Short-Term Fertility Intentions and Their Realization in Central Europe: A Comparative Analysis

If Not Soon, Then Never? The Age of the Youngest Child as a Key Determinant of the Intended-Realized Fertility Gap

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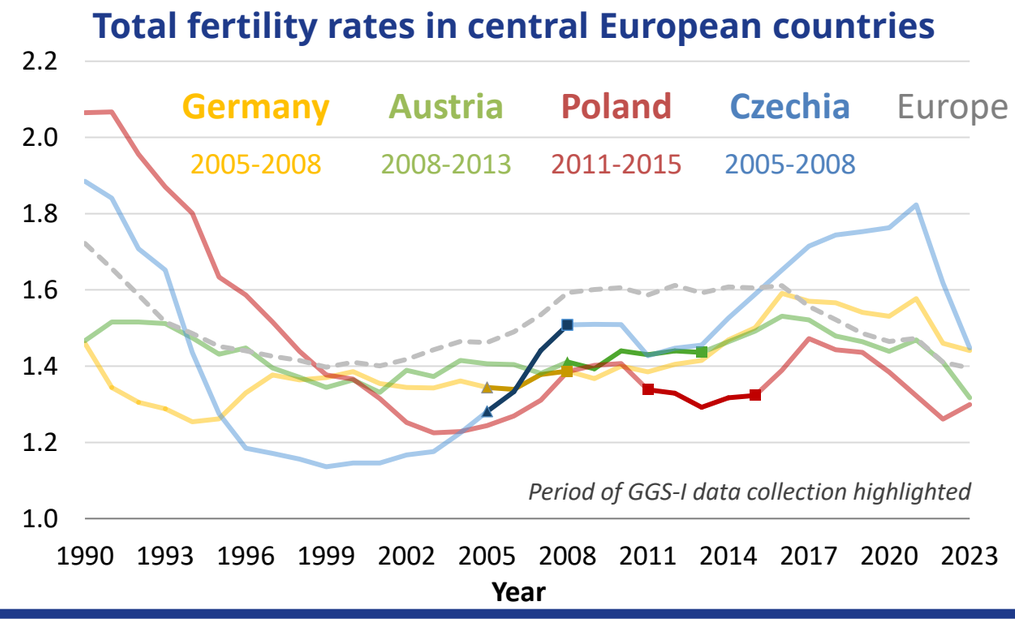
Key findings

Who succeeds in having a child when they intend to and how might the age of their youngest child shape that outcome?

- **The realization of the short-term fertility intentions** of parents **declines** sharply **with the age of the youngest child**—thus indicating a narrow time window for the expansion of families.
- **Economic conditions influence the realization of fertility for childless individuals**, but **not significantly for existing parents** – where timing and the family structure matter more.
- Parents in Germany and Austria are more likely to realize their fertility intentions than those in Czechia ➔ **important role of national family policies**.



Data: Generations and Gender Survey (GGS-I), Waves I & II:

Poland (2010–2015), Germany (2005–2008), Czechia (2005–2008), Austria (2008–2013)

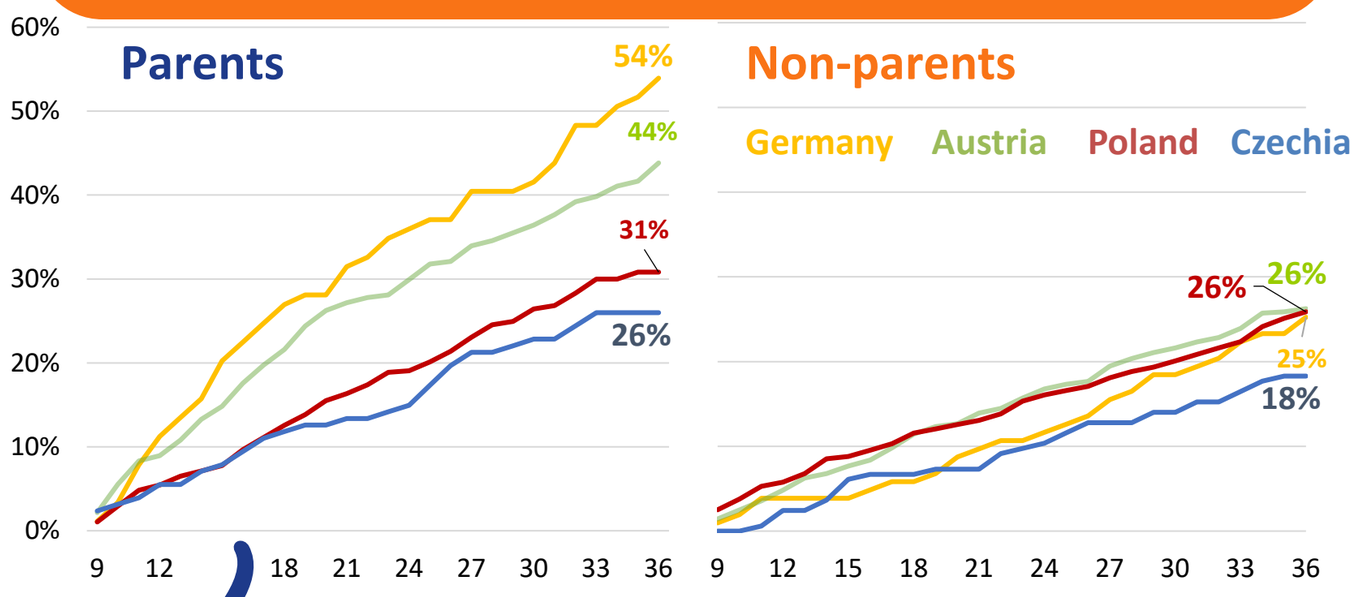
Sample: Respondents aged 18–39 in Wave 1 with positive short-term fertility intentions (intention to have a child within 3 years)

N = 2,242 (1,225 childless, 1,017 parents)

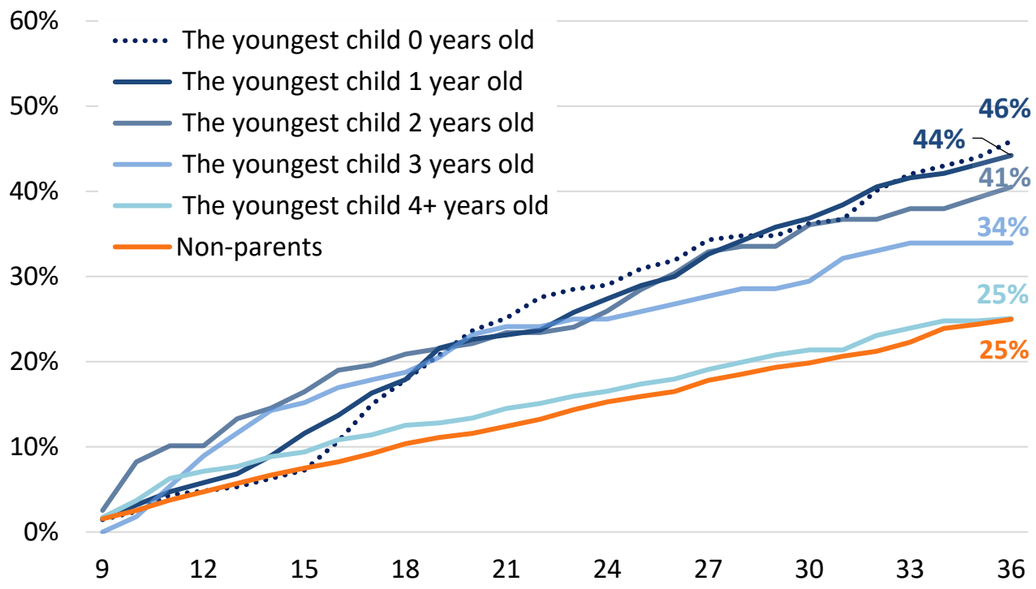
Methods: Descriptive analysis and binary logistic regression

Outcome: Realization of intentions = birth of a child within 9–36 months after Wave 1

Realization of intentions among parents × non-parents



Realizing intentions to have a child: Role of the age of the youngest child



The realization of positive short-term fertility intentions declines as the age of the youngest child increases. Parents whose youngest child is 4 or more years old evince the lowest realization rate—just 25%—comparable to that of childless individuals.

For parents, **the odds of realizing short-term fertility intentions** significantly **decrease with the increasing age of the youngest child**, **higher parity** (2+ children), and **non-coresidential partnership**. **Higher odds are observed for respondents from Germany and Austria** (compared to Czechia), and for those **with strong fertility intentions**. While **financial difficulties reduce the realization odds for childless**, these effects are not significant for existing parents.

The odds of realizing intentions decrease with the increasing age of the youngest child

	Parents (OR)	Non-parents (OR)
Sex (ref. Female)		
Male	1.00	0.64 **
Country (ref. Czechia)		
Germany	3.10 ***	1.52
Austria	2.07 **	1.65
Poland	1.14	1.80 *
Partnership Status (ref. Coresident partner)		
Non-coresident partner	0.32 **	0.60 **
No partner	0.95	0.27 ***
Fertility Intention Strength (ref. Probably yes)		
Definitely yes	1.85 ***	1.86 ***
Age (ref. 25–29)		
Below 24	1.22	0.73
30–34	0.82	1.19
35–39	0.70	0.65
Education (ref. Secondary)		
Primary	1.19	1.65
Tertiary	1.19	0.68 *
Making Ends Meet (ref. With difficulty)		
Easily	1.31	1.48 *
Satisfaction with Dwelling (ref. Lower)		
Higher	0.79	1.2
Age of Youngest Child (ref. 0 years)		
1 year	0.82	
2 years	0.91	
3 years	0.59 *	
4+ years	0.54 **	
Number of Children (ref. 1 child)		
2 or more children	0.62 **	
N	997	1 206
R2	14.7	15.5

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