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The Family Revolution

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It is not easy to explain what has happened so that we have experienced a decline in fertility that has been the fastest, longest and the most intense decline that has ever happened in history. To the point that 'The Economist' has released a report announcing a precise year in which several countries are going to be extinguished unless there is a radical reverse the trend. This long reduction in the number of births has been called the "demographic winter".

The urgency to understand what is happening is incredibly high, since the consequences of this demographic winter are increasingly serious and are strongly disrupting our societies.

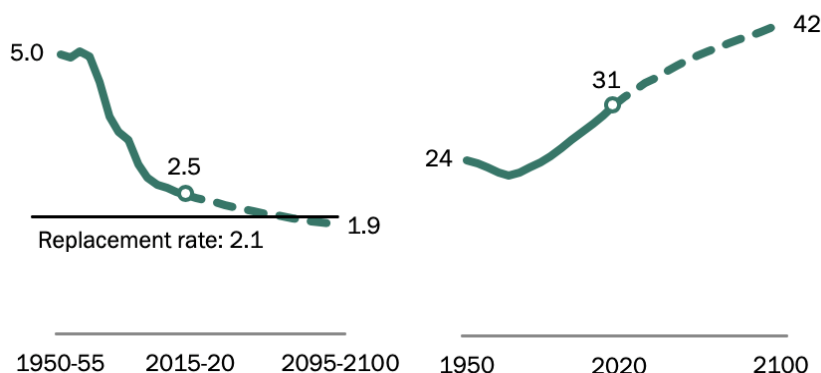
As our welfare system is based on the replacement of generations, it is a matter of mathematics to figure out when a system goes bankrupt in which the number of passive classes is steadily increasing and the number of workers to finance them is progressively declining. The result is a growing impoverishment of society, which already affects future generations, particularly our children.



Global fertility is falling as the world is aging

Number of live births per woman (total fertility rate)

Median age of the world population



Note: The replacement rate is the number of births per woman required to maintain a population at a constant size.

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2019."

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Why are there so few children in the world and why are large families already almost a group at risk of extinction? This question could also be raised in another way: Are fewer and fewer children born because we have really decided not to "want" to have them, or does it simply happen that we "cannot" have them? Although this is one of the most serious questions that we should face right now to define strategies and action plans, unfortunately it seems to be an issue that has not been given enough attention to on the public agenda. Perhaps because its effects are slow and always come in the medium and long term, and politicians are especially interested in the results before next elections. Fortunately, this demographic summit and the family policies that Hungary is carrying out are an example of how things can change. *

We are going to review briefly what may have been the causes that have formed that explosive cocktail of the demographic winter.

The high cost of housing is one of them. This has even changed the definition of marriage, as a joke but very real, which now becomes a union for ever for the sake of paying off the mortgage. This is one of the reasons for the increasing delay in so many countries to form new households.

The globalization could be another one. The support network that has always been the family, nowadays many people are geographically far away from it, and it is an important factor to take into attention when it is time to have a child. In addition, young people who want to get a job should now compete not only with residents of their own city, but also with the inhabitants of their entire country and even with other countries. This greater competitiveness on the labour market means that companies can significantly reduce wages (they will always have candidates), and therefore we have witnessed a greater precariousness of young people's work.

In Spain we call it junk contracts, with a great temporality and very low salaries. In order to get a good job, you have now to spend more years than before doing graduate studies, specialization courses, etc.

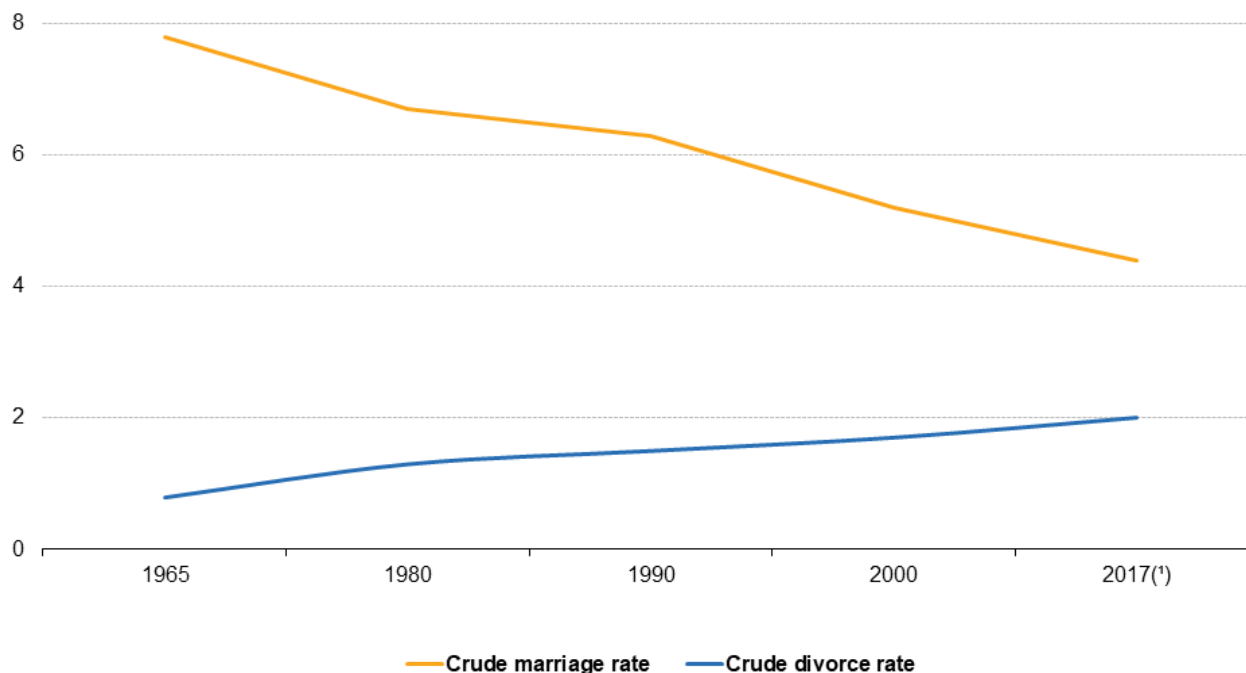
With a distant family network to support you, low salaries, precarious jobs, the need of more years to study, and a very high cost of housing, how can a young person consider forming a new family in such conditions like that in their twenties?

Therefore, another response might be that we have fewer children because the social model in which we currently live practically "forces" us not to have

them, or to have them less and much later than before. The data shows, for example, that the number of marriages (that is, the commitment to form a stable home with a projection of the future) is declining and the age of marriage is increasing worldwide, and therefore the average age of access to motherhood, for example, in Spain, is today more than thirty-two years. How to be a large family at that age? If the ideal biological age to have children is between the ages of twenty and thirty, we are now beginning to have them in their mid-thirties. That is the reason why, in Spain, for exam-

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Crude marriage and divorce rates, EU-28, 1965–2017 (per 1 000 inhabitants)



Note the change in time interval on the x-axis. Up to 1990: excluding French overseas departments
(*) Crude divorce rate 2017: estimate based on 26 countries (France not available)
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: demo_nind and demo_ndivind)

ple, the number of international adoptions and, above all, the number of artificial reproduction clinics has been significantly increasing.

Therefore, we must add another one. A few years ago, in Brussels, in an event on family policies, I intervened to ask for the inclusion of the family perspective into the policies of the European Union. A representative of the Government of a country wanted to answer my question and replied that the family did not exist for public policies because the only ones who had rights are individuals. Taking into account that mentality, nowadays a worker is only an individual whose productivity is the only interesting. His family dimension does not exist.

With this model of society, why have children if we are not going to have time to care of them? We do not have enough time to take care of our family. Perhaps this is one of the main reasons for the increased rate of school failure, violence or youth addictions, or the raise in divorce rates. We do not have time; time to spend with our partner, time to live together as a family, time to get to know our children well and give each one the time they need, time to interact with the school and work together with them; time to go out and have fun together, or time to chat with the whole family at the dinner table.

The massive involvement of women in the educational world and therefore also in the labour market throughout the twentieth century has been a factor that has had a strong impact on families.

It is clear that the movement for equality in the rights of women and men, and for their full incorporation into all areas of society has been a great step forward, very positive. But the mismatch occurs when the family dimension is not considered, and motherhood becomes a reason for penalization of women. Experts confirm that true discrimination against women, for example in wages, arises not only because they are a woman, but begins with the onset of motherhood, which is almost like a real 'disease' for the business world. And that is a factor to consider when deciding to have children.



For many of these reasons, having a large family today is a revolutionary action, it becomes an "anti-system" action.

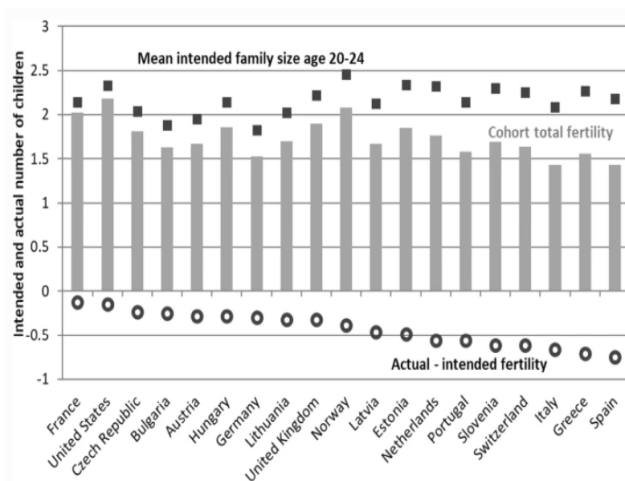
A while ago I saw a report on television that amazed me. It was called "Use, throw, buy" and it was about programmed obsolescence. It began with a light bulb that since the nineteenth century has still lit in a fire station in the United States, and how a consumer society was based on things that had lasted little and had changed a lot. It is what we can call 'Ikea culture'. Time ago the furniture, let's think about our grandparents, they were solid, designed to last a long time. Now the furniture is fragile, designed to change a lot in life. That culture was very well defined by the philosopher Zygmunt Bauman with his theory about liquid society,

which he then expanded with another essay on liquid love. That culture of mass consumption, always changing, has been transmitted to personal relationships, and we have moved from a society based on stable and solid links to another, in which we must change many times for something more attractive, newer, without any commitments to nothing or any-

one for a long time.

All these factors, which I have mentioned very briefly and superficially, if we put them together and shake them, they can possibly give us some explanation of the cocktail of reasons for the demographic winter.

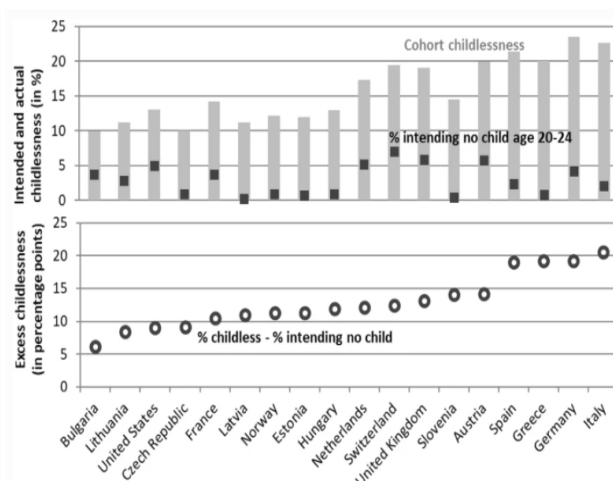
At the beginning we wondered if we didn't have children because we didn't want to or because we couldn't. All the surveys show that people would like to have more children than they actually have, that there is a gap between the number of children desired and those who eventually will be born. But what we have also observed is that the number of children desired is smaller and smaller with each survey. In other words that a person starts with fewer children



Sources for intentions: Fertility and Family Surveys, Onderzoek Gezinsoorming, CPC General Household Survey time series; for cohort total fertility: Human Fertility Database, national statistical offices or provided by Tomáš Sobotka. Interpretation: in Austria, women born in the early 1970s intended to have 1.95 children but only had 1.67 on average. Actual family size was thus lower than intended family size by 0.28 children on average, so the size of the gap was 0.28 children per woman

Mean intended family size at age 20–24, completed cohort fertility rate at age 40–42, and fertility gap.

Source: *Fertility Intentions and Completed Fertility in Europe and the United States: A Cohort Approach*. *Popul Res Policy Rev* 38, 507–535 (2019).



Sources like in Fig. 1; in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Greece levels of childlessness were extrapolated based on the existing data. Interpretation: in Austria, 5.8% of women born in the early 1970s intended to remain childless, but on average 19.9% remained childless. The share of women eventually childless was thus larger than the share originally intending not to have children, exceeding it by 14.1 percentage points

Share of women intending not to have children at age 20–24, share not having children at age 40–42, and excess childlessness.

because the social model we live in, quickly described earlier, means that one cannot "have" the desired children; but as this model does not change and remains unchanged over time, in the end young people lose hope of having more children, and they prefer to invest resources and opportunities in another way.

For many of these reasons, the creation of a large family today is a revolutionary action, it becomes an "anti-system" action.

It is not easy to correct the course. We must respond to the change in current social model to another by creating family-friendly environments that facilitate family life. If in the first half of the twentieth century we saw the struggle for women, the feminism, to take its place in society, since it was a socially ignored dimension; if in the second half of the last century we saw how respect for the environment, ecology, was another dimension that was incorporated into our social model, because ignoring it seriously threatened our future, and today nobody discusses its place in our society, the new twenty-first century, ours, must recover the family dimension and incorporate it into all social spheres. If we had the revolution of feminism, and the ecological revolution, now we urgently need the family revolution.

The new twenty-first century, ours, must recover the family dimension and incorporate it into all social spheres. If we had the revolution of feminism, and the ecological revolution, now we need urgently the family revolution.

When we realize that there is a great challenge ahead, and the difficulties in achieving a truly family-friendly society, we can feel discouraged, and think: "And what can I do?" Events such as this Demographic Summit to reflect and propose the changes we need, as well as the mobilization of

civil society through family associations, are fundamental and very important to 'create' culture and bring about the transformation of society. It is about bringing to the world the conviction that having children, forming a family, is not only an act of hope, but the best possible investment, not only from a economic

point of view, but above all cultural, transmission of values, care of people, education of the one who is the human capital of our countries, and the reason for personal happiness.

We are the families with the future in our hands and the power to change it. That is why we like to say that, in the face of demographic winter, large families are the spring. We are already doing now this 'family revolution'. As the Portuguese Fernando Castro told us many times (he was the first president of the European Confederation of Large Families, the father of thirteen children who died of cancer at an early age), "large families are not the problem, we are the solution."

* Speech given on occasion of the 3rd. Budapest Demographic Summit, 5-6 September 2019