Patterns of female and male fertility in Serbia based on the results of the 2022 Census

The decades-long low fertility of the population of Serbia is one of the biggest social challenges and a key component of population dynamics in the long term. Recent research suggests that the reduced progression to first and second child poses an increasingly significant challenge to the recovery of the total fertility rate despite the widespread perception that this is a reduction in higher child parity. At the same time, the pronounced gender imbalance in the spatial distribution of the population in their prime reproductive ages accelerates the processes of population aging and poverty in Serbia, despite the policy makers’ goals presented through key national strategies regarding the country's sustainable development. Demographic analyses of changes in fertility patterns of the population in Serbia typically refer to females. Limiting the collection and interpretation of fertility data to women may lead to ignoring the specifics of men’s reproductive behaviour, or to the assumption that the level, patterns, and changes in fertility do not differ significantly between men and women. The results of the 2022 Census in Serbia for the first time provide an opportunity to assess male fertility and perform a gender-sensitive analysis of fertility patterns. Existing research suggests that male fertility in Europe, especially in Eastern Europe, is lower than female fertility in recent periods, and that male fertility has declined faster than female fertility. Although the analysis of the results of the 2022 Census cannot conclude how this pattern has changed over time in Serbia, it will be very important to determine, from the aspect of pronounced differences in demographic capacities between areas and regions of Serbia that affect the demographic resilience of the country, what (dis)similarities exist between female and male fertility patterns, especially in their spatial distribution and settlement type. The aim of the paper is to identify patterns, correlations and trends in the fertility of the population of Serbia using statistical methods of longitudinal analysis of cohort fertility indicators of men and women - cumulative and specific according to age, birth order of the child, marital status, education and type of settlement based on the special processing of the 2022 Census data. The results will show whether current generations in reproductive age reach, exceed or fall behind the fertility level of previous generations. Also, by comparing these results with those of the 2011 Census, it will be possible to determine whether there have been changes in female fertility patterns in the intercensal period regarding relations between frequency of births, number of live births and mean age of women at birth of first child. The results of the analysis will contribute to a better understanding of the reproductive patterns of the population in Serbia, thus possibly helping in creation of more adequate policy measures in the field of family planning.

Keywords: Female and male fertility, Census 2022, cohort analysis