

# The role of the partner age gap on first births by age at union formation: a cross-regional perspective

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Fertility and family trends: Insights from GGS Austria and beyond - 20/11/2024

There is a large body of evidence on the association between partnership characteristics and fertility behaviours, e.g.:

- ▶ Marriage vs. cohabitation
- ▶ Social homogamy / heterogamy
- ▶ Delay of partnership formation
- ▶ **Age difference between partners**

In heterosexual couples, men tend to be older than their female partners (Ausubel et al., 2022)

- ▶ **Gendered preferences:** women tend to prefer older men, while men tend to be more attracted to younger women
- ▶ Association with other mating patterns (e.g., social homogamy/heterogamy)
- ▶ **Social perceptions/stigma:** higher attractiveness of older men and lower attractiveness of older women
- ▶ **Availability** of partners on the partnership market

*NB: The age difference is measured as the age of the male partner - age of the female partner*

**The age difference varies with age at partnership formation** (Kolk, 2015):

- ▶ The older men (re)partner, the greater the age gap with the female partner
- ▶ With age, women tend to form a (new) partnership with men their age or younger

This is **mirrored in parental age gap patterns** (Dudel et al., 2023):

- ▶ The parental age gap increases with age at fatherhood
- ▶ and decreases with age at motherhood

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## Research question

- ▶ Based on the age difference between partners and at starting the union, which partnerships are more likely to result in a birth?
- ▶ Are there differences across contexts?

- ▶ Regions:
  - ▶ Northern Europe: Denmark, Norway
  - ▶ Western Europe: Germany, Austria, Netherlands
  - ▶ Central and Eastern Europe (CEE): Czechia, Estonia, Moldova, Belarus, Croatia
  - ▶ Latin America: Uruguay and Argentina (Buenos Aires)
- ▶ Cohort 1970-1989 (who were aged 30 or over at the time of the survey)
- ▶ **Retrospective information on first coresidential partnerships**
  - ▶ Different-sex couples
  - ▶ Ego is childless at union formation
  - ▶ Formed before age 41

|                                | <b>Northern Europe</b> |       | <b>Western Europe</b> |       | <b>CEE</b> |       | <b>Latin America</b> |      |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|------------|-------|----------------------|------|
|                                | F                      | M     | F                     | M     | F          | M     | F                    | M    |
| Mean age at first cohabitation | 23.2                   | 25.0  | 23.6                  | 25.6  | 23.2       | 25.3  | 23.8                 | 26.2 |
| Mean age diff between partners | 2.0                    | 2.0   | 2.8                   | 1.6   | 2.5        | 2.1   | 2.1                  | 2.6  |
| N                              | 2,298                  | 1,736 | 3,641                 | 2,476 | 5,837      | 4,157 | 1,046                | 581  |

**Table:** Descriptive statistics by region

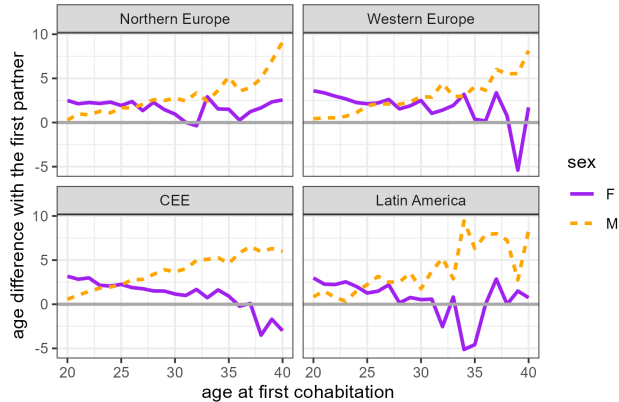
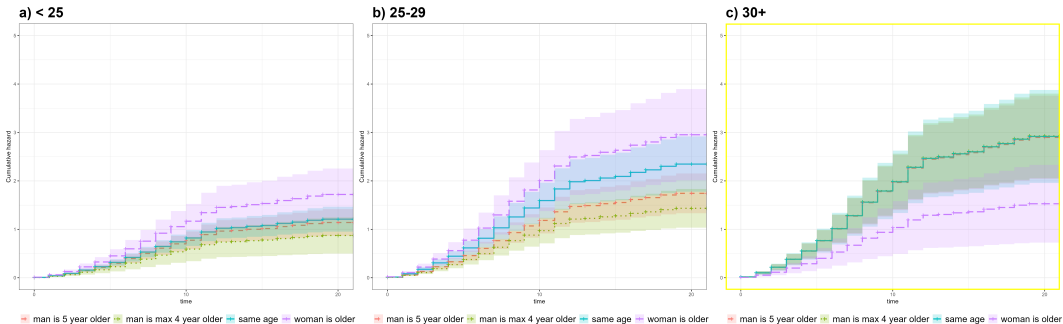


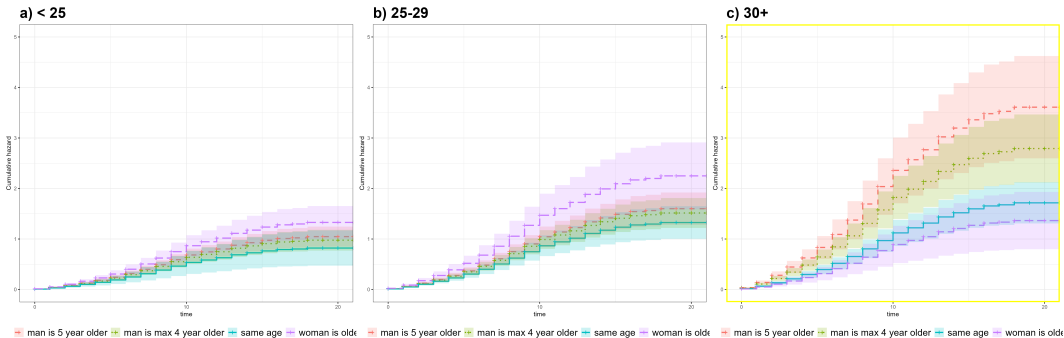
Figure: Average age difference with the partner by age at first union



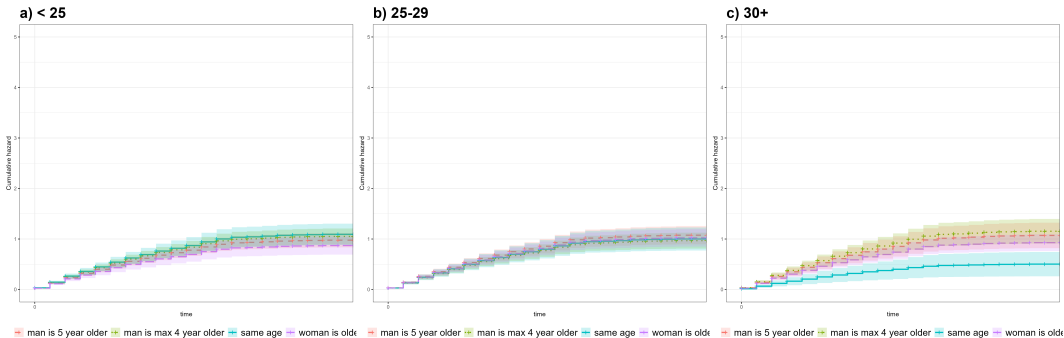
- ▶ Cox models by sex and region
- ▶ Estimate the likelihood of first partnerships to result in a first birth
- ▶ Age difference as categorical
- ▶ Interaction with age at cohabitation (cat.)
- ▶ Controls for individual characteristics (education, religiosity, birth cohort, migration background) and other partnership characteristics (whether the partner already has a child, marriage)
- ▶ Interaction results displayed as cumulative hazards (*ref: tertiary educated, cohort 1970-79, not married, no step child, average religiosity level, born in the surveyed country*)



**Figure:** Cumulative hazards of first births, **Men in Northern Europe**



**Figure:** Cumulative hazards of first births, **Men in Western Europe**



**Figure:** Cumulative hazards of first births, **Men in Central and Eastern Europe**

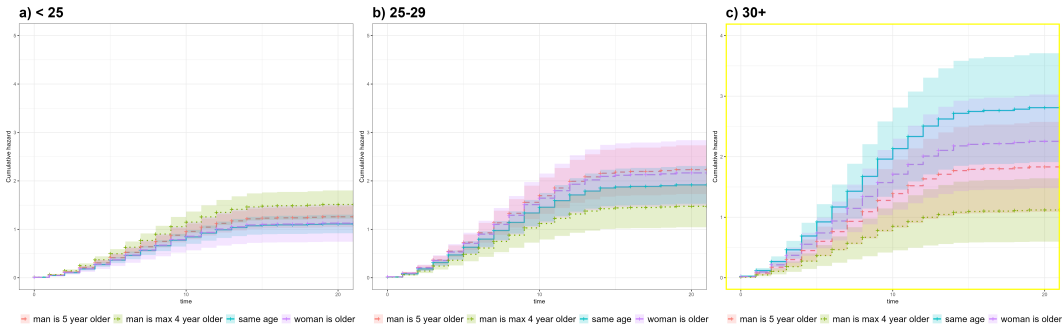
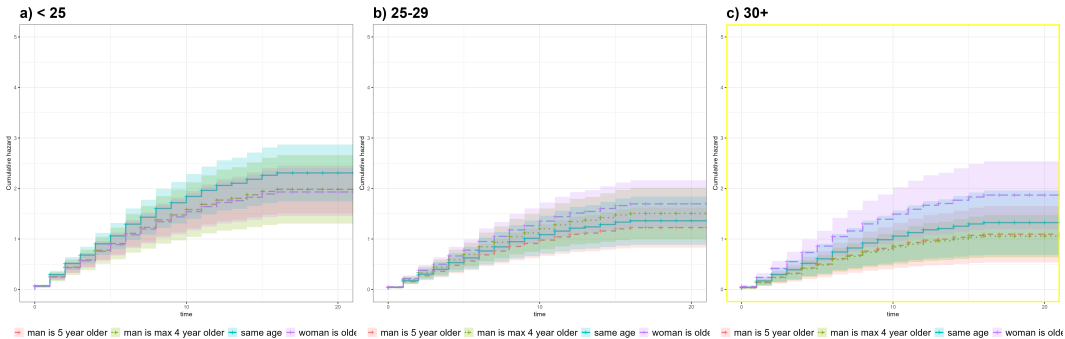
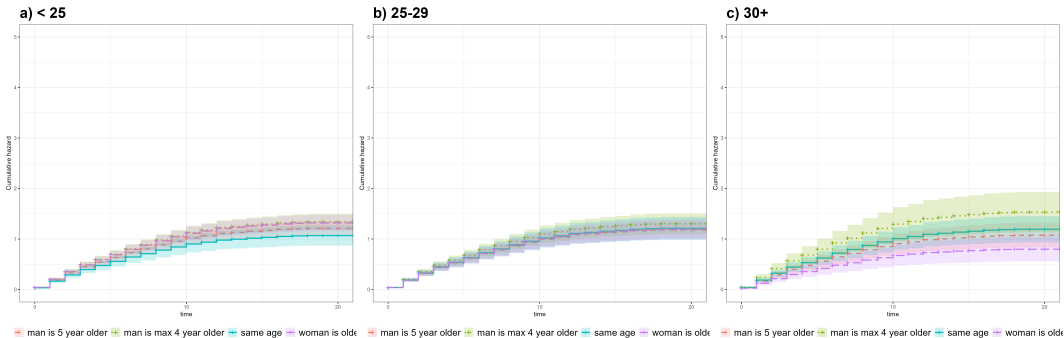


Figure: Cumulative hazards of first birth, **Women in Northern Europe**



**Figure:** Cumulative hazards of first births, **Women in Latin America**



**Figure:** Cumulative hazards of first births, **Women in Central and Eastern Europe**

- ▶ There is a weak relationship between the partner age difference and first births in Central and Eastern European countries

In the other regions:

- ▶ Men who first partner before age 30 are more likely to become fathers with an older woman. From age 30, they are more likely to become parents with younger partners
- ▶ Women who partner late are more likely to become mothers with a partner their age or younger in Nordic and Latin American countries



# Thanks!



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|       | Northern Europe |      | Western Europe |      | CEE   |      | Latin America |      |
|-------|-----------------|------|----------------|------|-------|------|---------------|------|
| <25   | 1,405           | 49.1 | 1,158          | 43.0 | 2,758 | 48.5 | 229           | 39.4 |
| 25-29 | 982             | 34.3 | 1,026          | 38.1 | 2,052 | 36.1 | 210           | 36.1 |
| 30+   | 476             | 16.6 | 510            | 18.9 | 881   | 15.5 | 142           | 24.4 |

**Table:** Distribution of age categories at union formation by region - **Men**

|       | Northern Europe |      | Western Europe |      | CEE   |      | Latin America |      |
|-------|-----------------|------|----------------|------|-------|------|---------------|------|
| <25   | 2,552           | 67.6 | 2,508          | 62.8 | 5,647 | 71.7 | 599           | 57.3 |
| 25-29 | 860             | 22.8 | 1,090          | 27.3 | 1,656 | 21.0 | 286           | 27.3 |
| 30+   | 362             | 9.6  | 395            | 9.9  | 574   | 7.3  | 161           | 15.4 |

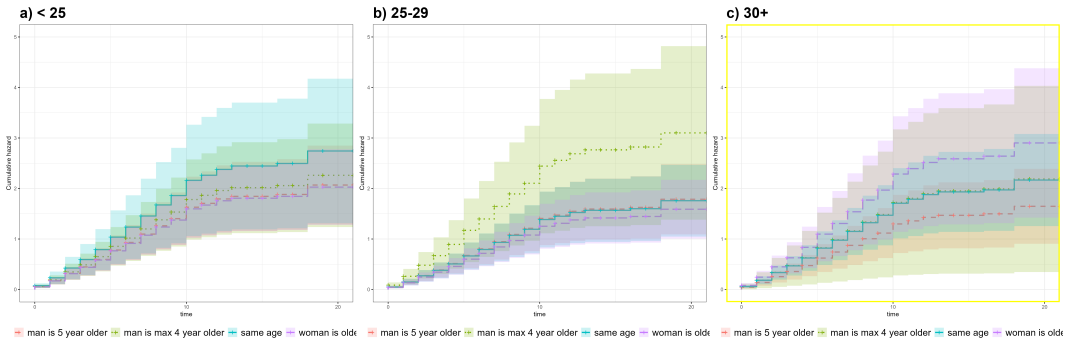
**Table:** Distribution of age categories at union formation by region - **Women**

|                   | Northern Europe |      | Western Europe |      | CEE   |      | Latin America |      |
|-------------------|-----------------|------|----------------|------|-------|------|---------------|------|
|                   | n               | p    | n              | p    | n     | p    | n             | p    |
| Man is min 5 year | 408             | 14.3 | 433            | 16.1 | 1,306 | 22.9 | 128           | 22.0 |
| Man is max 4 year | 870             | 30.4 | 914            | 33.9 | 1,933 | 34.0 | 188           | 32.4 |
| Same age          | 1,231           | 43.0 | 1,047          | 38.9 | 1,901 | 33.4 | 185           | 31.8 |
| Woman is older    | 354             | 12.4 | 300            | 11.1 | 551   | 9.7  | 80            | 13.8 |

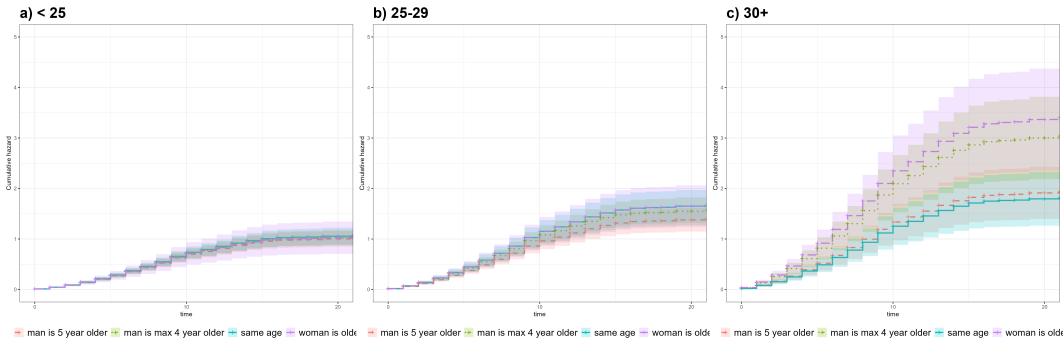
**Table:** Distribution of age-difference categories by region - **Men**

|                         | Northern Europe |      | Western Europe |      | CEE   |      | Latin America |      |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------|----------------|------|-------|------|---------------|------|
|                         | n               | p    | n              | p    | n     | p    | n             | p    |
| Man is min 5 year older | 798             | 21.1 | 1,061          | 26.6 | 2,024 | 25.7 | 289           | 27.6 |
| Man is max 4 year older | 1,232           | 32.6 | 1,327          | 33.2 | 2,720 | 34.5 | 299           | 28.6 |
| Same age                | 1,444           | 38.3 | 1,294          | 32.4 | 2,468 | 31.3 | 304           | 29.1 |
| Woman is older          | 300             | 8.0  | 311            | 7.8  | 665   | 8.4  | 154           | 14.7 |

**Table:** Distribution of age-difference categories by region - **Women**



**Figure:** Cumulative hazards of first births, men in **Latin America**



**Figure:** Cumulative hazards of first births, women in **Western Europe**