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## **EXPLAINING FERTILITY INTENTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

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This analysis was developed within the **GGG Fellowship Programme** launched by UNFPA in November 2021 with the purpose to conduct in-depth targeted analysis based on GGS to support the authorities to design data-driven policies and build demographic resilience in the Republic of Moldova.

The Generations and Gender Program is implemented by **UNFPA** in partnership with the **Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP)**, the **National Bureau of Statistics**, the **Interdisciplinary Institute of Demography in the Netherlands (NIDI)**. The program is funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the India-UN Development Partnership Fund and UNFPA.

The Generations and Gender Survey (GGG) is the first and the most complex longitudinal demographic study conducted so far in more than 24 countries and is part of the international program coordinated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Institute of Demography (NIDI).

The conclusions of this study will support the decision makers to better understand the demographic changes in the Republic of Moldova, so that the authorities can develop people-centered demographic policies tailored to people's needs. At the same time, the conclusions of this analysis will be used by the authorities to identify measures to transform the demographic crisis into an opportunity, to support the country's development and to promote demographic resilience in Moldova.

**For references:** *Republic of Moldova - Generations and Gender Survey(2020). Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova, National Bureau of Statistics (study sample), UNFPA, NIDI-GGP (partner and data distributor).*

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## Main Findings

- Younger people are more likely to express an intention to have a child at some unspecified time in their lives. The effect of youth is different when planning is short-term. Here, a clear inverted U-shaped trend is observed, showing that most Moldovans postpone having children until their late 20s and 30s.
- Females are less likely than males to have both types of fertility intentions: the probability decreases by about 11% if motherhood is considered at all and by about 7% if it is considered in the next three years.
- Chisinau residents consistently have higher fertility intentions than other regions, despite being the less religious region with less traditional values. In this case, Chisinau's better economic environment seems to offset the normative shift toward postmodern values, where starting a family and having children are less important. The results suggest that socioeconomic difficulties play a stronger role as a barrier to fertility intentions.
- Moldovans from households with higher income sources are more likely to have fertility intentions. As for economic insecurity, there are no surprises: fertility intentions are negatively correlated with gloomy prospects about the economic situation in the short run. That is, the cost of having children requires some degree of economic stability.
- The impact of income on short-term fertility intentions is found to remain stable over the years before declining beyond age 30. There is also a notable gender difference in fertility intentions, possibly due to biological reasons. For long-term fertility intentions, the effect of income is similar for males and females at their youngest ages. For females, however, it becomes more relevant until it peaks at age 29-35. For men, on the other hand, the trend is slower and has a greater impact only after age 40.
- Employment in a high-skill occupation is associated with a 5% higher probability of having long-term fertility intentions, but this result is not significant for short-term intentions. The opposite is true for work arrangement, although, the effect is not statistically significant for long-term fertility intentions - consistent with the idea that long-term fertility intentions primarily measure the normative ideal of the family for Moldovans - it has an important effect when short-term fertility intentions are examined. For example, the effect of work arrangement is associated with a 6% increase in the probability of having a child in the next three years.
- Gender-egalitarian division of family labor is associated with higher fertility intentions. In addition, who are very satisfied with a modernized division of labor are more likely to have fertility intentions than those who are not satisfied with this division of family tasks. Indeed, they are more likely to have both types of fertility intentions than those who follow a traditional division of the household labour, regardless of their level of satisfaction. Moreover, the relationship with the couple is also positively related to fertility intentions, and some of the studied effects of fertility intentions-financial problems, work-life balance-can be

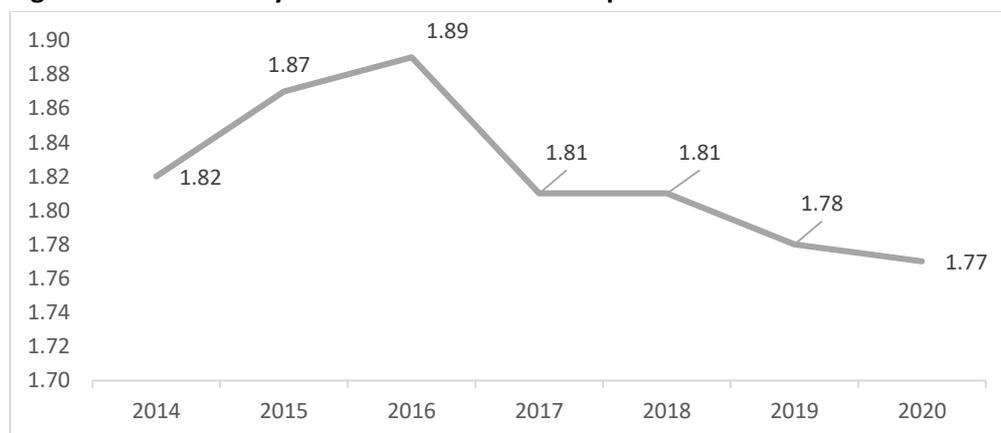
channelled through disagreements within the couple. Three aspects - family task sharing, financial problems, and work balance - represent the most frequent source of disagreement within the couple. Therefore, resolving these issues may also mitigate the harmful direct effects on fertility intentions.

- Gender-egalitarian division of childcare within the couple tends to increase fertility intentions, especially in the short run. In addition, short-term fertility intentions seem to be less likely when individuals rely on institutions or market providers than when they have access to help through social contacts. It is also less likely that both types of fertility intentions exist if individuals have no support at all. Individuals who rely on their social contacts are more likely to have fertility intentions. The effect is also positive for those who have a combination of social contacts and institutions or other forms of purchased help. However, when individuals have support only from institutional or other forms of paid childcare, or no support at all, the likelihood of fertility intentions varies dramatically. From these results, we can conclude that paid childcare appears to hinder fertility intentions through its impact on the couple's finances. Thus, individuals who can avoid the economic pressures of this type of childcare support, either by using the altruistic help of social contacts to mitigate these costs or by not using any childcare support at all, are more likely to have fertility intentions.

## Context and Theoretical Framework

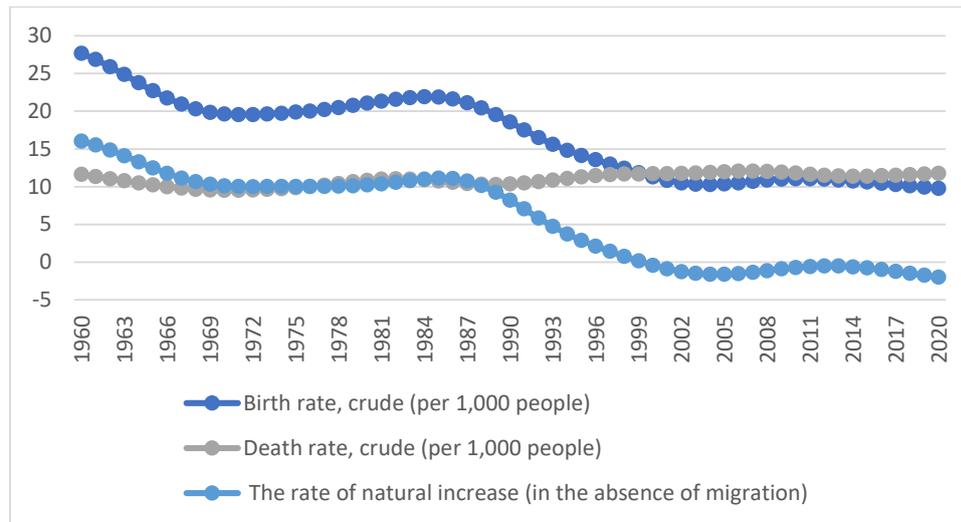
In recent decades, the Republic of Moldova has experienced a drastic population decline. The underlying social causes of the population decline are complex and include high out-migration and a decline in the total fertility rate (see Figure 1). One of the most meaningful indicators of population dynamics is the natural growth rate, calculated by subtracting the crude death rate from the crude birth rate (the number of live births during the year per 1,000 inhabitants, estimated at mid-year), which indicates the rate of population change in the absence of migration. The evolution of population dynamics and the timing of the decline in the crude birth rate, shown in Figure 2, clearly indicate that the post-socialist transition brought obstacles and constraints to the daily lives of Moldovans that led to a change in fertility patterns (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Total Fertility Rate in Usual Resident Population in Moldova<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova

**Figure 2: Population Dynamics in Moldova during the 1960-2020<sup>2</sup>**



Moldova is no exception, the lowest low fertility (Billari and Kohler 2004; Kohler, Billari, and Ortega 2002) has been consistently observed in Central and Eastern Europe during the post-socialist transition. A similar trend has been observed in Southern European countries in recent years (Eurostat estimates of Total Fertility Rates across years)<sup>3</sup>, often explained by waning economic conditions and labour market insecurity.

It has been suggested that the main cause of low fertility in Central and Eastern Europe is deteriorating economic conditions and opportunities (Billingsley and Duntava 2017; Aassve, Billari, and Spéder 2006). One of the proposed explanations for the drastic changes in fertility behaviour is that declining living standards negatively affect fertility decisions (Easterlin 1976). Therefore, women from low socio-economic backgrounds are expected to suppress their fertility intentions. But is it just a question of resources, or are fertility intentions also associated with opportunity costs? The economic rationality perspective explains the behaviour of individuals in the context of constraints and preferences. That is, individuals face constraints such as economic costs when deciding to have a child and have certain preferences about having children. In line with the economic rationality perspective, the intention to have a child is expected to be determined by opportunity costs (constraints) and benefits given certain preferences (Becker 1981). Thus, women with a high socio-economic background and the highest earning power are expected to suppress their fertility intentions when faced with high opportunity costs.

However, there is no consensus on the social causes linking the post-socialist transition to low fertility. In contrast to the economic rationality perspective, the ideational framework perspective, which emerged after the Second Demographic Transition (SDT), assumes that the new fertility patterns result from the adoption of attitudes, values and norms such as autonomy and individualism that weaken traditional family orientations (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2002). It focuses on the role of disengagement from traditional institutional and normative arrangements and the increasing importance of self-expression and self-actualisation. Although the revolution in value orientations proposed by SDT theory has obscured the explanatory power of social norms in demographic decision-making, recent research has noted their contribution (Billari and Liebroer 2010). Norms, a long-

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank Estimate

<sup>3</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00199/default/table?lang=en>

standing concept in sociology (Merton 1968), are understood as prescriptive and proscriptive commands and prohibitions on socially accepted behaviour. Their regulatory power influences important life course decisions such as cohabitation, leaving the parental home or having children (Aassve, Arpino, and Billari 2013; Dalla Zuanna 2001; Perelli-Harris and Bernardi 2015). Thus, the dynamic interplay between new post-material values and long-lasting social norms represents one of the most important explanations for fertility behaviour in different countries. This is particularly true for the countries of the former Soviet Union, where the transition from totalitarian regimes to democratic systems brought major changes in their cultural environment. The effects of this intermediate anomie have been observed specifically in these countries (Billingsley 2010; Philipov, Spéder, and Billari 2006). Based on the ideational change perspective and the economic rationality perspective of fertility behaviour, this study aims to identify the drivers of fertility intentions in Moldova. Therefore, we examine the influence of socio-economic covariates, considering the value dimension relevant for fertility intentions.

## Methodology

### Data and Analytical Strategy

This study is based on the GGS wave 1 from Moldova.<sup>4</sup> The GGS is a cross-national longitudinal study of family and relationship dynamics. In 2020, 10 044 face-to-face interviews were conducted in Moldova. The analysis was conducted in Stata 16. The dependent variables are long-term (Do you want to have a child at all) and short-term (Do you want to have a child in the next 3 years) fertility intentions. We dichotomise the two dependent variables as follows: 1. Definitely not; 2. Probably not; 3. Uncertain represent individuals who are not fertility oriented, while those who select 4. Probably yes; 5. Definitely yes are considered to have fertility intentions.

In order to estimate the influence of socio-economic factors on fertility intentions, a composite measure of respondents' socio-economic background was constructed, including variables such as (1) respondents' education, (2) parents' occupational status when respondent were 15 years old, (3) parents' education level. First, the number of factors was determined, then a metric for a hypothetical construct (in this case, the socio-economic background of the respondents) was constructed by estimating a factor value using the regression method. The estimated factor score is thus the standardised value indicating an individual position on the factor. The decision to include parental education and occupation is based on the extensive empirical evidence that they are the best proxies for social background effects, which in turn shapes various life course outcomes and drives the intergenerational transmission of inequality.

The analytical strategy is the following. First, we examine a general influence of socio-demographic characteristics on both types of fertility intentions. We estimate logistic regression models to examine the extent to which socioeconomic factors and social norms/values influence fertility intentions after accounting for background covariates such as (1) age, (2) gender, (3) current place of residence (we distinguish the following statistical regions: Chisinau, North, Centre and South in accordance with the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova), (4) language at home (can be an indicator of ethnic identity), distinguishing three categories: Moldovan, Romanian, Russian, other languages;

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<sup>4</sup> Republic of Moldova – Generations and Gender Survey (2020). Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova, National Bureau of Statistics (survey sample), UNFPA, NIDI-GGP (as partner and distributor)

(5) partnership status, (6) religiosity, (7) employment status (response categories: in paid work, not in paid work but looking for work, now in paid work and not looking for work), (8) number of children. To capture the influence of values, we construct an additive index of the items "men/women need children to be fulfilled".

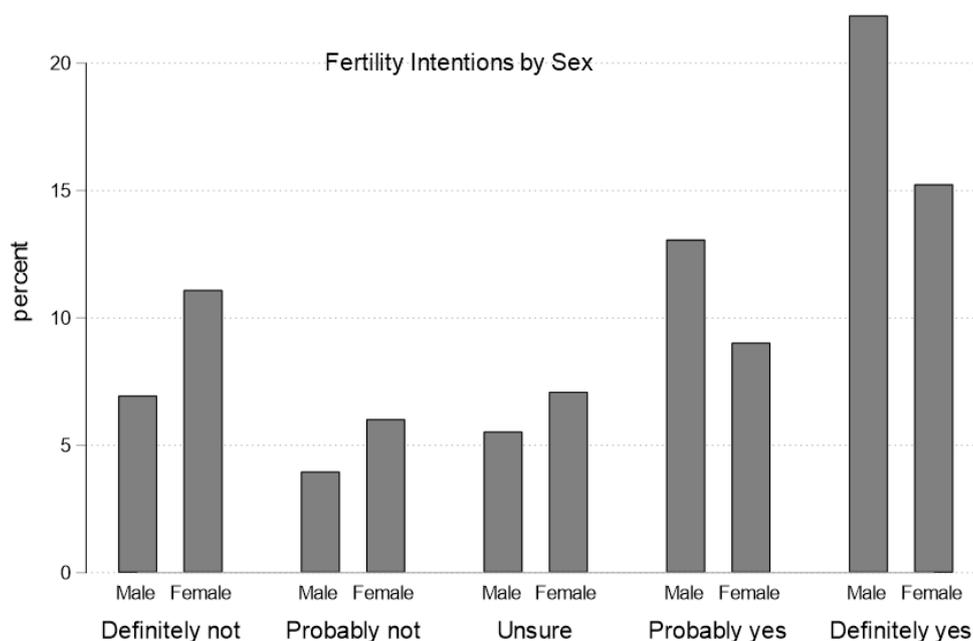
Second, separate models are then run to examine some dimensions of interest in more detail: economic resources, working conditions, gender division of housework and cultural values. Separate analyses with only the main control variables are necessary to obtain a sufficient sample size for statistical inference. The list of main control variables includes (1) age, (2) gender, (3) language at home, (4) educational level of the respondents. All results are presented in terms of average marginal effects (AME), which allow comparison of estimates across samples and models (Mood 2010). The interpretation of AMEs is straightforward: they express the average effect of the independent variable on the probability of the outcome - having a fertility intention at all or in the next 3 years.

## Results of the Analysis

### 1.1. Gender Differences in Fertility Intentions

There is a clear gender gap in fertility intentions, i.e., among those who do not want to have children at all, the proportion of females is higher, and among those who answer that they definitely want to have children, the proportion of males is higher. This result suggests that females either have to overcome more constraints that prevent them from having children or that their normative ideas about having children are changing (see Figure 3).

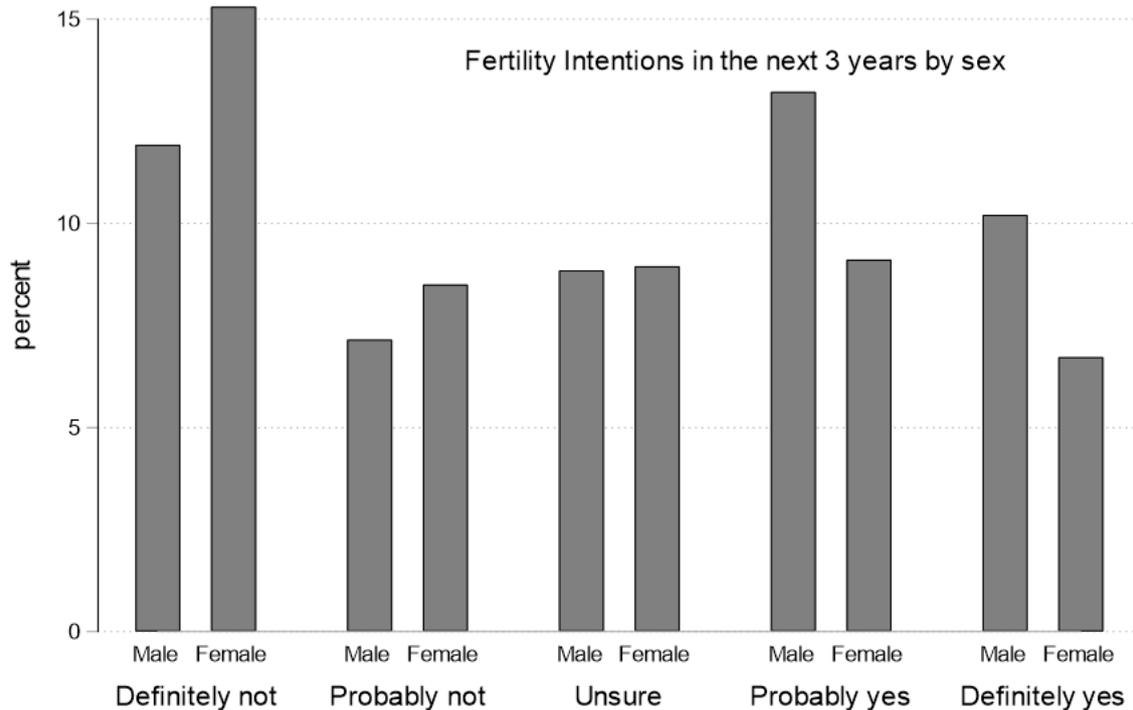
**Figure 3: Frequency distribution of long-term fertility intentions (“Do you intend to have children at all”) by gender**



The gender gap is also observed in short-term (next 3 years) fertility intentions. Among those who answer that they definitely do not want to have children in the next 3 years, females are

overrepresented, while among those who say probably yes and definitely yes, males are overrepresented (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Frequency distribution of fertility intentions in the next 3 years (“Do you intend to have children in the next 3 years”) by gender**



It is obvious that males are more willing to have children than females. Are females are also willing to have fewer children? Since fertility intentions depend not only on values and opportunities/constraints, but also on the number of children the parents have already had, we can answer this question with the "ultimate intended family size." In addition to the number of children the parents already had, the remaining number of "intended" children provides an estimate of the "ultimate intended family size." The mean value of "intended family size"<sup>5</sup> is higher for females (mean=3.9) than for males (mean=3.4), which means that on average females want more children than males, although fewer females than males intend to have children.

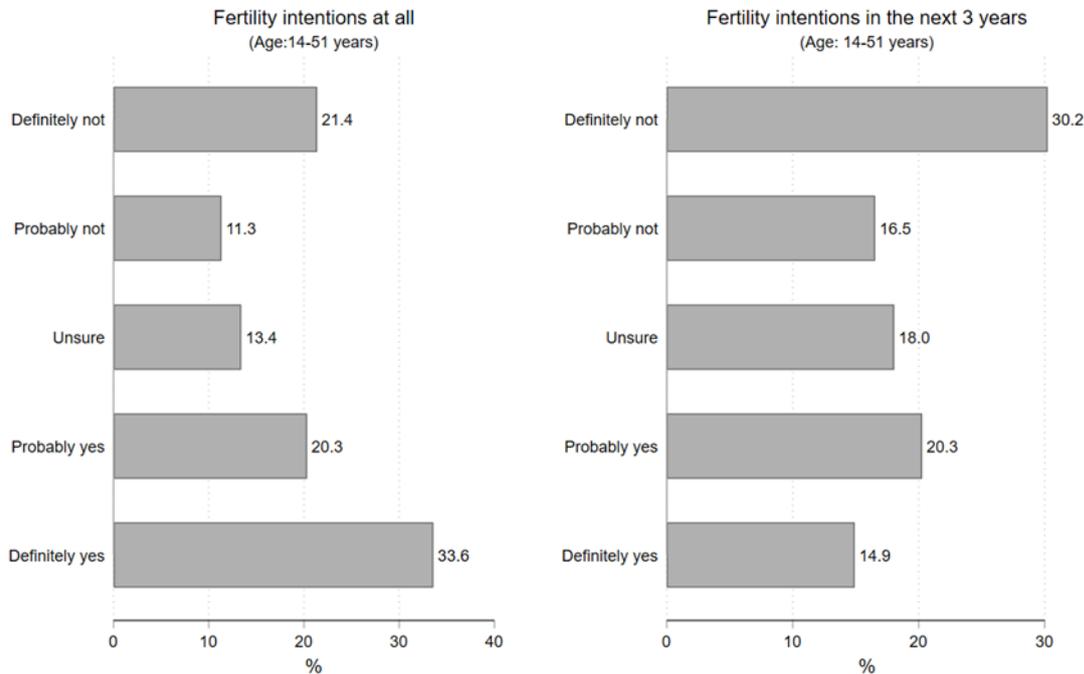
## 1.2 Disentangling the Main Drivers of Fertility Intentions

The presence of notable obstacles to the formation of fertility intentions is particularly evident in Figure 6. When asked about fertility intentions, every second Moldovan indicates that he or she would like to have a child. In particular, the largest share of the sample (53.9%) indicates that they would like to have children at some point in their lives. The presence of significant obstacles to realizing the desire to have children is thus explicitly reflected in the inverse trend when the time horizon is set at 3 years: Most Moldovans are reluctant to engage in family planning. The percentage of respondents

<sup>5</sup> The ultimate intended family size is calculated as the sum of the total number of children and intended number of children

declaring their intention to become parents in the next 3 years drops by half: only 14.92% are sure about it.

**Figure 5: Frequency distributions of long-term and short-term fertility intentions**



The discrepancy between the unambiguously positive attitude towards "whether" (intend to have a child at all) and "when" (intend to have a child in the next 3 years) is addressed as follows. First, we test the sequential relationship between the two questions, since the second question is logically derived from a positive answer to the first question. We use a Heckman selection model (Heckman 1979), where the first equation-the selection equation-identifies fertility intentions in the short run. Since the correlation coefficient for the residual component of both equations is not statistically different from zero, we can conclude that the two types of fertility intentions are meaningfully different from each other, as suggested by other researchers (Philipov et al. 2006). This result not only minimises the risk of selection bias, but also has theoretical implications. Given the results, the intention to have children can be interpreted as the normative ideal of parenthood for Moldovans, while the reluctance to realise this intention in the short term could indicate underlying barriers that hinder reproduction.

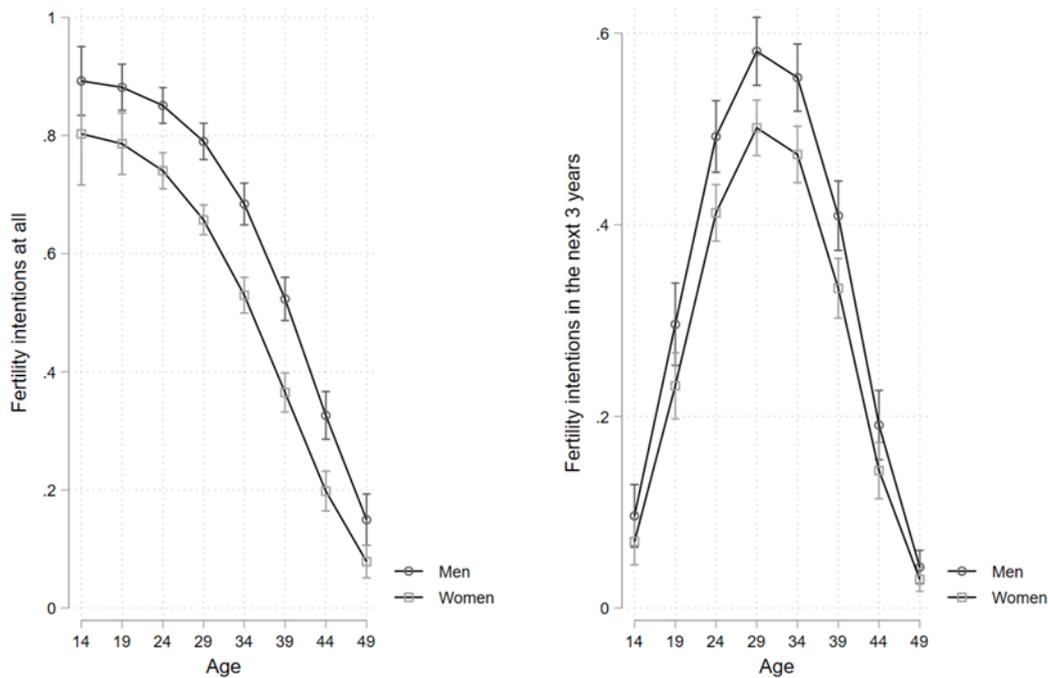
### 1.2.1 Moldovan's fertility aspirations: A socio-demographic overview

Our results show that Moldovan trends in fertility intentions are not too different from those of other European countries. As might be expected, there is an interplay between ideational and socio-economic factors that shape both types of intentions. Religious people and people with traditional values regarding parenthood are more likely to have childbearing intentions, but the effect is relatively small in both cases. In addition, the number of children is negatively related to the intention to have a child, but the effect decreases with each additional child. Moreover, it becomes positive once a person already has four children. One explanation for this non-linear relationship could be due to the

characteristics of people with large families, who are on average more religious and traditional, but it could also show that the barriers to fertility are more severe for those who are childless. Once a person overcomes this threshold and enters parenthood, the associated burden is comparatively less.

Finally, three factors show the greatest influence on the likelihood of having fertility plans: Age, gender, and place of residence. An analysis by age and gender can be found in Figure 6. As we can see, younger people are more likely to express the intention to have a child at an unspecified time in their lives, which is related to the fact that they have a longer time horizon for planning. The older they get, the less likely they are to express these ideas. The effect of youth is different when planning is short-term. Here we see a clear inverted u-shaped line, showing that most Moldovans postpone having children until their late 20s and 30s (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Average marginal effect of gender on fertility intentions (by age)**



Marginal analysis confirms that females are less likely than males to have both types of fertility intentions: the probability decreases by about 11% if motherhood is considered at all, and by about 7% if it is considered in the next 3 years.

Some tentative explanations are suggested. First, there might be a discrepancy in the evaluation of future events due to gender socialization. For example, females may be more realistic - or pessimistic - than males in planning for life events and more accurate in assessing their likelihood of becoming parents, i.e., measuring their structure of constraints and opportunities, than males, who overestimate their chances. Second, females may face a different and more restrictive structure of opportunities and constraints than males. The point, then is not what they think their chances are of realizing their plans, but that they face greater obstacles than males. Third, it is plausible that normative values regarding parenthood differ between the sexes. Females may have adopted new values associated with ideational change, whereas males are more traditional.

Models involving gender interaction show that males tend to have more fertility intentions than females, regardless of their employment status, social support, or marital status. Females also exhibit lower levels of religiosity and traditional values. While these results may support the idea that men's stronger inclination toward parenthood is due to their attachment to traditional values, the small size of the effect should be taken with caution.

Moreover, the role of residence is paradigmatic of the intertwining of economic and cultural factors and how their interaction affects fertility intentions. Chisinau residents consistently have higher fertility intentions than other regions, despite being the less religious region with less traditional values. In this case, Chisinau's better economic environment seems to offset the normative shift toward postmodern values, where starting a family and having children are less important. All in all, the results suggest that socioeconomic difficulties play a stronger role as a barrier to fertility intentions.

**Table 1: Logistic Regressions (Dependent variables: Fertility intentions at all; Fertility intentions in the next 3 years)**

Variables	Fertility intentions at all	Fertility intentions in the next 3 years
Age (ref: 14-24)		
25-29	-0.0552* (0.0298)	0.283*** (0.0294)
30-34	-0.173*** (0.0302)	0.225*** (0.0289)
+35	-0.418*** (0.0301)	0.0188 (0.0263)
Female (Ref: Male)	-0.113*** (0.0158)	-0.0678*** (0.0177)
Current residence (ref: Chişinău)		
North	-0.0907*** (0.0228)	0.00220 (0.0255)
Center	-0.0838*** (0.0205)	-0.0520** (0.0230)
South	-0.0539** (0.0251)	-0.0485* (0.0289)
Language at home (Ref: Moldovan/ Romanian)		
Russian	-0.00152 (0.0241)	0.0173 (0.0281)
Other language	0.0120 (0.0757)	-0.00252 (0.0809)
Partner (Ref: No partner)	0.0361* (0.0195)	0.138*** (0.0204)
Religiosity	0.00912***	0.0191***

	(0.00352)	(0.00392)
Parenthood as self-fulfilling	0.0102**	0.00493
	(0.00502)	(0.00599)
Number of siblings	0.00578	0.00514
	(0.00452)	(0.00530)
Activity (Ref: Employed)		
Unemployed	0.0526***	0.0344
	(0.0187)	(0.0224)
Inactive	-0.00815	-0.0429**
	(0.0186)	(0.0203)
Social Class Index (Ref: Low socioeconomic background)		
Medium socioeconomic background	0.0163	-0.00476
	(0.0213)	(0.0260)
High socioeconomic background	0.0531**	0.0396
	(0.0218)	(0.0261)
Current number of children	-0.175***	-0.191***
	(0.0137)	(0.0149)
Square current number of children	0.0167***	0.0162***
	(0.00285)	(0.00284)
Observations	3,217	3,201

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Robust standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

### 1.2.2 The role of economic resources

The economic situation of the individual is measured by three indicators: Income, Housing Quality and Perception of Economic Insecurity. Total household net income is measured using a 10-point scale ranging from less than 1000 lei to more than 50,000 lei. Housing quality is analysed as a self-assessment of satisfaction with housing on a scale from 0 to 10. Finally, the perception of economic insecurity is measured by the expected economic situation in three years, on a scale from 1 -much better- to 5 -much worse-.

Economic resources play a key role in shaping fertility intentions. As can be seen, Moldovans from households with higher income sources are more likely to have fertility intentions, although the effect size is relatively small. Satisfaction with housing situation does not show statistically significant results. As for economic insecurity, there are no surprises: Fertility intentions are negatively correlated with gloomy prospects about the economic situation in the short run. That is, the cost of having children requires some degree of economic stability. Thus, we might expect those with short-term intentions to be more concerned about their economic situation (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Average marginal effects of the variables of fertility intentions**

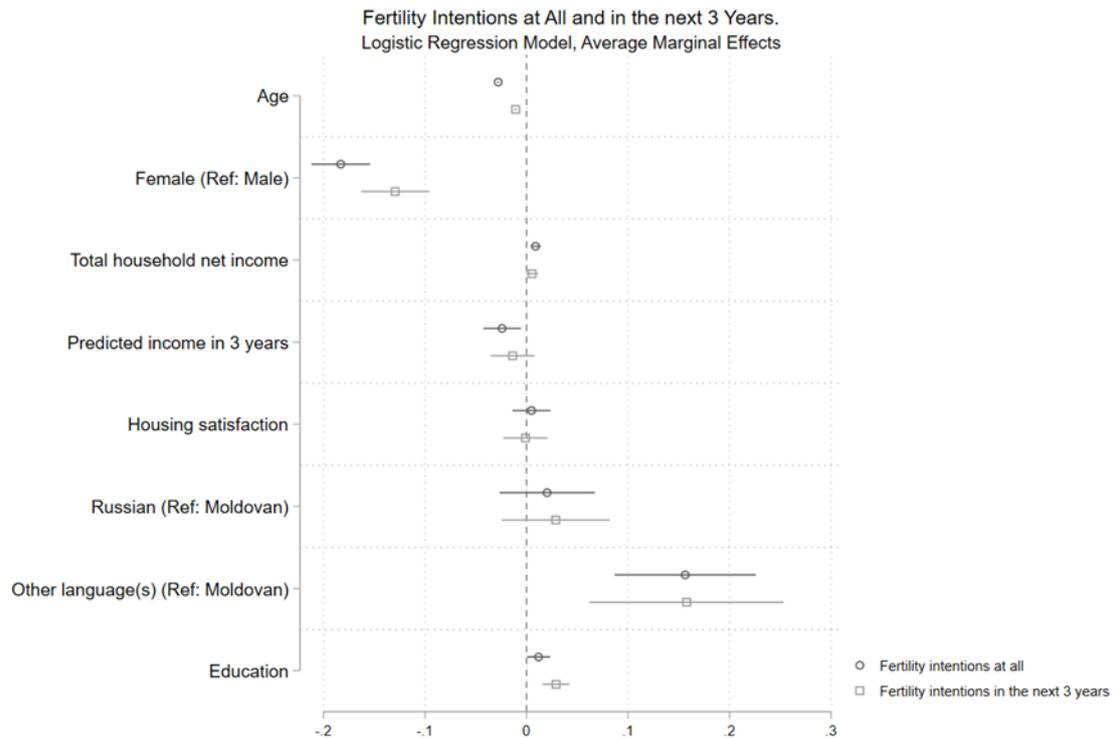
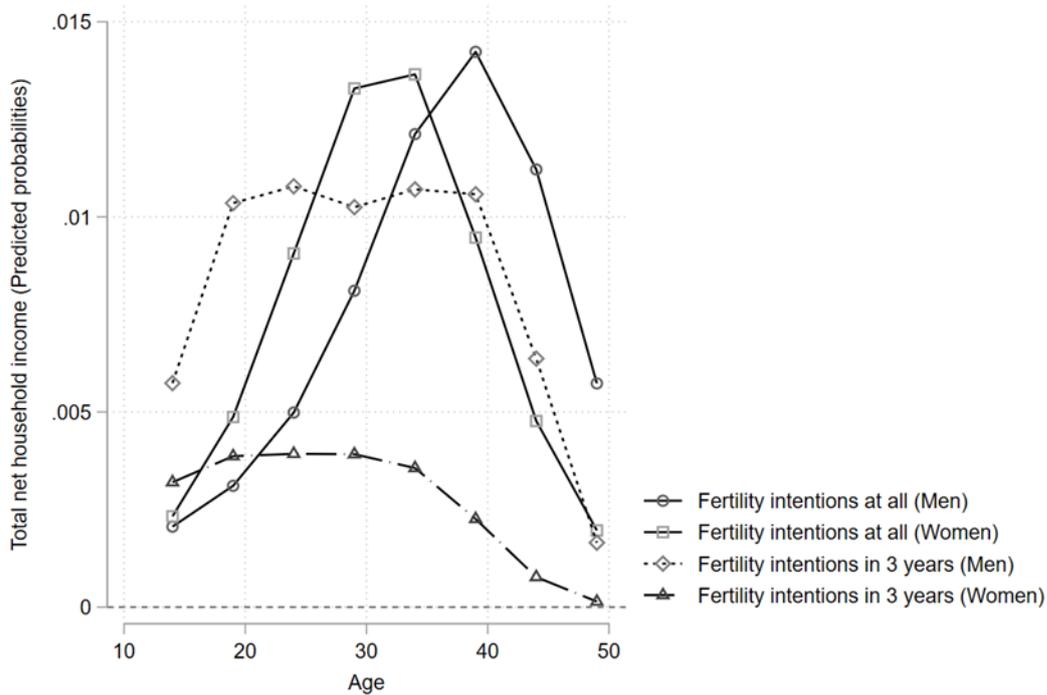


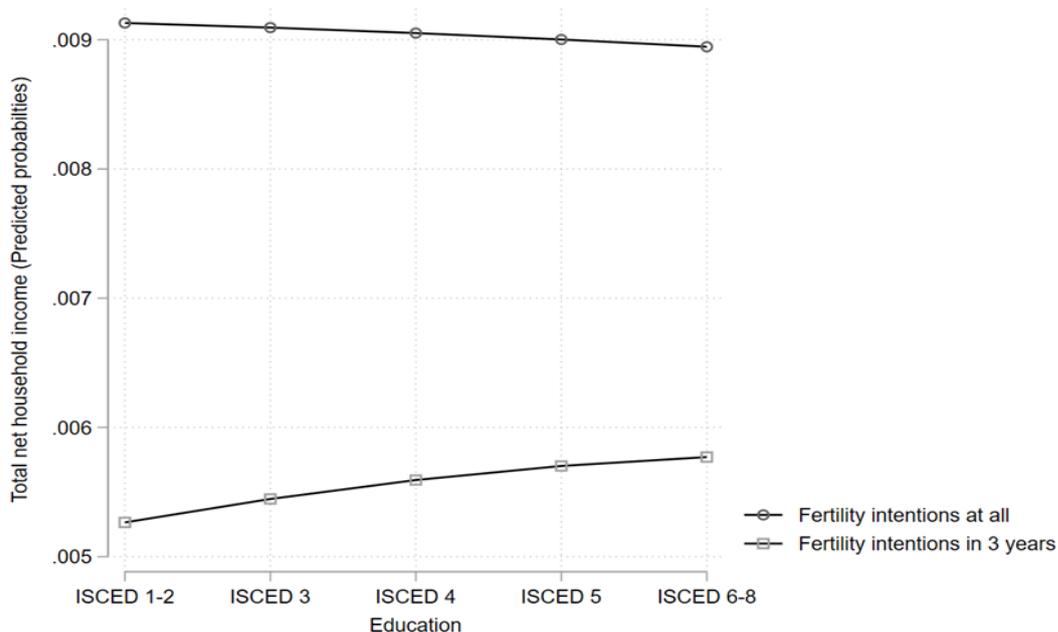
Figure 8 shows the interaction effect of household net income and age separately by gender. It is evident that the effect of income on short-term fertility intentions remains stable over the years before declining beyond age 30. However, higher income has an increasing effect on age, overpassing the effect on short-term fertility intentions when individuals are older than 25. There is also a notable difference in fertility intentions between the sexes, possibly due to biological reasons. For long-term fertility intentions, the effect of income is similar for males and females at their youngest ages. However, for females, it becomes more relevant until it peaks at age 29-35. For males, on the other hand, the trend is slower and has a greater impact from age 40 onwards. This is probably the result of the longer biological time horizon for reproduction in males (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Interaction effects of household net income and age separately by gender on fertility intentions**



Another interesting aspect is how household income affects fertility intentions as a function of education. As can be seen in Figure 9, the impact of income decreases slightly when individuals have a higher level of education. Since the magnitude of this change is modest, ideal fertility appears to be more homogeneous among Moldovans with different educational backgrounds, and economic resources do not have a large impact on it. However, the effect of income on fertility in 3 years shows a larger effect on education (see Figure 9).

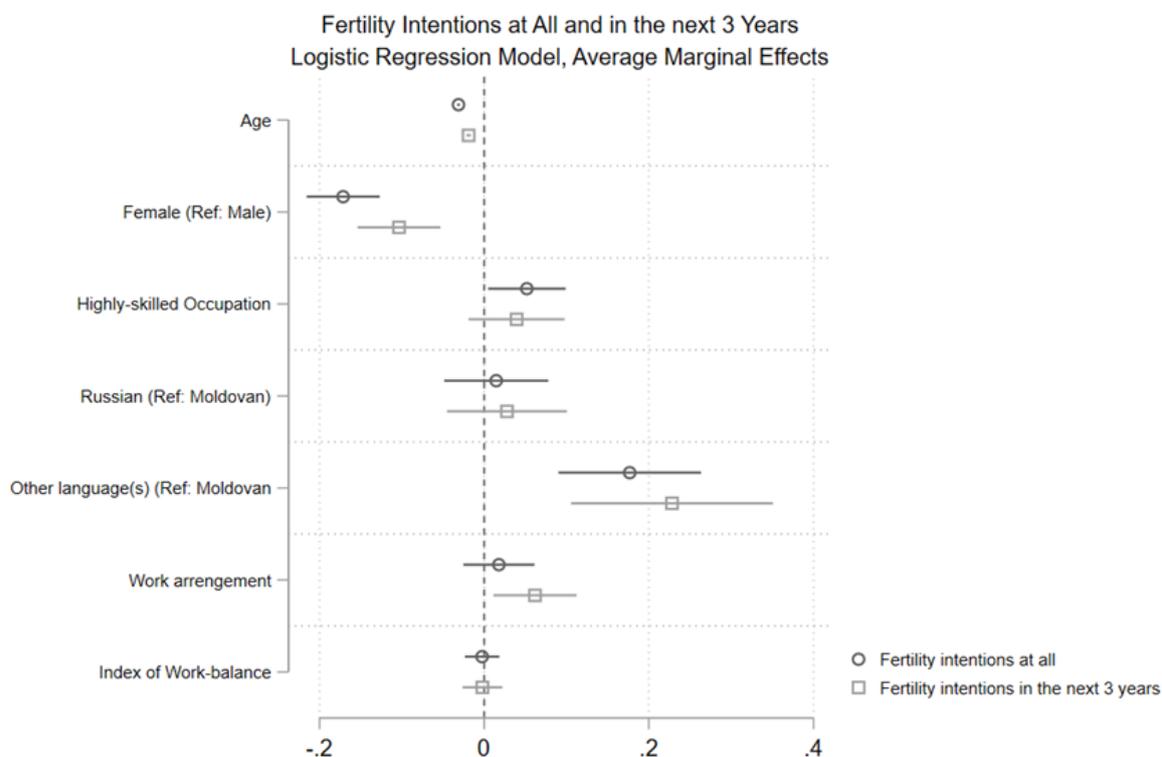
**Figure 9: Interaction effects of household net income and education on fertility intentions**



### 1.2.3 The role of Working conditions

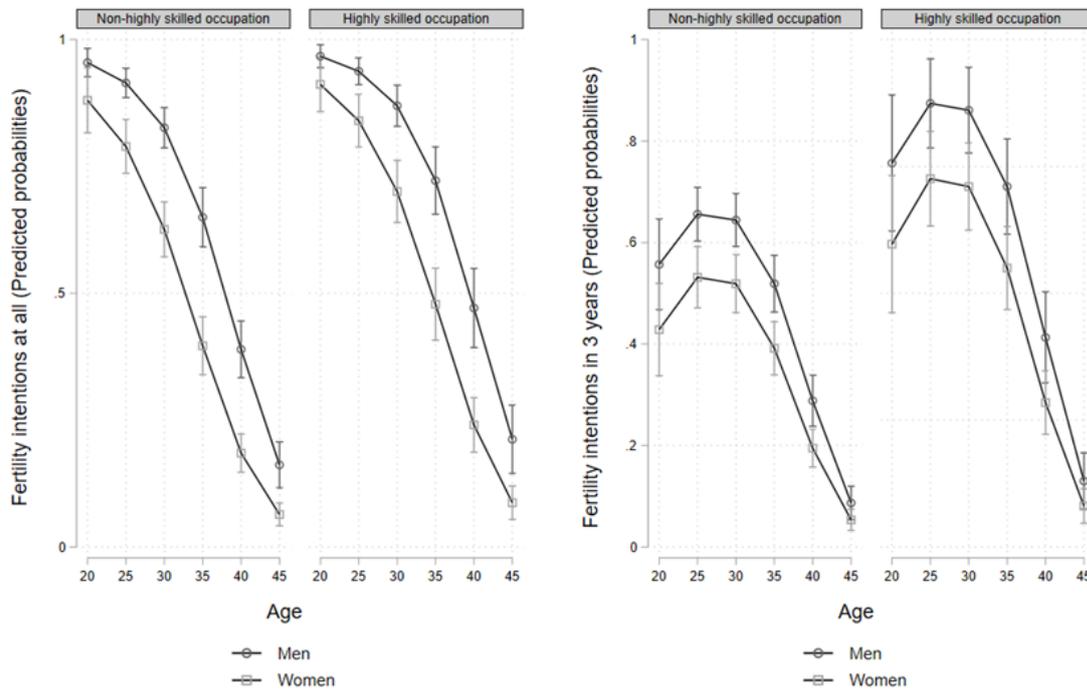
To decipher the role of working conditions, a new model includes three new dimensions of occupational status. The first-dimension measures whether a person is employed in a highly skilled occupation, i.e., an occupation belonging to groups 1 and 2 of ISCO 08. Employment relationships are also included in the model, including the amount of work done by the partner. Finally, an index of self-assessed work balance is added, based on questions in the survey about the frequency of the following situations: too tired to do household chores (due to work) and too tired to meet family obligations (see Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Average marginal effects of the variables on fertility intentions**



The results are shown in Figure 12, which indicates that employment in a high-skill occupation is associated with a 5% higher probability of having long-term fertility intentions, but this result is not significant for short-term intentions. The opposite is observed for work arrangements. Although the effect is not statistically significant for long-term fertility intentions - consistent with the idea that long-term fertility intentions primarily measure the normative ideal of the family for Moldovans- it has an important effect when short-term fertility intentions are examined. For example, the effect of work arrangement is associated with a 6% increase in the probability of planning to have a child in the next three years (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Predicted probabilities of the effect of highly skilled jobs by gender**



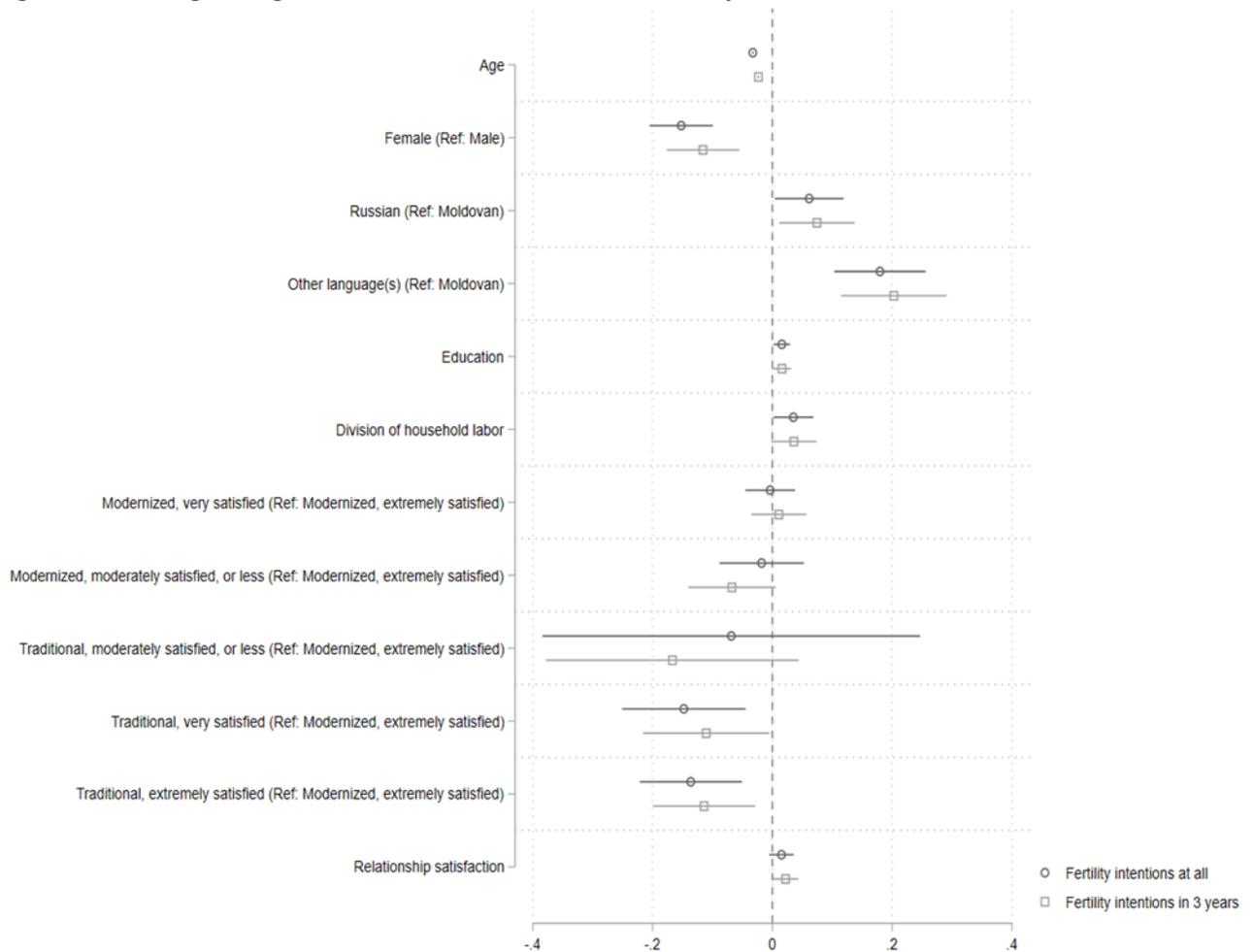
#### 1.2.4 The role of Household's chores gender division

Although low fertility rates are commonly explained by the interaction of ideational factors-such as the late transition to adulthood (Dalla Zuanna 2001) -or economic changes, part of the variation between and within countries can be attributed to the different forms of private and public support provided to families. Regarding family support, studies have theorized that egalitarian sharing of tasks between partners or access to extended networks within - and beyond - the family is crucial (Riederer, Buber-Ennsner, and Brzozowska 2019). However, results are mixed: some studies argue that more egalitarian couples are more likely to be childless, while others show that both modern and traditional couples are more likely to want to have children as long as they are satisfied with their division of family responsibilities. To test this, a specific analysis is conducted that examines the division of family labor and childbearing.

Three new variables are included in this analysis. First, an index of household division, calculated as the mean index of family tasks shared between partners-preparation of daily meals, vacuuming, minor repairs, laundry, etc. - is calculated. Second, following the index of (Riederer et al. 2019), in which traditional and modernized division of labor is understood as one in which " the man contributes to all household tasks and to at least one of them equally, or the man always does one task and additionally contributes to at least one of the remaining three tasks" (p.1867), we replicate this index with a scale of 1-6, where (1) is extremely satisfied and modernized division of labor, (2) is very satisfied and modernized division of labor, (3) is moderately or less satisfied and modernized division of labor, (4) is moderately or less satisfied and traditional division of labor, (5) is very satisfied and traditional division of labor, and (6) is extremely satisfied and traditional division of labor. Finally, we control for relationship satisfaction with partner as a variable on a 0-10 rating scale.

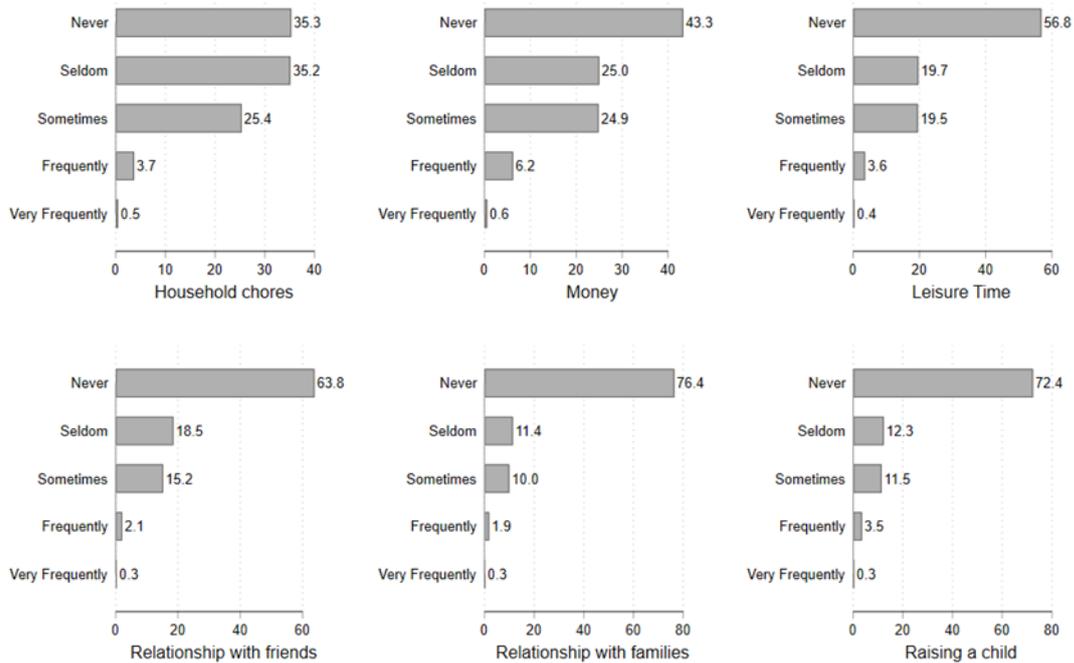
Figure 13 shows the results of short-term and long-term fertility intentions. It can be seen that a gender-egalitarian division of family labor is associated with higher fertility intentions, and the effect size is similar for both. This is also confirmed by the level of satisfaction with this division of tasks: Couples who are very satisfied with a modernized division of labor are more likely to have fertility intentions than those who are not satisfied with this division of family tasks. Indeed, they are more likely to have both types of fertility intentions than those who follow a traditional division of the household, regardless of their level of satisfaction; nevertheless, there is a small u-shaped trend, as high satisfaction with the traditional division reduces the negative likelihood of fertility intentions more than those who are less satisfied with this division. As predicted, the relationship with the couple is also positively related to fertility intentions (see Figure 13)

**Figure 13: Average marginal effects of the variables on fertility intentions**



As predicted, the relationship with the partner is also positively related to fertility intention. This has theoretical implications, as some of the studied effects of fertility intentions-financial problems, work-life balance-can be channeled through disagreements within the couple. Indeed, as can be seen in Figure 14 these three aspects - family task sharing, financial problems, and work balance - represent the most frequent source of disagreement within the couple. Therefore, resolving these issues may also mitigate the harmful direct effects on fertility intentions, but also indirectly result from a healthier couple relationship in which fertility intentions are more likely (see Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Frequency distributions of the sources of disagreement within couples**

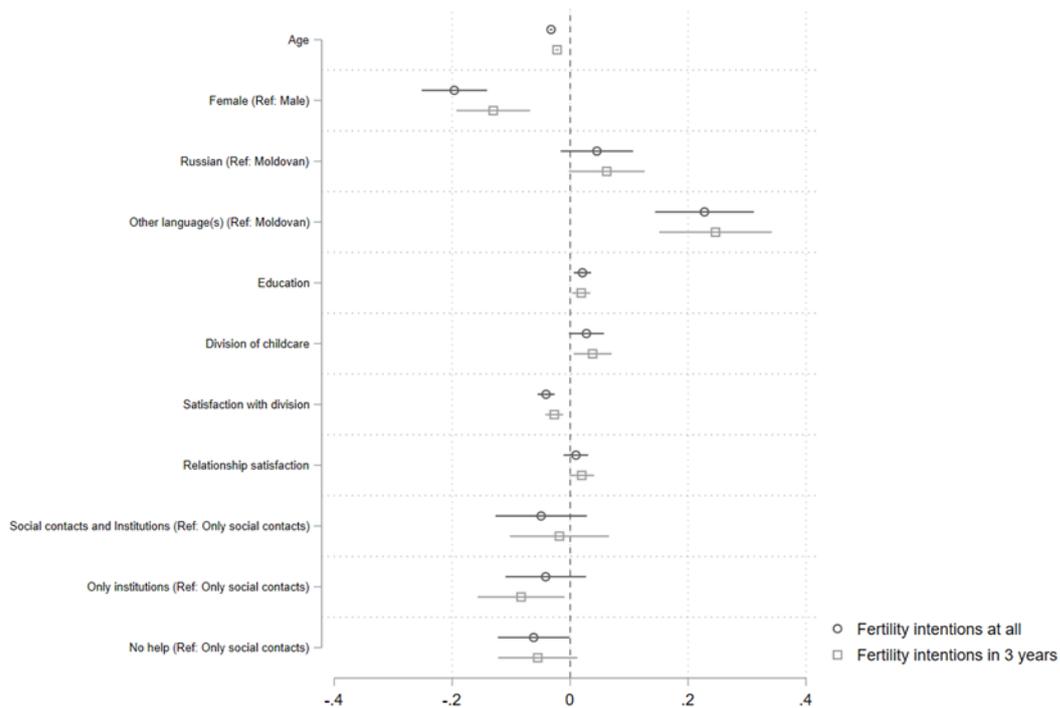


### 1.2.5 The role of Childcare

Childcare availability has been shown to be an excellent predictor of fertility intentions and realizations among couples who already have children. It is also important because, as has been shown with within-couple satisfaction, it can be one of the channels through which other fertility constraints can be realized. To examine the effects of childcare, we conduct a new analysis that includes variables corresponding to those of the division of housework only for respondents with at least one child. This means that we include an objective index of the division of partner involvement in childcare from a gender egalitarian perspective. We also measure the same index of satisfaction with the modernized and traditional division of these activities. Finally, we included a categorical variable that assesses the type of support respondents receive from private and public sources. The categories are as follows: (1) support from social contacts only (e.g., family, acquaintances, etc.), (2) support from social contacts and institutions or other forms of purchased assistance, (3) institutions only or other forms of purchased assistance, and (4) no support.

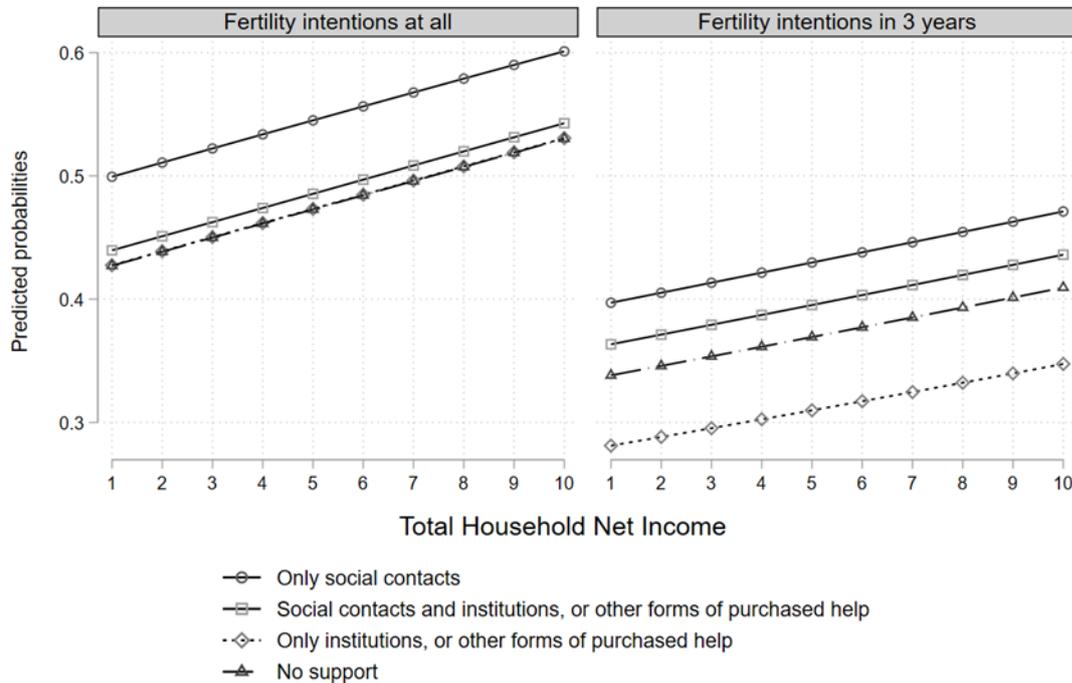
The results presented in Figure 15 show that a gender egalitarian division of childcare within the couple tends to increase fertility intentions, especially in the short run. However, the effect of satisfaction with this division is less relevant for these types of fertility intentions, as the negative effect of traditional models is less pronounced. Finally, the source of childcare support seems to yield interesting results: short-term fertility intentions seem to be less likely when individuals rely on institutions or market providers than when they have access to help through social contacts. It is also less likely that both types of fertility intentions exist if individuals have no support at all (see Figure 15)

**Figure 15: Average marginal effects of the variables on fertility intentions**



Is childcare one of the channels through which economic constraints influence fertility intentions? To test this plausible mechanism, we include the variable total net household income in the model. The interaction effect with childcare support shows interesting results. Individuals who rely on their social contacts are more likely to have fertility intentions. The effect is also positive for those who have a combination of social contacts and institutions or other forms of purchased help. However, when individuals have support only from institutional or other forms of paid childcare, or no support at all, the likelihood of fertility intentions varies dramatically. In the case of fertility intentions at all, the effect is overlapping, while in the case of short-term fertility intentions, the positive effect is much smaller for both types of (no) childcare support outside the couple. From these results, we can conclude that paid childcare appears to hinder fertility intentions through its impact on the couple's finances. Thus, individuals who can avoid the economic pressures of this type of childcare support, either by using the altruistic help of social contacts to mitigate these costs or by not using any childcare support at all, are more likely to have fertility intentions (see Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Interaction effects of total household net income and source of support on fertility intentions**



## Conclusions and Policy Implications

The results show that most Moldovans postpone having children until their late 20s and 30s. In addition, females are less likely than males to have both types of fertility intentions (short and long term). It is evident that economic resources play a strong role as a barrier to fertility intentions. Specifically, the effect of income on long-term fertility intentions is similar for males and females, however, in case of short-term fertility intentions it becomes more relevant for females until reaching its peak at age 29-35. Thus, the first suggested policy recommendation is the following:

- Females' economic empowerment, targeting young females in their late 20s and 30s.

Another important dimension which shows statistically significant effect on short-term fertility intentions is flexible work arrangement. The effects of the flexible work arrangement is associated with a 6% increase in the probability of planning to have a child in the next three years. In addition, gender-egalitarian division of housework, and relationship satisfaction is associated with higher fertility intentions. Most importantly, some of the studied drivers of fertility intentions such as financial problems and work-life balance can be channelled through disagreements within the couples, given that, these three aspects family task sharing, financial problems, and work balance represent the most frequent source of disagreement within the couples. Therefore, most promising policies to mitigate these harmful direct effects on fertility intentions, and indirectly affect a healthier couple relationship in which fertility intentions are more likely to emerge would be:

- Extension of flexible working arrangement practices and ensuring that young people have access to them, since it increases the probability of short-term fertility intentions by 6%.
- Promoting equal division of household labour and encouraging male involvement practices.

Furthermore, gender egalitarian division of childcare within the couple tends to increase fertility intentions, especially in the short run. In addition, the source of childcare support seems to yield interesting results: short-term fertility intentions seem to be less likely when individuals rely on institutions or market providers than when they have access to help through social contacts. It is also less likely that both types of fertility intentions exist if individuals have no support at all. From these results, we can conclude that paid childcare appears to hinder fertility intentions through its impact on the couple's finances. Thus, individuals who can avoid the economic pressures of this type of childcare support, either by using the altruistic help of social contacts to mitigate these costs or by not using any childcare support at all, are more likely to have fertility intentions. Thus, one of the crucial policy recommendations would be:

- Ensuring universal high quality childcare availability.

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