Retraditionalization as a Pathway to Escape Lowest-Low Fertility? Characteristics and Prospects of the Eastern European "Baby Boom"

Sebastian Klüsener[1,2,3], Aiva Jasilioniene[2,3], Victoria Yuodeshko[4]
[1] Federal Institute for Population Research (Germany),
[2] Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (Germany),
[3] Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania),
[4] Research Institute of Labour (Belarus)

Over the last two decades, Belarus and Russia have witnessed substantial fertility increases that have catapulted the Total Fertility Rates of these countries from lowest-low fertility to levels above 1.7 children per women. While it is frequently argued that higher gender equality is an important mechanism to overcome low fertility, these developments are rather paralleled by a retraditionalization of gender attitudes. This paper uses the 2017 Belarusian Generations and Gender Survey to look into the determinants and prospects of the Eastern European "baby boom". We show that the fertility increases are driven by two main components: The recuperation of births postponed during the preceding post-communist transition crisis and fertility increases among cohorts born after 1980. These cohorts also display very conservative attitudes. While recuperation will not have a long-term effect, the trend towards bigger families among young cohorts might affect fertility positively for longer.

Introduction

Below-replacement fertility is a pressing issue for many developed countries. According to the 2015 Revision of the World Population Policies Database, 29 of the 44 covered European countries articulated as a goal that they would like to increase fertility levels (UN 2016). Discussions about the factors that cause fertility to fall below replacement levels and whether developed societies are able to positively influence fertility levels have been central to the field of Demography over the last century (Kirk 1996;Van Bavel 2009; Lesthaeghe 2010). In recent years, there has at least in the Western debate been an increasing consensus that in high-income countries enhancements in gender equality bolstered by family policies supporting the reconciliation of family and career goals is the most promising path to escape low fertility (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015; Goldscheider et al. 2015). However, the recent stark (period) fertility decreases in countries with high gender equality such as Norway and Iceland raise at least some doubt about the universality of these statements. And even in high developed societies there are still substantial shares of people who favor traditional family forms in which women and men specialize in different tasks (e.g., Hudde 2018). In such role divisions, women tend to specialize on the private sphere of the household and on raising children, while men focus on gainful economic activities in the public sphere. Such male-breadwinner attitudes seem still to be particularly widespread in Eastern Europe (Lappegård, Klüsener, and Vignoli 2018), and seem to have even increased in relevance as the gender-equality legacy of the former Communist regimes has been fading (Fodor and Balogh 2010). Also the heydays of male-breadwinner attitudes being very dominant in Western societies are not that long gone. They were very prevalent in the Golden Age of Marriage of the 1950s and the 1960s, which also back then entailed in many societies a baby boom.

During the 1990s it seemed that Europe was generally characterized by convergence in economic and social conditions. Many societies in Central and Eastern Europe moved away from centrally planned economies towards market-oriented systems as they already existed in Western Europe (Kuzio 2001; Aslund 2013). This transition was often fostered by inadequacies in the centrally planned economies which caused in many countries deep structural economic crises in the transition period of the 1990s (Alam et al. 2005; Sobotka 2003). The convergence in economic systems was paralleled by convergence in family formation patterns. Non-marital fertility started to increase in Central and Eastern Europe after 1990, in part due to the economic crises, but also due to a rise in more liberal values (Thornton and Philipov 2009). These developments suggested that if Eastern Europe was continuing to follow this path, strategies which had allowed some Western European societies to bring their fertility close to replacement levels might also serve as a blue print for Eastern Europe.

However, over the last years, a number of Eastern European countries have left the path of convergence. This is particularly true for Belarus and Russia, which have witnessed a period of societal restoration. During this restoration, the Total Fertility Rates have substantially increased from levels around 1.1-1.3 in 2000 to above 1.7 in 2016 (see also Figure 1). At the same time, a number of Eastern European societies experienced a decrease in non-marital births, which ran counter to the trends in other parts of Europe where the non-marital ratio is either still growing or stagnating at high levels (Klüsener 2015). Particularly strong were the

decreases in Belarus (2005: 24%, 2016: 13%) and Russia (2005: 30%, 2016: 21%) (Eurostat; Klüsener 2015; Rosstat). It is disputed to what degree new family policies in Belarus and Russia that are rather bolstering the traditional male breadwinner model have contributed to the trends. Freijka and Zacharov (2013) argue that the return to higher fertility is not driven by family policies, but rather by the recuperation of births at higher ages that were postponed during the crises years. Similar recuperation arguments have been brought forward by others for Central and Eastern European countries (e.g., Bongaarts and Sobotka 2012; Fox, Klüsener, and Myrskylä 2018). Also the decrease in the share of births outside marriage is likely to be to some degree affected by this trend, as (higher order) births among older mothers are more likely to occur within marriage (Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2011).

However, the multiple equilibria argument put forward by Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015), which we will discuss in more detail below, allows to develop a theoretical expectation that depending on the level of gender equality achieved, fertility increases might not only be possible through gender equality enhancements, but also through gender equality reductions. The 21st century "baby boom" in Eastern Europe might perhaps provide us with an example in which the return to relatively high low fertility levels is not achieved through higher gender equality, but by a retraditionalization of societies, coupled with a period of economic stabilization after a drastic economic crisis. If this were the case, this would entail the question to what degree such a pathway might also be viable for other countries, and whether such "baby booms" have the potential to last. At least the mid-20th century baby boom in Europe and North America, which also contained some tendencies of retraditionalization (Van Bavel and Reher 2013), came to an abrupt end when cohorts reached childbearing age that had not directly experienced the atrocities and destructions of the war. Will this also be the destiny of the Eastern European baby boom once the post-transition cohorts reach prime childbearing ages? One important counter argument might be the long-standing legacy of gender inequality in Eastern Europe. Historical research based on household structure data shows that today's East-West disparities in gender inequalities across Europe were also visible in the 19th century (Szołtysek et al. 2017). The long legacy of higher gender inequality in Eastern Europe might imply that Eastern Europe has indeed more pathways to high fertility available compared to Western European societies that are currently strongly leaning towards high gender equality.

[Figure 1 about here]

The freshly released 2017 Belarusian Generations and Gender Survey data provide a unique opportunity to take a detailed look at the characteristics and prospects of the recent fertility increases in Belarus. Belarus and Russia share many similarities in their socioeconomic and political developments, so that our findings are potentially also relevant for understanding the determinants and prospects of the recent fertility increases in Russia. These similarities include that after an initial liberalization process in the 1990s, which was paralleled with economic turmoil that brought hardship to large parts of the population, both societies elected leaders that put their priorities rather on stabilizing the economic and political situation. As a result, the governments of the two countries gained again substantial control over economic and political processes. In terms of the fertility trends, the similarities between Russia and

Belarus are not only visible in the fertility increases over the last decades, but also in the most recent numbers for 2017, where both countries reported for the first time in this decade a fertility decrease. This trend change raises the question whether we already see the end of the "baby boom", or just a temporary dip.

With this paper we follow two main research objectives. The first is to explore to what degree the fertility increases over the last decades are driven by a recuperation of births that were postponed during the post-communist transition crises of the 1990s and 2000s. If the fertility increases are to a large degree caused by this component, they are likely to be only of a temporary manner. Our results show that recuperation is indeed playing a role. The second objective is to get a better understanding of characteristics of women that are at the center of the current baby boom. As official statistics suggest that the fertility increases are particularly strong in non-metropolitan areas of Belarus (Belstat 2017), we expect that these parents are rather holding traditional family formation attitudes. For the "baby boom" to prevail, it would also require the younger succeeding generations of potential mothers and fathers to show strong family orientation both in attitudes and behavior. Our findings provide indications for such a strong family orientation especially among young respondents born 1980-1995. This is suggestive of a part of the "baby boom" not just being a temporary phenomenon, but potentially lasting for a longer time.

Background

Whether and to what degree specific demographic developments are universal is a recurring theme in debates on population and development (Caldwell 2001; Thornton 2013; Drummond et al. 2014; Lima et al. 2018; IPC 2009). Some processes such as the demographic transition, fertility postponement, and the longevity revolution seem to affect virtually all populations around the globe, while other aspects show at least for now still substantial variation across countries. This includes family formation patterns or the prevalence of same-sex unions. For a long time it looked as if conservative populations were able to achieve higher fertility outcomes. In Europe, for example, rural and/or religious areas tended to witness delayed fertility declines during the demographic transition (e.g., Goldstein and Klüsener 2014), and the same was true for a number of rather conservative societies such as Italy, Portugal, and Spain. However, this pattern changed in the late 20th century, when across high-income countries within a few years the relationship between female labor force participation and fertility shifted from negative to positive (Brewster and Rindfuss 2000; Engelhardt and Prskawetz 2004). As already mentioned above, over the last years the debate about fertility in high-income countries leans to the point of view that increases in fertility are best achieved through enhancements in gender equality (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015; Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård 2015). These theories describe a U-shaped pattern of development in which fertility is initially decreasing due to higher female labor participation and increased normative confusion about appropriate gender roles, and then increasing again if also institutional adjustments are taken to support dual-earner couples to reconcile family and work. However, it is not clear whether all societies will follow such a U-shaped path in a unidirectional way, or whether some societies experience periods in which they become more tradi-

tional again in terms of gender roles. If the U-shaped path is indeed true, and if countries are rather at the turning point of the U-shaped path, than retraditionalization could actually lead to fertility increases. The example of Belarus might provide as with such a case, into which we will look into by investigating to what degree variation in fertility behavior across cohorts is mirrored by variation in family norms.

However, next to shifts in family attitudes, also family policies might play a role in the recent fertility increases (Frejka et al. 2016). Neyer and Andersson (2009) stress that critical junctures with drastic social policy changes with relevance for family behavior are best suited to identify the impact of policies on fertility and family behavior. However, in the case of Belarus it is difficult to single out such critical junctures, as there have been frequent reforms especially since the early 2000s. In the following, we will provide a short overview over the development of family policies in Belarus since the 1980s. The 1980s had in the Soviet Union been characterized by an expansion of family support schemes (Imbrogno 1986). Next to the provision of free housing and the expansion of public child care facilities, the support for families also included the introduction of a lump-sum benefit for every newborn child, a parental leave benefit paid during the child's first year of life as well as a possibility to take unpaid child care leave until the child reached the age of 1.5 years. During the crisis period of the 1990s, the government extended the paid child care leave until the child reached the age of three. At the same time, access to public child care decreased as many kindergartens and nurseries that had been operated by former state-owned enterprises were closed down.

Throughout the 2000s, various family support schemes were further expanded, especially in the area of housing policies. In 2000 the government introduced concessional loans granted for construction, reconstruction or acquisition of housing. After free housing stopped being available, limited access to housing had been a serious problem especially for young families that aggravated during the 1990s. Important steps in the housing reform were implemented in 2004, particularly targeting at families with three and more children and families residing in rural areas. The adopted measures included reduced interest rates on concessional housing loans, extended period for repaying them, providing financial assistance to families which failed to meet the repayment terms, and other measures. Multiple amendments to the housing reform were also implemented during the following years (especially in 2007), of which also families with less than three children benefitted. These significantly contributed to further improve housing conditions of families without having a negative impact on their living standards. In addition to that, child allowances increased, and access to public child care improved again. For child care, especially reforms in 2011 and 2013 were relevant. As all these measures were implemented in a period of general economic recovery, it would be difficult to disentangle policy effects from the recovery effects. But our understanding of how family policies have developed over the last decades will be very relevant for interpreting our findings.

One challenge in exploring whether a societal restoration process is likely to last is that backlashes might occur swiftly. The data we have available provides us with information on attitudes, but existing research shows that responses to attitude question might be affected by social desirability bias (Fisher 1993; Nederhof 1985). Another issue is that attitudes might be

adjusted to the behavior such as have having a first child or transitioning to a third child (see Brandstädter and Rothermund 2002; Huinink and Kohli 2014). This might affect our analysis of attitudinal trends over cohorts. Generally, we believe that actual behavior such as having children early or transitioning to a third birth or births of even higher order is more informative for family orientation than attitudes. Nevertheless, in order to learn more about potential future macro trajectories, attitudes (Beets, Liefbroer, and Gierveld 1999) or intentions (see Philipov 2011) can be of help. However, particularly for cohorts of young adult ages caution has to be applied as in this life phase attitudes can still change quite significantly (Beets et al. 1999), especially after entry into parenthood (Baxter et al. 2014).

Data and Methods

We use data from the 2017 Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) in Belarus, which provides us with detailed information on union and fertility histories and gender attitudes for 9994 persons (5514 females and 4480 males) aged 18-89 years. We analyze the official dataset (Version 1.0), to which we were granted access to through the Generations and Gender Programme's (GGP) webportal (https://www.ggp-i.org/). The webportal provides detailed background information both about the GGP and the data collection. Throughout the analysis, we mainly focus on women; only in terms of gender attitudes we also look at men. We put a particular emphasis on urban-rural differences in the observed patterns. Since the dataset accessible to us through the GGP webportal does not include information whether the place of residence of a respondent is in an urban or a rural area, we added this attribute from a national GGS dataset. In order to look into the representativeness of the GGS data, we first contrasted the developments recorded in the survey with the information on fertility trends obtained from the Human Fertility Database. The outcomes are presented in the appendix of this paper. Overall, the comparison provides support for the view that the GGS data are reliable enough to perform our analyses.

In our investigation we will mostly focus on descriptive methods that allow to obtain an understanding of the demographic components of the recent fertility trends. We first look at single-decrement life tables showing transitions to first, second and third births. Life tables are generated for both real and synthetic cohorts of women following the life table construction approach developed by Andersson and Philipov (2002) for an analysis of similarly structured Fertility and Family Survey data. To GGS data, it was applied by Philipov and Jasilioniene (2008). In the cohort life table analysis, we examine fertility patterns of six cohorts of women, born in 1950-59, 1960-69, 1970-74, 1975-79, 1980-84, and 1985+. The synthetic-cohort life tables are constructed for five period intervals, 1984-1990, 1991-1997, 1998-2004, 2005-2011, and 2012-2017. The dates of events are measured in years and months. For the exact timing of events, we use the middle of the reported month. The life table values are interpreted as cumulative percent of individuals who have experienced the studied event by a specific age. To explore more closely the recuperation aspect, we perform hazard models (smoothed hazard rates plotted by 'sts graph, hazard' in Stata) that enable us to investigate how age schedules and durations between births have changed over time. In order to study

cohort patterns in gender attitudes, we analyze responses to gender attitude questions of the GGS.

Results

In investigating cumulative fertility both from a period and cohort perspective, we will first look at the patterns for whole Belarus. When presenting the cumulative percentages, we decided for the higher order births not to condition on whether a woman had actually already transitioned to the preceding parity. This allows us in the cohort graphs to directly identify the share of women that have at least two or three children. The alternative perspective of conditional cumulative percentages would make such assessments more difficult, as e.g. the share of women who transitioned from the second to the third child would be provided as a share of those women that had at least two children.

As a first step we will look at the period figures (Fig. 2). The data for first births show the well-documented phenomenon that the transition to first births is almost universal in Belarus. In all the periods considered, around 90% of all women of these synthetic cohorts would at the end of the reproductive life span have given birth to a first child. Postponement is visible as in the later three periods the cumulative percentages increase at later ages than in the first two periods (1984-1990, 1991-1997). This trend is confirmed by the HFD data depicting the mean age at first birth, which started to increase in the second half of the 1990s (Fig. A1). Bigger disparities over time are visible for second births. Here we see that in the post-Soviet period transitions to second births occurred much less frequently. The ultimate level of having a second child decreased from above 70% in the late 1980s to 50%-60% in the 1990s and 2000s. In addition, we witness substantial postponement in the ages of women at which transitions to second births occur. In the last period (2012-2017), however, the cumulative percent increased again to around 70%, and is with this close to the level registered in the 1980s. Even more remarkable is the temporal variation in the transition to a third birth. Again we see decline and postponement in the post-Soviet transitional period, but in the last period between 2012 and 2017 third births actually occurred more frequently than in the 1980s. And even though second births are on average happening substantially later today as compared to the 1980s, the cumulative percent for third births increase in the same manner as in the 1980s. This suggests that durations between the second and third birth have decreased at least for some sections of the Belarusian society. We will look at this in more detail later on. In addition, the cumulative percentage further increases also at ages beyond age 32, which contributes to the higher total outcomes.

[Figure 2 about here]

In order to get a better understanding of potential recuperation trends, we turn to the cohort perspective (Fig. 3). In the progression to first birth we see, compared to the period perspective, even fewer differences in the ultimate share of women entering into motherhood. In all the birth cohorts, around 90% of all women had at least a first child at the latest observable age. And even among the cohorts born after 1985, which were 32 and younger at the end of

the observation period, already 80% had a first child. For the younger cohorts we also see some postponement and recuperation. In the cohorts born 1975-1979 some women were in their 20s postponing births, and then catching up at ages after 30 (i.e., after 2005). Postponement of the transition to the first birth was even stronger for the cohorts born 1980-84 and after 1985.

[Figure 3 about here]

For the transition to second birth we see quite substantial postponement starting with the cohorts born 1970-1974. Women of this cohort were most affected by the post-communist transition crisis as it gained momentum exactly at the time when they reached childbearing ages; they are likely to end up with the lowest cumulative percent among all the cohorts considered. The cohorts born 1975-1979 and 1980-1984 had their second births much later compared to the older cohorts, but recuperated at later reproductive ages. This recuperation is particularly pronounced for the cohorts born 1980-1984 where the share of women who had a second birth will most likely be higher than among the cohorts born 1960-1969. This supports the view that the recent increases are not just driven by recuperation, but also by a rebound in cohort fertility levels. In the youngest cohorts (1985+), the cumulative percent of those already having a second child is close to 50%, suggesting that postponement is less pronounced in the youngest cohorts compared to the preceding ones.

Third births play compared to first and second births a much more minor role in Belarus. But the cohort patterns are still remarkable. Even though the cohorts born 1980-1985 (aged 32-37 in 2017) had not reached the end of their reproductive life span at the time in 2017, the share of women in this cohort who had at least three children (17%) is already the highest among the considered cohorts. It is even higher than the levels reached by the cohorts born 1950-1959 of whom most women still completed their reproduction during Soviet times. This upward trend does not seem to stop at the moment, as even among the cohorts born after 1985 the level of having a third child is already 14%. The patterns for the younger cohorts again suggest that we are not only dealing with the recuperation of postponed births, but also with quantum increases in fertility.

There are, however, quite substantial differences between urban and rural areas, especially when it comes to second and particularly third births. In interpreting the graphs by place of residence presented below, it is important to point out that we do not have migration histories available for the respondents. This implies that we derive the plots conditional on the place of residence when the survey was conducted. Thus, we do not know for sure whether a birth of a women residing in an urban area did indeed occur in an urban area. As internal migration intensities after age 30 are rather low, we still believe that our analyses can provide an impression about urban-rural differences in fertility outcomes, even though we have to condition on the place of residence at the survey.

Among first births, the variation between urban and rural areas is marginal both in terms of quantum and tempo (see Fig. 4 and 5). This underlines again the universality of experiencing motherhood in Belarus. For second births, we see in the period graphs (Fig. 4) that women

living (at the survey) in urban areas had in the 1980s lower transition rates to second births than those in rural areas. The decreases after 1991 were also stronger among women in urban areas. The levels remain higher in rural areas also in the very last period (2012-2017). Third births were during Soviet times much more prevalent in rural compared to urban areas. The absolute reductions during the post-Soviet period were thus also much higher in rural compared to urban areas. In the last period, however, the levels in urban areas are by far the highest of all the periods considered. In rural areas, they are slightly above the levels recorded in the 1980s.

[Figures 4 and 5 about here]

When we move to the cohort perspective, we again see no big differences in the progression to first birth between the cohorts living in urban and rural areas. For second births, the levels are lower for women in urban areas and this is particularly true for the cohorts most affected by the crises (1970-1974), where the levels are 51% in urban and 67% in rural areas. Trend patterns are, however, very similar, and in urban areas the return to the pre-transition levels seems also from this perspective to be further advanced than in rural areas. The pronounced postponement and recuperation among the cohorts born 1980-84, which we pointed out at the country level, is particularly visible among rural cohorts. Similarly, the more frequent second birth transitions at younger ages are in the 1985+ cohorts more pronounced among women residing in rural areas.

Among third births, the cohorts born 1980-84 have in urban and rural areas a very similar trajectory. At the end of the observation period, around 16-18% of all these women have transitioned to the third birth. This is remarkable considering that in all the other cohorts considered levels are much higher in rural than in urban areas. This is particularly true for the last cohort group (1985+). Even though this latter cohort group shows also in urban areas an even faster trajectory to third births compared to the cohorts born 1980-84, this is far away from the massive increases in third births which we witness in rural areas. In the rural cohorts born 1985 and later, the transition to third births occurred quickest among all the cohorts considered. Already in the early 30s 30% have experienced a third birth. With this they already achieved now the levels that were registered for cohorts that finished most of their reproduction still during Soviet times. The remarkable similarities in the trajectories of urban and rural women born 1980-84 might be related to the situation that in the post-Soviet transition crisis a return to economic growth first occurred in urban areas (see also Alam et al. 2005 and Macours and Swinnen 2008). The pattern for the youngest cohorts suggest that particularly in rural areas we are currently witnessing a rush to third births, which might indeed be related to policies that support big families with three or more children. In this regard especially the family support linked to housing seems to be particularly helpful in rural areas.

To look more into the postponement-recuperation element, we turn to the smoothed hazard rates for second and third births. In Figure 5 we show the rates for the synthetic cohorts for second births, and in Figure 6 for third births. For second births, in all the periods the hazard peaks around 3-4 years after the first birth. The highest hazards were recorded in the period 1984-1990, but the hazard rates were quickly decreasing 6-10 years after the first birth. Dur-

ing the crisis period (1991-1997, 1998-2004), the second birth hazards were the lowest and there were no indications for recuperation. This is different especially in the last two periods (2005-2011, 2012-2017). In the period 2005-2011 we nearly see a bimodal shape as there is almost a second maximum around ten years after the first birth. And also in the last period the hazard rates of the transition to the second birth continue even ten years after the first birth to be still high. The hazard schedules for second births by age of the mother provide additional support for the view that recuperation is an important element of the current fertility trends. We see a marked increase in the hazards of second births at older childbearing ages, especially in the last period (2012-2017). Urban and rural areas differ in levels, but the overall trend patterns over time exhibit many similarities. For third births (Figure 6), the big difference to second births is that the hazards in the last period are now by far the highest. This pattern is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where people seem to rush very quickly to third births, with the hazards swiftly decreasing 5-8 years after the second birth.

[Figure 6 about here]

The fertility patterns for the youngest cohorts suggest that they will indeed have at least higher cohort fertility outcomes than those cohorts who were of prime childbearing age during the 1990s and early 2000s. However, this might not necessarily be linked to a retradionalization of the Belarusian society, as it might just be a return to higher fertility after the crisis, perhaps bolstered by the extension of family policies. We therefore look in Tables 1 and 2 at cohort patterns in responses to gender attitude questions. The first question we turn to is whether it is rather the role of women or men to earn money for the family (Table 1). In all cohort groups apart from rural women born in the 1970s, the majority believes that men have higher responsibilities. These perceptions have also contributed to higher pressure on men during the post-Soviet transition crises (see Cockerham 2012). However, there are shifts over cohorts. Interestingly, among women, the highest values are not recorded in the oldest cohorts, but in the cohorts that are at the center of the cohort fertility increases (1980-1995). In these cohorts, up to 60% subscribe to this view, while the values are by 5-10 percentage points lower in other cohorts including the youngest one. For men, the highest levels are recorded in the oldest cohorts and in the cohorts born 1985-1990. The peak in the younger cohorts is, however, less pronounced than among women. Overall, gender differences related to these attitudes are lowest in the cohorts born after 1980 which might contribute to the fertility increases. In terms of potential future trends it is worthwhile to note that the male breadwinner norm seems to be less pronounced among the youngest cohort, which was 18-22 during the interview. As attitudes can still be subject to substantial changes at these ages, it is too early to call this a trend change. But if this were the case, potential for gender conflict with possible consequences for fertility outcomes might be on the rise again among younger cohorts. While we see quite substantial urban-rural differences in fertility outcomes, the differences in attitudes are rather small also for the youngest cohorts. Also consistency checks where we looked into differences by educational attainment did not return big differences.

[Table 1 about here]

In Table 2 we look at attitudes towards responsibilities of women and men to take care of the home and the children. In all cohorts considered, the majority believes that both women and men are equally responsible for bringing up children. But there are also substantial shares who expressed the view that this is rather the role of women. Both among women and men, we find the least support for assigning this task to women among the cohorts born in the 1960s and early 1970s, while the levels are high both among the oldest and the youngest cohorts. This pattern is among women particularly pronounced for the cohorts born after 1990. Compared to the older cohorts, women themselves assign the responsibility for bringing up children to women to a higher degree than to men, which does not provide the impression that gender conflict is likely to arise about these issues among these cohorts. This seems particularly true for rural areas, as rural males seem actually to be most likely to assign the responsibility to both partners or to males. However, if women see themselves more in the responsibility to take care of the children, this might create a double burden if they have at the same time to contribute to the household income through employment. Again, consistency checks did not result in big differences across educational attainment groups. Overall, the analysis of gender attitudes provides the impression as if the cohort fertility increases are indeed paired with a return to more traditional gender attitudes.

[Table 2 about here]

Discussion and Conclusion

As to the question whether the current Eastern European "baby boom" fits into a universal pattern or is the result of unique local conditions, it is perhaps too early to make a call. So far it exhibits many parallels to the mid-20th century baby boom (see Van Bavel and Reher 2013). Recuperation was in both processes an important element in the period when the countries experienced the return to rising fertility rates. However, at a later stage also fertility increases in the succeeding cohorts played an important role. In the mid-20th century baby boom this was concentrated in the cohorts born during the Great Depression and its aftermath, who were still children during World War II. In the case of Eastern Europe, it seems to be driven by those cohorts who were children when the Soviet Union collapsed. More research is needed to explore whether the recuperation among older cohorts after crisis-induced postponement has an effect on the cohort fertility increases among succeeding cohorts. Over the last years, evidence has mounted that fertility events in the social surrounding can influence own fertility decisions (Lois and Becker 2014, Mishra and Parasnis 2017). In a context where many older women are recuperating postponed fertility decisions, this will likely positively affect the frequency with which younger women are confronted with births among family members, coworkers, or other social contacts. This exposure to an enhanced frequency of fertility events might have a positive effect on the degree to which fertility plans are formed and realized. At the same time, based on discussions with older women who postponed their childbearing plans during the crisis, the succeeding younger cohorts might feel privileged to be less constrained in their childbearing plans, which might also lead to higher fertility outcomes. If this mechanism plays a role, then those parts of the quantum increases

among younger cohorts that stem from such positive "contagion effects" due to the recuperation of older cohorts are likely not to last for long.

If recuperation in older cohorts does indeed positively affect fertility in succeeding cohorts due to an increased frequency of birth events, this might also be relevant for a number of Western societies that are currently witnessing the end of a period of massive postponement (Goldstein, Sobotka, and Jasilioniene 2009). The slight cohort fertility increases among the cohorts born in the late 1970s (Myrskylä, Goldstein, and Cheng 2013) that succeed those who were at the center of the postponement might actually at least be partly explained by such a mechanism. It would be a fruitful avenue for future research to explore this theoretically with agent-based models or empirically with datasets that contain information on social contacts and their fertility attitudes and behavior.

We pointed out that Eastern Europe has a legacy of higher gender inequality compared to Western Europe (Szołtysek et al. 2017). This legacy might contribute to make the Eastern European "baby boom" lasting longer than the baby boom in the mid-20th century. Whether this will happen, we will only learn in the years to come. One limitation is, however, that we could only measure gender attitudes at one point in time. Especially among young adults, these attitudes might be still subject to changes (Baxter et al. 2014), especially if the birth of a child results into the adoption of work divisions in which one partner focuses on gainful employment and the other on childrearing activities (Höfner, Schadler, and Richter 2011).

However, while the fertility levels at currently around 1.6 children per women are above average in a European comparison, the levels are still substantially lower than the fertility levels which were recorded in the mid-20th century baby boom. To this contributes that fertility levels in Belarusian urban areas remain quite low, even though they are in part higher than during Soviet times. Considering that urbanization continues to increase in Belarus, this also puts the long-term sustainability of the recent increases in doubt. If the observed less traditional attitudes in the youngest cohorts related to who should contribute to the household income stabilize themselves in the years to come, this might enhance the risk that fertility will decrease again in the future. Nevertheless, the recorded fertility improvements are very helpful for Eastern European societies as they open new opportunities to alleviate challenges due to drastic ageing processes that these societies are currently facing.

Whether retraditionalization offers societies with lowest-low fertility a pathway to higher fertility might depend on the level of gender equality which has been achieved (i.e., at which section of the imagined U-shaped relationship a society is situated) (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2013). In Eastern Europe, the lower general gender equality might have offered the opportunity to reach higher fertility levels through retraditionalization. This option might not be available for societies with higher gender equality levels, were a return to lower gender equality would rather lead to lower fertility levels. However, also for Eastern Europe, history has still to prove that such a retraditionalization can sustain over longer periods of time. Otherwise, the Eastern European "baby boom" might also come as quickly to an end, as did the mid-20th century baby boom.

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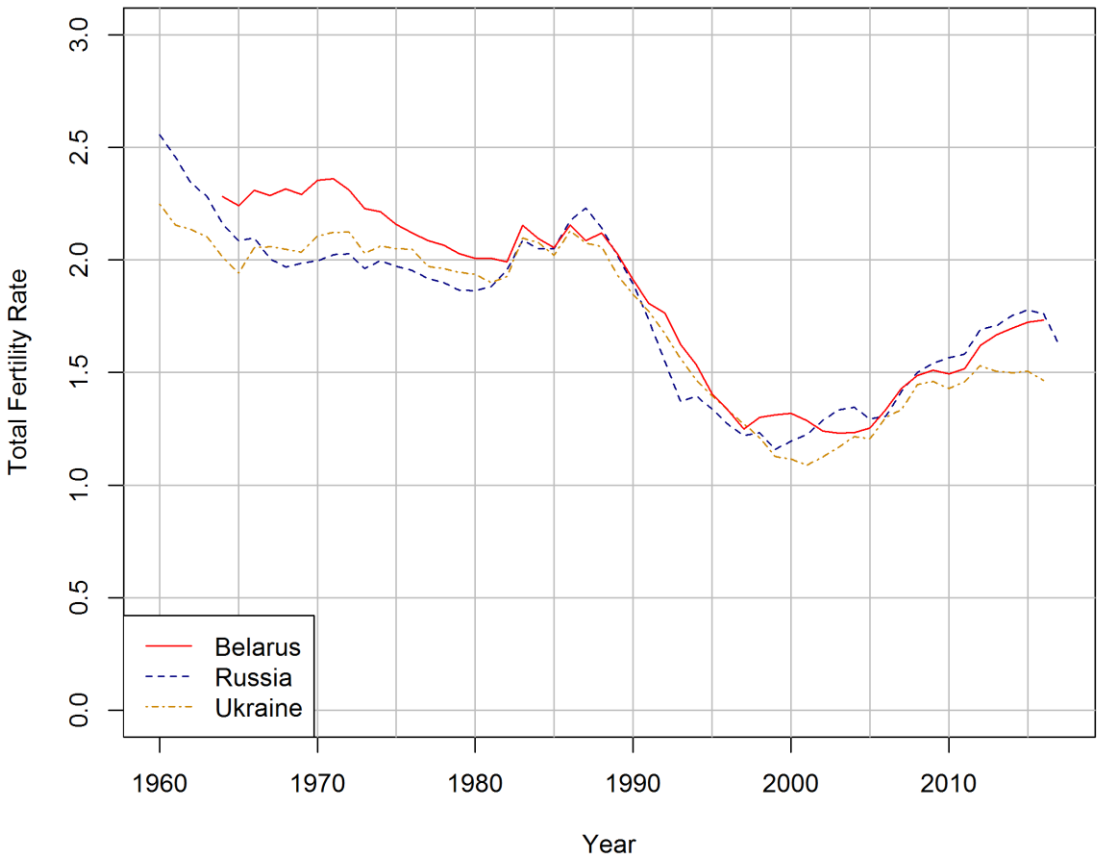
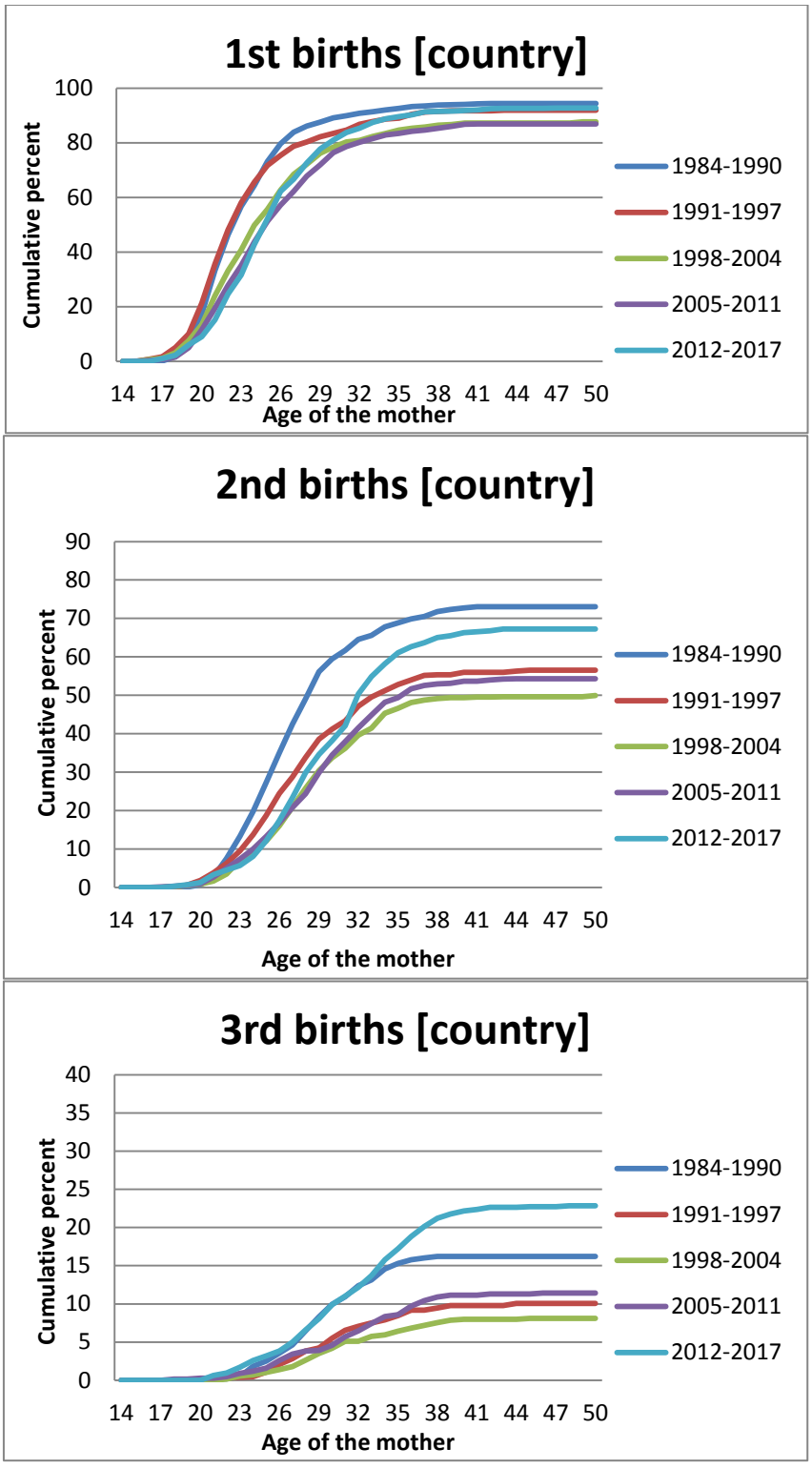
Fig. 1: Fertility trends in the Belarus, Russia and Ukraine (1960-today)



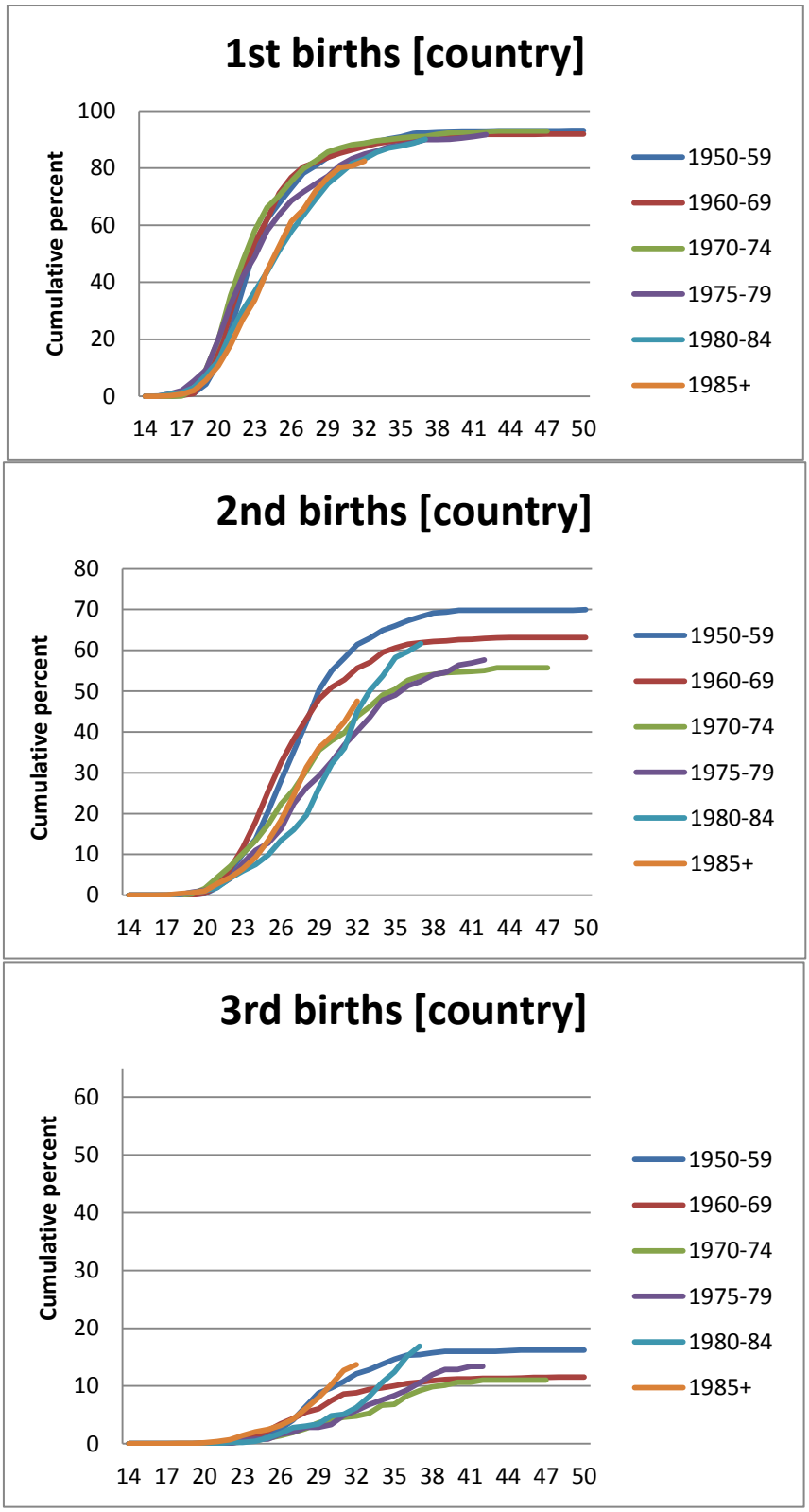
Source: Human Fertility Database

Fig. 2: Cumulative percent increases by birth order (period perspective)



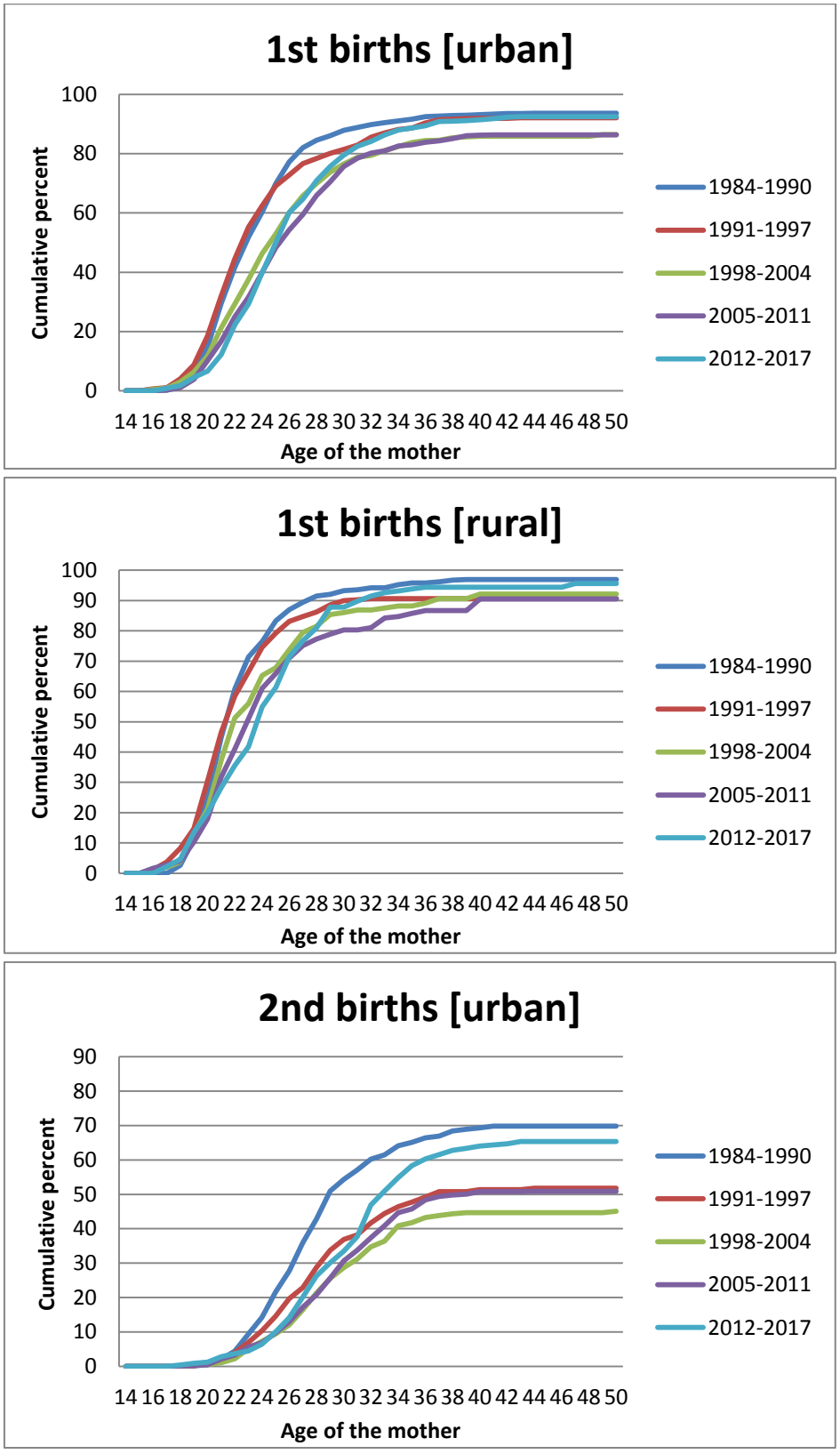
Source: Belarusian GGS, own calculations

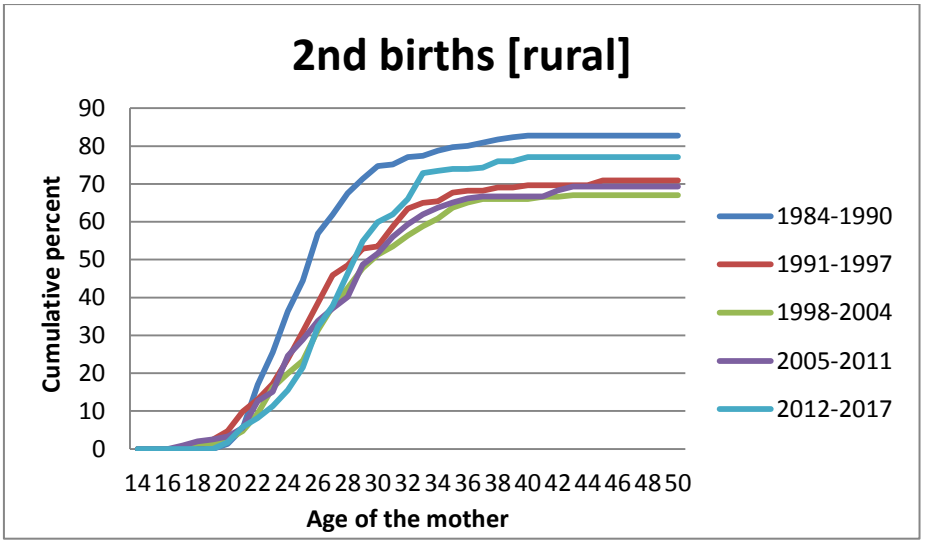
Fig. 3: Cumulative percent increases by birth order (cohort perspective)

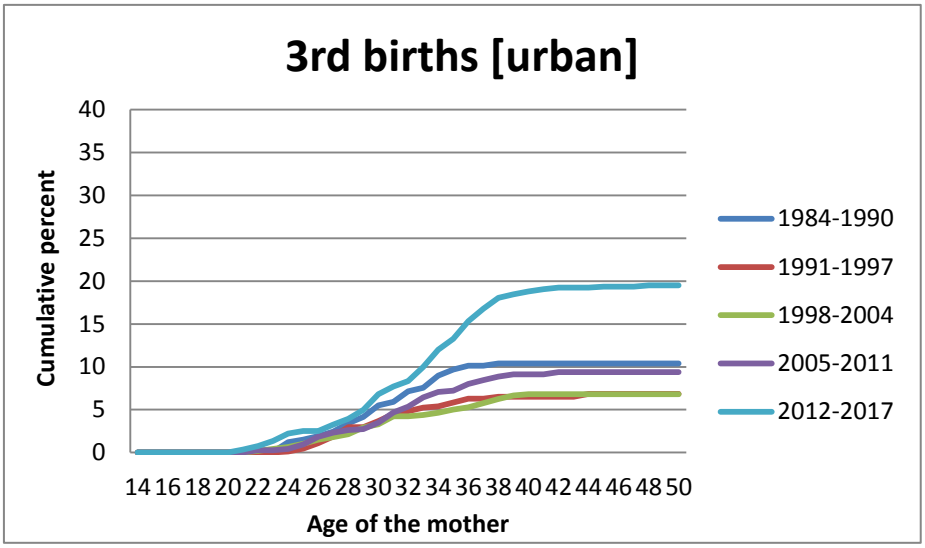


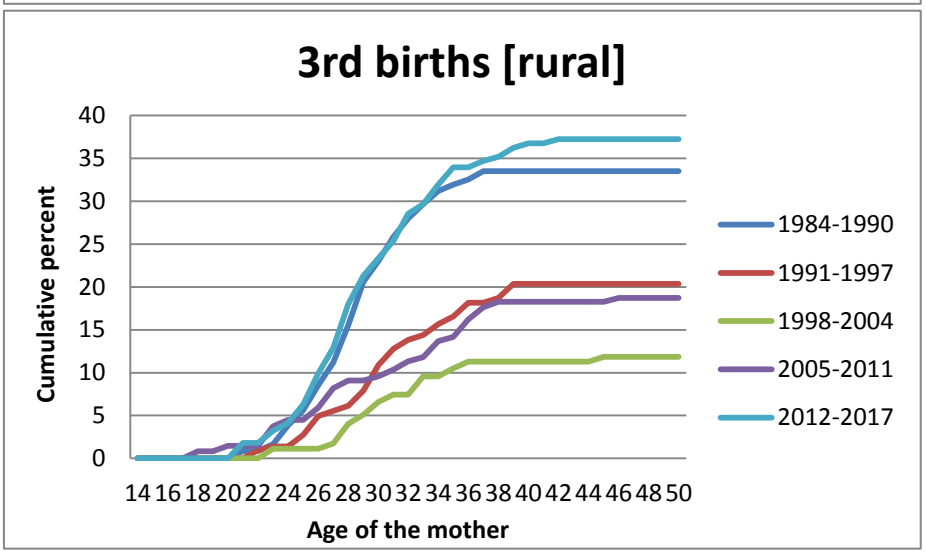
Source: Belarusian GGS, own calculations

Fig. 4: Cumulative percent of women ever having a birth by birth order and urban/rural place of residence (period perspective)



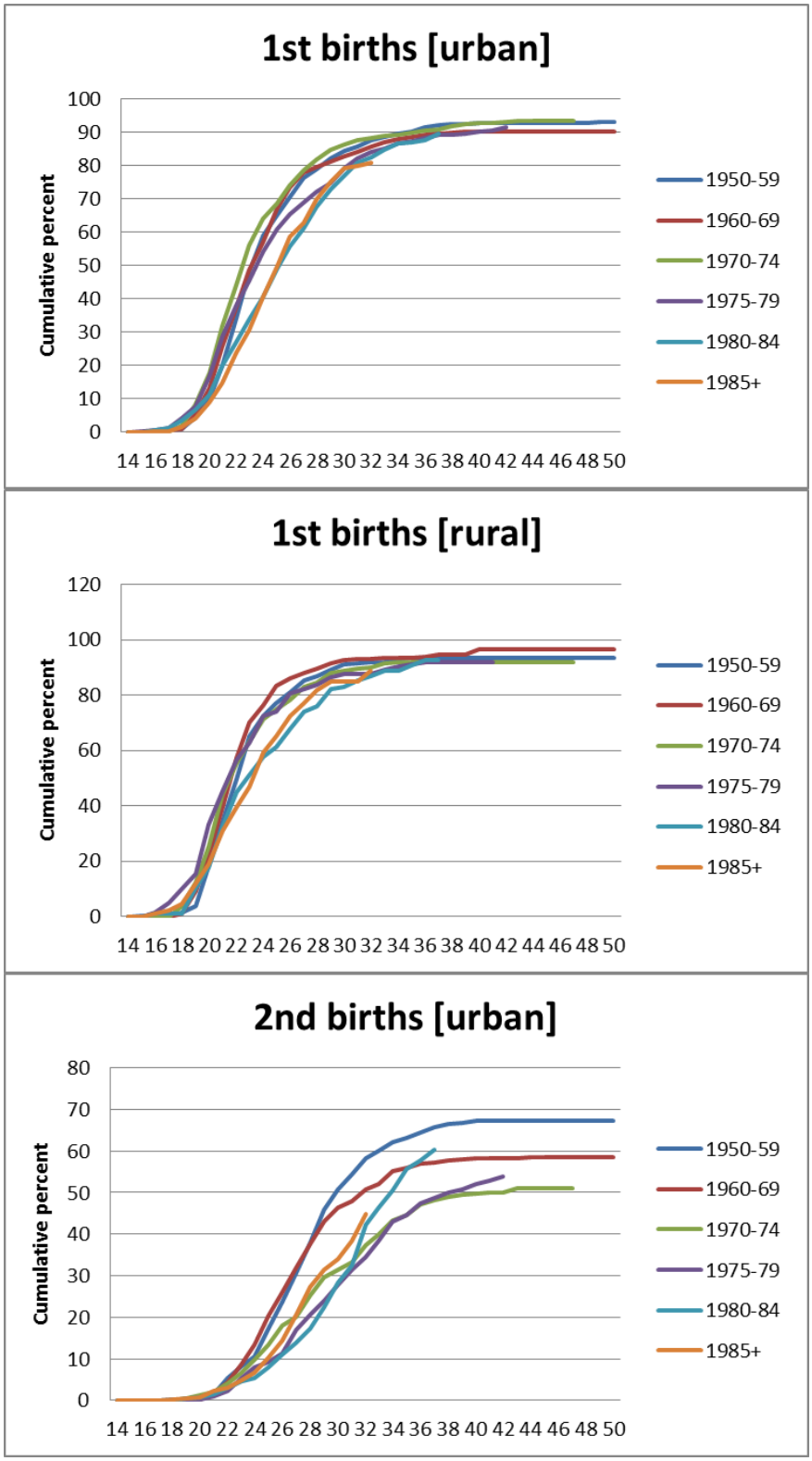


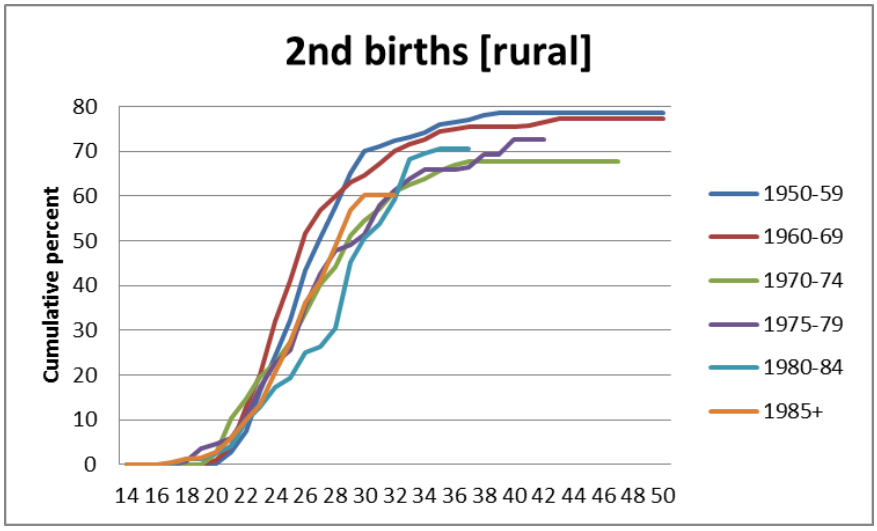


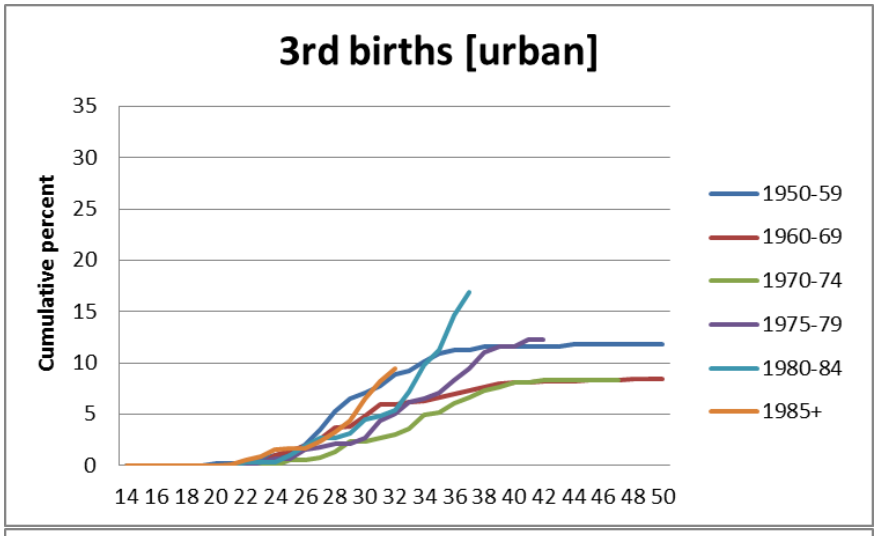


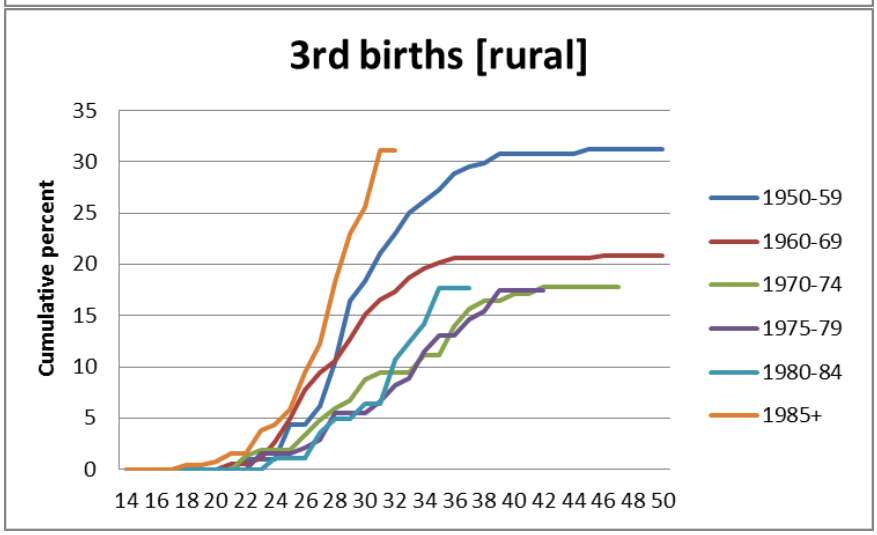
Source: Belarusian GGS, own calculations

Fig. 5: Cumulative percent of women ever having a birth by birth order and urban/rural place of residence (cohort perspective)



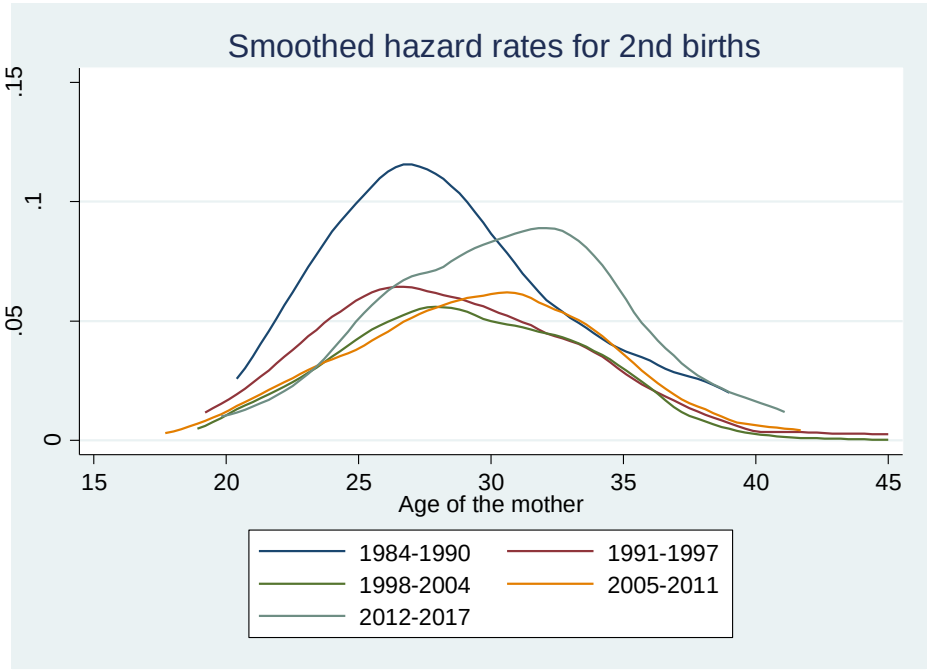


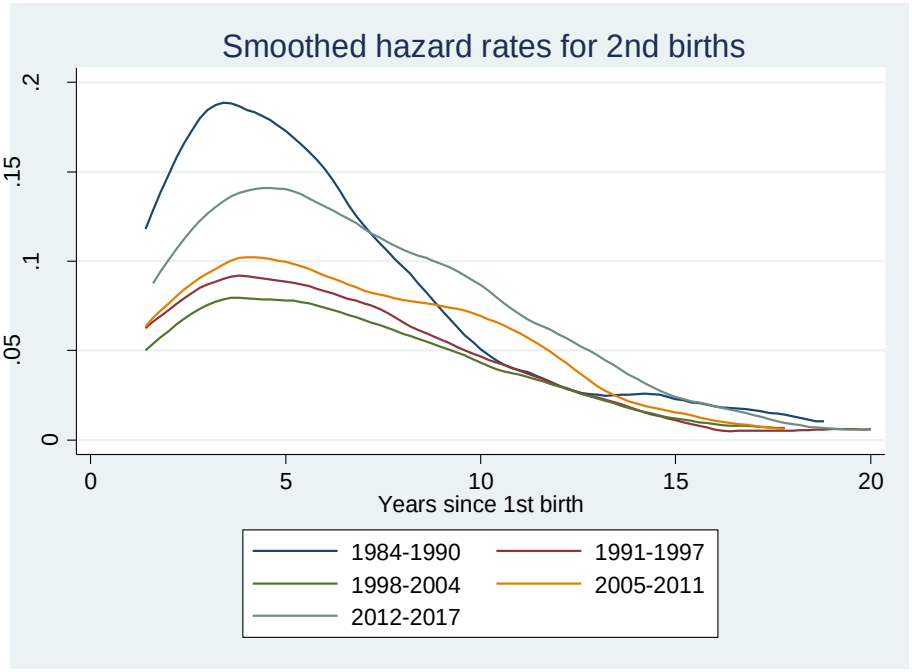


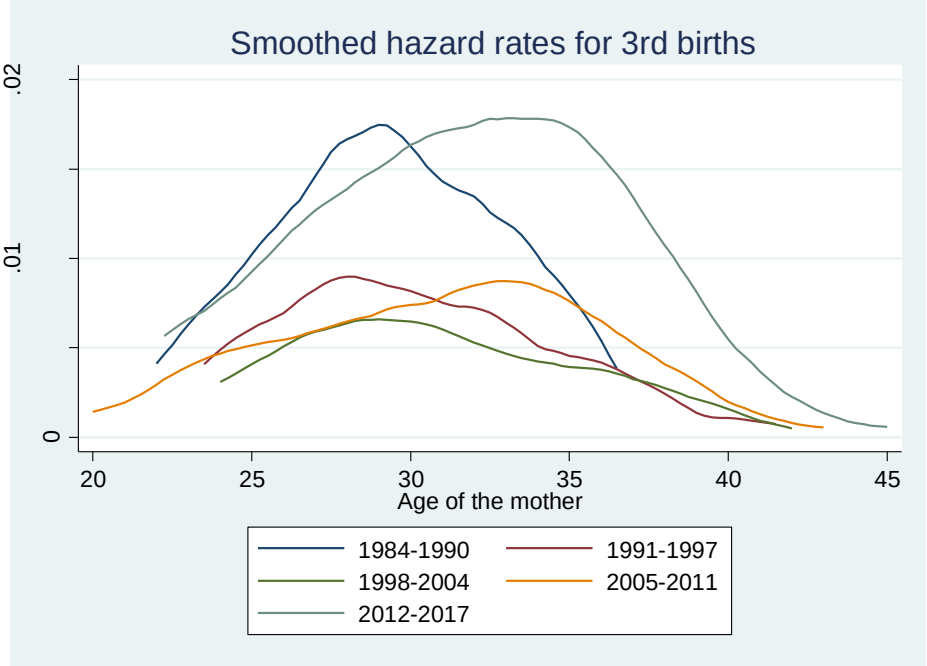


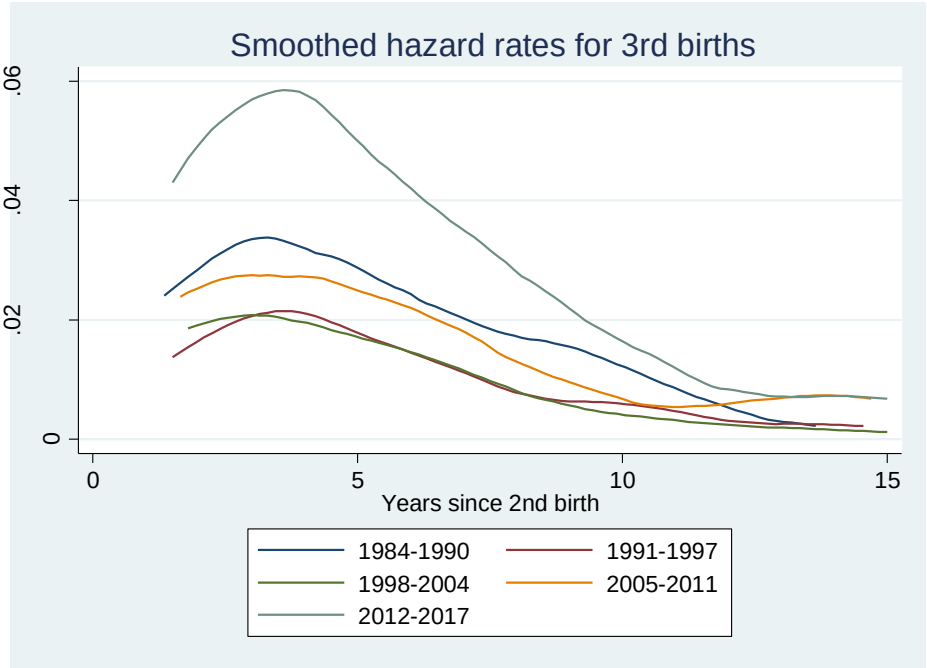
Source: Belarusian GGS, own calculations

Fig. 6: Smoothed hazards rates for having a second and a third birth (period perspective)









Source: Belarusian GGS, own calculations

Table 1: Cohort trends in gender attitudes about who should earn money for the family (Share which state definitely or slightly men)

	Belarus		Urban		Rural	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1940-49	70.1% (298)	49.6% (593)	67.7% (226)	49.0% (443)	77.8% (72)	51.3% (150)
1950-59	63.5% (669)	55.2% (1010)	62.4% (484)	54.7% (775)	66.5% (185)	56.6% (235)
1960-69	62.6% (716)	51.1% (940)	61.1% (512)	50.7% (697)	66.2% (204)	52.3% (243)
1970-74	62.5% (387)	51.0% (500)	61.2% (296)	51.9% (370)	67.0% (91)	48.5% (130)
1975-79	64.5% (425)	51.0% (537)	64.7% (334)	51.8% (429)	63.7% (91)	48.2% (108)
1980-84	65.4% (486)	58.6% (517)	67.3% (398)	58.3% (432)	56.8% (88)	60.0% (85)
1985-89	69.5% (547)	60.7% (494)	69.7% (466)	61.2% (397)	67.9% (81)	58.8% (97)
1990-94	66.9% (484)	61.6% (411)	66.7% (417)	63.2% (326)	68.7% (67)	55.3% (85)
1995-99	60.8% (380)	54.7% (320)	60.9% (317)	54.2% (262)	60.3% (63)	56.9% (58)

Notes: Total number of valid answers per cohort group are provided in brackets.

Source: Belarusian GGS, own calculations

Table 2: Cohort trends in gender attitudes about who should take care of children (Share which state definitely or slightly women)

	Belarus		Urban		Rural	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1940-49	45.3% (298)	39.7% (594)	45.1% (226)	39.1% (443)	45.8% (72)	41.7% (151)
1950-59	40.0% (670)	35.9% (1012)	38.7% (486)	36.0% (777)	43.5% (184)	35.3% (235)
1960-69	35.2% (715)	33.6% (939)	37.2% (511)	33.8% (696)	30.4% (204)	32.9% (243)
1970-74	35.5% (386)	36.4% (500)	36.8% (296)	36.8% (370)	31.1% (90)	35.4% (130)
1975-79	38.4% (427)	38.5% (538)	40.5% (336)	39.3% (430)	30.8% (91)	35.2% (108)
1980-84	40.0% (485)	37.2% (516)	40.8% (397)	37.0% (432)	36.4% (88)	38.1% (84)
1985-90	37.6% (545)	39.0% (495)	37.1% (464)	37.8% (399)	40.7% (81)	43.8% (96)
1990-94	35.7% (484)	44.0% (414)	36.5% (417)	44.4% (329)	31.3% (67)	42.4% (85)
1995-99	44.2% (380)	48.0% (321)	43.5% (317)	47.9% (263)	47.6% (63)	48.3% (58)

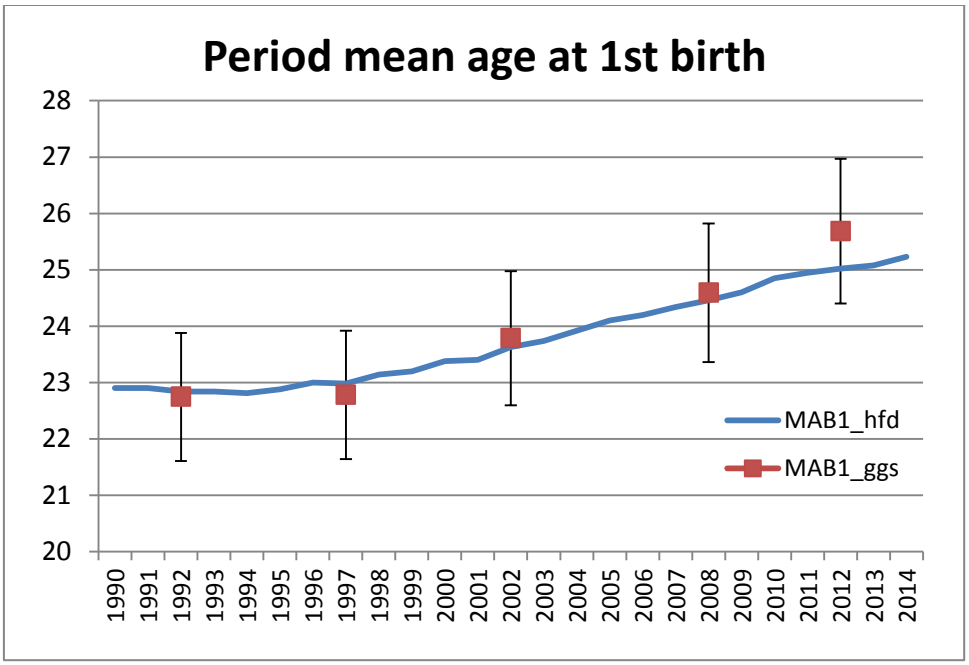
Notes: Total number of valid answers per cohort group are provided in brackets.

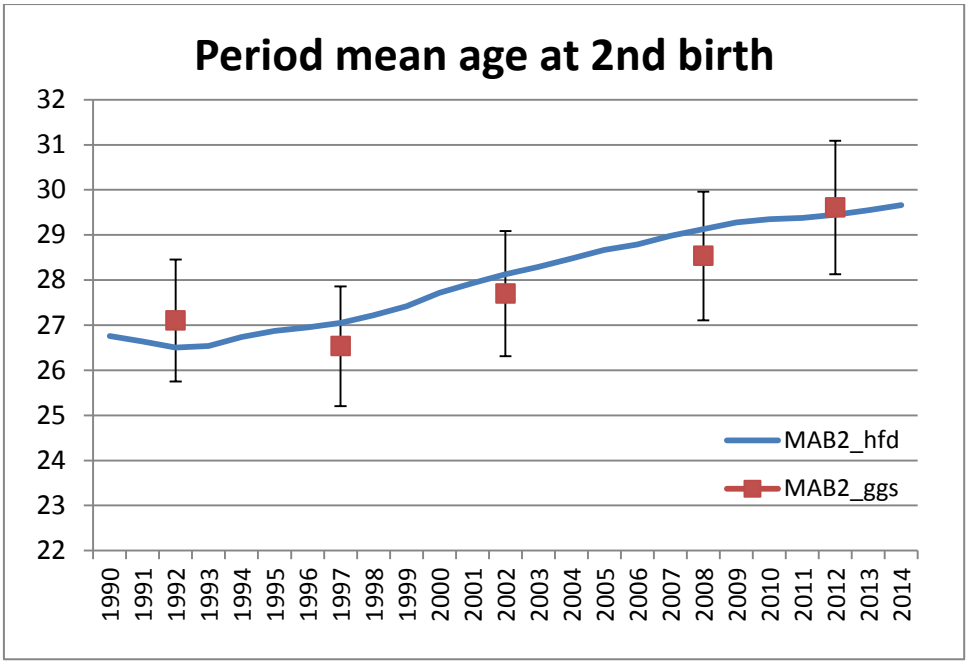
Source: Belarusian GGS, own calculations

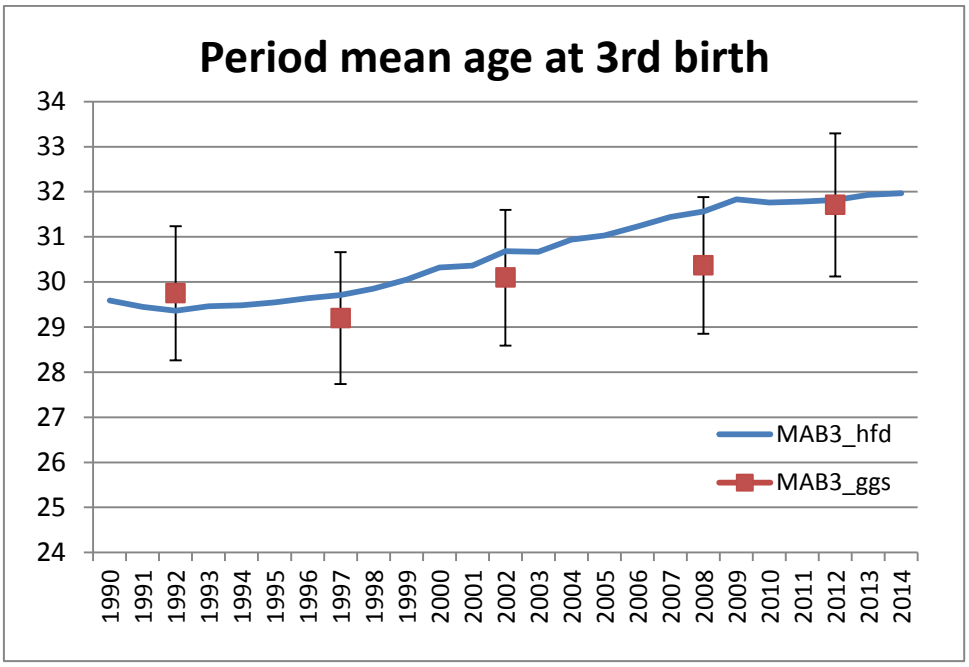
Appendix: Consistency checks between GGS data and birth registration data

To investigate the representativeness of the GGS data, we contrasted trends in the mean age for the first, second, and third birth as derived from the survey data with data from the Human Fertility Database (HFD). We focus on the period since 1990 (see Figure A1). For the mean age at first birth, the match is over most of the observation period very good. Only for the years before the survey, the mean age at first birth derived from the GGS is more than half year above the mean age available in the HFD. However, the HFD levels are still within the confidence interval of the estimate for the last period. Also for second births and third births we see some deviations from the HFD trends. But the HFD trend data remains again in all cases within the confidence interval of the GGS estimates. This provides the impression that GGS data mirrors general trends in the mean age at child birth very well.

Figure A1: Trends in the mean age at child birth (1st to 3rd birth)







Source: Human Fertility Database, Belarusian GGS, own calculations