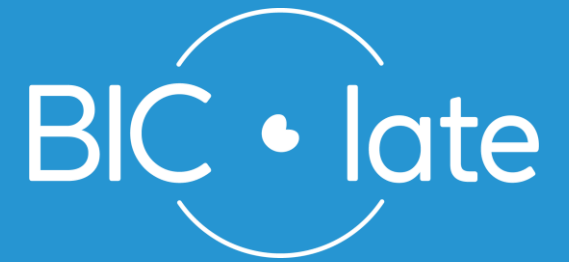




Wittgenstein Centre

FOR DEMOGRAPHY AND
GLOBAL HUMAN CAPITAL



Reaching reproductive boundaries? The components of childlessness in times of delayed fertility

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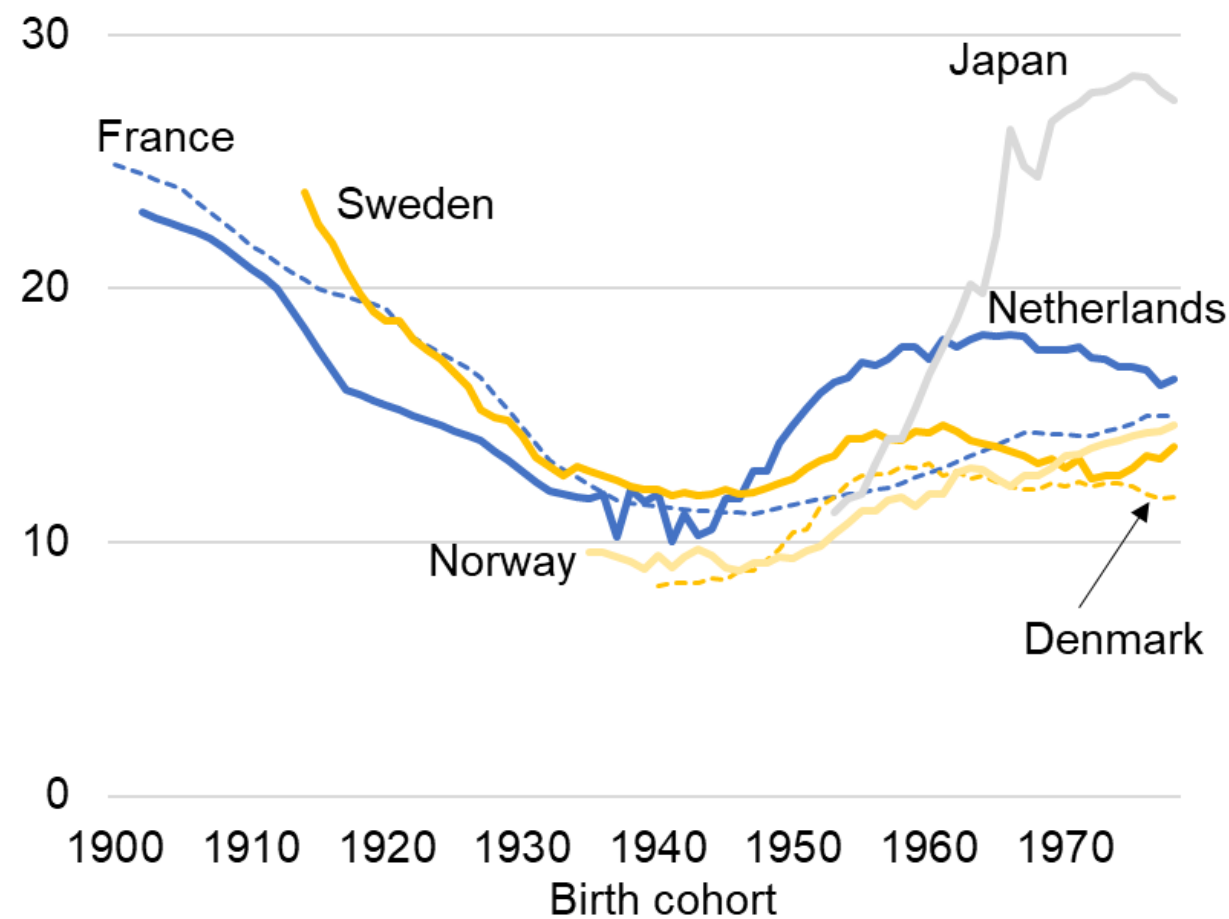
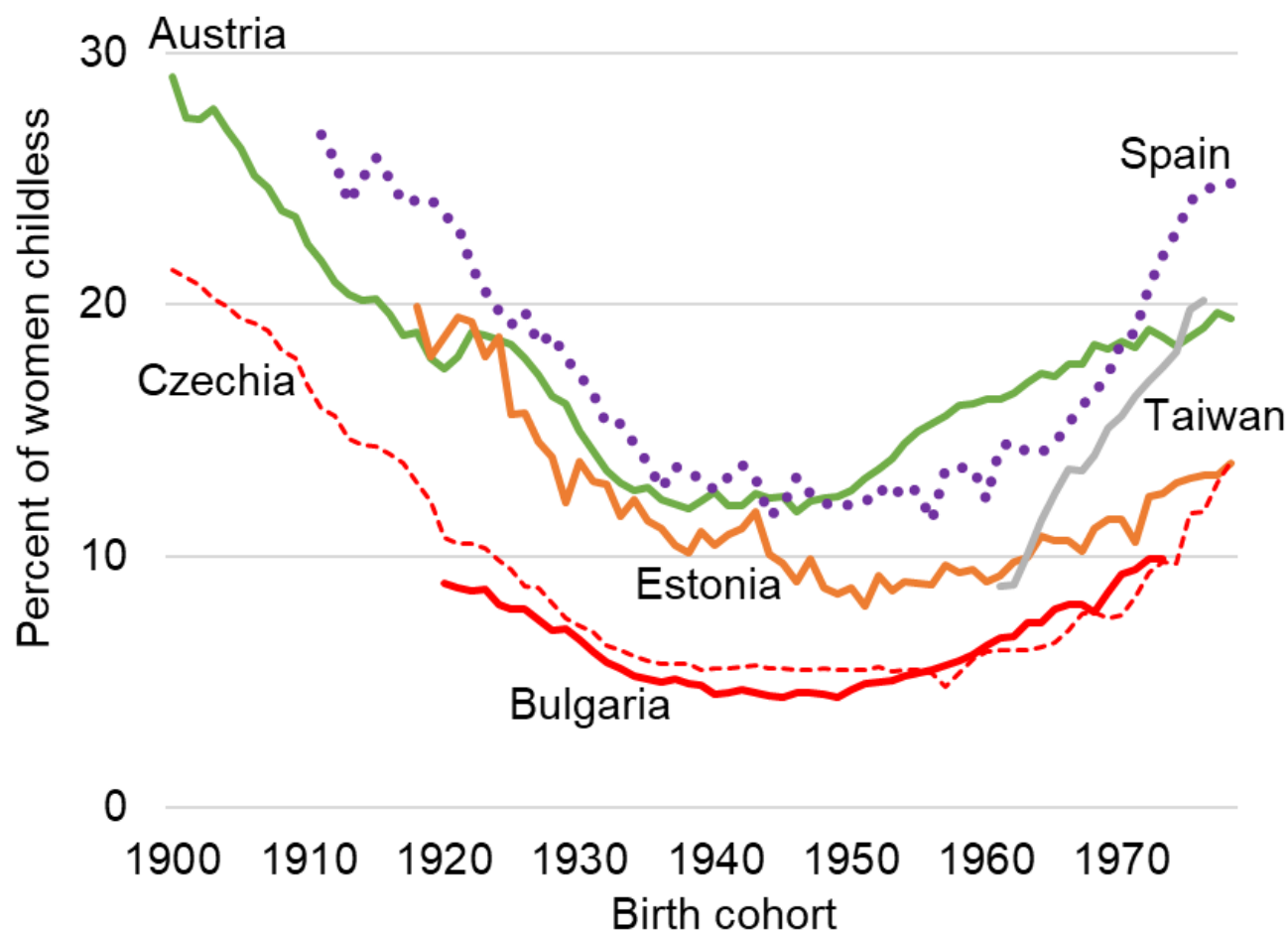
International Symposium on MAR
Villa Vigoni, 16-18 Sept 2024



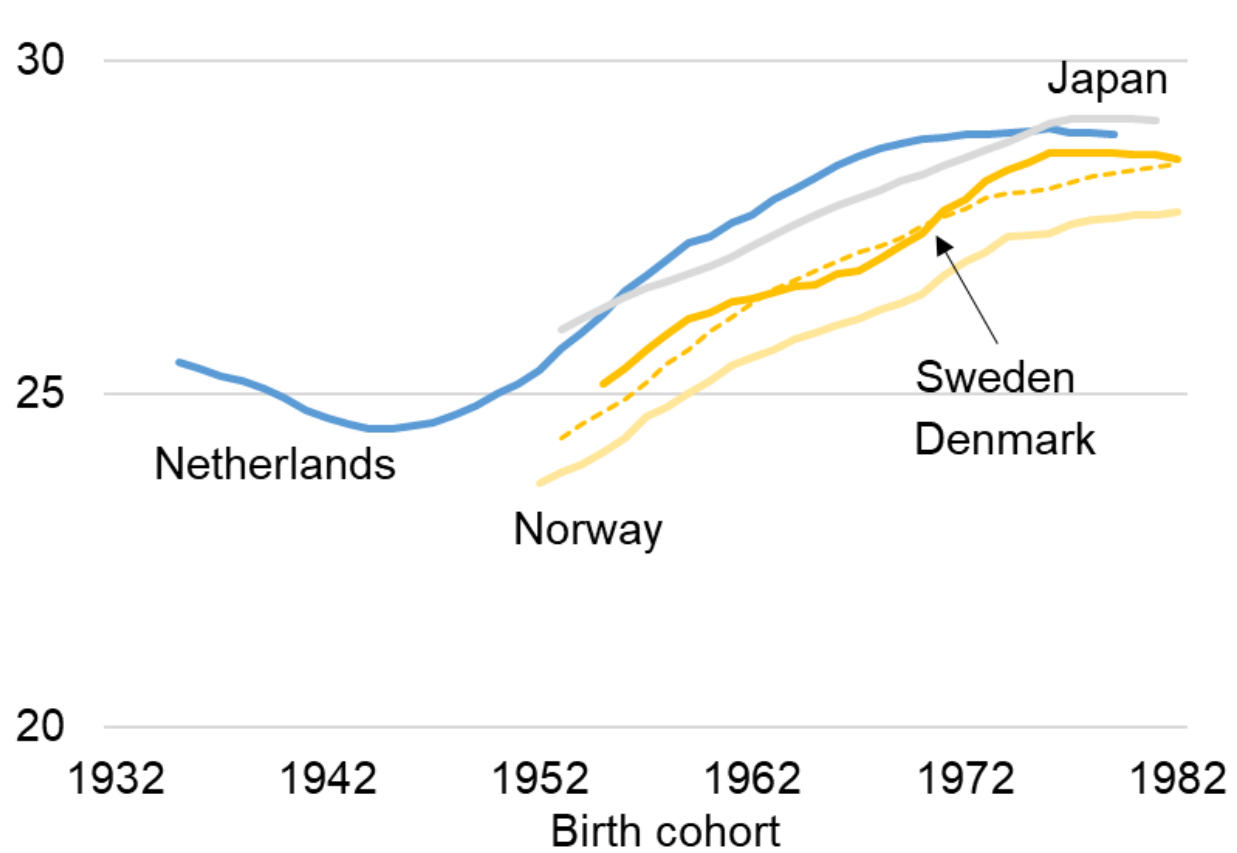
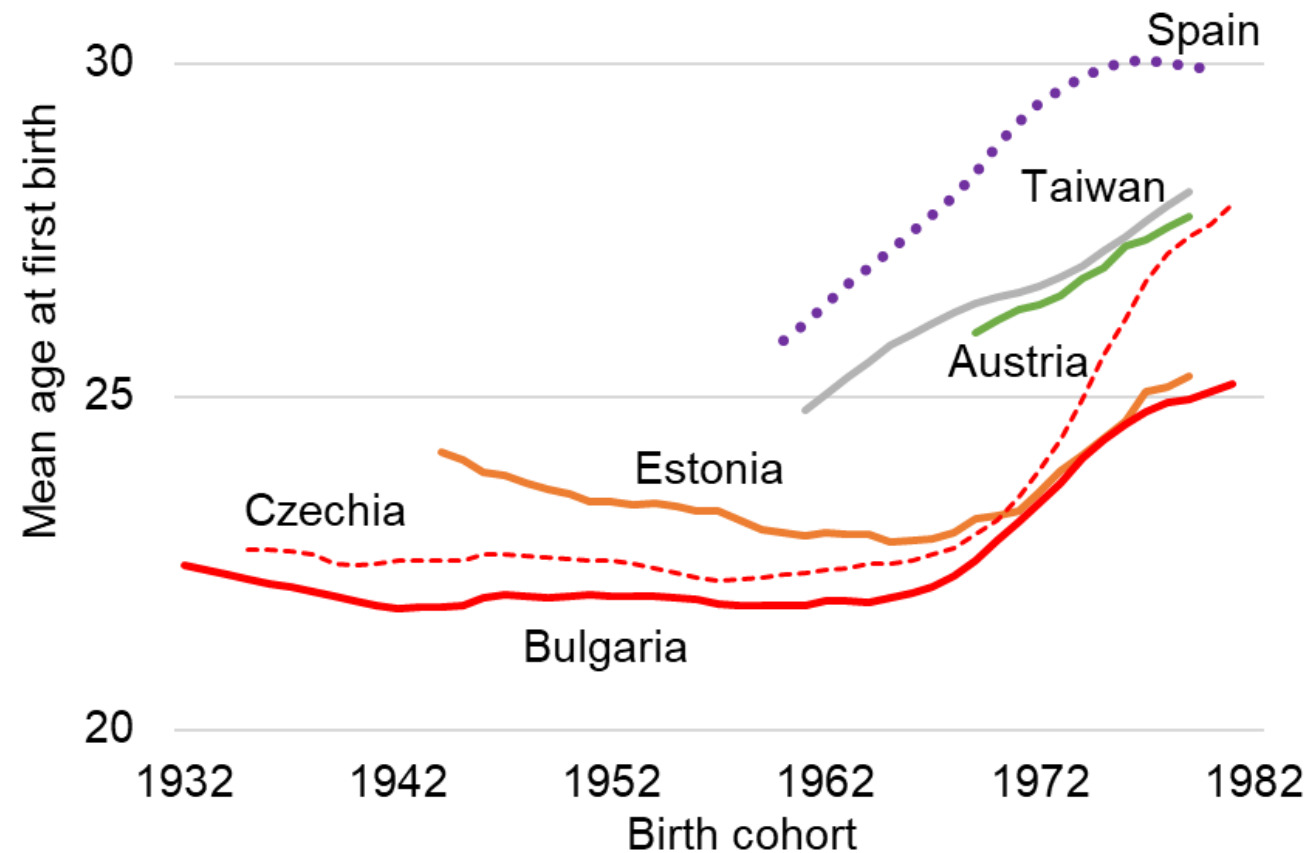
Delayed fertility and childlessness



Trends in share of childless women, 1900-1980 birth cohorts



Trends in mean age at first birth, 1932-1982 birth cohorts



Does the fertility delay result in more childlessness?

- At the individual level, capacity to have a child decreases with age
 - Hence, women who start trying to have a child late are less likely to have children by the end of their reproductive life
- But little way to assess **directly** whether more childlessness in a country or at a given time is due to delayed fertility
 - Because in most surveys, we don't know at what age **childless** people started trying to have a child
 - And because some of this relationship may be **indirect**: some people postpone childbearing and eventually do not even try for a child
 - This is difficult to assess because of the fluidity of fertility intentions

(e.g., Leridon 2004)

This talk

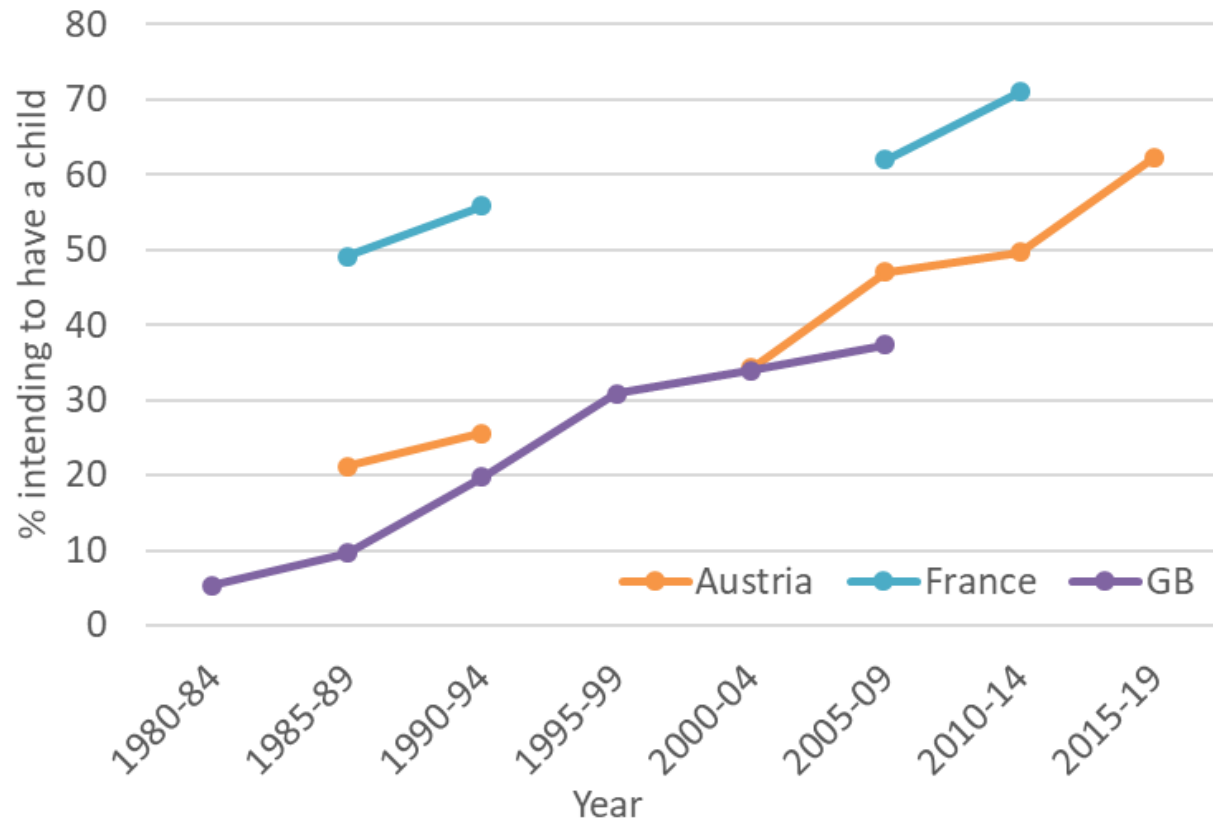
- We try to link fertility delays with childlessness levels by asking:
 - Do more people try to have a child at later ages, and do they manage to have them?
 - Did more people experience infertility and remain childless in countries where births are more delayed?
“Biological childlessness”
 - What did the other childless persons experience?

Maybe people simply
no longer want to have
children?



Rising intentions to have children among older childless women (35-39)

Figure. *Percentage of childless women aged 35-39 who say they intend to have a child; Austria, France and Great Britain, 1980-2019*

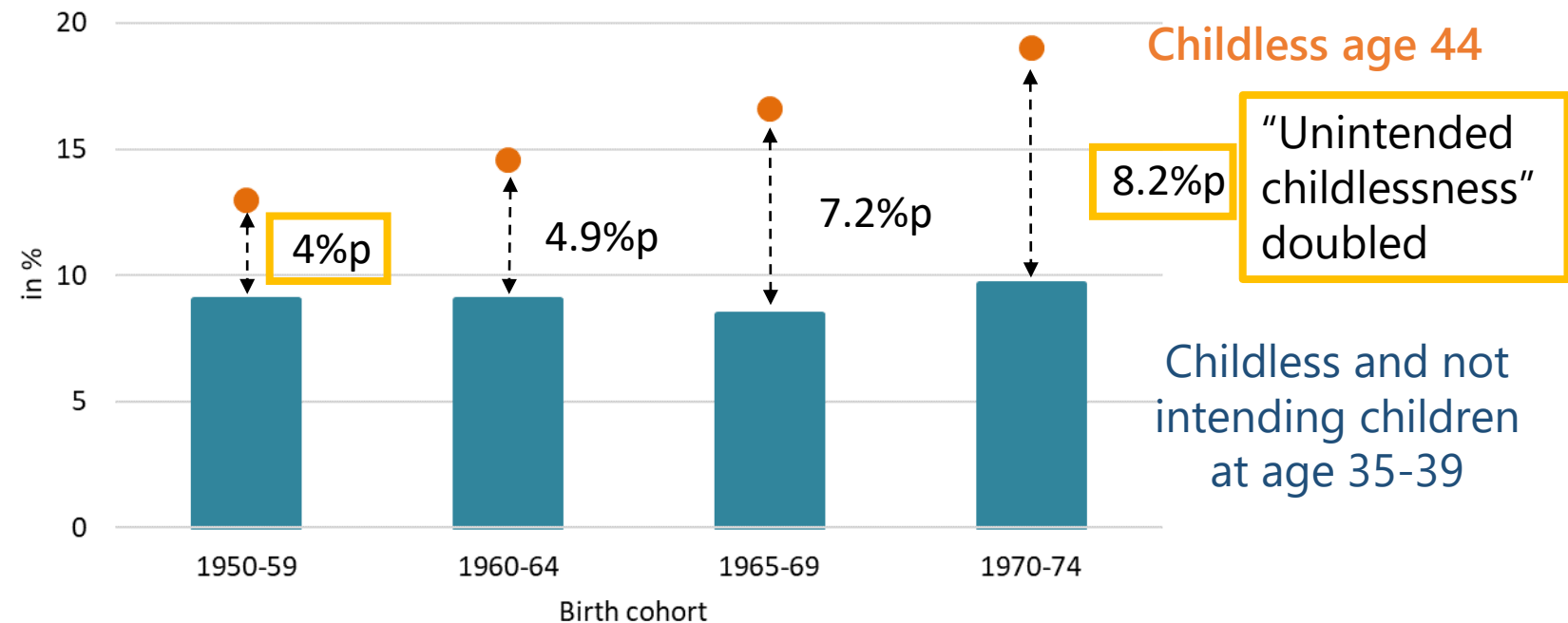


Further analyses show:

- The share of women who realise their strong positive intentions decreases with age
- They will gradually change intention
- Or experience infertility issues

Despite stable intentions to remain childless at 35-39, the share of women eventually childless is increasing

Figure. Share childless and not intending a child at age 35-39 versus share childless at age 44, by birth cohort, Austria, all women



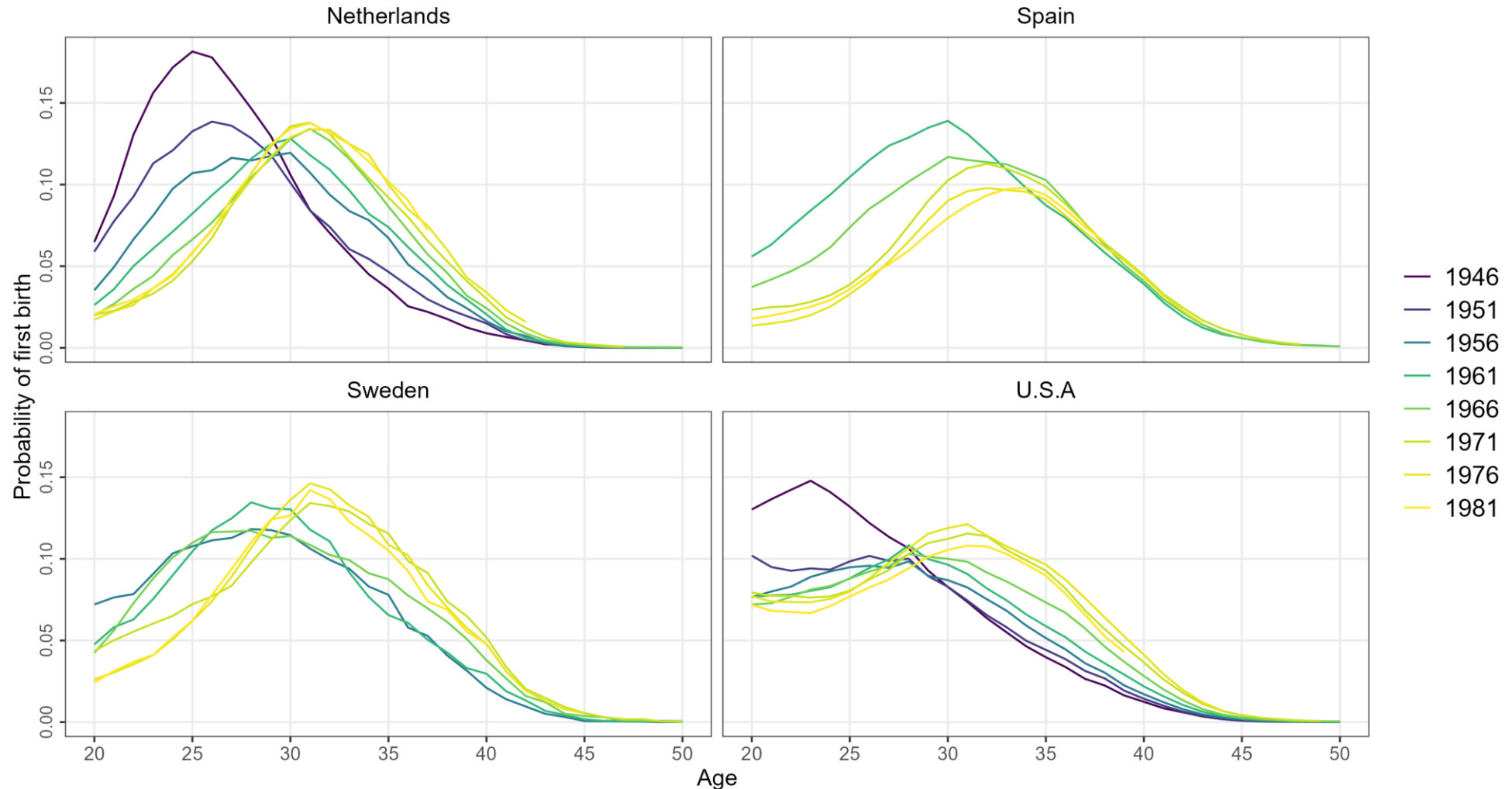
Source: Beaujouan 2018
Data: Austrian micro-census 1986-2016



**More biological
childlessness where
fertility is delayed
most?**

Saturation across birth cohorts of the probability to have a first child at later ages despite rising intentions

Figure. Probability of first birth among childless women by age (q_{1x}) in the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the USA, birth cohorts 1946-1981.



Data sources for biologically childless

- Generation and Gender Surveys II
 - Nine countries so far (checked by Leocádio et al. 2023)
 - Question on experience of infertility asked up to age 59
 - Was there ever a time when you and a partner were trying to get pregnant but did not conceive within at least 12 months?
 - Allows to identify infertility experience and “biological childlessness”
 - Parity at age 40-59 (0 child = childless)
- Spanish fertility survey 2018; pairfam (Germany); Fecond (France)

More women end up childless with declared infertility in countries with later fertility

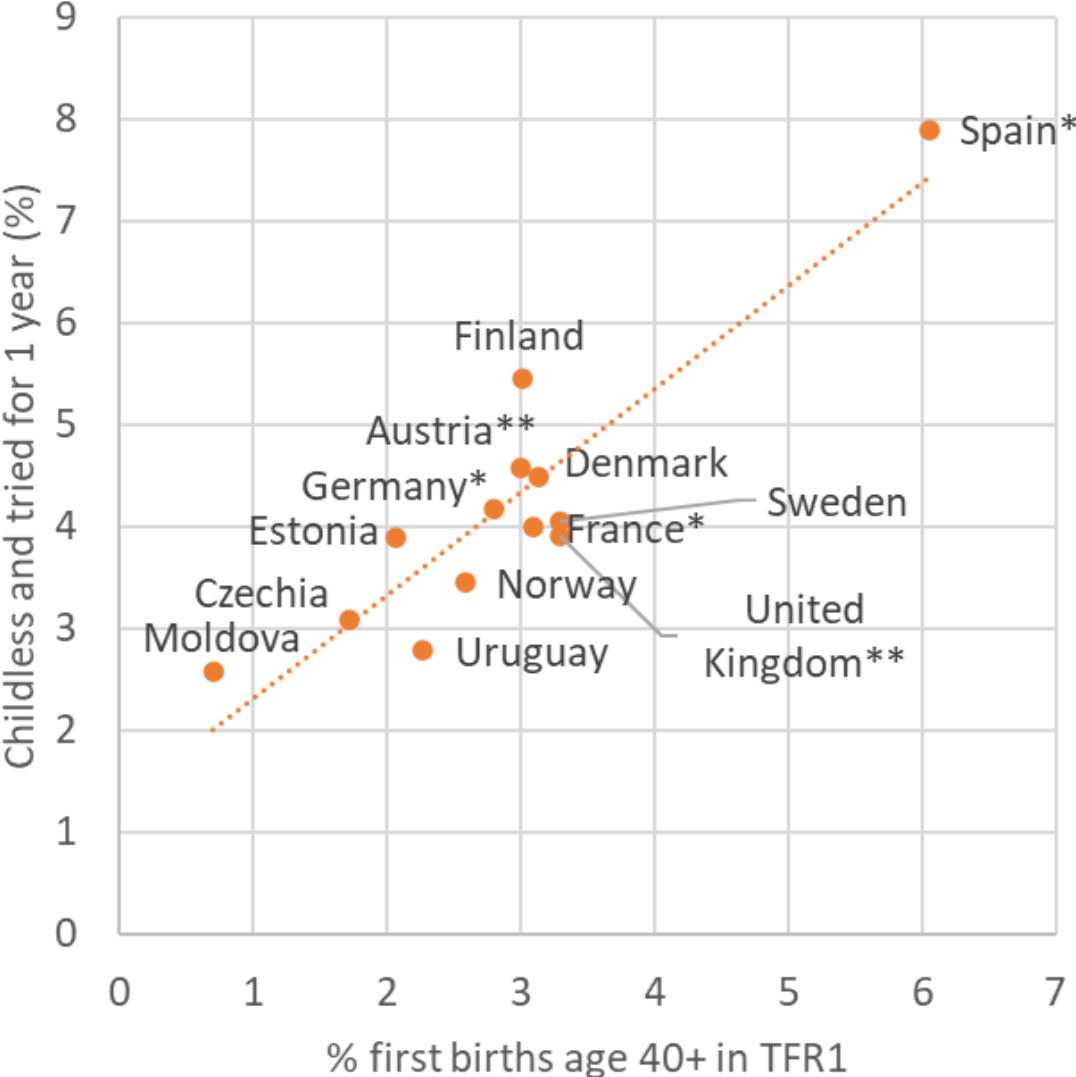


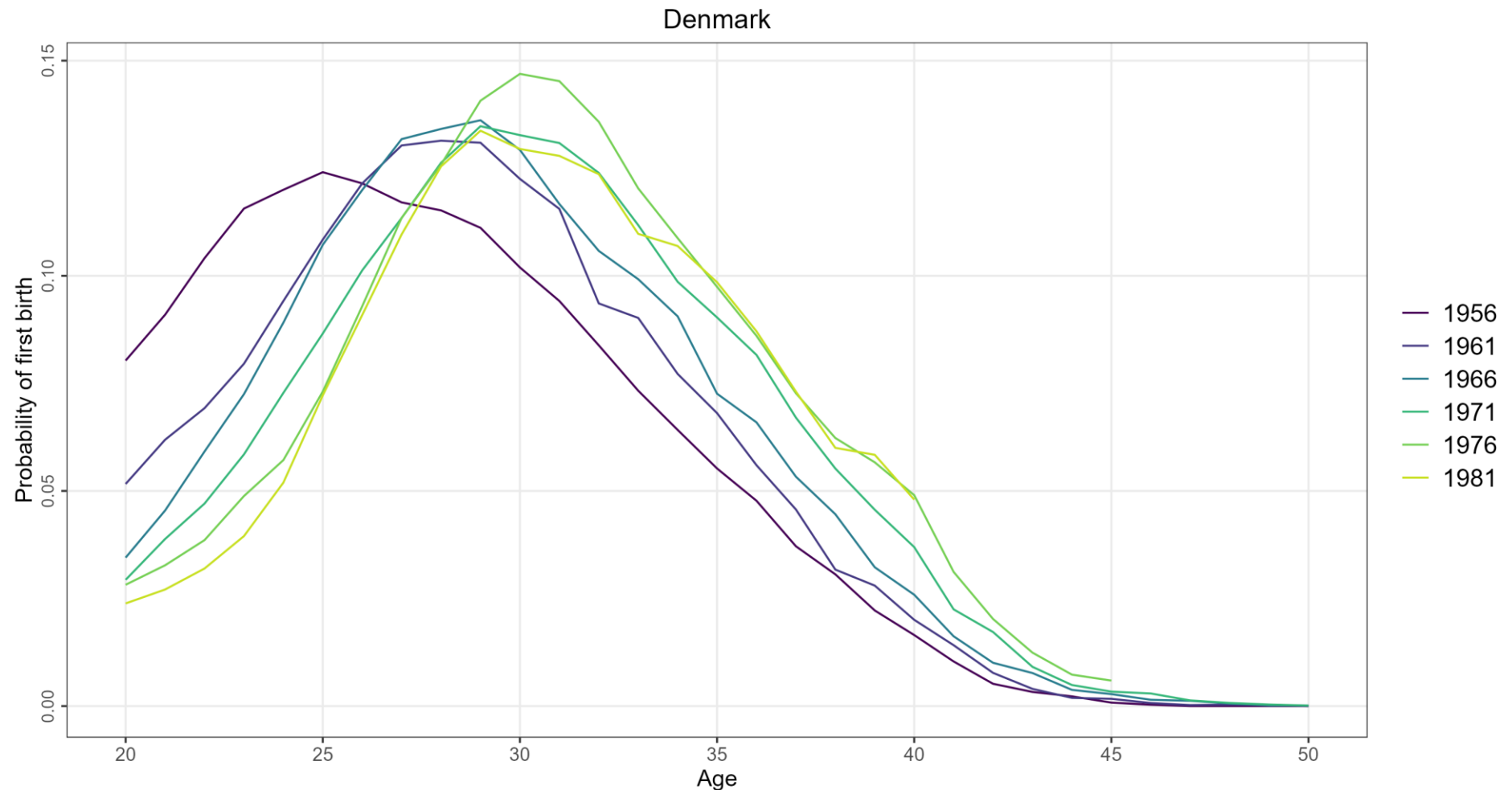
Figure. Proportion of women childless and with declared infertility at age 40-59 versus share of late first births, across countries, 2020s

- Between 2.1 and 8% of women are childless and declare infertility issues
- Between 1.3 and 3.4% of men
- ART already available

Data. GGP II, * Spanish fert survey, pairfar Fecond. HFD, Cabella et al. 2023
Field. All respondents, weighted

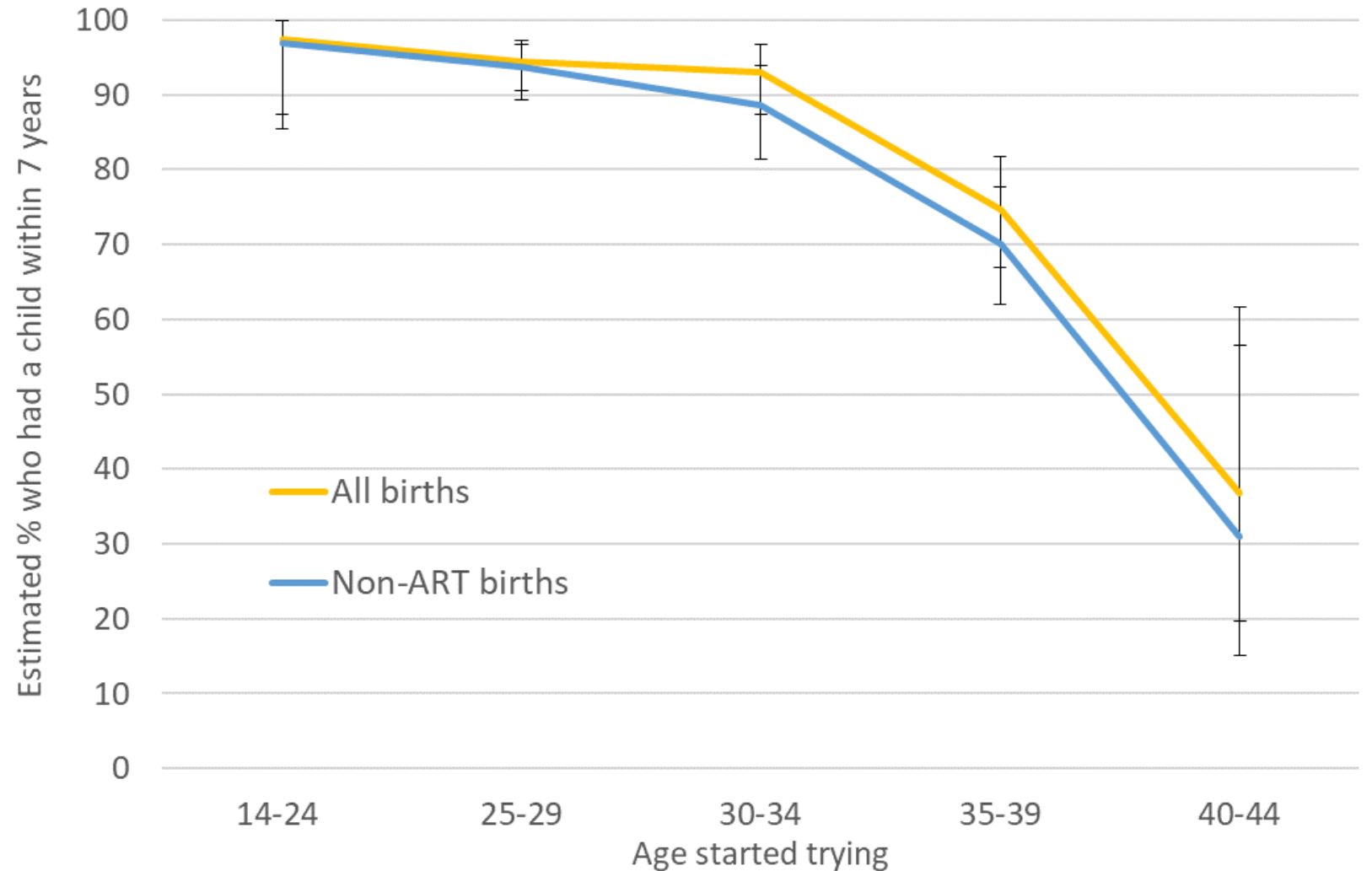
Saturation of probability to have a first child among childless women in the 35-40s, can MAR help?

Figure. Probability of first birth among childless women by age (q_{1x}) in Denmark, birth cohorts 1946-1981.



Probability to “ever” have a child among women trying decreases with age, with or without ART

Figure. Probability to have a child within 7 years from starting trying, all births *versus* non-ART births, Germany, 2010s



Source: Beaujouan, Köppen & Hagley (in progress)
Data: pairfam

The other components of childlessness



A more nuanced approach of childlessness

- Childfree

- “Childless by choice” (estimated to around 3-6% of all women, idem for men)
- But ambiguity/instability of answers to questions on fertility desires

(Debest et al. 2014; Waren and Pals 2013; Abma and Martinez 2006; Tanturri)

- Biologically childless (1.5 to 8% of all women across countries)

- Encounter infertility problems that prevent them from having a child

(Letherby 2002; Berrington 2004; Albertini and Brini 2021; Mynarska and Rytel 2018; Chauhan 2020; Carmichael and Whittaker 2007)

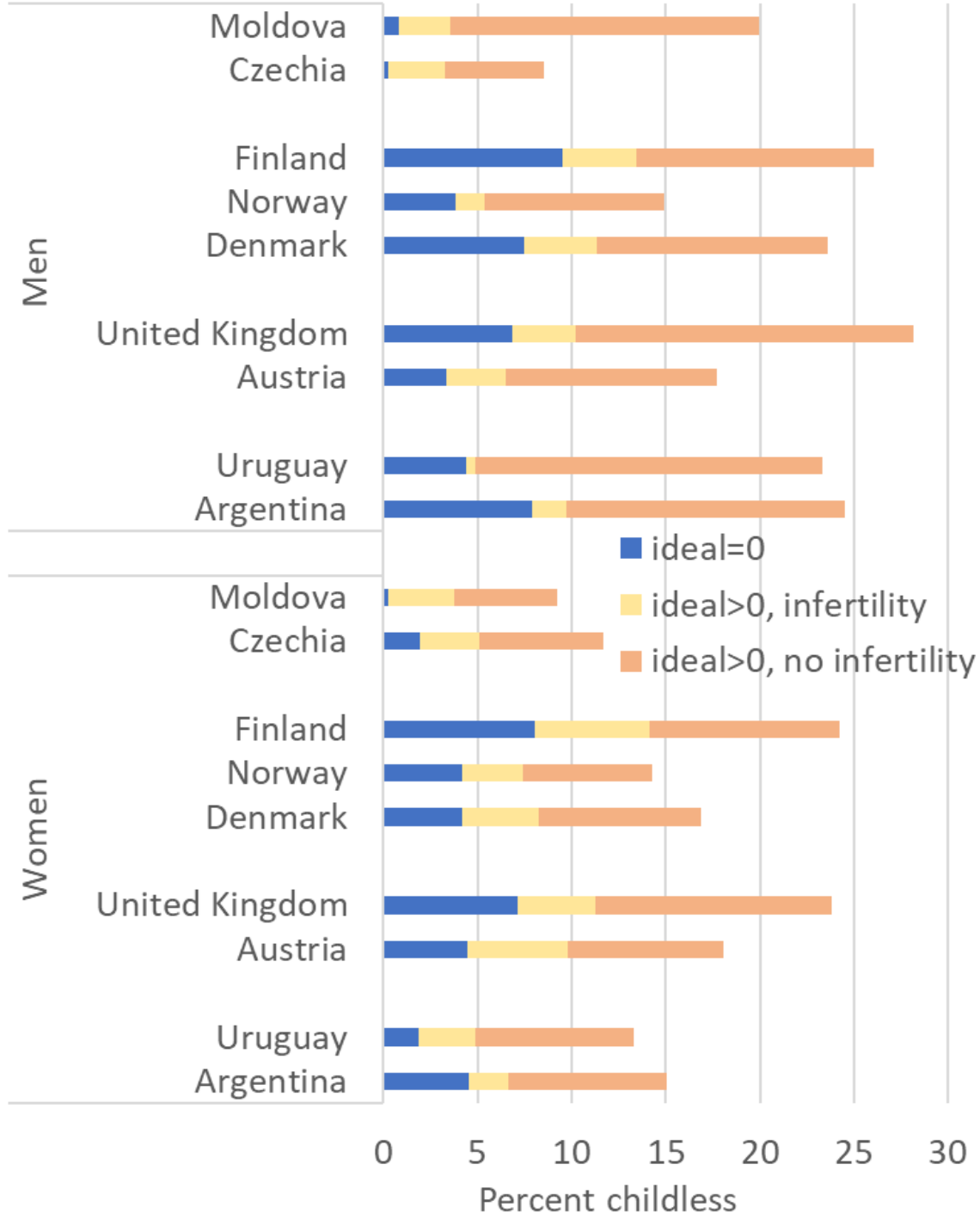
- Childless by circumstance

- Ambivalent
 - May not think about it, unsure
- “Perpetual postponers”
 - Want a child at some point, but end up without a child at the end of their reproductive life

A majority of childless people would be so “by circumstance”

Figure. Share of women and men without child; age 40-49 at survey, GGS II countries, 2020s

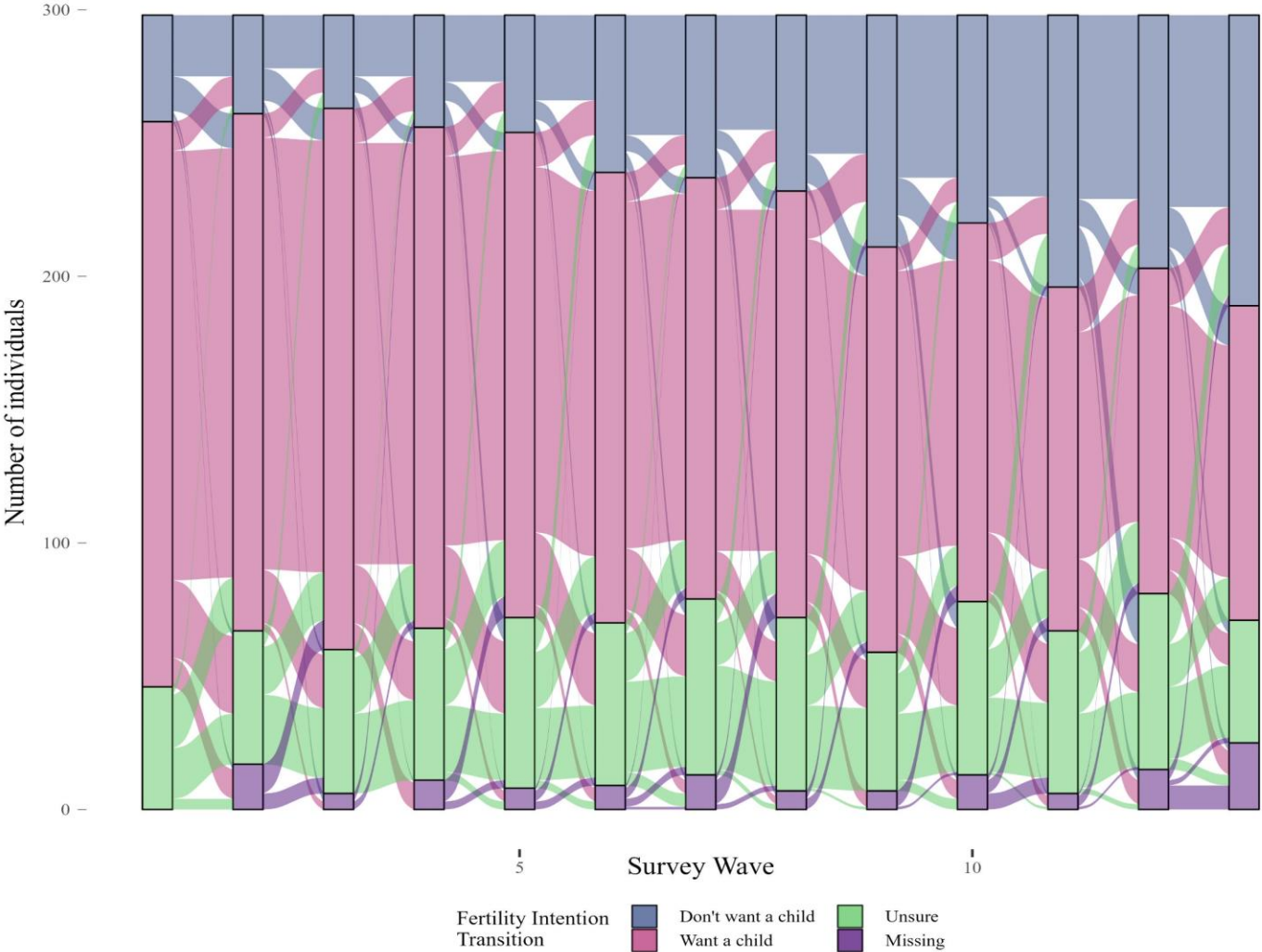
➤ Question: For you personally, what would be the ideal number of children you would like to have or would have liked to have had?



Data. GGP II.
Field. All respondents, weighted

Most people who remained eventually childless changed fertility intentions several times

Figure. Change in intentions to have a child across survey waves, individuals eventually childless; Germany

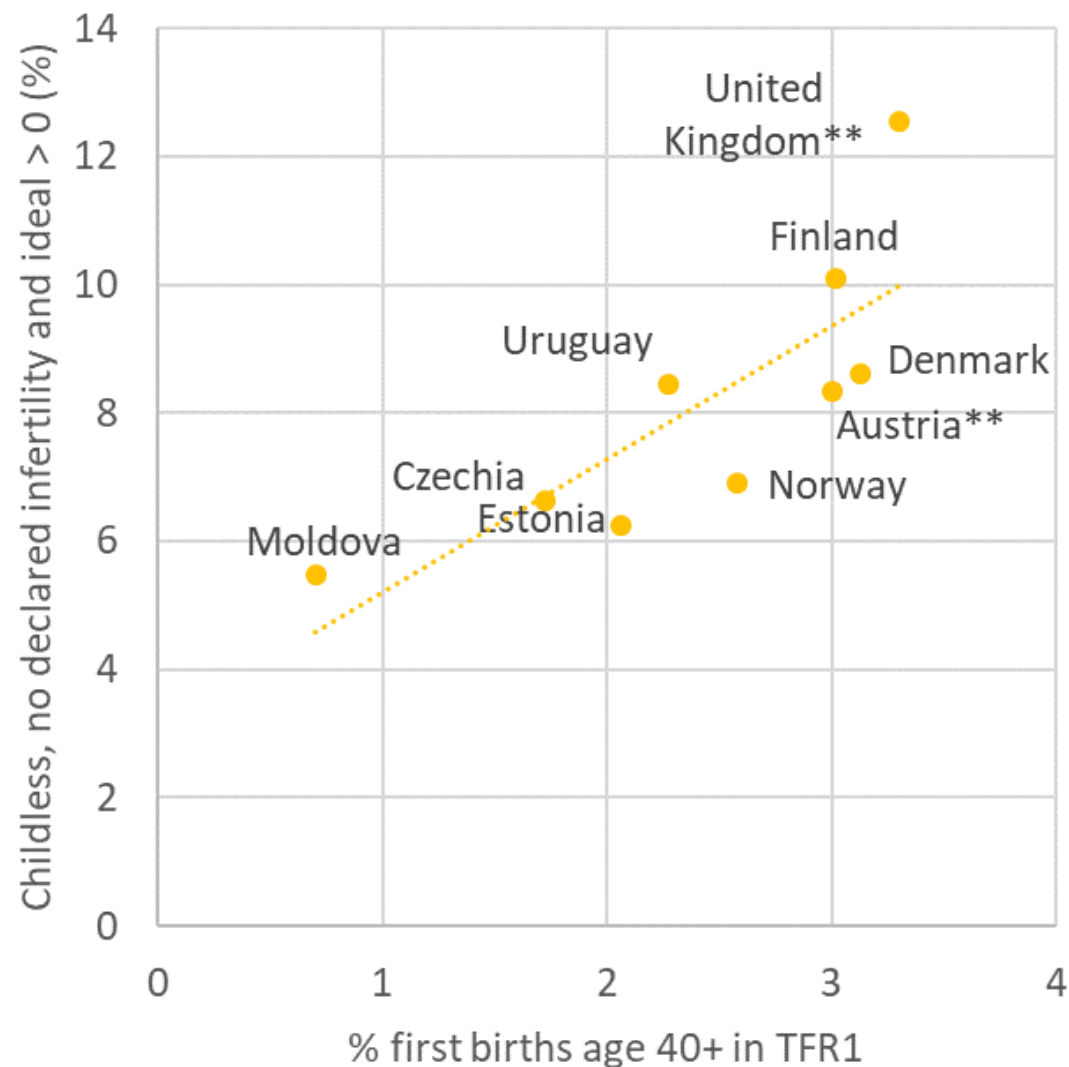


At age 37-39, 10,5% of all respondents are childless and do not want a child
But only 1,2% never wanted a child in their life
(and even less in fact)

Data. pairfam, 2010s.
Field. Respondents childless at age 37-39

“Childlessness by circumstance” also related with later fertility

Figure. Proportion of women childless and who had a positive ideal family size at age 40-59 versus share of late first births, across countries, 2020s



Data. GGP II, * Spanish fert survey, pairfam, Fecond. HFD, Cabella et al. 2023
Field. All respondents, weighted

Discussion



Discussion (1)

- May delayed childbearing lead to more childlessness
 - An increasing number of women want children at later ages and many don't have them
 - There is a relationship between biological childlessness and first birth timing across countries
 - However, the direct relationship between first birth timing and biological childlessness is not yet formally established
 - Asking age at first conception attempt and information about the first reproductive experience would allow to establish a direct link and understand which type of problem people may have encountered

Discussion (2)

- Biological childlessness remains a small component of childlessness, except in some countries
 - Extremely delayed fertility may be driving higher proportions of childless women in Spain, Italy or Japan
- Experience of infertility is not the only element leading to childlessness
 - Many people declare that their ideal number of children was higher than the number they had, even if they did not declare infertility
 - Possibly, the share of women childless by circumstance raises as well in times of fertility postponement, due to more “perpetual postponement”



Acknowledgement:

Research funded by ERC grant BIC.LATE, European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, grant Agreement No 101001410



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