



## **Economic recession has put a brake to the recent increase in fertility rates across Europe and in the United States**

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The economic recession of 2008–2009 was the first global recession since the oil shocks of the 1970s. The common wisdom suggests that economically hard times will lead to a reduction in fertility rates. An article published today by Tomáš Sobotka and Dimiter Philipov from the Vienna Institute of Demography and Vegard Skirbekk from the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis finds general support for this view.

The onset of an economic recession is often followed by a decline in fertility rates. Accordingly, the recent recession has brought a sudden trend reversal to the previous pattern of rising fertility rates in several highly developed countries, including Spain and the United States. A larger group of countries including England and Wales, Ireland, Italy, and Ukraine experienced stagnation of fertility rates, following a decade of generally rising fertility after 1998 (see figure).

However, individual reactions to the recession vary by sex, age, number of children, education level, and migrant status. Especially the young and the childless are less likely to have children during recessions. Among women, the highly educated react to employment uncertainty by adopting a “postponement strategy,” especially if they are childless. In contrast, less-educated women often maintain or increase their fertility under economic uncertainty. The patterns differ for men: Men with low education and low skills face increasing difficulties of finding a partner or in supporting their family and often show the largest decline in first birth rates.

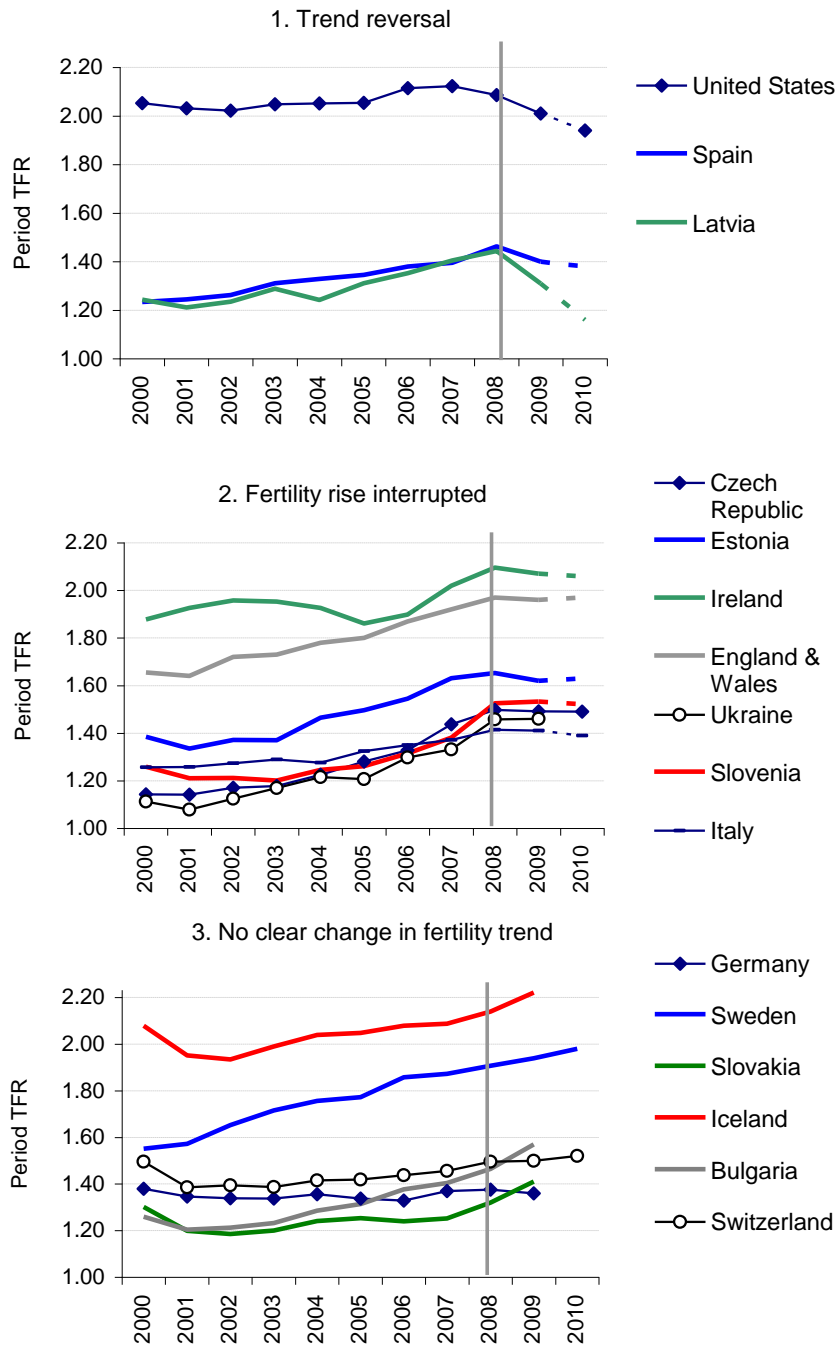
The recent global economic recession has brought to an end the first concerted rise in fertility rates across the developed world since the 1960s. Out of 27 countries of the European Union, fertility rates increased in 26 in 2008 and stagnated in Luxembourg. One year later, as many as 13 countries saw their fertility rates declining in 2009, and another four countries experienced stable fertility rates. A rise in unemployment and employment uncertainty was a key factor behind this trend. In many developed countries cuts in social spending driven by the need to address ballooning budget deficits may prolong the fertility impact of the recent recession well beyond its end.

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## Period fertility trends during the recent economic recession in selected countries of Europe and the United States: Three patterns of fertility changes



SOURCES: Council of Europe, Eurostat, and national statistical offices.

NOTE: Dashed data for 2010 are preliminary estimates based on the reported preliminary numbers of total births or fertility rates for the whole or a part of the year. Grey vertical lines mark an onset of the recession in 2008.

### Methodological explanation on the fertility indicator used in the figure:

The period total fertility rate (TFR) gives a hypothetical number of children per woman under a condition that the observed fertility rates by age in a given year would remain unchanged indefinitely. In reality, this assumption often does not hold, and the period TFR therefore does not express the real number of children among generations of women. That can be measured precisely only for women who are past their reproductive age.