

DIFFERENT EVOLUTIONS OF THE SHARE OF LIVE BIRTHS OUTSIDE MARRIAGE, IN THE EU MEMBER STATES

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Abstract

Over the last decades, in most EU countries, there has been a steady increase in the number and share of live birth outside marriage, a demographic phenomenon with negative social effects, at least on those children.

In this paper, we realised an analysis of the evolution of live birth outside marriage, in EU member states during 2005-2015. The study emphasize that during the analysed period, only in the case of 4 countries there were reductions in the share of the live birth outside the marriage, all the others having increases, in some cases even significant.

From the comparative analysis of the statistical data we concluded that a determinant factor of extra conjugal fertility is the accentuated increase registered in the last decades of consensual unions, to the classical marriages detriment.

At the same time, the increase of the age at first marriage, a phenomenon encountered in all EU Member States, is another determining factor in the increase in the share of live birth outside marriage. Another conclusion of the study is that there is no direct correlation between the level of economic development of countries and the share of live birth outside marriage.

Keywords: *live birth outside the marriage, extra conjugal fertility, marriage, consensual unions*

Introduction

The indicator *live births outside marriage* generally refer to the live births whose mothers, at birth date, have civil status other than married. In the category of live births outside marriage are included the children whose mothers are alone or live in consensual union as well as those whose mothers are widowed or divorced.

Children born outside of marriage may be ranked one, two, three or more. The issue of live births outside marriage is not a recent one and it is beginning to manifest at higher levels in the middle of the last century. If 5-6 decades ago the live births outside marriage were rare and usually associated with negative social and legal implications for the child and even for mothers, nowadays, many of the unmarried mothers are currently in stable relationships [1].

In fact, one of the determinants of the increase of the number and the share of the live births outside the marriage is the increase of the number of consensual unions. In the last few decades, in most European countries, the number of consensual unions (unregistered marriages) has increased considerably, in the detriment of official marriages, several family models have emerged (cohabitation, consensual union, marriage de facto, intimate relationships, couples), these tendencies being recognized as contemporary processes inseparable from other social changes [2].

The process of the accentuated increase of live births outside marriage must be related not only to the attributes, the parents' characteristics and contextual conditions but also to the socio-economic, political and legislative situation in a country or region [3], which explains otherwise, also, the significant differences that exist between countries, regarding the share of live births outside marriage.

Some analysts in sociology consider that an important cause of the rise of live births outside marriage is the increasing of the number of women who put on the first place the job, professional development and secondarily the marriage [4].

Even if there are currently enough negative outcomes in society regarding the birth of the child outside marriage, they are far more liberal compared to those of 5-6 decades ago. We can say that the notion of "born non-legitimate" has lost its meaning, observing a more tolerant attitude towards unmarried women, who give birth to children, especially if they have done so consciously.

However, the alarming increase of the share of live births outside marriage, which reaches over 50% in many European countries, requires an analysis of this situation, with important demographic and social implications. Why is this process a problem, however, given that in many countries, the birth of a child outside marriage it is considered something normal?

According to some authors, in many cases children born out of marriage, especially by single mothers, have socio-emotional problems [5], they have less chances to achieve in society and more often than children born in marriage, they divorce or have children out of marriage [6]. Married couples generally have greater opportunities to provide a higher standard of living and education than single mothers.

Therefore, some specialists believe that to prevent the increase of the number of live births outside the marriage, some school or community programs would be needed to warn of the negative consequences of this process [7].

Literature review

The issue of live births outside of marriage began to emerge in particular in the 1960s when major changes in the structure and formation of families as well as in their fertility, occurred in most industrialized countries in Europe and North America [8].

The main reason why the increasing dynamics of the number and the share of the live births outside the marriage determined the specialists' concern is the fact that they consider that in most cases these children are disadvantaged compared to the children born during marriage, having lower chances to succeed in the future [9], [10], [4].

The increasing of the divorce rate, of the number and share of consensual unions, the reducing of fertility, the increasing of the number of live births outside marriage - demographic phenomena with negative implications, that have manifested in many of the European countries over the past decades - have attracted the attention not only of the specialists but also of the authorities, who also supported the need for policies in these areas [11].

One of the issues most frequently addressed by specialists regarding the live births outside marriage was represented by the analysis of the causes that determine this process. The increasing of the number of live births outside marriage is attributed in many countries to cohabitation changes, namely the increase of the number of consensual unions against marriages [12].

The rapid dynamics of consensual unions in the last few decades, the lesser attention given by the new generations of marriage, have led consensual unions to be considered normal situations and not exceptional cases with negative consequences for children or for those who living together.

It is believed that the children born in consensual unions, with two parents, have the same conditions and chances of development as children born during marriage. Moreover, some authors believe that a distinction must not be made between children

born during marriages and outside marriages, but also between those born to single mothers and those born in consensual unions [8].

The increase of the number and the share of the consensual unions in the last decades have been determined not only by the changes in the economic and social life, but also by the way in which this form of marital relations was institutionalized and promoted in society [13].

In this respect, we have to mention the fact that in the past decades, religious institutions, which almost without exception, support fertility in marriage, have lost their influence on the way of forming families [14]. Even in the case of some countries, such as Romania, where the traditional family and the influence of the religious institutions on the way of family formation is still preserved, we are witnessing a relaxation and implicitly, an increase of the number and share of the consensual unions [15].

An important cause of the rise of live births outside marriage is also the emancipation of women, who have become more economically independent in recent decades, as a result of easier access to the labor market. The phenomenon of increasing the economic and financial independence of women was accompanied by a more relaxed position of women towards the marriage institution and the situation of having children without a legal state [16].

The dimension of extramarital fertility is especially influenced by the structure of the population by various socio-demographic characteristics. This also explain the major differences that exist between European countries [10]. Thus, in Northern Europe, live births during marriages have become an exception, especially in the case of the first child, while in South Eastern Europe there are still countries such as Greece or Albania, where the live births outside marriages are rare cases [17].

Research methodology, data, results and discussions

In the analysis of the evolution of the live births outside the marriage in the case of the EU member states, we used a statistical indicator of structure, respectively the share of the live births outside marriage in the total number of live births. We chose this approach because we considered that a comparative analysis based on the total number

of live births outside marriage would not be suggestive, because it is normal to exist significant differences between EU countries regarding this indicator, taking into account also the differences regarding the number of population. The analysis refers to the period 2005-2015 and was based on the statistical data from EUROSTAT.

Even if, in the last few decades, as we have previously stated, there is a much clearer and permissive position towards extramarital fertility, however, in many cases this phenomenon is considered to be a negative one, especially through the consequences on live births outside marriage.

Unfortunately, in the last few years, we witness an alarming increase of the share of live births outside marriage in most EU countries. The statistical data presented in Table 1, highlights that during the period 2005-2015, only 4 countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden) experienced a reduction of the share of live births outside marriage, all the other countries registering an increase, in some cases, even significant.

The evolution of the share of live births outside marriage in the EU 28 member states, in 2015 in comparison with 2005

Table 1

geotime	The share of live births outside marriage (%)		Dynamic 2015/2008 (%)
	2005	2015	
Belgium	39.4	:	*
Bulgaria	49.0	58.6	119.6
Czech Republic	31.7	47.8	150.8
Denmark	45.7	53.8	117.7
Germany	29.2	35.0	119.9
Estonia	58.5	57.9	99.0
Ireland	31.8	36.5	114.8
Greece	5.1	8.8	172.5
Spain	26.5	44.5	167.9
France	48.4	59.1	122.1
Croatia	10.5	18.1	172.4
Italy	15.4	30.0	194.8
Cyprus	4.4	16.6	377.3
Latvia	44.7	41.5	92.8
Lithuania	28.0	27.7	98.9
Luxembourg	27.2	38.8	142.6
Hungary	35.0	47.9	136.9

Malta	20.0	26.9	134.5
Netherlands	34.9	49.8	142.7
Austria	36.5	42.1	115.3
Poland	18.5	24.6	133.0
Portugal	30.7	50.7	165.1
Romania	28.5	31.0	108.8
Slovenia	46.7	57.9	124.0
Slovakia	26.0	39.2	150.8
Finland	40.4	44.3	109.7
Sweden	55.4	54.7	98.7
United Kingdom	42.9	47.9	111.7

: = not available

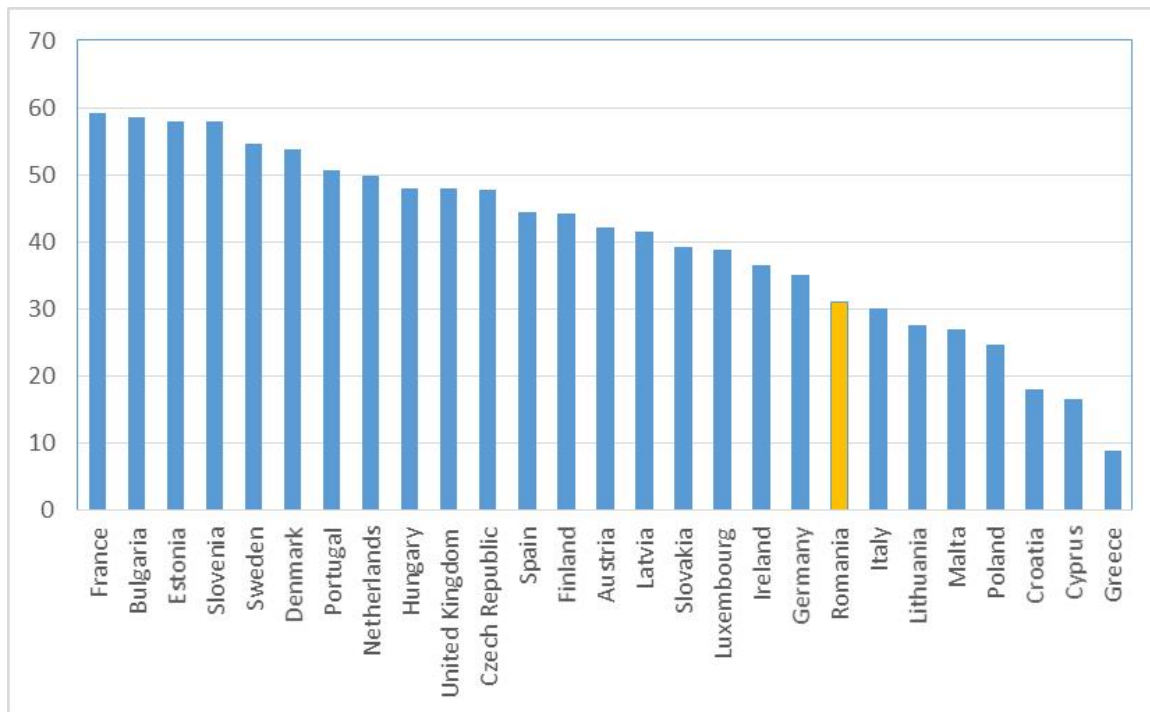
Data sources: Based on the information retrieved on July 27, 2017, from EUROSTAT, [18].

The largest increases of the share of live births outside marriage, registered in 2015 as compared to 2005 were in Cyprus (+ 277.3%), Italy (+ 94.8%), Greece (+ 72.5%), Croatia (+72.4%). These significant increases are all the more worrying because they have been recorded in countries where extramarital fertility is very low.

The statistical data from Table 1 as well as from Fig. 1, show that at the level of 2015 there were significant differences between the EU member states regarding the share of the live births outside the marriage. Nordic countries are a category of countries with high extramarital fertility compared to the EU average (42% in 2014): Sweden (54.7%), Denmark (53.8%), Finland (44.3%).

The share of live births outside marriage in the EU 28 member state, in 2015

Figure 1



Data sources: Based on the information retrieved on July 27, 2017, from EUROSTAT, [18].

These large shares of live births outside marriage, registered in the Nordic countries are explained by both the very permissive, liberal policies of these states regarding extramarital relations and by the fact that traditional families do not benefit from tax exemptions or other benefits. As regards the countries of southern Europe, Portugal (50.7%) and Spain (44.5%) recorded high birth rates outside the marriage, while Greece (8.8%) and Italy (30.0%) are among the countries with a situation favorable countries, where the traditional family, the institution of marriage plays an important role.

In western and central European countries, countries in which consensual unions became normality, extra-marital fertility had high values in 2015: France (59.1%), the Netherlands (49.8%). Austria (42.1%). Non-marital fertility is very different in former communist countries. Thus, in 2015, the share of live births outside marriage exceeded the European average and recorded very high values in Bulgaria (58.6%), Slovenia (57.9%), Estonia (57.9%); in other countries where the cultural factor plays an important

role in maintaining marital fertility, the share of live births outside marriage was relatively low: Croatia (18.1%), Poland (24.6%), Lithuania (27.7%), Romania (31.0%).

As mentioned above, a determinant factor of the increase of the number and the weight of the live births outside the marriage is the sharp increase of the number of consensual unions against the (legal) marriages. The phenomenon of marriage has registered a significant decline in most of the EU member states in recent decades (Table 2).

The evolution of marriage indicators in the EU 28 member states, in 2015 in comparison with 2005

Table 2

geotime	Crude marriage rate (‰)		Mean age at first marriage – females (years)	
	2005	2015	2005	2015
Belgium	4.1	3.6	28.1	:
Bulgaria	4.4	3.9	25.6	27.0
Czech Republic	5.1	4.6	26.4	28.8
Denmark	6.7	5.1	30.9	31.9
Germany	4.7	4.9	29.1	30.9
Estonia	4.5	5.2	26.4	29.3
Ireland	5.1	4.8	30.5	31.9
Greece	5.5	5.0	28.3	30.1
Spain	4.7	3.6	29.4	32.7
France	4.5	:	29.6	:
Croatia	5.1	4.7	26.2	27.9
Italy	4.3	3.2	29.1	:
Cyprus	8.0	7.2	27.3	:
Latvia	5.6	6.9	25.8	28.5
Lithuania	6.0	7.6	25.0	27.5
Luxembourg	4.4	3.6	28.9	32.1
Hungary	4.4	4.7	26.7	29.2
Malta	5.9	7.0	:	:
Netherlands	4.4	3.8	29.2	30.8
Austria	4.8	:	28.6	:
Poland	5.4	5.0	25.3	26.9
Portugal	4.6	3.1	26.3	30.2
Romania	6.7	6.3	25.1	26.8
Slovenia	2.9	3.1	28.7	30.0
Slovakia	4.9	5.3	:	28.2
Finland	5.6	4.5	29.4	31.0
Sweden	4.9	5.3	31.7	33.6
United Kingdom	:	:	:	:

: = not available

Data sources: Based on the information retrieved on August 1, 2017, from EUROSTAT, [19].

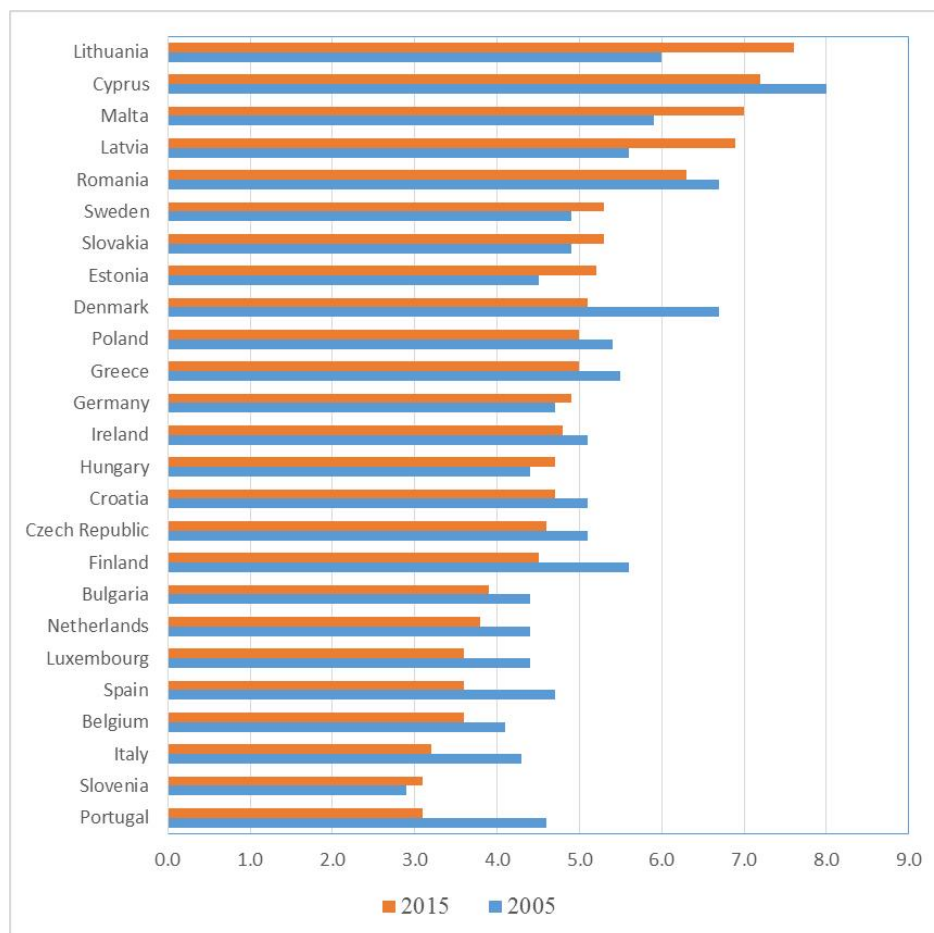
Thus, as shown by the data presented in Table 2 as well as Figure 2, only 9 EU Member States recorded increases in marriage rates in the period 2005-2015, the other countries registering more or less significant decreases.

In 2015, the lowest marriage rate (marriages per 1000 inhabitants) were registered in Slovenia (3.1 ‰), Portugal (3.1 ‰), Italy (3.2 ‰), Spain (3.6 ‰), Luxembourg (3.6 ‰), the Netherlands (3.8 ‰) and Bulgaria (3.9 ‰), which are also characterized by a high proportion of live births outside marriage.

On the other hand, the countries with the highest rates of marriages such as: Lithuania (7.6 ‰), Cyprus (7.2 ‰), Malta (7.0 ‰) are among the countries with the lowest share of live births outside marriage.

The evolution of crude marriage rate in the EU 28 member states, in 2015 in comparison with 2005 (‰)

Figure 2



Note: there are represented only the states with data in both years

Data sources: Based on the information retrieved on August 1, 2017, from EUROSTAT, [19].

Another factor influencing the increase of the number of live births outside marriage is the change in the last two decades of the marriage model in most EU countries, but especially in the case of former communist countries, in the sense of increasing age at the first marriage.

According to specialists, women postpone marriage by putting their professional or material achievement first, which means, in many cases that they born children, but without a legal status. Based on the data from Table 2, in all EU countries, the age at the first marriage of the women increased in 2015 compared to 2005.

Among the countries with the highest age of the women, at the first marriage are: Sweden (33.6 years), Spain (32.7 years). Luxembourg (32.1 years), Denmark (31.9 years), countries with a high share of the number of live births outside marriage.

Conclusions

The analysis carried out for the period 2005-2015 in the case of EU Member States shows an alarming increase in the phenomenon of extra-marital fertility, the share of live births outside marriage exceeds in several states half of the total number of live births (France, Bulgaria, Estonia, Sweden, Slovenia, Portugal) and in other states has quite high values. Only in few countries (Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Poland) the marriage institution and conjugal fertility still have the role that society should have in society.

The determinant factor in the increase in the share of live births outside marriage is, from our point of view, the sharp increase in the number and weight of the consensual unions in recent decades, accompanied by a significant reduction in marriage rates in many EU countries. Increasing the age of women at the first marriage is also another important factor of extramarital fertility.

Taking into account the negative effects that extramarital fertility has in many cases on children, especially those born of a single mother, we believe that states should take steps to stop this phenomenon.

Even though this is the current trend, and especially the mentality of young people related to marriage has changed, we still think that, at least for children, a stable family based on trust, love and mutual support is obviously a better option than that of a disunited or single parent family.

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