childless is observed.

Differently from education, the employment situation does not appear to have any consistent and significant effect.¹⁰ The most consistent finding concerns men: Having a partner who is not employed is linked to higher levels of intended childlessness. This result is particularly strong and significant only in the case of Eastern Germany. Furthermore, for Polish women, non-employment is associated with more frequent intentions to remain childless (significant at the 10% level). The negative effects of unemployment may become more prominent in the phase of realisation of expressed desired fertility (Toulemon and Testa 2005).

Although the income level was not strongly associated with intentions to remain childless, a higher income might be expected to reduce uncertainty about parenthood intentions: It reduces the constraints which a child may place on the parents' standard of living, and broadens the range of options available for (paid) childcare. Among women, a higher income is indeed linked with lower levels of uncertainty as to intention (the result is significant at the 10% level only in Belgium (Flanders)), but there is no consistent and significant effect for men.

As for attitudinal covariates, religious women intend to have children more often than women who are not religious, but the effect of religiosity is strong and significant only in Germany, where religiosity also reduces uncertainty about parenthood intentions. Among men, religiosity has a significant effect only in Germany, where it is also linked with a considerably stronger family orientation, and in Poland where it is linked with a low level of uncertainty about parenthood intentions.

Out of the two analysed statements about children and childlessness, the first one ("...[only]...feeling completely happy and at ease at home with your children") turned out to be considerably more important for predicting intentions to remain childless than the second, normative statement ("It is your duty towards society to have children"). Disagreement with the first statement is strongly correlated with the intention to remain childless and uncertainty about childlessness, for women and men alike. An indifferent response is also related to high levels of uncertainty as regards intentions, and in Germany also with intended childlessness. Poland constitutes an anomaly, where men who disagree that they are only completely happy at home with children display very low levels of intended childlessness (this result is weaker and not significant for Polish women). Considering childbearing a duty towards society is only weakly associated with a personal intention to remain childless. Although disagreement with this statement is slightly more often correlated with the intention to remain childless, this effect is not consistent between countries, and is strong and significant only for men in Eastern Germany.

As envisioned, preferred living arrangements are closely linked with intentions to remain childless. Men and women who prefer less committed living arrangements frequently intend to remain childless and express high levels of uncertainty concerning parenthood intentions. This association is usually stronger and more

¹⁰ A weak link between employment and intentions to remain childless may be partly explained by the problematic definition of employment status, which does not distinguish between specific categories of non-employment (footnote 3).

significant than the effect of age and partnership status. Interestingly, intentions of people who want to cohabit and then marry (our baseline category) are very distinct from those who want to cohabit without subsequently marrying. The former are relatively close to respondents who want to marry without cohabiting. Curiously, the preference for “direct marriage” is associated in Germany with a higher frequency of intended childlessness among women and considerable uncertainty as to parenthood intentions among men than the preference for cohabitation followed by marriage. Similarly, Italian men who prefer marriage intend to remain childless more often as well. For both men and women, the preference for cohabitation without marriage is closely correlated with intended childlessness. This result is more pronounced for women (odds ratio 4.1 in Italy, 14.8 in Poland and 36.4 in Germany) than for men (odds ratio 1.8 in Poland, 6.1 in Italy and Germany). Thus, in terms of intended childlessness, people who prefer to cohabit only are very close to those who prefer an LAT relationship, and usually also closer to those who prefer to remain single than to those respondents who want to cohabit and marry afterwards.

9.5.3 Reasons for not Intending to have a Child or Being Uncertain as Expressed by the Respondents

Intentions to remain childless are usually related to a combination of several reasons, which often consist of a mixture of lifestyle choices and different constraints or adverse personal circumstances. Although there is a vast cross-country heterogeneity in the proportion of respondents choosing different reasons and the number of reasons per respondent, respondents in most countries have typically chosen several reasons in justification of their intentions. Even the reason which ranks as the least important, namely the desire on the part of the respondent’s partner not to have a child, has been cited as important on average by one-fifth of respondents. Many respondents selected concern about the future of their children as an important reason: It was the most frequently chosen reason among women and the second most frequent reason among men. This reason is fairly difficult to interpret as it may have different meanings for diverse groups of respondents. Among many young people, it probably reflects general feelings of uncertainty about the future.

Interestingly, there were no differences between men and women and between the respondents from the former communist countries and from the other regions of Europe: In all these cases, more than 40% of respondents listed concern about the future as an important reason for their intention. Among men, intentions are strongly influenced by their partnership situation. Having no steady partner was the most frequent reason, mentioned as important by one-half of childless men who intended to remain childless or were uncertain. This result is in line with the findings of the multivariate analysis presented above. For women, a lack of a steady partner is relatively important as well. However, it ranked lower than concern about the possible consequences of parenthood for material well-being and fear that life would not be enjoyable with a child. Health reasons were relatively important for women as well, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

Given the generally-perceived difficulties attaching to combining work and motherhood, occupational and professional activities surprisingly ranked among the less frequently stated reasons for the “negative” childbearing intentions among childless men and women alike. It is roughly as important a reason for both sexes as the threat that parenthood may pose to their leisure time. This finding can be interpreted as a sign that only few women have such a pronounced career orientation, which would lead them to deliberately refrain from becoming mothers.¹¹

9.6 Summary and Discussion

We have examined contemporary attitudes towards childlessness, as well as the prevalence and features of intentions to remain childless among younger Europeans. This analysis also contributes to an understanding of men’s and women’s decision-making towards parenthood. Many of our findings indicate that parenthood frequently competes with other options and opportunities in people’s lives. Respondents not only weight different advantages and disadvantages of parenthood, but they may also consider childlessness as a possible option. This is clearly reflected not only by the non-negligible proportion of men and women who intend to remain childless, but also by a significant share of respondents who are uncertain about their intentions as regards parenthood.

Most respondents cite several reasons for opting for not intending to have a child. Thus, intended childlessness cannot be frequently explained by a single “reason”, but by a mixture of lifestyle choices and different constraints or adverse personal circumstances. As there was no indication of the time framework of the stated fertility intentions in the IPPAS survey, we assumed that most respondents expressed their long-term intentions. In particular, we considered respondents who stated that they did not intend to have a child as revealing their intention for permanent childlessness rather than referring to the near future. However, we should take into account that some respondents may have expressed their intentions as related to their life circumstances at the time of the survey.

Attitudes towards children and childlessness are generally comparable between men and women, but they differ by partnership status, have a considerable age gradient and depict wide cross-country differences. Respondents in Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands show generally the most positive attitudes towards childlessness, whereas relatively traditional attitudes prevail in the post-communist societies of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Austria and “familistic” Italy. Childbearing is often seen in these countries as a duty towards society; childless people are commonly considered as unhappy and respondents strongly accentu-

¹¹ Although employment and career may not strongly affect the intentions of childless women, it may have a more prominent impact at the stage of actual decision-making on childbearing. It is also plausible that many women acknowledge the difficulties of reconciling work and family life only after they actually become mothers and are directly confronted with realities on the labour market.

Table 9.5 Reasons for not intending to have a child or being uncertain about parenthood. Ranking and mean proportion of responses “important” and “very important” based on 11 predefined reasons (childless respondents aged 18–39, in %)

Rank	Question number	Women			Question number	Men		
		Reason	Relative weight	Adj. %		Reason	Relative weight	Adj. %
1.	Q8	Concerned about the future	1.45	47.8	Q3	No steady partner	1.72	51.7
2.	Q6	Maintain standard of living	1.29	42.9	Q8	Concerned about the future	1.46	46.5
3.	Q9	Would not enjoy life	1.23	37.3	Q6	Maintain standard of living	1.31	43.5
4.	Q3	No steady partner	1.19	39.3	Q9	Would not enjoy life	1.13	36.1
5.	Q7	Child would cost too much	1.13	39.3	Q7	Child would cost too much	1.05	36.4
6.	Q2	State of health	1.09	40.0	Q5	Leisure time	0.92	32.1
7.	Q4	Job	0.93	33.5	Q4	Job	0.89	31.3
8.	Q5	Leisure time	0.92	31.8	Q2	State of health	0.75	25.8
9.	Q10	Too old	0.71	26.7	Q1	Does not want a child	0.62	23.2
10.	Q1	Does not want a child	0.64	25.7	Q10	Too old	0.61	21.9
11.	Q11	Partner does not want	0.60	23.1	Q11	Partner does not want	0.55	22.6

Source: IPPAS

Notes: The ranking is based on the mean values of standardised relative weights of each analysed reason in twelve countries (all countries except Italy; Eastern and Western Germany are considered separately). See sub-section 9.3.4. on methods for the computation of relative weights. Questions 5 and 6 were not asked in Slovenia, Question 9 was not asked in Estonia and Questions 10 and 11 were not asked in Belgium (Flanders).

The exact wording of the questions relating to different reasons was as follows:

Q1: “I already have all the children I want”;

Q2: “My state of health does not allow me to have a(nother) child”;

Q3: “I live alone and I don’t have a steady partner”;

Q4: “My job and professional activities would not allow it”;

Q5: “I would have to give up leisure-time interests”;

Q6: “I want to maintain my present standard of living”;

Q7: “A(nother) child would cost too much”;

Q8: “I am too concerned about the future of my children”;

Q9: “I would not be able to enjoy life as I have so far”;

Q10: “I am/my partner is too old”;

Q11: “My partner does not want a(nother) child.”

ate the value of happy family life with children. This finding supports part of our first hypothesis, which envisioned that the low childlessness levels recorded until recently in all Central and Eastern European societies will continue to shape people's generally negative attitudes towards voluntary childlessness. The very positive evaluation of family life, expressed also by the majority of younger childless respondents, may be also in part a consequence of the family patterns of the previous era.

Attitudes towards childlessness are highly differentiated by age not only in the former communist societies, but also in several other countries, especially in Finland. Thus, the second part of our first hypothesis, envisioning that the age gradient will be particularly pronounced in the former communist societies among the younger cohorts because of their strong receptivity to recent social and cultural changes, is confirmed only to some extent. Unfortunately, we do not have more detailed data that would enable us to disentangle the age effects from the period effects.

In line with the second hypothesis, we found in every country a significant proportion of childless respondents who intend to remain childless or are uncertain about parenthood, but we also detected a considerable degree of heterogeneity between countries. A high proportion of Austrian and German respondents intend to remain childless, whereas indecisiveness is most pronounced among Polish and Finnish respondents. Germany stands out for the high overall level of both intended childlessness and uncertainty. These trends may be viewed as the outcomes of structural and institutional constraints, which encourage the traditional male-breadwinner family model based on marriage, and are detrimental to the combination of employment and family life (e.g. Federkeil 1997; Kreyenfeld 2004). However, our study also indicates that irrespective of these institutional constraints, a "culture of childlessness" has emerged in Germany as a consequence of high and gradually increasing childlessness levels in the past decades. Germany has become a society where a child-free lifestyle enjoys considerable popularity and, in combination with a widespread preference for less traditional living arrangements as well as high intended childlessness among the married respondents, it has become a widely-accepted option.

The example of Italy points out that the spread of childlessness and its wider societal acceptance are culturally specific. Italian women make their family-related decisions in an environment where institutional support for the traditional family model is even more engrained than in Germany, and where the possibilities for combining work and family life are considerably more constrained. But, differently from Germany, Italian culture retains a strong "familistic character" and children and family life continue to be highly valued by the large majority of the population.

We have not found support for our third hypothesis, envisioning that uncertainty about parenthood would be particularly pronounced among young adults. For most younger respondents, uncertainty is probably seen as temporary and thus does not affect their long-term life planning. The frequency of uncertainty as to intention increases sharply after the age of 30. A slight decline can be observed among men

at young ages; however, as the regression estimates indicate, this is more closely linked to their partnership status than to age. Until reaching their early thirties, childless men express both higher levels of intended childlessness and uncertainty as to parenthood in comparison with women. In combination with their stronger preference for less conventional living arrangements, our findings lend a modest degree of support to various hypotheses on men's greater reluctance towards, or even retreat from, parenthood.

Our research provides a limited degree of support for the fifth hypothesis, namely that men's parenthood intentions are more closely connected with their partnership status, whereas age is of paramount importance for women. Among the subjective reasons for intentions to remain childless or uncertainty, a lack of a steady partner ranked as the most important reason among men. On the other hand, if we check for several factors in a multivariate analysis, "having no partner" is not strongly related with intended childlessness among men, but it is rather manifested by higher levels of uncertainty about parenthood intentions.

Not only the current partnership status, but also preferences for living arrangements, are tightly interwoven with intended childlessness. A descriptive analysis has shown an expected gradient between the level of partnership commitment and childbearing preferences (first part of our sixth hypothesis). Respondents who prefer arrangements with a low level of commitment, such as single-living or living-apart-together relationship, also express a high degree of preference for childlessness. Living arrangement preferences and intentions to remain childless obviously constitute two sides of one coin and reveal underlying values, life-style preferences and personality traits.

A further link can be established between attitudes towards childbearing and intentions: Our study found a relatively strong correlation between a respondent's very positive attitude towards family life with children and his or her intentions towards childbearing. Similarly, Schoen et al. (1997) have found a direct relationship between attitudes towards childlessness and fertility intentions among childless respondents.

Individuals who prefer to cohabit and subsequently marry are rather similar in their childlessness preferences to those respondents who prefer "direct" marriage. A strong family orientation among both groups of respondents was also detected by the multivariate analysis. However, men and women who prefer cohabitation without subsequent marriage emerge as a group which is clearly distinct from the group of respondents who prefer to cohabit and then marry. The former group shows high levels of intentions to remain childless and of uncertainty, which brings it closer to respondents who prefer a non-co-residential partnership, living single or flat-sharing.

The mechanism which links childbearing intentions with the preference for marriage cannot be investigated with our data. It is possible that willingness to marry is perceived as a sign of partnership commitment sufficient for family formation, or that marriage is generally seen as a favourable arrangement for childbearing, also from the normative and institutional perspective. Our study has revealed some contrasts between the preferences expressed by men and women. A descriptive analysis

has suggested that women who prefer cohabitation without subsequent marriage express stronger childbearing intentions than men who prefer to cohabit. Similar differences have been found for those respondents who prefer single living, where a quarter of women would still prefer to have a child while living single. These findings again point to a stronger family orientation among women.

A negative correlation of educational attainment with intentions to remain childless among men is in agreement with the second part of our sixth hypothesis. Moreover, we also found that women with a low educational level frequently intend to remain childless, whereas women with higher educational attainment do not necessarily express a high preference for intended childlessness. Conversely, highly-educated women in Flanders and Poland are less likely to intend to remain childless, other things being equal. This finding appears to be at odds with the fact that highly-educated women also have the highest levels of childlessness (e.g. Dorbritz 2003; Lappegård 2002; Shkolnikov et al. 2004; Spielauer 2005), although childlessness is becoming more widespread across all educational levels (McDonald 1998). Also some theoretical arguments imply that voluntary childlessness should be more common among highly-educated women due to more employment choices and, presumably, also stronger career orientation, when compared to women with a low educational level. For the latter, family formation may serve as one of the few lifestyle options available to them for self-fulfilment and also for reducing their uncertainty (Friedman et al. 1994).

We interpret our findings as a sign that an exclusive orientation towards work and career is relatively rare among women with high educational attainment, and that most of them prefer to combine both employment and family life by having at least one child. Indeed, it may be that the effects of being highly educated come to play only later on, namely in the transition from the first to the second child. Several other studies have also found that the desire for childlessness is relatively low among more highly-educated women (see Miettinen and Paajanen 2005 for Finland and Heiland et al. 2005 for Germany). However, the relationship is sensitive to different question wordings, and if intentions are referred to a short time period, for example, childless and highly-educated people intend less often to have a child (Testa and Toulemon 2006).

Our study also shows that the partner's education matters as much as a woman's own education. Given that highly-educated women postpone childbearing to a relatively late age, and that they face higher opportunity costs of childbearing, and thus more problems of coordinating their work, partnership and family "careers", we would not expect the observed association between educational attainment and childlessness to disappear in the foreseeable future.

Our multivariate analysis can be further extended to address the issue of endogeneity, to consider intentions to remain childless and uncertainty in a joint model, and to inspect interactions between various factors associated with intended childlessness. The IPPAS data cannot be used, however, to address an issue which emerges in different forms throughout this article: How do the attitudes, intentions and preferences related to living arrangements and family formation influence each other, evolve during the life course and affect subsequent behaviour? Only a lon-

gitudinal study would enable us to find an answer to this research question. Our contribution indicates that the process of forming a family can differ between men and women, and that men's overall stronger preferences for childlessness and for the less traditional living arrangements may constitute a limiting factor in a couple's family decision-making (Thomson 1997; Voas 2003). Or are men's intentions and preferences less firm and thus more easily adjustable to the preferences of their partners, as suggested by Rindfuss et al. in 1988? Further research in this area may greatly enrich our understanding of contemporary low fertility.

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Appendix

Table 9.6 Sample size by country, sex and childlessness status. Respondents aged 18–39 (non-weighted data)

	Women			Men		
	Total	Childless	% childless	Total	Childless	% childless
AT	505	200	39.6	353	212	60.1
B (FL)	913	441	48.3	814	472	58.0
CZ	308	84	27.3	168	98	58.3
DE (East)	387	166	42.9	364	239	65.7
DE (West)	468	246	52.6	459	311	67.8
EE	427	258	60.4	275	185	67.3
FIN	853	429	50.3	559	358	64.0
HU	573	229	40.0	520	290	55.8
IT	1194	610	51.1	1226	810	66.1
LT	323	80	24.8	275	110	40.0
NL	394	202	51.3	319	190	59.6
PL	1137	469	41.2	1040	597	57.4
RO	315	131	41.6	320	147	45.9
SI	362	146	40.3	382	212	55.5

Source: IPPAS

Notes: The number of childless respondents for Romania has been estimated from the variable listing the number of children in respondent's household.

Table 9.7 Odds ratios of uncertain childbearing intentions among childless women aged 18–39

	B (FL)		DE		IT		PL	
Age								
Age 18–24	0.53	+	1.58		2.94	+	0.61	
Age 25–29	1		1		1		1	
Age 30–39	2.16	*	7.29	***	7.79	***	2.43	
Partnership status								
Single, no partner	1.62		0.83		2.82	+	1	
With partner	1		1		1			
Married	0.43	+	1.92		2.39		0.25	**
Own education								
Low	0.76		0.47		1.51		2.67	+
Medium	1		1		1		1	
High	0.48	*	1.00		0.22	+	1.16	
Still studying			0.81					
Partner's education								
Low	2.62				0.27		14.89	*
Medium	1		1		1		1	
High	1.21		0.73				0.96	
Employment								
Employed	1		1		1		1	
Not employed	0.80		0.99		1.01		1.30	
Partner's employment								
Employed	1		1		1		1	
Not employed	1.23		0.21	+	3.30	+	0.46	
Religiosity								
Not religious	1		1		1		1	
Religious	0.92		0.45	+	1.33		1.08	
Only feel happy at home with children								
Agree	1		1		1		1	
Indifferent	0.99		3.61	**			1.58	
Disagree	1.65		2.68	*	1.38		1.01	
Duty towards society to have children								
Agree			1		1		1	
Indifferent			0.48	+			2.04	*
Disagree			0.60		1.13		1.55	
Preferred living arrangement								
Marriage			1.19		0.74		0.73	
Cohabitation, then marriage			1		1		1	
Cohabitation only			4.29	*	1.33		4.25	+
LAT			5.53	**	1.22		1.05	
Single, flat-sharing			5.73	**	0.91		2.84	*
Log likelihood	–159.0		–126.4		–110.3		–224.8	
N	326		282		532		398	

Source: IPPAS

*** p <= 0.001; ** p <= 0.01; * p <= 0.05; + p <= 0.10

Table 9.8 Odds ratios of uncertain childbearing intentions among childless men aged 18–39

	B (FL)		DE		IT		PL	
Age								
Age 18–24	1.12		1.52		0.43	*	0.40	**
Age 25–29	1		1		1		1	
Age 30–39	2.87	**	3.66	**	1.19		1.93	+
Partnership status								
Single, no partner	5.17	***	0.79		2.00		1	
With partner	1		1		1			
Married	0.26	*	0.67		0.18		0.22	**
Own education								
Low	1.66		0.74		1.67		1.63	
Medium	1		1		1		1	
High	0.84		0.33	**	1.19		0.39	
Still studying							2.12	*
Partner's education								
Low	1.12				1.28			
Medium	1		1		1		1	
High	1.02		0.78		0.40		0.74	
Employment								
Employed	1		1		1		1	
Not employed	0.59		0.87		0.92		1.28	
Partner's employment								
Employed	1		1		1		1	
Not employed	0.60		0.99		1.20		0.90	
Religiosity								
Not religious	1		1		1		1	
Religious	1.20		0.90		0.87		0.45	*
Only feel happy at home with children								
Agree	1		1		1		1	
Indifferent	1.64		2.46	*			1.62	+
Disagree	3.22	**	3.00	**	1.25		0.96	
Duty towards society to have children								
Agree	1		1		1		1	
Indifferent	0.56		1.67				0.99	
Disagree	1.12		1.03		1.89	+	1.44	
Preferred living arrangement								
Marriage			6.18	**	0.49	+	0.99	
Cohabitation, then marriage			1		1		1	
Cohabitation only			2.98	*	2.32	*	2.78	
LAT			6.90	***	5.25	**	12.55	***
Single, flat-sharing			5.17	***	24.34	***	7.38	**
Log likelihood	–167.9		–187.6		–168.5		–267.8	
N	331		340		680		474	

Source: IPPAS

*** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$; + $p \leq 0.10$.

Notes: The models in tables APPENDIX 2 and 3 also check for urban-rural residence and income. The variable “Preferred living arrangement” is not available for Belgium. The “indifferent” response option in the attitudinal covariates is not available for Italy. All the other empty spaces are due to variables dropped from the analysis because they showed too few cases.

Table 9.9 Covariates used in the regression analysis (proportions in %). Women

	B (FL)	DE	IT	PL
Age				
Age 18–24	48	46	35	74
Age 25–29	31	29	39	19
Age 30–39	21	25	26	7
Partnership status				
Single, no partner	31	45	35	79
With partner	54	48	52	
Married	15	7	13	21
Own education				
Low	8	10	15	5
Medium	34	38	69	43
High	58	28	16	16
Still studying		24		36
Partner's education (distribution among respondents with a partner)				
Low	10	6	21	5
Medium	52	53	61	72
High	38	41	18	23
Employment				
Employed	70	87	53	74
Not employed	30	13	47	26
Partner's employment (distribution among respondents with a partner)				
Employed	90	94	88	96
Not employed	10	6	12	4
Religiosity				
Not religious	66	76	28	10
Religious	34	24	72	90
Childlessness attitudes				
Only happy with children				
Agree	23	42	74	60
Indifferent	33	25		22
Disagree	44	33	26	18
It is your duty towards society to have children				
Agree	4	32	40	46
Indifferent	16	29		28
Disagree	80	39	60	26
Preferred living arrangement				
Marriage		5	52	71
Cohab. followed by marriage		52	39	21
Cohabitation only		16	5	1
LAT		9	3	1
Single, flat-sharing		18	1	6

Source: IPPAS

Table 9.10 Covariates used in the regression analysis (proportions in %). Men

	B (FL)	DE	IT	PL
Age				
Age 18–24	38	29	35	60
Age 25–29	32	28	34	25
Age 30–39	30	43	31	15
Partnership status				
Single, no partner	38	65	45	82
With partner	44	29	45	
Married	18	6	10	18
Own education				
Low	13	10	18	14
Medium	47	47	72	55
High	40	28	10	10
Still studying		15		21
Partner's education (distribution among respondents with a partner)				
Low	7	10	16	6
Medium	43	53	70	62
High	50	37	14	32
Employment				
Employed	77	81	64	75
Not employed	23	19	36	25
Partner's employment (distribution among respondents with a partner)				
Employed	84	93	77	94
Not employed	16	7	23	6
Religiosity				
Not religious	76	87	35	13
Religious	24	13	65	87
Childlessness attitudes				
Only happy with children				
Agree	30	33	74	60
Indifferent	32	29		24
Disagree	38	38	26	16
It is your duty towards society to have children				
Agree	6	34	44	45
Indifferent	24	28		33
Disagree	70	38	56	22
Preferred living arrangement				
Marriage		3	42	67
Cohab. followed by marriage		41	45	20
Cohabitation only		10	9	2
LAT		13	3	3
Single, flat-sharing		33	1	8

Source: IPPAS

Notes: Tables 9.9 and 9.10 show the distribution of respondents in the model contrasting the “negative” and the “positive” childbearing intentions (see Tables 9.3 and 9.4).