

Joint Analysis of Mobility and Childbearing Intentions and Their Realization in Europe

Topic

This paper analyzes mobility and childbearing intentions and their subsequent realization in selected European countries in a common framework. The emphasis is on how intentions in these two domains co-develop and how their realization reflects the coordination of life-course transitions across diverse institutional contexts. The research is based on the Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS), providing an ideal setting for an in-depth analysis of life-course synchronization between family and residential transitions in contrasting institutional and housing-market contexts. While existing studies have already examined mobility and fertility intentions, no cross-national analysis has yet explored how these two types of intentions co-evolve and translate into actual behavior.

Theoretical Focus

Residential mobility and fertility are central components of the life course, marking key transitions in adulthood. Both are usually intentional, planned behaviors, embedded in social norms and structural constraints that vary substantially across countries. People often plan to move to accommodate family changes such as partnership formation or family growth while, conversely, the inability to move due to housing or economic constraints can delay or suppress family formation.

Despite clear conceptual and temporal links, research on mobility intentions and fertility intentions has largely developed in parallel. Existing comparative analyses, which for Europe are usually based on the GGS, have examined either the formation and realization of fertility intentions (Brzozowska & Beaujouan, 2021; Dommermuth et al., 2015; Spéder & Bálint, 2024) or the dynamics of moving intentions (Dommermuth & Klüsener, 2019; Schwanitz et al., 2021). A notable exception is the study of Deimantas (2023), who studies two-directional links between childbearing/marriage intentions and mobility, but does not analyze how the two types of intentions interact both in terms of formation as well as realization.

The paper integrates the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) with life-course and life-cycle perspectives. According to the TPB, behavior is preceded by intention, which is in turn shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Fertility and mobility plans can be viewed as such intentions. Their realization depends, inter alia, on whether the perceived controls align with actual opportunities. The joint approach extends TPB by recognizing that fertility and mobility intentions may share underlying attitudinal and normative components, and that their realization may depend on overlapping structural conditions (e.g., housing stability, partnership quality, or employment security). Life-course and life-cycle theories complement the TPB by embedding intentions in temporal and institutional contexts (Elder et al., 2003). In such a framework, residential mobility and fertility are not isolated acts but interconnected transitions within the sequence of adulthood events (e.g., Bernard et al., 2014; Clark & Lisowski, 2018; de Groot et al., 2011).

By combining the TPB with life-course theory, the paper frames mobility and childbearing intentions as coordinated behavioral plans: individuals plan moves and childbearing not as isolated acts but as coordinated steps responding to perceived opportunities and constraints. The realization of these intentions, or their postponement or abandonment, reveals how individual agency interacts with constraints such as housing affordability, policy support for families, and labor-market conditions.

Data

The analysis uses harmonized panel data from Waves 1 and 2 of the Generations and Gender Survey (Gauthier et al., 2018). The GGS collects measures of fertility and mobility intentions and follows respondents longitudinally, allowing direct assessment of whether intentions are realized. However, some differences exist in the implementation of the national questionnaires and not all information is available for all countries. This study includes five European countries, for which data on migration and its subsequent realization is available: Bulgaria, Germany, France, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic. Together, they capture institutional diversity in family and housing systems.

The mobility intention is captured by the response to the question whether the respondent intends to move within the next three years. Tracking residence changes is possible for 24,544 respondents in the sample. The fertility intention is captured by the response to the question whether the respondent intends to have a(nother) child within the next three years. Joint mobility and fertility longitudinal information is available for 12,335 respondents. The plan realization is captured by actual occurrence of a live birth and/or a residential move between survey waves.

Methods

The analysis proceeds in two stages:

1. Descriptive stage: an examination of cross-national distributions of fertility and mobility intentions, their overlap, and rates of realization (single, dual, or none). This stage highlights country-level differences in both the prevalence and fulfilment of intentions (Tables 1-5)
2. Modelling stage: A Structural Equation Model will be applied for predicting the joint formation and realization of both fertility and mobility intentions. This approach allows for simultaneous modeling of correlated latent propensities and captures feedback between mobility and fertility intentions. It also allows to test whether realization in one domain is associated with realization in the other. Independent variables will include, inter alia, age, gender, partnership status, parity, education, employment status, tenure (owner/renter), and household size, as well as variables related to attitudes and norms. Country-specific dummies and contextual moderators will capture institutional variation. The analysis will consider known biases/selectivity of the GGS database.

Expected Findings

Drawing on previous research and theoretical expectations, we hypothesize:

1. Positive association at the intention stage: individuals intending to have a child are more likely to intend to move, reflecting forward planning and the alignment of housing and family transitions.
2. Sequential dependency in realization: realizing a move increases the probability of fertility realization, consistent with TPB's notion of perceived behavioral control, as better housing and location conditions facilitate childbearing.
3. Institutional variation: in contexts with flexible rental markets and supportive family policies (e.g., France), both intentions are more likely to be realized jointly. In more constrained contexts (e.g., Bulgaria), housing market rigidity may decouple the two processes, leading to lower dual realization rates.
4. Dual non-realization as structural constraint: a notable share of respondents will fail to realize both intentions, particularly those with insecure employment or limited housing options.

Preliminary descriptive results

Table 1. Co-occurrence of mobility and fertility intentions in Wave 1

Intention to have a child during next 3 years	Intention to move within the next 3 years				Total
	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably yes	Definitely yes	
Definitely not	5016	1239	842	468	7565
Probably not	824	604	361	160	1949
Probably yes	725	448	426	218	1817
Definitely yes	411	135	227	231	1004
Total	6976	2426	1856	1077	12335

Source: Own elaboration based on the GGS Wave 1 for Bulgaria, Germany, France, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic (DOI: 10.17026/dans-z5z-xn8g)

Table 2. Mobility intentions in Wave 1, by country in %

Country	Intention to move within the next 3 years				Total
	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably yes	Definitely yes	
Bulgaria	64.61	19.17	12.35	3.87	100.00
Germany	69.41	13.77	8.63	8.20	100.00
France	60.29	9.79	13.74	16.17	100.00
Lithuania	61.28	21.68	12.12	4.92	100.00
Czech Republic	67.07	17.38	9.65	5.91	100.00
Total	64.51	16.53	11.37	7.59	100.00

Source: Own elaboration based on the GGS Wave 1 for Bulgaria, Germany, France, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic (DOI: 10.17026/dans-z5z-xn8g)

Table 3. Fertility intentions in Wave 1, by country in %

Country	Intention to have a child during next 3 years				Total
	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably yes	Definitely yes	
Bulgaria	57.36	18.34	17.90	6.40	100.00
Germany	68.97	14.13	9.38	7.52	100.00
France	63.46	9.57	14.16	12.80	100.00
Lithuania	50.57	28.44	16.86	4.13	100.00
Czech Republic	58.13	19.90	13.82	8.14	100.00
Total	59.09	18.29	15.00	7.62	100.00

Source: Own elaboration based on the GGS Wave 1 for Bulgaria, Germany, France, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic (DOI: 10.17026/dans-z5z-xn8g)

Table 4. Co-occurrence of mobility between waves and births between waves

Mobility	Birth		
	No	Yes	Total
No	21374	549	21923
Yes	2471	150	2621
Total	23845	699	24544

Source: Own elaboration based on the GGS Wave 1 and Wave 2 for Bulgaria, Germany, France, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic (DOIs: 10.17026/dans-z5z-xn8g, 10.17026/dans-xm6-a262)

Table 5. Co-occurrence of birth and mobility changes, by country in %

Country	Type of changes				Total
	No changes	Only mobility	Only birth	Mobility and birth	
Bulgaria	94.41	3.44	1.95	0.20	100.00
Germany	87.79	9.21	2.17	0.84	100.00
France	74.71	23.17	1.12	0.99	100.00
Lithuania	90.53	6.33	2.49	0.65	100.00
Czech Republic	87.77	6.16	5.30	0.76	100.00
Total	87.08	10.07	2.24	0.61	100.00

Source: Own elaboration based on the GGS Wave 1 and Wave 2 for Bulgaria, Germany, France, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic (DOIs: 10.17026/dans-z5z-xn8g, 10.17026/dans-xm6-a262)

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