NONMARITAL BIRTHS IN ROMANIA VERSUS OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES - A FEW CONSIDERATIONS

TRAIAN ROTARIU[*]

ABSTRACT. This study continues the author's previous attempts to analyse and understand the significance of the phenomenon of nonmarital births in European societies today. Rather than performing mostly on Romanian data as in previous research, this time an attempt is being made to obtain a broader picture of the phenomenon by processing information about European Union countries. The aim is to create a typology of these populations in relation to the phenomenon of nonmarital births by taking into account three key dimensions: the intensity, the tempo and the dynamics of the phenomenon, with special emphasis on Romania's place within these countries. The study innovates on the analysis of the phenomenon in that, in addition to the frequently used *proportion of nonmarital births*, a relative indicator, it introduces *a rate of nonmarital births*, which is an absolute indicator, calculated as a part of the total fertility rate (TFR), allotted to births outside marriage.

Keywords: population, fertility, nonmarital births, Romania, the European Union

Introduction

The problem of nonmarital births has been addressed in my work both separately (Rotariu, 2009a) and in the context of discussions on demographic behaviour change in the second half of last century, with emphasis on the way they have been explained by a culturalist paradigm circulated under the improper label of the "second demographic transition" (Rotariu, 2006a, 2006b, 2009b). These analyses were based on available demographic information on Romania, the situation of other countries being raised only in general terms without providing detailed information on what was happening beyond our borders. This approach, however, has the disadvantage that it eventually leads to a sort of singularisation of the analysed country's situation, which is seen as different (even opposite) from that of other countries (of the Western civilisation, in this case) rather than as one that falls within a range of situations, showing similarities and differences with other nations.

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[*] Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, e-mail: trotariu@socasis.ubbcluj.ro

Essentially, our studies showed that the most frequently cited culturalist model,[1] which contains the idea of the profound change of major aspects in the demographic behaviour pattern illustrated particularly by northern and north-western European countries, only applies to a very small scale to Romania's population, meaning that only some of its elements are fully reflected while the others are represented to a lesser degree. Thus, from the six most important demographic changes highlighted in the 1960s:

  i. reduced fertility,
  ii. high percentage of nonmarital births,
  iii. high mean age of mothers at birth,
  iv. low nuptiality,
  v. high proportion of cohabiting couples,
  vi. increased divortiality,

only the first element is fully developed in Romania. The others are either developing or, as in the case of divortiality, have not undergone any significant changes since the 1980s. This lead me to the assumption[2] that actually *these tendencies can manifest independently and do not necessarily derive from a unique cause, namely the adoption of a postmodern value system.*

On the whole, I have focussed mainly on the (very low) fertility level, which is the most important element, I would say essential or, in any event, the starting point of most of the explanatory attempts that would include gradually the other issues mentioned above. My research shows that Romania is a pioneer in the field, being since the mid-1960s in the world top ranking lowest fertility countries. As only the interventions of the dictatorial regime kept the indicator value above the replacement level of generations, there were obvious expectations that our country quickly catch up with the other European countries, which had kept evolving in the absence of such a totalitarian regime. As it is known, only a few years passed after the fall of the totalitarian regime and this happened without researchers being able to acknowledge a dramatic change in the Romanians' value system, which would explain such behavior modification.

In short, my central idea is that the *decrease of fertility levels to 1.2 - 1.4 children per woman is a fact that can be explained without invoking the postmodern value system, supposedly its generator.* In fact, as early as the 1950s, the great French demographer Alfred Sauvy predicted such a possibility during the burgeoning baby boom period, seeing it as probable on condition a cheap and easy to use contraceptive appears. It is no accident that the generalised use of the contraceptive pill in the mid-1960s coincided with the beginning of massive changes in the level and tempo of fertility in Western countries.

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[1] See, for example, regarding the contents and the birth of the theory of the second demographic transition, Van de Kaa (2002) and Surkin and Lesthaeghe (2003).

[2] My position is summarised in the *Introduction* to the recent volume of demographic texts, published by Polirom Publishing House (Rotariu, 2010: 13).

On the other hand, some aspects, such as the proportion of nonmarital births, have evolved in Romania on a trend that seemed to bring us closer to the Western states. Yet, as I have always said at least with respect to this phenomenon, the people contributing to its development after 1990 are not those that appear to be carriers of postmodern values, as such births are largely unwanted and products of very young women with a low level of education, located mostly in the countryside, in poor areas, of Rroma etnicity etc. Moreover, the trend was broken at one time and the process seems to have stopped after a maximum of 29.4% of total live births, achieved in 2004. Indeed, in subsequent years the following percentages were recorded: 2005 - 28.5%, 2006 - 29.0%, 2007 - 26.7%, 2008 - 27.4%, with a quasi-stationary level at around 28%. This was happening while, as we shall see, in many EU countries the phenomenon is experiencing a rapid growth in the last decade.

My interpretation was and remains that *most of the growth after 1989 is due to persons characterised by a pre-modern system of values*, knowing that in our area cultural modernisation was incomplete and there always have been a significant number of nonmarital births ("love children") that counted as an almost acceptable behaviour (at least in some communities) and not as a shameful one, as the behaviour was deemed in Western countries. Obviously, the lack of clear regulations after the fall of the old regime favoured the expansion of this behaviour mostly in cultural areas in which it had always occurred. Yet, such an extension can not go so far as the adoption of the other model and it is natural that at some point it should stop. On the other hand, this does not mean that in Romania there are no behaviours based on postmodern values (such as active women giving birth without wanting to get married or by children born to couples living in postmodern forms of cohabitation similar to those in the West, and not in the traditional common-law marriage), but, as seen in my previous analyses, this process is still in an early stage and its contribution to nonmarital births is modest.

The present inquiry: data and interpretation

In the present study, which is mostly descriptive, I intend to place Romania among the EU member countries in terms of out-of-wedlock births. This will help us discover a certain number of Romanian features that can be found in neighbouring countries and, even more importantly, that each country has its own specificities, thus being difficult to highlight a general trend towards a form given by a few representatives of the above mentioned "pure" theoretical model. Furthermore, the data will show that the issue of children born outside marriage, everywhere in Europe should take into account the contribution of the most deprived groups who often live a pre-modern lifestyle. This finding is

supported by results of other research. Thus, in a slightly outdated document (INED, 2000) it is said that despite the spread of nonmarital births in all walks of life (in parallel with widespread cohabitation), they remain more frequent "in popular milieus." In an article dating roughly from the same period (Masuy-Stroobant, 2002), the author emphasises several differences between those born within and outside the institution of marriage in Belgium, finding clear inequalities in relation with the latter, which obviously arise from social inequalities in which children are born and live.

An ample documentation would no doubt be necessary to describe in detail the situation of each country, which is beyond my capabilities of individual researcher. Therefore, I will limit my study to the processing and analysis of statistical data on EU countries[3], available on the EUROSTAT site. In spite of some lacunary information, the European institution offers for the recent period the evolution of the intensity of nonmarital births and the change in their tempo in comparison with what used to be called "legitimate" births. An informed reading of these figures can highlight various types of situations related to statistics and structure and also to data dynamics/ trend.

Firstly, Table 1 shows some basic data[4] that represent a starting point for an overall view of the intensity of nonmarital fertility within the general fertility context of the analysed countries. As can be seen, there is information on the *current fertility rates*, both for all births and separately for births outside the marriage[5], aiming to become a most reliable intensity measure instrument. The use of these rates represents a methodological innovation because we chose not to limit our approach to the share of nonmarital births out of the total number of births (as do most studies). Indeed, it is easy to understand that the share of these births is only a *relative indicator*, as it depends on the intensity of all births whereas the nonmarital fertility rate is an *absolute indicator* because it measures only the intensity of births outside the marriage, regardless of fertility within marriage.

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[3] I shall present comparative data only for 24 out of the 27 EU countries because the figures I would have to use in various detailed analyses are too small for the other three (Cyprus, Luxembourg, and Malta); in a similar vein, I am going to use only data for "metropolitan France" and not those for its "overseas territories."

[4] Concerning data in Table 1, mention should be made that at the moment of this analysis, the latest data on EUROSTAT site were from 2008, but not all countries had updated so actually I used the most recent figures for each country.

[5] The fertility rate of nonmarital births is calculated similarly to the total fertility rate, by taking into consideration only the children born outside the marriage. Thus, the number of nonmarital births by women with age x in a given year is divided by the total number of women aged x. This way we obtain rates of the second kind for each age ranging between 15 and 49. The mentioned indicator is the sum of these rates. Evidently, the rate of births within marriage is represented by the difference between the TFR and the nonmarital fertiliy rate; in other words, the TFR can be subdivided into two components, corresponding to the two types of births.

Table 1.

Synthetic table of general fertility and the intensity of nonmarital births for 24 EU countries in 2008

Country	Total fertility rate (TFR)	Nonmarital fertility rate (NMFR)	Share of NMFR in TFR (%)	Share of nonmarital births in total births (%)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)=[(3)/(2)]x100	(5)
Austria	1.41	0.55	39.2	38.8
Belgium*	1.82/1.76	0.70	39.7	39.4
Bulgaria	1.48	0.76	52.0	51.1
Czech Republic	1.50	0.57	37.8	36.3
Denmark	1.89	0.89	47.2	46.2
Estonia	1.66	0.97	58.6	59.0
Finland	1.85	0.75	40.7	40.7
France	2.00	1.03	51.7	51.6
Germany	1.38	0.44	32.3	32.1
Greece	1.51	0.10	6.6	5.9
Hungary	1.35	0.55	41.1	39.5
Ireland**	2.10/1.93	0.62	32.4	32.7
Italy***	1.41/1.37	0.25	18.6	17.7
Latvia	1.45	0.61	42.6	43.1
Lithuania	1.47	0.41	27.9	28.5
Netherlands	1.77	0.73	41.4	41.2
Poland	1.39	0.28	20.1	19.9
Portugal	1.37	0.51	37.5	36.2
Romania	1.35	0.38	28.1	27.4
Slovakia	1.32	0.41	30.9	30.1
Slovenia	1.53	0.81	53.1	52.8
Spain	1.46	0.49	33.8	31.7
Sweden	1.91	1.05	55.0	55.7
United Kingdom**	1.94/1.85	0.81	44.1	43.7

Note: *) 2005; **) 2006; ***) 2007 are years for which the figures in columns 3-5 and the second figure on the second column are valid, the latter being used to calculate the share in column 4 for the respective countries.

In order to see more clearly the difference between the two indicators, namely between the proportion of nonmarital births and their rate, the 24 countries can be ranged according to their values. Two distributions are obtained, which obviously will not be very different, but not identical either. Here are the two hierarchies, as shown in Table 2, indicating in ascending order of values, the rank of each country based first on the nonmarital rate and then on the percentage of nonmarital births.

Table 2.

**The ascending ranking of countries according to the rate (1)
and the percentage (2) of nonmarital births**

Ascending ranking of countries	Nonmarital birth rate	Percentage of nonmarital birth
	(1)	(2)
Greece	1	1
Italy	2	2
Poland	3	3
Romania	4	4
Slovakia	5	6
Lithuania	6	5
Germany	7	8
Spain	8	7
Portugal	9	10
Hungary	10	14
Austria	11	12
Czech Rep.	12	11
Latvia	13	17
Ireland	14	9
Belgium	15	13
Netherlands	16	16
Finland	17	15
Bulgaria	18	20
Slovenia	19	22
United Kingdom	20	18
Denmark	21	19
Estonia	22	24
France	23	21
Sweden	24	23

It can be noticed that only the first four countries and then the Netherlands maintain their position in the two rankings. There are also several pairs of countries that retain their neighbouring positions in both hierarchies but switch their places. Finally, there are others that move at least two positions from one ranking to the other. The latter situations seem to me the most attention-grabbing and it should be interesting to see which countries have a lower rank according to the first indicator (lower intensity of nonmarital fertility) and a higher one according to the second (higher percentage of nonmarital births) and vice versa. In the first category, with a lower rate, we can notice Hungary, Latvia, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Estonia whereas in the second, Ireland, Belgium, Finland, United Kingdom, Denmark and France. The explanation is simple: the

first have a lower overall fertility than the latter, and therefore, *ceteris paribus*, will have fewer births out of wedlock reported to a woman at the same percentage of nonmarital births or, conversely, will have a higher percentage of nonmarital births, for the same average number of children born out of wedlock by one woman. The most glaring inconsistency of positions according to the two criteria are manifested in the case of Ireland, a country which ranks a modest place 9 according to the percentage of nonmarital births while it reaches a much higher synthetic indicator: the 14th position.

The effects of this kind help us understand that, even if not very broad, the range of the general fertility in Europe in recent years shows a certain diversity and the differences highlighted in Table 1 can count significantly in some situations like the one contemplated here, not to mention its application to other more important aspects such as reproduction. Let us note that, in terms of fertility levels, our country ranks low among the 24 European countries analysed, namely position 23, with Slovakia on the last position. It is true that, unlike western and northern countries, with a fertility much closer to 2 children per woman, other countries such as Germany, Hungary, Poland and Portugal follow Romania closely, with a very low fertility level, below 1.4 children per woman whereas just above are the other countries in Eastern, Central and Southern Europe. What is still to be noted is that in recent years European countries have shown a slight increase in fertility, both in the case of those with very low levels (in 1999, the Czech Republic had 1.13, Spain 1.20, Italy 1.23, Latvia 1.18, Slovenia, 1.21) and in the case of those with over 1.5 children (in the table, the figures for the latter climb from 1.75 for France in 1997, 1.90 for Ireland in 2000, 1.72 for Finland and Denmark in 2002, etc.).This trend - which may be a fleeting episode occurred after ending a period of deferment of marriage, when the deferred recovered, but which, equally well, can mean the beginning of a longer upward trajectory - is not visible in Romania, because for more than 15 years annual fertility has maintained around 1.3 children per woman.

Let us return to the main aspect of the present study, namely the intensity of nonmarital births. If in the case of fertility, differences between European countries are still relatively small (compared with what still happens in other parts of the world), the intensity of births outside marriage profoundly distinguishes European societies. Indeed, the latest available data show a change in the proportion of nonmarital births from 5.9% in Greece to 59.0% in Estonia and a variation rate of these births from 0.10 children per woman in Greece to 1.05 in Sweden, so that no matter how we measure intensity, it varies on a scale from 1 to 10.

The value of 0.38 children per woman and a share of 27.4% undoubtedly situates Romania within the group – quite varied in itself – of the countries with a low intensity of births outside marriage, this phenomenon being more

spead in Romania than in Greece, Italy, and Poland and a little less than in some other countries such as Lithuania, Slovakia etc. More clearly, leaving aside Greece, with a very exceptional situation among the countries analysed, then Italy and Poland, also with lower values, Romania is part of a group of countries where nonmarital fertility is approaching 0.4 and is not higher than 0.5 children per woman while the proportion of births outside marriage is around 30%, namely Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Spain. In contrast, the situation is more complicated if we consider the two parameters simultaneously because, as shown above, they may generate different rankings, especially in this area. Indeed, Estonia, Sweden, Slovenia, France and Bulgaria have a higher than 50% share of out-of-wedlock births, whereas Sweden, France, Estonia, Denmark and the United Kingdom have the five largest values of the fertility rate, the sequence being in descending order in both cases. Obviously, it is hard to find a factor to account for these rankings, since neither geographical location on a west-east or a north-south axis nor the religious dimension or the membership/non-membership in the former communist bloc explains these differences. Most likely we are dealing with an interaction of numerous factors, which ultimately gives each country its specific profile.

Finally, mention should be made that in Table 1, we pointed out in the fourth column, the share (in percentage) of the nonmarital rate in relation to the total fertility rate. This indicator is theoretically better than the one in the last column, namely the share of nonmarital births but, because their values are close, I will not comment on their variations and I will not introduce it in other analyses, taking also into account the fact that the percentage of births outside marriage is a better known and more frequently used indicator.

Beside the intensity with which nonmarital births occur in populations at a given time, a second dimension of the phenomenon requires careful study, which is the timing of births, i.e. how births are distributed in relation to the ages of those involved (particularly women). Some of the tempo indicators are highlighted in Table 3. We shall take a brief look at them and then visualize distributions for certain countries by graphs and charts.

Concerning nonmarital births, Table 3 shows a few significant indicators: mean[6] age, median age and proportion of births for women under 20 years old and those for women aged 25 upwards. It should be understood that the interpretation of these data is not very simple because we need to keep in mind that there are (still) large differences between European countries in relation to birth tempo as a whole, differences which shall be reflected in the timing of nonmarital births. In other words, it would be interesting to compare countries using only differences of tempo of nonmarital births, which *do not originate*

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[6] Mention should be made that all mean ages at childbirth are the rough figures and not the standard. The differences between these types of values are minor and the use of one or another does not influence the results of our analysis.

from a general pattern of births. Such a thing is technically difficult to achieve and I shall use only a cursory analysis, which is possible by comparing the mean age for nonmarital births either with that calculated for all births, or with that performed for marital births. These latter two values appear in columns 2-3 while the 5th column highlights differences between the mean maternal age within and outside marriage.

Table 3.

Synthetic table of the timing of nonmarital births for EU countries in 2008

Country	Mean age of mother at birth of child				Median age for extra-marital births	% of nonmarital births of mothers aged under 20	% of nonmarital births of mothers aged 25 and above
	Total	Marital births	Extra-marital births	Difference between marital and non-marital births			
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Austria	29.9	30.6	28.7	1.9	28.4	6.8	71.6
Belgium*	29.6	30.2	28.7	1.5	28.5	5.4	73.9
Bulgaria	26.9	28.6	25.3	3.3	24.7	22.0	48.1
Czech Republic	29.7	30.5	28.2	2.3	28.4	7.4	69.9
Denmark	30.9	32.0	29.6	2.4	29.4	3.1	79.3
Estonia	28.6	30.0	27.6	2.4	27.2	9.4	64.3
Finland	30.1	31.1	28.6	2.5	28.2	4.9	70.7
France	30.1	31.1	29.1	2.0	28.8	4.3	75.4
Germany	30.4	31.3	28.3	3.0	27.9	8.4	67.3
Greece	30.7	30.9	27.2	3.7	26.4	20.0	56.2
Hungary	29.3	30.5	27.5	3.0	27.6	13.3	63.1
Ireland**	31.1	33.0	27.2	5.8	26.4	10.1	59.4
Italy***	31.9	32.1	30.6	1.5	31.0	5.9	79.0
Latvia	27.8	29.0	26.3	2.7	25.3	14.6	51.8
Lithuania	28.0	28.5	26.7	1.8	25.9	14.6	54.9
Netherlands	31.1	31.5	30.4	1.1	30.5	2.9	82.7
Poland	28.2	28.8	25.9	2.9	25.0	16.6	49.8
Portugal	30.2	31.2	28.3	2.9	28.3	10.3	66.9
Romania	27.1	28.2	24.5	3.7	23.0	29.5	40.2
Slovakia	28.3	29.3	26.0	3.3	25.3	18.4	51.8
Slovenia	30.1	30.9	29.3	1.6	29.2	2.0	81.8
Spain	31.4	32.3	29.6	2.7	29.9	7.1	74.6
Sweden	30.8	31.7	30.1	1.6	30.0	2.6	81.1
United Kingdom**	29.5	31.4	26.9	4.5	25.9	14.5	55.1

Note: *) 2005; **) 2006; ***) 2007 are the years for which country figures in columns 2-8 are valid.

The similarity between the two models of births (within and outside marriage) is immediately visible, in the sense that there is a consistent variation between the mean age at birth of married and unmarried mothers, which is confirmed by a 0.76 correlation coefficient (Pearson) for the 24 countries. However, in spite of its being rather high, the coefficient indicates that the nonmarital births model explains only about 50% of the variance of the mean age values for the group.

Even if it does not solve the problem suggested above, calculating the difference between the mean ages of married and unmarried mothers helps us advance towards a better understanding of the issue. All differences are positive, pointing to the fact that unmarried new mothers from one country are younger than their married counterparts in the same country. It is interesting that these differences are significant, ranging from 1.1 years in the Netherlands to 5.8 years in Ireland. An important implication attributable to this difference could be that the small variation may mean that nonmarital births follow a related logic with the marital births (i.e. they are produced by cohabiting women or, in the case of single women, they have planned it similarly to the married ones). This reasoning is supported by the fact that, besides the Netherlands, among countries with the smallest differences are countries such as Sweden, France, Belgium, Austria, and Slovenia, where such a lifepattern is assumed to be widespread. Moreover, it is apparent that there is a very close negative correlation of the difference size with the mean age of married mothers (-0.61), which means that the differences decrease with the increase of maternal age, a phenomenon that also characterises countries of the kind mentioned above.

Interestingly, however, there are important exceptions to this pattern. For example, island countries such Ireland and Britain, show the largest differences, although both have a pattern of late childbearing. Yet, this is the only similarity because, when considering the intensity of nonmarital births, then the United Kingdom "is ahead" by about ten points in terms of their percentage and by 0.2 children, according to their rate. On the other hand, Italy is an interesting case, which is similar to Ireland regarding the chidbearing age of married women but shows a very small difference, approaching that of the Netherlands, from which it is different in terms of the share of nonmarital births.

Table 4 shows our attempt to group countries according to the mean age at birth (all births) and to the difference between mean ages for the two types of births; I obtained this classification by compressing the values of each variable into three classes, with the limits highlighted in the table. The tendency mentioned above is evident along with the diversity of situations, respectively the deviations from the norm, which leaves no box empty, with at least a case for each.

Taking into consideration Romania's situation, we notice that the age difference between the two categories of mothers places our country among the countries with high values of the indicator, which is another sign of its being far from the postmodern model because a significant difference in age means that

married women have different patterns of births, as a result of their different social status, an idea which I clearly pointed out in my previous studies. Generally, in Romania births occur earlier than in most European countries, which gives us a typical position, along with Bulgaria, in the lower left box in Table 4. The difference to our neighbors south of the Danube is that the intensity of the phenomenon is much higher (double, in terms of rate) in Bulgaria.

Table 4.

EU countries grouped according to the mean age of mothers at childbearing and the difference between the mean ages of women giving birth within and outside of marriage

Age difference: marital – nonmarital births	Mean age of mothers at childbearing (years)		
	Low(<29.5)	Medium (29.5-30.5)	High (over 30.5)
Low (< 2 years)	Lithuania	Belgium Austria Slovenia	Sweden Netherlands Italy
Medium (2.0-2.9 years)	Latvia Poland Estonia	Czech Republic Finland France Portugal	Denmark Spain
High (3 years and above)	Bulgaria Romania Slovakia Hungary	United Kingdom Germany	Greece Ireland

On the other hand, it should be noted that Romania's and Bulgaria's place within the rubric of large differences situates us not only among countries with overall low mean age at birth. As exemplified above - and as can be seen clearly from the table – this category also includes countries with average middle-aged new mothers (Great Britain, Germany) and even with high mean age (Greece and Ireland), which means that adopting the model of late childbearing can be accomplished even in the cases where a component of out-of-wedlock births subsists distinctly (as model) from marital births.

The data on the mean values used for the classification in Table 4 can be supplemented with those on the median age and the percentages for age thresholds listed in Table 3. The median value shows up to what age half of the nonmarital births occur while the other columns show the percentage of unwed mothers below 20 years of age and from 25 upwards. Here, of course, differences between countries appear to be very spectacular: the median ranges from 23 in Romania to 31 in Italy; the percentage of nonmarital births by mothers under 20 years rises from 2.0% in Slovenia to 29.5% in Romania and those with mothers of at least 25 years, from 40.2% in Romania to 82.7% in the Netherlands.

These figures highlight the special situation of Romania concerning the tempo of nonmarital births. In the case of our country, we can notice the lowest mean age (24.5 years) of women who give birth outside marriage, the lowest median, the highest percentage of such births by women below 20 years and, correlated with it, the lowest percentage of women above 25 years. Thus, whereas in terms of intensity we come close to several EU countries, in terms of the age at which these births occur, we are by far champions of early births. This simply means that the Romanian pattern of nonmarital births is, of all countries surveyed, the farthest from the ideal model that says these births should occur as a behavior generated by the adoption of postmodern values.

A series of suggestive information derive from the comparison of distributions of nonmarital births represented in three graphs. The first shows *the share of nonmarital births for each childbearing age*, the second shows the *distribution of out-of-wedlock births by maternal age* at birth, with frequencies being expressed as a percentage of all births, in order to make comparisons between countries. The third and perhaps the most expressive shows *the value of nonmarital fertility rate at each age*. Interestingly, the first distribution shows that in all cases the curve starts at 15 years from high values (close to 100%) and decreases faster or slower; then, around 30 years, it starts to slightly rise again and ends in a plateau. For some countries, this shape of inverted J is sharper, whereas for others it is less pointed. Yet, all countries begin to manifest the highest frequencies of out-of-wedlock births at ages below 20, confirming the previous assumption that there are everywhere women subgroups for which this behavior has completely different reasons than those stated by the theory of postmodern values.

To sum up, the intensity of nonmarital births at each age is illustrated in Figures 1a, 2a and 3a, while their distribution by maternal age is illustrated in pair figures 1b, 2b and 3b. Figures 1c, 2c and 3c show the curves of nonmarital fertility rates. We chose to illustrate in graphic form only a few cases from those suggested in Table 3.

Firstly, Figures 1 present five out of the seven countries with late general births: three have small differences between the mean age of the two types of birth (the Netherlands, Sweden and Italy) and two have large differences (Greece and Ireland). The graphs in Figure 1a are very different from each other, drawing specific profiles for each country, which could hardly have been anticipated only by global indicators. However, the graph makes it clear that neither the five countries nor the two groups in Table 3 share common aspects. In contrast, the common aspect for each sub-category is visible in Figure 1b, which is built solely on tempo dates. Indeed, here the curves for Greece and Ireland have the maximum net more to the left than Sweden, the Netherlands and Italy. The situation is somewhat similar in Figure 1c, except that intensity places the curves at very different heights, with Greece and Italy very low, Ireland in the middle and the Netherlands and Sweden reaching very high rate values for certain ages. Therefore,

it means that in the first two countries, even though they share late births with the others, the category of women who give birth outside marriage will be more clearly differentiated from that of those giving birth within it, by a well-defined unequal age, which may hide differences in social status.
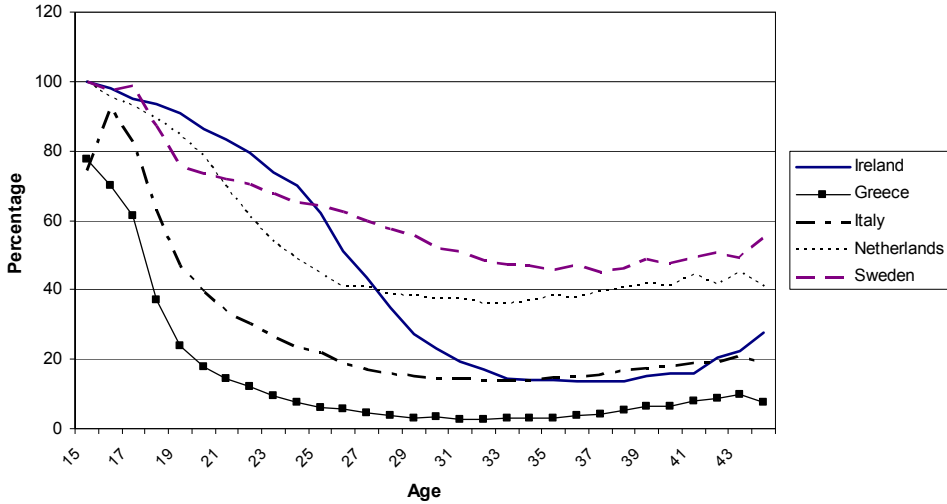

Figure 1a. The share of nonmarital births (%), by childbearing age, for five European countries with high mean age at birth
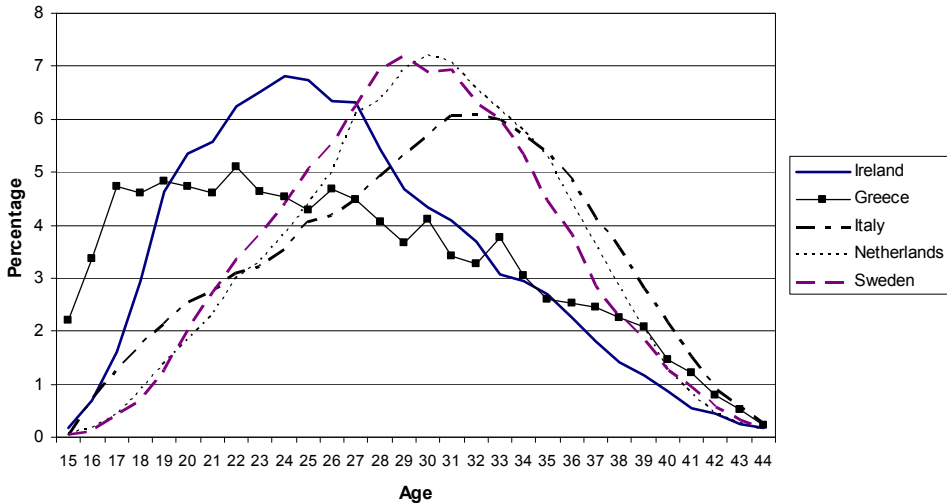

Figure 1b. Distribution by maternal age of nonmarital births (%) in five European countries with high mean age at birth
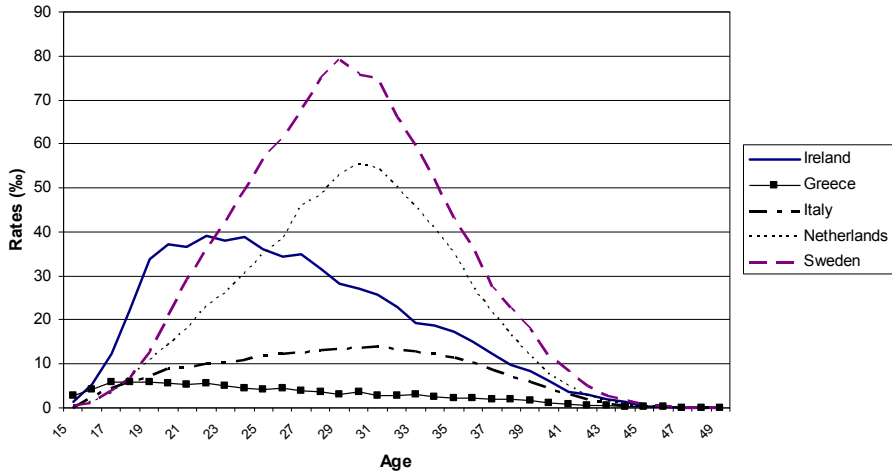
Figure 1c. Fertility rates by age (‰) in five European countries with high mean age at birth

Figures 2 show five countries that are placed on the last row of Table 4, namely with large differences between ages for marital and nonmarital births. Two of them, namely Greece and Ireland, were also represented in the previous graph in contrast to countries with low difference. This time, they are compared with three countries (Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia) with overall low age at birth. In Figure 2a, the diffrences of the curves are more related to their height
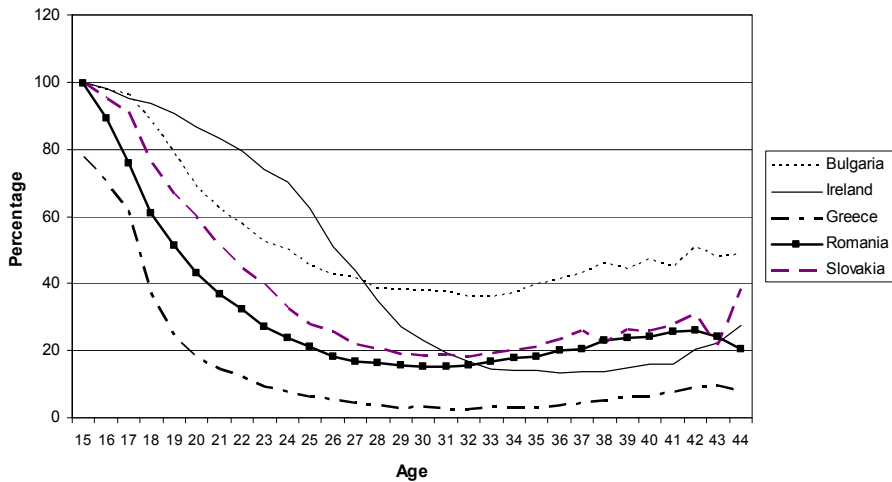
Figure 2a.The share of nonmarital births (%) for each childbearing age, for five EU countries with large difference between mean age at marital and nonmarital births

(showing the intensity of nonmarital births for each age) except Ireland that, similar with the previous case, has a slightly dissimilar shape. Next, in Figure 2b the differences in the curve shapes are less visible than in the precedent similar case, namely 1b. Again, Ireland slightly differs in that it has the frequency peak somewhat to the right. However, all five curves are strongly asymmetric, pointing to the left, Romania being the most obvious case of this kind. This finding is also reflected in Figure 2c, only now, as in the previous case, the height of the curves also marks the intensity of the phenomenon itself.
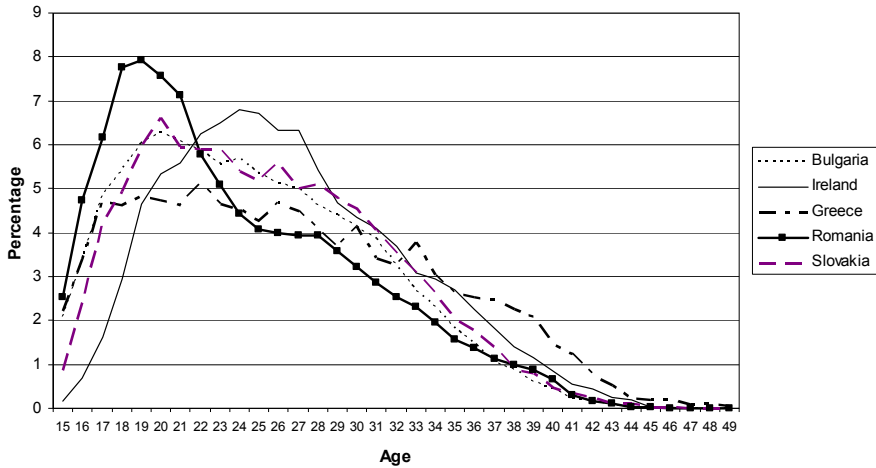
**Figure 2b. Distribution by maternal age of children born outside marriage (%)
for each childbearing age, for five EU countries with large difference
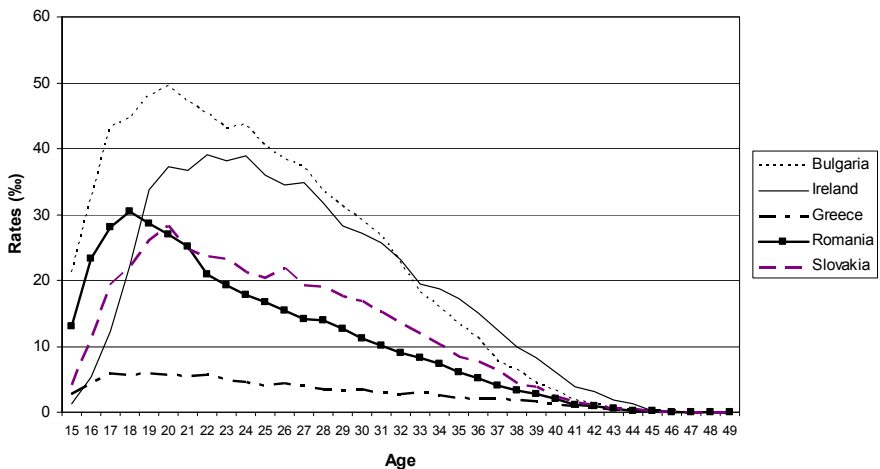in the mean age for marital and nonmarital births**

**Figure 2c. Fertility rates by age (‰) in five EU countries with large difference
between mean age for marital and nonmarital births**

In Figures 3 we have highlighted two contrasting situations, by choosing from Table 4 two countries in the bottom left corner (Bulgaria and Romania) and two in the upper right corner (the Netherlands and Sweden). Again the situation in terms of relative intensity create the basic features of Figure 3a, where Romania is clearly placed below the other three countries that have, as previously seen, a higher level of nonmarital births. On the other hand, in Figures 3b and 3c, the timing similarities approach Romania to Bulgaria (with early birth ages) and the Netherlands to Sweden (both with late birth ages). It should be noted, in this last figure, that there are shape and height distinctions between Bulgaria and Sweden, marking profound dissimilarities between these two countries that, seen exclusively from the perspective of the proportion of nonmarital births, share the same category, having similar high values (51% in the first case and 55.7% in the second).
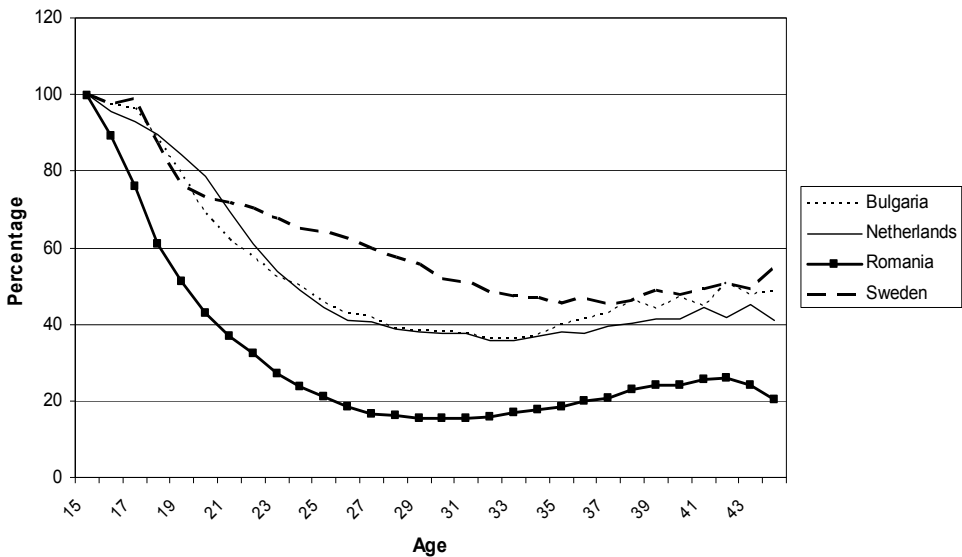

Figure 3a. The share of nonmarital births (%), for each childbearing age, for four EU countries in contrasting situations in terms of the mean maternal age and of age differences of women giving birth within and outside marriage
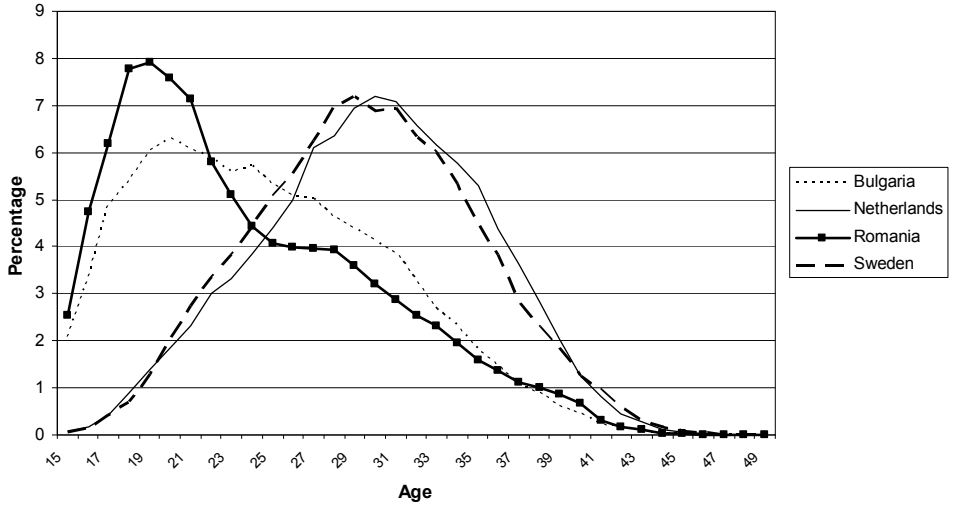
Figure 3b. Distribution of nonmarital births by maternal age (%) for each childbearing age, for four EU countries in contrasting situations in terms of the mean maternal age and of age differences of women giving birth within and outside marriage
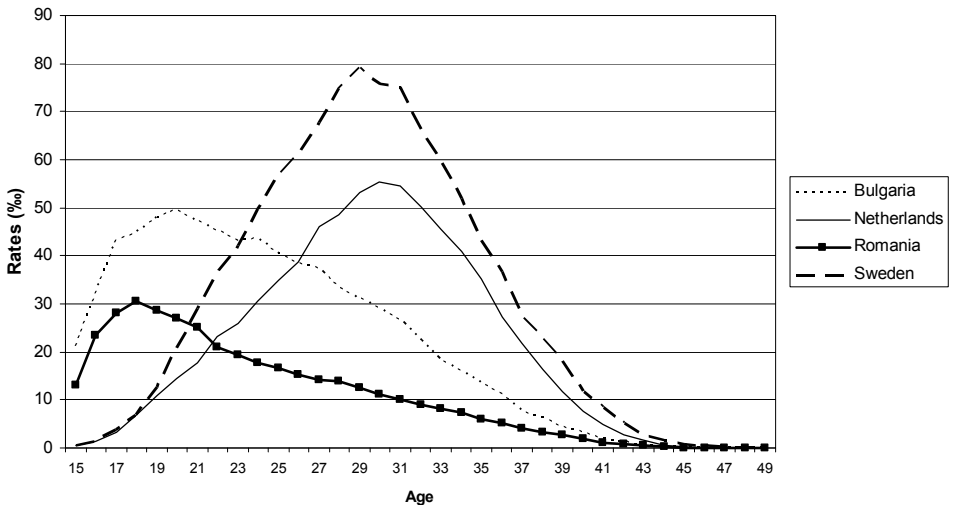

Figure 3c. Fertility rates by age (‰) for four EU countries in contrasting situations in terms of the mean maternal age and of age differences of women giving birth within and outside marriage

It is highly tempting to use other types of graphs to draw attention to differences among European countries in terms of birth intensity and timing as this way of illustration can suggestively highlight many otherwise unnoticeable nuances. I shall add only one type of graph based on fertility rated by age in order to make visible the difference between the intensity of marital and nonmarital fertility at each age between 15 and 50 years. For comparisons, Romania and Bulgaria are presented in Figure 4a and Sweden and the Netherlands in Figure 4b.
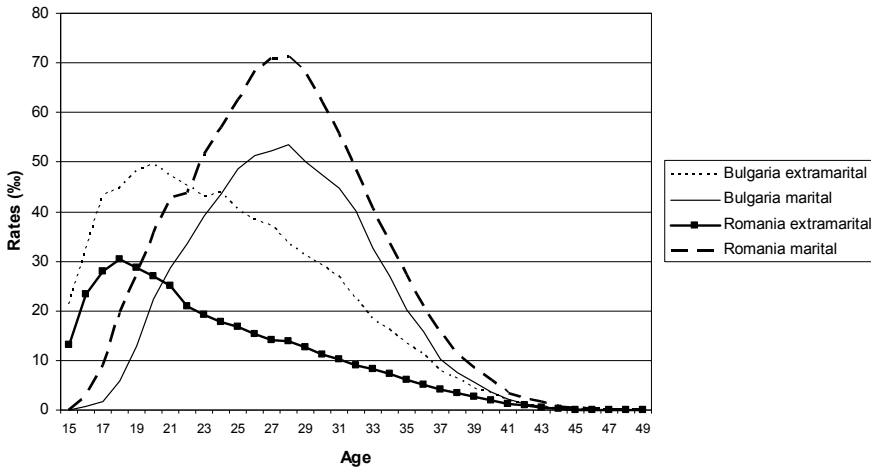

Figure 4a. Marital and nonmarital fertility rates by age in Romania and Bulgaria (‰)
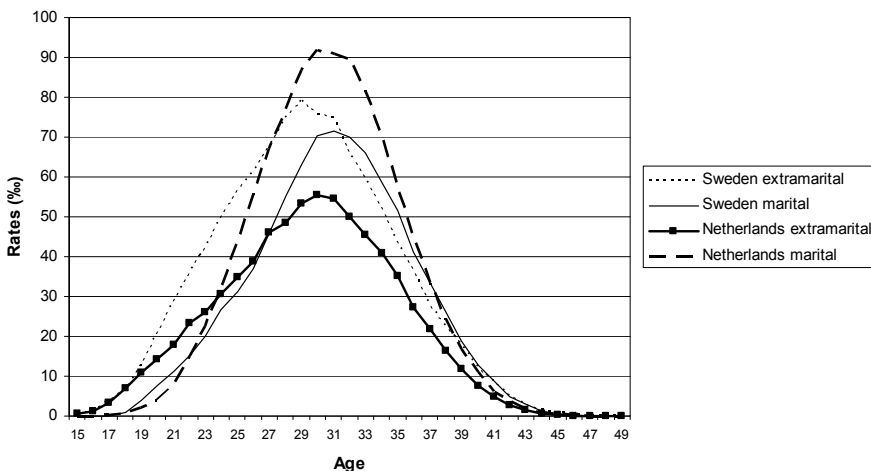

Figure 4b. Marital and nonmarital fertility rates by age in Sweden and the Netherlands (‰)

Similarities and differences are very obvious. Mainly, it is noticeable that for the pair Romania-Bulgaria there is a definite difference in terms of value distribution for the two types of births, with the nonmarital being much earlier than the marital. In contrast, Figure 4b shows similar curve shapes in both cases. Secondly, the differences between the countries on the same graph are more pronounced in terms of curve heights, namely in relation to the intensity of the phenomenon they represent. In Bulgaria, the intensity of nonmarital births is higher than in Romania while the marital intensity is lower. Similarly, Swedish nonmarital births are more frequent at almost all ages than in the Netherlands whereas, in contrast, the marital births curve in the Netherlands is higher.

Finally, by introducing the third aspect mentioned above, namely the dynamics of nonmarital births during the recent period, new similarities and differences between European countries will be visible right away. To avoid complicating the analysis, I will limit my approach to a single indicator, namely the share of nonmarital births of the total births for a year for which recently published information on the respective countries is available. In Table 5, based on a time interval of ten years, I shall attempt to highlight the increase by pointing out both to the absolute growth (the difference in percentage between the two ends of the time interval) and to the relative growth (the difference in percentage as compared with the initial figure, which is obtained as shown in the last column of Table 5).

Table 5.

The relative and absolute growth of percentages of nonmarital births during the latest decade, using available data

Country	Period	Initial value (%)	Final value (%)	Absolute growth (percentual points)	Relative growth (%)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)=(4)-(3)	(6)=[(4)/(3)-1]x100
Austria	1998-2008	29.5	38.8	9.3	31.5
Belgium	1995-2005	17.3	39.4	22.1	127.7
Bulgaria	1998-2008	31.5	51.1	19.6	62.2
Czech Republic	1998-2008	19.0	36.3	17.3	91.1
Denmark	1998-2008	44.8	46.2	1.4	3.1
Estonia	1998-2008	52.5	59.0	6.5	12.4
Finland	1998-2008	37.2	40.7	3.5	9.4
France	1998-2008	40.7	51.6	10.9	26.8
Germany	1998-2008	20.0	32.1	12.1	60.5
Greece	1998-2008	3.8	5.9	2.1	55.3
Hungary	1998-2008	26.6	39.5	12.9	48.5
Ireland	1996-2006	25.3	32.7	7.4	29.2
Italy	1997-2007	7.0	17.7	10.7	152.9

Country	Period	Initial value (%)	Final value (%)	Absolute growth (percentual points)	Relative growth (%)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)=(4)-(3)	(6)=[(4)/(3)-1]x100
Latvia	1998-2008	37.1	43.1	6.0	16.2
Lithuania	1998-2008	18.0	28.5	10.5	58.3
Netherlands	1998-2008	20.8	41.2	20.4	98.1
Poland	1998-2008	11.6	19.9	8.3	71.6
Portugal	1998-2008	20.1	36.2	16.1	80.1
Romania	1998-2008	23.0	27.4	4.4	19.1
Slovakia	1998-2008	15.3	30.1	14.8	96.7
Slovenia	1998-2008	33.6	52.8	19.2	57.1
Spain	1998-2008	14.5	31.7	17.2	118.6
Sweden	1998-2008	54.7	54.7	0	0
United Kingdom	1996-2006	35.5	43.7	8.2	32.1

Even if not all figures are exactly comparable because of different years at the ends of the decennial time range, the data in the last two columns of Table 5 are relevant for the various speeds with which the phenomenon occurred in recent years. We have, in relative figures, a variety of situations ranging from zero growth, in Sweden, to 150% (that is two and a half times) increase of the number of out-of-wedlock births, for Italy. Nearly double figures can be noticed for Belgium, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. There is also an important growth, namely from 50% to 80%, in the case of Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia. As shown in Table 4, which presents the two reference figures, most of them had low or very low starting points (Greece, Italy, and Poland), which explains why differences in percentual points (column 5) are not very big. There are some cases in which the high relative growth is doubled by a similarly high absolute growth: the Netherlands, Slovenia, Belgium, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic, with the latter having undergone the most significant changes during the last decade. The countries with highest initial figures (over 35%), namely Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Latvia, theUnited Kingdom, and Sweden have undergone the most moderate relative growth, as expected (generally below 20%), with similarly non-spectacular absolute growth rates (up to 10 percentual points).

In terms of dynamics, our country has evolved in a very slow pace during the analysed decade. Even if during the period after 1989 it seemed to attain proportions comparable to western countries, the growth process practically came to a halt between 2004 and 2008. With an increase of the share of only 4.4 percentage points and a relative increase of only 19% over the last ten years, Romania is approximately in the situation of countries like Denmark, Finland,

Estonia, Latvia, Sweden that, in contrast, slowed down the growth after they attained a much higher level. My explanation is that a strong dynamics of this phenomenon can only occur if it includes a large number of women from all social categories and at all childbearing ages, which implies a significant number of unmarried women (a considerable proportion living in cohabitation), who are either single or divorced. In Romania's case, the phenomenon of nonmarital births is located especially at very young ages (in the figures above, the intensity curve plummets after the age of 20) occurring at women with low level of education, etc, thus having different origin than, for example, in Sweden or the Netherlands. This fact would allow for a massive expansion only when the situation that generates it undergoes a change, in other words when other categories of women give birth on a massive scale without being married.

In order to obtain a more detailed picture of the situation of the 24 European countries, I regrouped them by using four of the above mentioned criteria: the nonmarital fertility rate, the maternal mean age for nonmarital births, the age difference between women with marital and nonmarital births and, finally, the growth rate of nonmarital births in total births. All variables were dichotomised at a round cut-off point close to the median of the values at national level. The result is shown in Table 6, where the cut-off points are mentioned.

Table 6.

The classification of countries according to the four criteria

Difference between mean ages (marital births – nonmarital births)	Relative growth of the share of nonmarital births	Nonmarital fertility rate (children/woman)			
		Low (<0.60)		High (≥0.60)	
		Mean age, nonmarital births		Mean age, nonmarital births	
		Low (<28 years)	High (≥28 years)	Low (<28 years)	High (≥28 years)
Low (≤2,5 years)	Low (<50%)		Austria	Estonia	Denmark Finland France Sweden
	High (≥50%)	Lithuania	Czech Republic Italia		Belgium Netherland Slovenia
High (>2,5 years)	Low (<50%)	Romania Hungary		Ireland Latvia United K.	
	High (≥50%)	Greece Poland Slovakia	Germany Portugal Spain	Bulgaria	

Noticeably, the situation is very diverse again and only 5 out of the 16 theoretical possibilities are missing altogether. In other four boxes there is only one country. Even where there are several countries, some of them barely meet that criterion, thus being closer to countries situated in a neighbouring box. In other words, the group located in a square is not very homogenous because of the large variation of the values. Moreover, because they have been divided only into two categories, countries with very different values share the same category. However, we shall attempt to find the logic of their location in the table. On the far right, in the last column, there are seven countries with high proportion of nonmarital births and high maternal age, which seems to best illustrate the above mentioned theoretical model. Out of the seven, four already have a low growth pace (even zero for Sweden) and the other three (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Slovenia) got into that group due to their steady increase during the last decade. All six show a small difference between the mean age of women with marital first birth and respectively nonmarital, a fact which strengthens their position within the model.

At the other end of the diagonal, in the lower left, there are five countries with low share of nonmarital births, low age of women involved in this phenomenon and with a large age difference between the two categories of births. Three of these countries (Greece, Poland, and Slovakia) registered a higher growth rate of the proportion of nonmarital births in comparison with a lower one registered in the other two (Romania and Hungary). Clearly, another pattern is at work even if this group is, in my opinion, less homogenous. Indeed, leaving aside the growth rate, we could rather group Hungary and Greece, by the mean age, which is over 27 years in both cases; in contrast Romanian, Slovakian and Polish women give birth outside marriage at a much lower age (an important sign of another type of behaviour). On the other hand, with an EFR of 0.55, Hungary is closer to the countries grouped in the third column (such as Ireland or Latvia) rather than to Romania. Finally, this column also includes Lithuania, a singular and somewhat "peculiar" case (with low nonmarital fertility, low age at nonmarital births and also with a small difference between the two mean ages). By ignoring this latter aspect, we could attach this country to the group of the last three or of the five in the first column in an attempt to simplify by eliminating the singular cases.

In the second column, there are six countries with a high mean age at nonmarital births. As five of them have high growth rates, it is clear that all incline towards the pattern of those in the last column (Austria, the Czech Republic and Portugal have not attained a similar proportion of nonmarital births but are heading there quickly, being very close to the threshold of 0.60 children/woman, used for classification with only Italy being a little farther behind because of joining this process at a later date).

Finally, the five countries in the last but one column have a situation that is more difficult to characterise, except maybe the case of Estonia that, having a mean age of 27.6 years, is closer to the cut-off point (28 years) and can occupy a position in a box from its right with countries forming the first category mentioned above. It would be very difficult to locate the other four in other vicinities. Due to the low mean age, especially in Bulgaria, these countries seem closer to the bottom left, even if they have attained a high proportion of nonmarital births.

Conclusions

To sum up, this classification according to four criteria does not lead to very homogenous groups, which can be explained by the fact that the diversity of European countries concerning nonmarital births increases when we take a closer look, namely when the analysis goes beyond the unique and insufficiently expressive criterion of the proportion of nonmarital births used worldwide.

This could be the general and somehow negative conclusion of this study in the sense that our initial implicit hypothesis stating that the situation of the European countries could be represented in a linear fashion with set country categories (some that have attained the criteria stated by the theory of the "second demographic transition", others that are closer or farther from this model but tend to attain it, and a third category that is still very far from this goal, with Romania supposedly being a part of it) has been confirmed only to a low extent. The introduction of some fine tuning elements such as the absolute intensity indicator, also called the nonmarital birth rate, and of some elements related to birth timing, made clear that the high proportion of nonmarital births is not enough evidence to conclude that a transition to behaviour generated by adoption of postmodern values has occurred. Thus, the situation in countries with similar percentages of nonmarital births such as the pairs Romania-Ireland or Bulgaria-Sweden, is very different in terms of other elements of analysis, with Ireland having another model than Romania and Sweden a totally different one than Bulgaria. Briefly, a multidimensional analysis makes it easier to see the positions and trajectories unique for each country. Still, even if all European countries show increasing intensity growth, increasing maternal age at nonmarital births (as well), and diminishing age differences between marital and nonmarital births, it is not yet very clear how far this natural convergence will go.

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