

# Starting or enlarging families? The determinants of low fertility in Europe.

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## ***Abstract***

This paper aims at getting a better understanding of the factors that contribute to maintain fertility at low levels in several European countries. A first concern is to figure out whether low fertility in ‘lowest-low’ countries is due to barriers to start a family or to increase family size. A second challenge is to get a better understanding of how cross-national differences in macro-level fertility outcomes combine with the heterogeneity of individual behaviour within countries. To address these issues, a key point is to look simultaneously at the combined influence of individual and contextual characteristics on fertility behaviour. In this perspective, we first provide an overview of fertility trends with the aim of characterising countries with low fertility. Then, we analyse the extent to which the decision of having a second child depends on individual characteristics and on the labour market situation preceding child conception, while at the same time taking into account each country’s institutional context. We find that “successful” labour market integration after the birth of a first child seems to facilitate women’s decision of having a second child. A stable and permanent employment position is most likely to create a secure economic environment, which seems to be a crucial condition for women for deciding in favour of a second child. Policies enabling mothers to combine work with family life, in particular the provision of child care for young children, are most likely to encourage women’s decision for a second child.

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