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Research Article

Lithuania: Fertility decline and its determinants

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Lithuania: Fertility decline and its determinants

Vlada Stankuniene[1]
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Abstract

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Lithuania has been undergoing significant transformations in family life and has experienced a precipitous decline in fertility. The determinants of the changes are diverse in character and are associated with socioeconomic transformations, economic difficulties faced by the post-Soviet society, inadequate social and family policies and changing value orientations and life styles. This article traces the fertility trends in Lithuania from the period and cohort perspective, providing adjusted TFR estimates that reveal the significance of the tempo effect on the recent decline in fertility. Furthermore, the main factors leading to the recently observed changes in family and fertility are identified and analysed. Finally, the characteristic features and necessary improvements of current Lithuanian family policy and its possible effects on individual behaviour and fertility trends are discussed.

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1. Introduction

In Lithuania, as in all the former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, rapid family transformation started at the beginning of the 1990s. The set of changes that have been taking place since 1990 strongly resemble the ones that the northern and western European countries experienced about four decades ago, followed by the southern European countries somewhat later. These changes are summarized under the label of the second demographic transition (van de Kaa, 1987). Throughout this period, fertility has been rapidly and steadily declining in Lithuania, reaching a level far below that required for population replacement. At present, fertility in Lithuania is one of the lowest in the EU.

The factors that provoked these dramatic changes in family and fertility are numerous and diverse in their character, origin and significance. Some seem long lasting and some were rather short lived. Overall, it is evident that the initial stimulus for family transformation and fertility decline in Lithuania was the rapid change in the social and economic environment, resulting from difficulty in adapting to changing living conditions. Decreased living standards, the spread of unemployment, the loss of secure income and the shortage and increasing price of accommodation have caused the postponement of marriage, a decrease in fertility and have encouraged the spread of new patterns of family and fertility behaviour. The influence of social and economic factors on the demographic behaviour of the population is still being experienced. Yet, with the strengthening of the market economy and stabilisation of the socio-economic situation, the demographic behaviour of the Lithuanian population is becoming more affected by the fundamental factors identified by van de Kaa (1987), the author of the theory of the second demographic transition. These include deepening individualisation, emancipation, growing individual freedoms and rights, and technological progress (the availability of modern methods of family planning). Changes in family and childbearing dynamics have also been accelerated by intensifying short term migration flows between Lithuania and Western countries. Lithuanian society has been absorbing and adopting the lifestyles, value orientations, and norms of behaviour prevailing in more advanced Western countries.

The demographic, social and economic consequences of sub-replacement fertility emphasise the necessity for an adequate response from policymakers. However, in Lithuanian family policy, the problem of dramatically decreased fertility is not given adequate attention. Although the general goals of family policy reflect demographic concerns, in developing and adopting measures for family support, the demographic motive is far from the decisive one. The development of modern Lithuanian family policy, which began after the restoration of independence, has not been well focused or consistent. It can be seen that, with the change of government, with different political

parties in the majority each time, the basic motives underpinning family policy development also change rather cardinally. Due to the inconsistency of the ideology, and the mixture of political motives, family policy measures have been developed in a rather fragmented manner, without regard to available conceptual and strategic outlines or international practice. The main focus is still financial measures, ignoring other non-financial forms of family support and their significance for the independent and autonomous functioning of the family.

This article is a country case study discussing recent childbearing trends, their determinants and current family policy in Lithuania. The study refers to several sources of data; vital statistics, the 2001 census of Lithuania, Fertility and Family Survey[3] (1994-1995), the European Comparative Population-Related Policy Acceptance Survey[4] (2001), and data from the most recently conducted Lithuanian Family Survey[5] (2005).

2. Fertility trends: period and cohort analysis

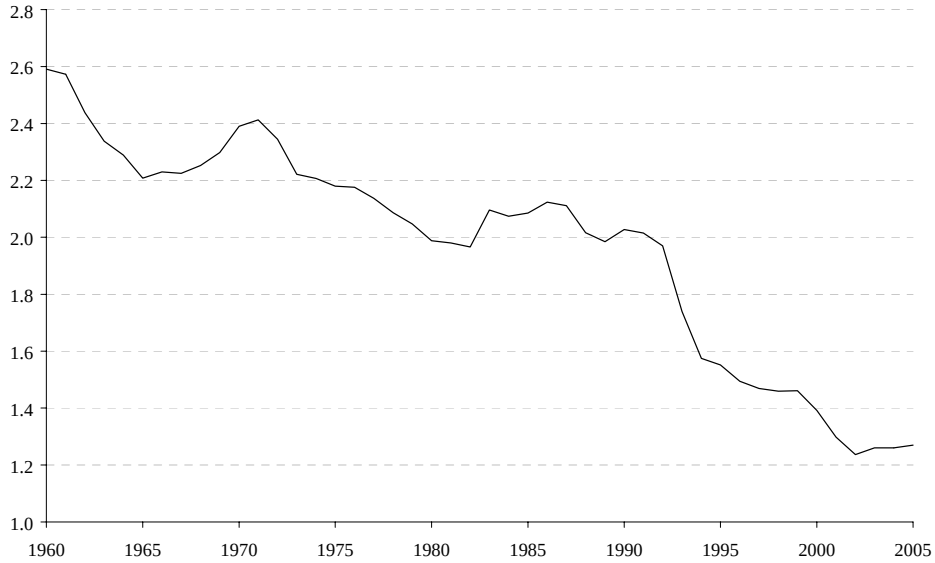
2.1 Period fertility trends

2.1.1 Period total fertility rate

For many years before the 1990s, the period total fertility rate (TFR) of Lithuania stood close to a level sufficient to ensure population replacement, i.e. it was close to 2.0 (see Figure 1). Even in the period 1990 to 1992, it ranged between 2.03 and 1.97. Soon afterwards, however, a major break occurred and a rapid decline started. The sharpest drop in the TFR was recorded in 1993 and 1994, when the fertility level fell (from 1.97 in 1992) to 1.57 in 1994. Since the mid 1990s, the TFR has been continuously decreasing with a short slowdown in the period 1995 to 1998 and an acceleration in the period 1999 to 2000. In 2002, to use the term introduced by Kohler, Billari and Ortega (2002), period fertility reached its lowest-low level in Lithuania. The TFR fell below 1.3 and stayed in the range of 1.24 to 1.27 throughout the period 2002 to 2005.

3 The Fertility and Family Survey was carried out in Lithuania by the Demographic Research Centre of the Institute for Social Research in 1994-1995. 2000 males and 3000 females aged 18 to 49 years were interviewed.
4 European Comparative Population-Related Policy Acceptance Survey was carried out in Lithuania by the Demographic Research Centre of the Institute for Social Research in 2001. The sample consisted of 613 males and 787 females aged 18 to 75 years.
5 The Lithuanian Family Survey was carried out by the Demographic Research Centre of the Institute for Social Research in 2005. The sample consisted of 933 males and females aged 18 to 75 years.

Figure 1: Period total fertility rate, 1960-2005

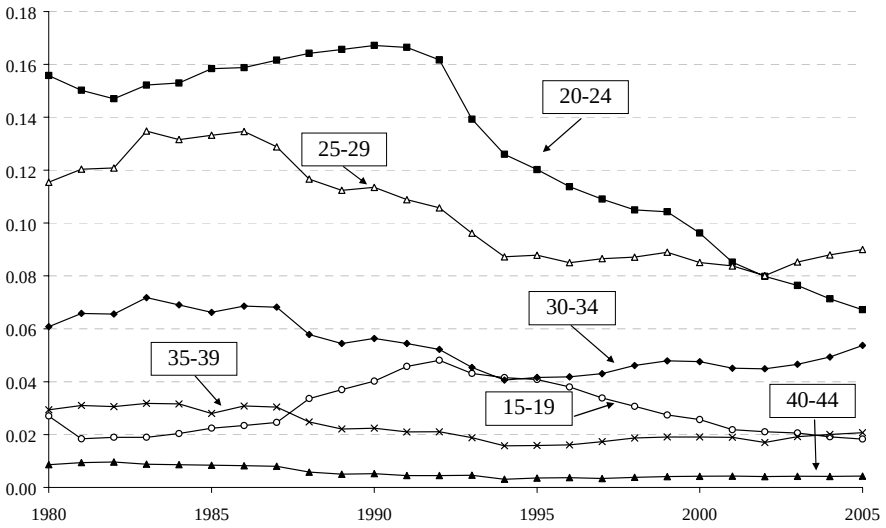


Source: Statistics Lithuania 2006.

2.1.2 Age pattern of fertility: signs of postponement

Another important feature of the recent fertility trends in Lithuania is the change in the age pattern of fertility and an increasing tendency for women to bear children at older ages. The previous long lasting downward trend in the mean age of women at first birth reversed in the mid-1990s. From 1994 to 2004, the period mean age of women at first birth increased from 23.04 to 24.84 years. Figure 2 depicts the age specific fertility curves, demonstrating a marked decline in fertility at younger ages. The most pronounced decline is observed in the age group 20 to 24 years: the fertility rate dropped from 0.17 to 0.07 per woman in the period 1990 to 2004. In recent years, the maximum fertility rate has shifted to the 25 to 29 years old age group.

Figure 2: Period age specific fertility rates by age group, 1980–2005



Source: Statistics Lithuania 2006.

2.1.3 Tempo effects in the fertility decline

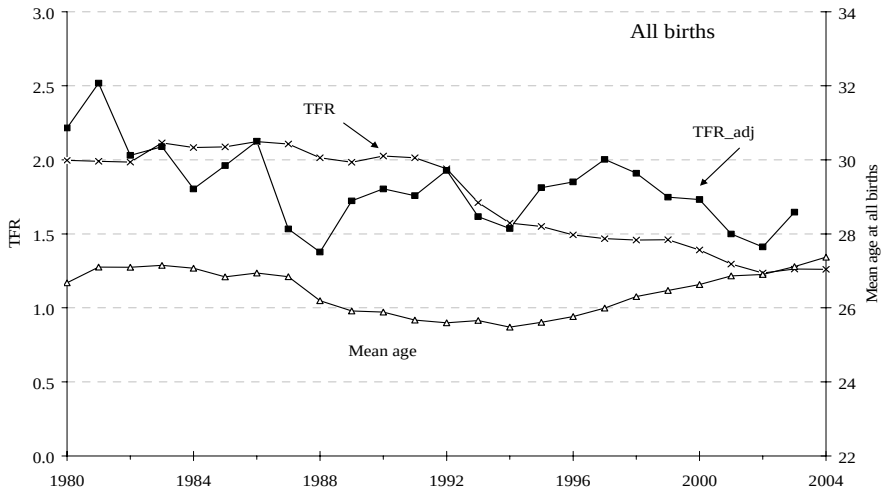
One of the significant shortcomings of the period fertility indicators, which, currently, is well recognized and widely discussed among demographic researchers, is their sensitivity to changes in the timing of childbearing. The postponement of births, though only very recently observed and still rather modest in Lithuania, distorts the period fertility measures. It is therefore difficult to identify to what extent the recent decline in the TFR is an outcome of a timing change and to what extent it is due to a "real" (quantum) reduction in fertility.

Distortions in the observed TFR, caused by increasingly delayed childbearing, have provoked a number of attempts to adjust it. One of the adjustments, based on order specific, total fertility rates and changes in order specific mean age at childbearing, was proposed by Bongaarts and Feeney (1998). Despite the criticism and arguments, that it is impossible to infer cohort fertility measures from period fertility measures (see, for example, van Imhoff 2001), in most cases the adjusted TFR, estimated according to the Bongaarts and Feeney (BF) model, is found to come closer to the completed cohort

fertility than the period TFR does (Philipov and Kohler 2001, Philipov and Dorbritz 2003, Sobotka 2003 and, 2004, Lesthaeghe and Willems 1999, and others). Nevertheless, even given all its advantages, the adjusted TFR remains a period measure and its interpretations should be treated with caution.

Using the BF formula, the adjusted TFRs for Lithuania were calculated for the period 1980 to 2003. The observed and adjusted TFRs, for different birth orders separately, all births together and mean ages at childbearing, are presented in Figures 3 and 4. The adjusted TFR demonstrates that both the decrease and increase in mean age at childbearing have a significant impact on fertility trends. The effect of the former dominated in Lithuania in the period before 1990, while the latter has been gaining influence since 1995. The adjusted TFR and observed TFR exhibit quite similar patterns of change, but the adjusted TFR is higher than its period equivalent in regards to both all births and order specific births after 1994, confirming the importance of tempo effects in the persistent downward fertility trends. The quantum effect was primarily responsible for fertility decline during the first years of the 1990s (until 1995). Later, with the intensifying postponement effect, its influence decreases, but still remains relatively noticeable.

Figure 3: Observed and adjusted TFR and mean age of women at all births, 1980-2004



Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2005; Statistics Lithuania 2007; Eurostat New Cronos Database; HMD database.

Figure 4: Observed and adjusted TFR and mean age of women at order specific births, 1980–2004

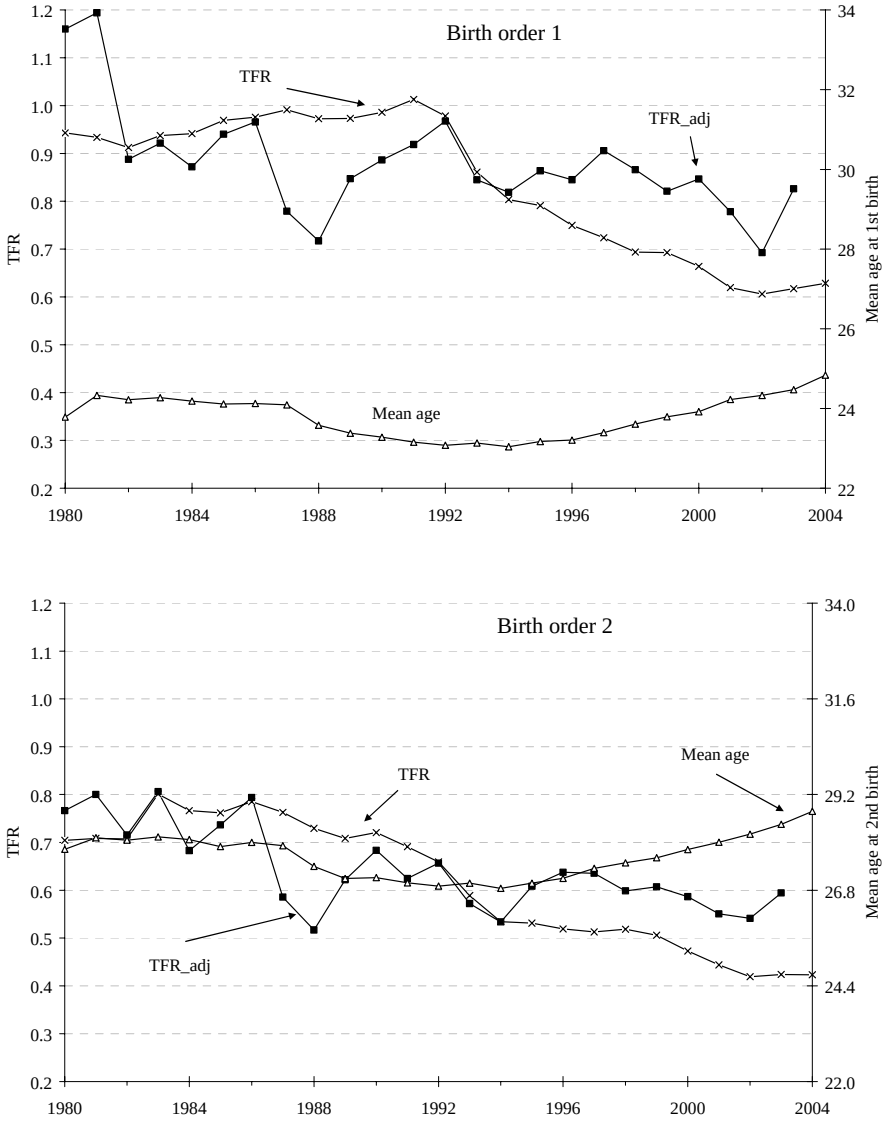
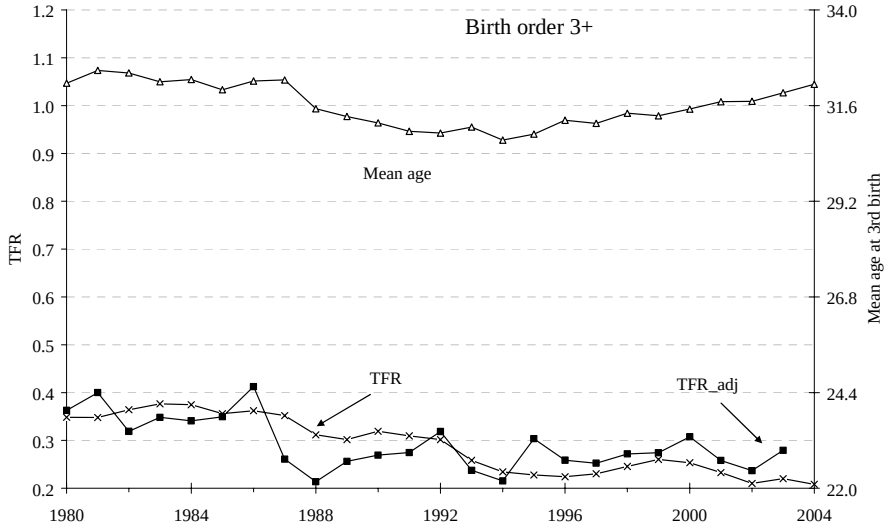


Figure 4: (continued) Observed and adjusted TFR and mean age of women at order specific births, 1980–2004



Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2005, Statistics Lithuania 2007, Eurostat New Cronos Database, HMD database.

The effect of postponement of births is particularly evident for the first and second order TFRs. The graphs in Figure 4 show that the decline in the period TFR observed from the mid 1990s has been mainly brought about by the postponement and decline of first and second births. The timing and quantum of third and subsequent births have changed to a much lesser extent, and their contribution to the difference between the observed and adjusted TFRs is less substantial.

The general conclusion that may be drawn from these findings is that changes in the timing of childbearing seem to have had an effect on the decline of the period fertility level in Lithuania. However, there is no guarantee that completed cohort fertility will converge later to the level of the adjusted TFR. The BF formula considers the postponement of fertility, to the extent that it is related to the change in order specific mean age at birth, but does not take into account other aspects of the fertility schedule.

2.2 Cohort fertility trends

2.2.1 Completed cohort fertility

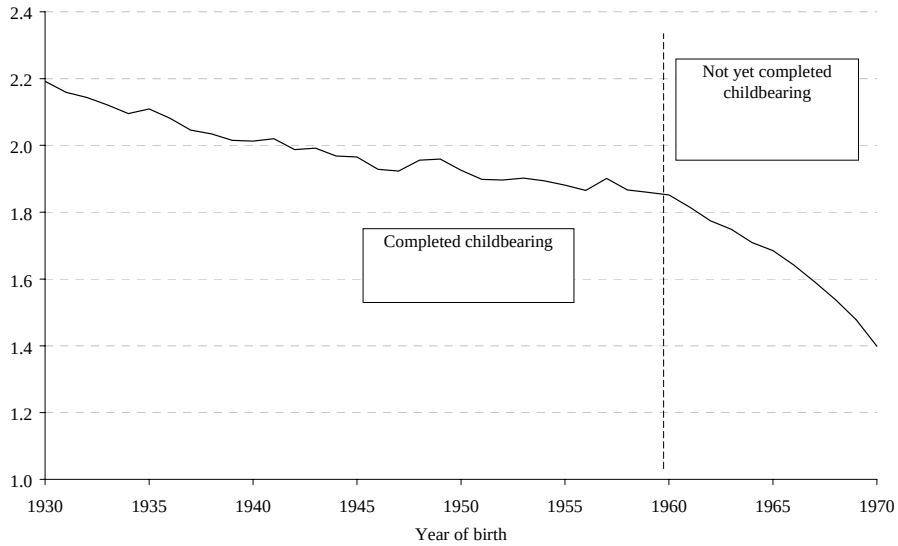
Completed cohort fertility rates are the best indicators of the actual fertility level. However, they can be calculated only after women of the particular birth cohort have reached the end of their reproductive life span. In Lithuania, the fertility rates for women over 40 years of age are very low. Taking this into account, the youngest cohort of women that we have included in the analysis is that for the year 1960. Women born in 1960 were about 41 years old at the time of the population census in 2001 (a source of data for our analysis) and, therefore, can be considered as having essentially completed their childbearing years.

The cohort fertility curve, which is depicted in Figure 5, reflects a rather smooth and gradual decline in fertility from 2.19 to 1.85 children in the birth cohorts, 1930 through 1960. It is worth noting that, despite the observed downward trend, the completed cohort fertility among women born before the 1960s is still very close to the replacement level.

2.2.2 Changing age pattern of cohort fertility

The completed fertility rates throughout the birth cohorts 1930 to 1960 show rather moderate changes compared to the precipitous decline in the period TFR. A much more difficult task is to predict the ultimate family size of the more recent birth cohorts, more so since many of them reached the age of highest fertility, or just entered childbearing age, at exactly the same time as the intense societal transformations. The environment in which these cohorts have been having children is very different from what it was before the fall of the Soviet regime, in terms of both socioeconomic and cultural conditions. As is evident from the shifting curve of the cohort age specific, fertility, shown in Figure 6, significant changes have been taking place not only in the period fertility trends, but also in the cohort fertility levels. What first strikes the eye is a marked decline in fertility in almost all age groups. Furthermore, the variance in the fertility schedule has noticeably increased. In the younger birth cohorts, there is no longer a uni-modal distribution of fertility rates with a pronounced peak in the age group 20 to 24 years, a feature that was quite typical for many cohorts of women born before the 1970s. Instead we observe that the fertility rates for women born since the early 1970s have been increasingly developing distributions with two much less pronounced peaks, one around age 20 years and the other around age 25 years (see

Figure 5: Cohort total fertility rate for birth cohorts, 1930-1970[6]



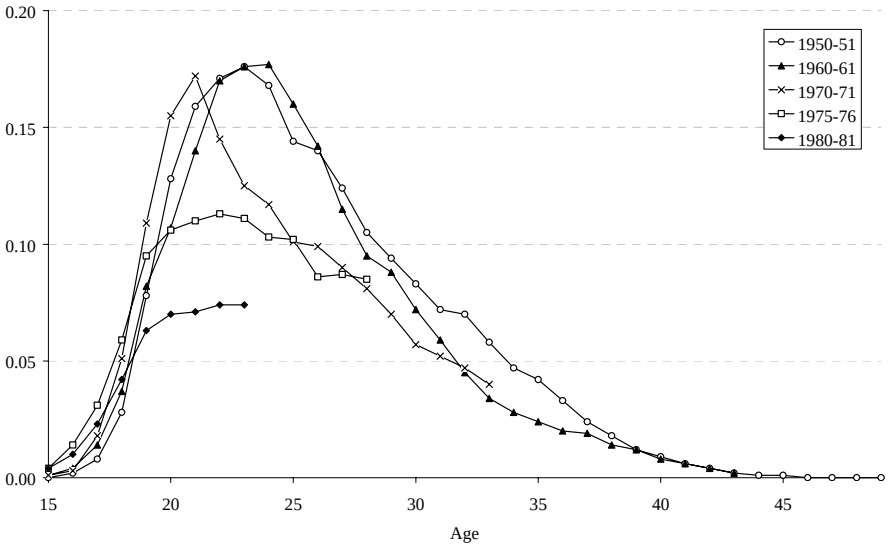
Source: Statistics Lithuania 2004 (2001 population census data).

Figure 7). The curve presenting the age specific, fertility rates for the 1980/81 birth cohort illustrates that there might be a return to one fertility peak in the future, but it would be at considerably higher ages than before.

Figure 7 shows the changes in the shapes of the age specific, fertility curves cohort by cohort for the birth cohorts that have been particularly receptive to the profound societal changes. The 1970/71 and 1971/72 birth cohorts are the last ones with a very pronounced fertility peak at an early age and constitute break points in the shift of the age pattern of cohort fertility. It is noteworthy that women belonging to these cohorts came of age around 1989 to 1990 when there were highly specific circumstances in Lithuania. First, important family policy measures encouraging childbearing were adopted in 1989. Second, those were years of national revival. Family and children were exalted as the highest value of the nation and as a guarantee of its survival, which

[6] Completed cohort fertility is calculated as the mean number of children born to women of a particular birth cohort, assuming that women who migrated or died had the same fertility rate at each age as the women who survived to the end of their reproductive period. Calculations are based on data from the 2001 population census.

Figure 6: Cohort age specific fertility rates among women born in 1950/51 to 1980/81

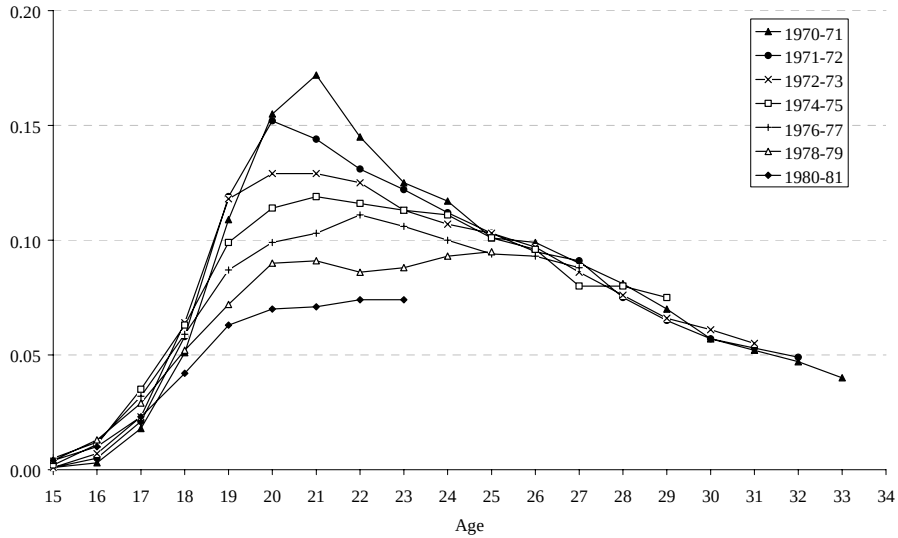


Source: Statistics Lithuania 2005.

also contributed to the creation of an atmosphere favourable to childbearing. Third, in order to escape military service in the Soviet army, right before Lithuania's declaration of independence and for some time after it, young men (mostly born in the period 1970 to 1972) started families earlier than usual. Marriage and having small children was one of the legal ways to avoid conscription or to postpone it. All these specific factors fostered high fertility rates at early ages among many women born in the period 1970 to 1972 (for a more extensive description, see the FFS findings in Stankuniene et al. 2000). Women born from 1973 onwards exhibit a different age pattern of childbearing, characterized by a shift away from early motherhood.

Thus, the age pattern of cohort fertility has changed significantly. Every cohort of women born since the early 1970s is having fewer births at early ages and is postponing childbearing until later in life. What their completed fertility history will be, only the future can tell. Based on available evidence, however, it would be too optimistic to expect that their fertility at older ages will be high enough to reach the population replacement level.

Figure 7: Cohort age specific fertility rates for most recent birth cohorts from 1970/71 to 1980/81

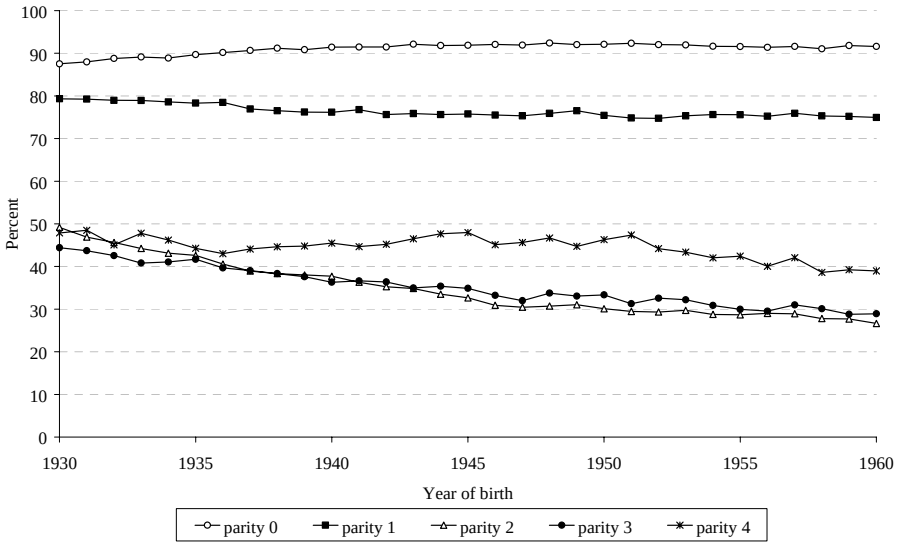


Source: Statistics Lithuania 2005.

2.2.3 Family size and composition

Figure 8 provides cohort parity progression ratios, retrospectively showing women's movement from one parity to the next. Around 90 per cent of women in all birth cohorts, except the most recent ones, gave birth to a first child. The proportion of childless women among those born before the 1960s ranges between 8 and 12 per cent and in the birth cohorts from 1937 to 1960 it ranges between 8 and 9 per cent. About 75 to 77 per cent of women at parity 1 progressed to parity 2, and the ratio was very stable for the birth cohorts of the late 1930s through the 1950s. After parity 2, differences in the parity progression ratios increase between the cohorts. The proportion of women who moved from parity 2 to parity 3 declined in each subsequent birth cohort: from almost 50 per cent in the 1930 cohort to 27 per cent in the 1960 cohort. The parity progression ratios from 3 to 4 depict a similar trend. The probability of having a fifth and higher order child fluctuated, but in general, after a slight increase in the birth cohorts of the 1940s, it declined and stabilized at around 40 per cent among women of the subsequent cohorts.

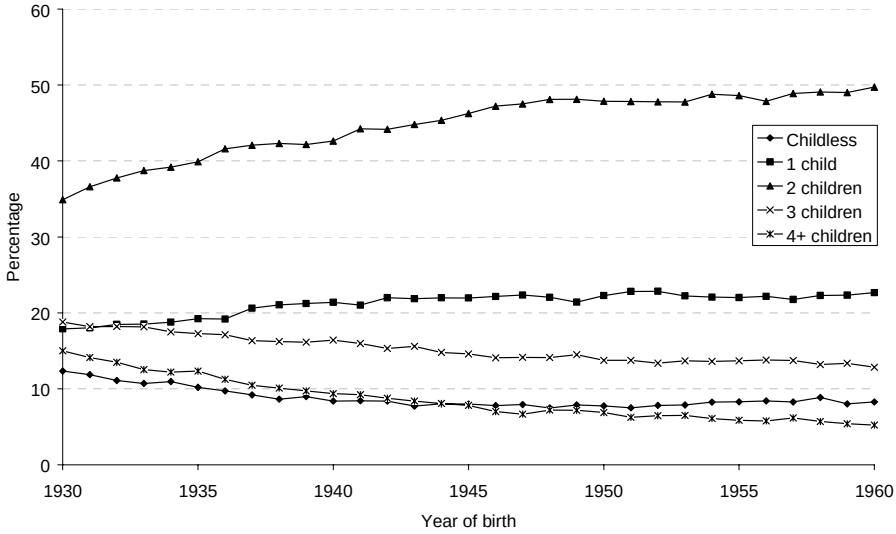
Figure 8: Cohort parity progression ratios for birth cohorts 1930–1960; probability of having a child or another child by current parity



Source: Statistics Lithuania 2004 (2001 census data).

Changes in parity progression ratios over the cohorts that were studied, suggest that much of the cohort fertility decline has been due to the falling rates of third and higher order births as well as an increasing preference for a two child family. The proportion of first and second order births in the birth cohorts of 1930 to 1960 increased from 53 to 72 per cent, while the proportion of third order births decreased from 19 to 13 per cent, and the proportion of fourth and higher order birth also dropped from 15 to 5 per cent (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Parity distribution, birth cohorts, 1930–1960



Source: Statistics Lithuania 2004 (2001 population census data).

3. Determinants of the shifting fertility level and pattern

In Lithuania, as in other Eastern and Central European countries, the very rapid and extensive decline in fertility that started in the 1990s has been preconditioned by numerous determinants of various origins, which manifested themselves at different time intervals, have different sequences and strengths and various effects on the childbearing behaviour of the population. First, the determinants that played an important role in the drop in fertility in the Western countries, and that are summarized in the theoretical framework of the second demographic transition, should be distinguished. Second, there are also specific determinants that are typical only for the post-communist countries experiencing transition to a market economy. Finally, there are national level determinants (Stankuniene 2000 and 2005). In all of them, the impact of the old and new conditions on the demographic, specifically childbearing, behaviour is interrelated. The determinants are of different levels:

- macro (societal level) — economic, social, cultural and political conditions; and
- micro (individual, family level) — psychological, demographic and other factors.

During the period of recent transformations, all spheres of public and private life have been changing fundamentally and rapidly, and all these changes have had an effect on childbearing behaviour and fertility patterns.

Thus, the variety of determinants is great. Some of them are short lived, and the estimation of their strength on the changes in fertility is far from easy. Nevertheless, the theoretical, empirical and practical information available makes it possible to identify some of the determinants and assess their impact, at least on a hypothetical level.

This section provides an overview of the key determinants that have affected the decline in fertility in Lithuania. The determinants, it is necessary to say, are closely interrelated and it is therefore not possible to avoid some overlap. They have been grouped as follows:

- *economic determinants of the transformational period*: economic transformations, economic crises, unemployment, low income, poverty, etc.;
- *transformation effect factors*: deprivation, anomy, etc., (also discussed by Philipov 2001 and 2002);
- *determinants inherited from the Soviet system*: lack of dwelling, orientation towards paternalistic state policy, conflict between patriarchal attitudes and emancipation and specifics of female employment;
- *demographic determinants*: emigration of youth, family de-institutionalisation and changes in family formation;
- *determinants of the second demographic transition in the transformational environment*: individualisation, emancipation, increasing freedom of choice, secularisation, modern methods of contraception, etc., (van de Kaa 1987, Lesthaeghe 1995, Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004, and others).

3.1 Economic determinants of the transformational period

An enormous economic decline, which accompanied the fundamental political, economic and social changes in Lithuania, was a very important and powerful cause for the drop in fertility at the beginning of the 1990s. Economic instability played the most important role here. This is frequently identified as one of the most powerful reasons for a low fertility level (Rossier 2005). Lithuania's declaration of independence in 1990 and its political separation from the Soviet Union was followed by a speedy and evident breach in economic relations, a decline in industry, and a complete breakdown of the

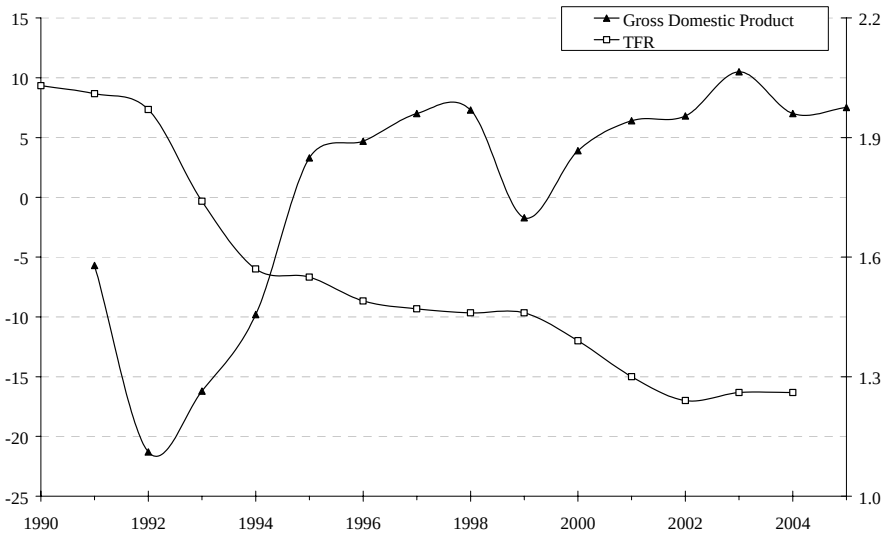
enterprises which were producing for the military industry of the USSR. The reorganisation and privatisation of the entire economic chain, which took place simultaneously, also had a destabilising effect on the economy of the country.

3.1.1 Economic instability: swings in GDP, unemployment and inflation

At the beginning of the 1990s, an economic crisis, that dragged on until 1995, erupted in Lithuania. During this period, GDP dropped sharply (Figure 10). Between 1992 and 1993 it lost more than 15 per cent a year. The inflation rate was very high, in fact at the hyperinflation level (1163 per cent) in 1992, which had a pauperising effect on a large portion of the population and increased income inequality in the society. Significant changes were taking place in the sphere of employment. A western type labour market was just emerging, alongside which unemployment appeared and was rising. For a society, which had had no previous experience of functioning under labour market conditions, not to mention in the environment of a deep crisis, the blow was tremendous. Furthermore, the institutional labour market system was forming slowly. At the beginning of the 1990s, Lithuanian society experienced a nearly five year long, extreme economic decline.

The economy of Lithuania bottomed out in the period 1992 to 1994, and, beginning in 1995, a slow recovery started. Signs of economic growth were visible for about four years, from 1995 to 1998. In the period 1999 to 2000, the economy of Lithuania again declined. GDP decreased 1.7 per cent in 1999, and the unemployment rate exceeded 10 per cent in the period 2000 to 2002. The Russian financial crisis of the late 1990s was responsible for the instability of the Lithuanian economy in that period. Since 2001, the economy of Lithuania has been growing at a rather high rate, more than 6 per cent. In 2003, GDP increased as much as 10.5 per cent (Statistics Lithuania 2007). In the period 2004 to 2005 unemployment decreased significantly. By the beginning of 2006, the unemployment rate was 4 per cent (Labour Exchange 2007). The rate of unemployment for young people remained high until 2005. According to labour force surveys, the unemployment rate for 15 to 24 year olds was much higher than 20 per cent and only decreased to 14 per cent in 2005 (Statistics Lithuania 2000, Statistics Lithuania 2002a, Statistics Lithuania 2003, Labour Exchange 2001, Statistics Lithuania 2007, Labour Exchange 2007).

Figure 10: Changes in gross domestic product (per cent) and TFR in Lithuania



Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2005; Statistics Lithuania 2007.

3.1.2 Economy by sectors

During the 1990s, production by sectors changed greatly in Lithuania. The share of GDP produced by industry fell significantly, but that contributed by the service sector rose. In 1992, 49 per cent of GDP was contributed by industry and construction, 39 per cent by services, and 12 per cent by agriculture (Statistics Lithuania 1997). In 2000 these sectors produced 30, 62 and 8 per cent of GDP, respectively (Statistics Lithuania 2000), and in 2004 these figures amounted to 34, 60 and 6 per cent (Statistics Lithuania 2007).

Corresponding changes were observed in employment by sector. In 1990 39 per cent, in 2000 54 per cent, and in 2004 56 per cent of all employees were engaged in services. The share of the population employed in industry and construction fell sharply: from 42 per cent to about 27 per cent and 28 per cent (Statistics Lithuania 2000, Statistics Lithuania 2007). These turbulent economic transformations required a lot of adaptation from society and were accompanied by an increased risk of losing one's job. There was a need to change professional qualifications, etc. It is noteworthy

that, despite the marked increase of employment in the service sector, social services are still rather poorly developed.

3.1.3 Income, poverty

Although the economy of Lithuania was very unstable in the 1990s, it was, on the whole growing. GDP per capita increased from US$ 487 in 1992 to approximately € 2600 in 1996, to € 3800 in 2000, and to € 6030 in 2005 (Statistics Lithuania 2007).

Nevertheless, the level of poverty remains rather high. The relative poverty rate was 18 per cent in 1995 and 16 to 17 per cent in the period 1998 to 2005 (Statistics Lithuania 2007). The share of expenditures on food has been declining, but continues to be rather high, especially in rural areas. In 1997 the rate was 52 per cent, in 2005 it was 39 per cent, and in rural areas in 2005 it was 49 per cent (Statistics Lithuania 2007).

The economic decline in the first years of transformation caused deterioration in standards of living, and pushed various social and economic groups into poverty. According to data from Statistics Lithuania, a social stratum of young families with a considerably low standard of living emerged. They are young families having more than one child, living apart from their parents, and having at least one breadwinner employed in the public sector, industry, or construction, and families living in rural areas. In addition, data show that living standards are directly related to the number of children in the family, and for almost a decade this situation has not changed. Compared to households with no children, in 1997 the average consumption expenditure per capita per month in households with one child under 18 was 14 per cent lower, and in households with three or more children under 18 this figure was 49 percent lower (UNICEF 1998). In 2005, these figures were, respectively, 15 and 51 per cent lower (Statistics Lithuania 2006c). Poverty is most prevalent in families with children under 18 years of age, and is especially so in households with several children (three and more). The relative poverty level among such families in 1997 and in 2005 was 37 per cent (UNICEF 1998, Statistics Lithuania 2006b).

Thus, it is not surprising that fertility dropped sharply at the beginning of the 1990s, especially in the period 1993 to 1994. In the early 1990s, childbearing intentions decreased significantly, too. The number of children desired decreased from 2.8 in 1990 to 2.1 in the period 1994 to 1995 (Stankuniene et al. 2000). In later years (1996 to 1998), the stabilisation of the economy was accompanied by a slower decline in fertility, but another economic decline in the late 1990s triggered an acceleration in fertility decline, and the TFR reached its lowest level. The curves of economic instability are duplicated in form by the shape of the TFR dynamics (Figure 10). There is, however, no doubt that the decline in fertility was also influenced by a multitude of

other determinants. Although the economy of Lithuania has been growing rapidly since the beginning of the 21st century, fertility remains very low.

Economic determinants evidently had a strong effect on the decline in fertility at the beginning of the economic transformations and during the crises. In fact, they served as the impetus for the change in family formation, renouncement and postponement of marriage, avoidance of long term matrimonial obligations, etc., and fertility, postponement of childbearing, or having fewer children**.** However, in the second half of the 1990s, the effect of these economic determinants started to weaken and was increasingly overwhelmed by determinants related to ideational changes that were taking place in the society.

3.2 Transformation effect factors

Some determinants that were forceful at the initial stage, that is, the beginning of the 1990s, of the recent changes in fertility and family might be called the transformation effect factors. Some of them are highly specific determinants and are typical in post-communist countries acquiring the principles of a market economy and a democratic society. They are the determinants that produce a sense of social loss after some of the Soviet era guarantees, such as employment and income, free education and health care. It is worth noting that, in Lithuania, the determinants of the first years of transformation were rather different from those of the later period of transformation.

One group of this type of determinants is an outcome of transformational irregularities. In the period of transition to a market economy and the formation of the labour market, the loss of Soviet era employment and minimum salary guarantees became crucial for part of the population, so much so that a consolidation of market rules was followed by a tremendous decline in the national economy and a shrinking of industry. In the initial phase of the transformations, large numbers of former industrial employees were thrown into a new and highly specific status of economic activity - inactivity. They were given unpaid leave and thus lost their wages. For many, the unpaid leave lasted a long time - a year, two years, or even longer. Loss of employment and income were common in other branches of the economy, too. It was rapid and massive where it related to the destruction of Soviet economic units, but also gradual, through the reorganisation and transformation of various economic structures. A significant portion of those who lost their jobs or employment related income (on unpaid leaves or being forced into part time employment) entered the shadow economy. According to data from various surveys/evaluations, about 15 to 30 per cent of the gross national product was generated in the shadow economy in the 1990s. According to estimates made by Statistics Lithuania, the unofficially employed amounted to about

300,000 or 18 per cent of the total labour force in 1996 (Gruzevskis, 1997). Employment in the shadow economy became a source of income, sometimes even larger than that obtained from official employment, but it could not assure any social guarantees or stability.

Thus, during the first years of the transformations, the establishing of new labour market rules, the lowering of income, and the weakening of social guarantees were taking place in parallel with an economic decline. The changes were rapid and drastic and had significant consequences on marriage and fertility.

In later years, when the Lithuanian national economy had recovered, for the passive segment of the population the loss of social guarantees was still painful and caused deprivation or even poverty, produced doubt about the future and modified childbearing behaviour. Part of the population still has difficulty adapting to the new conditions of the market economy.

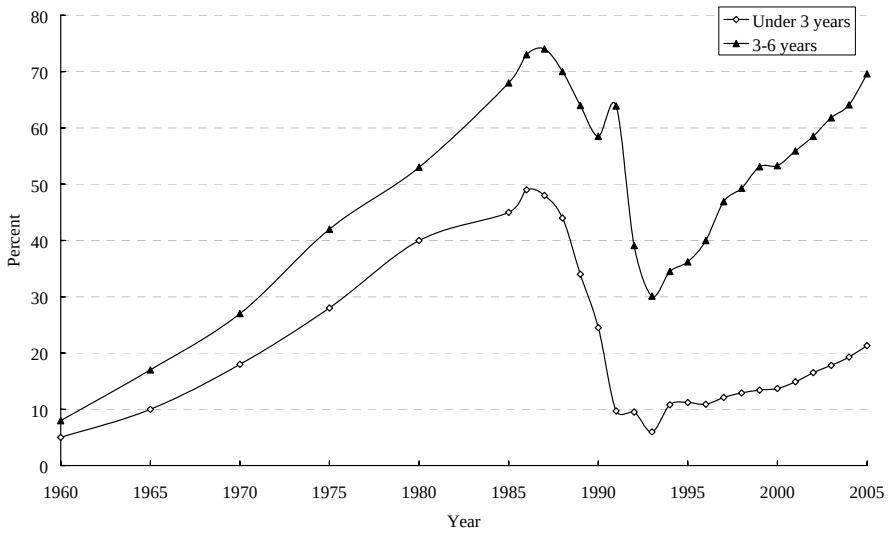
A dying away of the centralized and regulated system of housing supply, and transition to an open housing market, accompanied by a great shortage of accommodation, the absence of an alternative system for acquiring a home, and large increases in prices for accommodation have been, and still are, very painful for residents, especially those from the lower social strata. The absence of a favourable loan system for the purchase of a home is a very sensitive issue, particularly for young people, and has had a serious effect on their matrimonial and childbearing behaviour. According to the Population-Related Policy Acceptance Survey (PPAS) (carried out in Lithuania in 2001) data, 95 per cent of respondents in Lithuania indicated that the difficulties young people experience while trying to acquire housing are a very important or important cause for the postponement or renouncement of marriage (Stankuniene et al. 2003).

Surveys show that educational system reforms, which began in the transformational period and are still being carried out, have not yet produced a system that would make families feel certain about the fulfilment of their expectations and about providing their children with a desired education. "*Concern about the future of children*" is the most frequent reason for not wanting the first or another child. During the PPAS in 2001, 71 per cent of respondents indicated this as a very important or important reason, and during the Lithuanian Family Survey in 2005, 77 per cent did so. A *"substantial decrease in the cost of education of children",* mentioned by 44 per cent of respondents in 2001, is one of the most desired measures of family policy. These factors that arose during the period of transformation permit one to assert that the problem of educating children is an important transformational factor causing decreased fertility in Lithuania (Stankuniene et al. 2003). This is evidently related to the notable changeability in all levels of the educational system; continual changes made in

enrolment rules for universities and vocational schools, the growing proportion of paid studies and rapidly rising costs for professional training.

In the transformational period, major irregularities were also observed in the changing childcare services. In the Soviet period, the network of childcare centres in Lithuania, covering nurseries for children below three years of age and kindergartens for children aged three to six years, was rather more advanced than in the other republics of the Soviet Union. In 1987 about 64 per cent of Lithuanian children aged from one to six years were attending nurseries and kindergartens (Statistics Lithuania 1991, Statistics Lithuania 1992, Statistics Lithuania 1993 and Statistics Lithuania 1994, Socialnoie 1991) (see Figure 11). This was one of the highest levels of participation in the USSR.

Figure 11: Proportion of children attending nurseries and kindergartens from all children of respective age (per cent)



Sources: Statistics Lithuania 1991, Statistics Lithuania 1992, Statistics Lithuania 1993, Statistics Lithuania 1994, Statistics Lithuania 1999, and Statistics Lithuania 2006b.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the system of pre-school institutions began vanishing in Lithuania. In this field, the ideology and actions of the government were highly inconsistent. During the first five years of independence, the number of childcare centres in rural areas dropped 72 per cent and in urban areas it fell 38 per cent (Lietuvos gyventoju 2004). The number of children attending childcare centres also fell significantly. Elimination of these services reached a zenith in the period 1990 to 1993. By 1993 just 21 per cent of children from one to six years of age were attending childcare centres. Since the mid 1990s, childcare services in Lithuania have been expanded again (Figure 11), but they still do not meet the requirements of families for quantity, quality, or availability of the services.

Rapid societal transformations also brought about anxiety and confusion in the values and norms of the society. Attitudes to, and assessments of, the observed family changes, obtained during the PPAS, reflect rather well the uncertainty that society has been living through. The survey results show that, although, in general, the new family features (a decrease in the number of marriages, an increase in the number of cohabitations and children born out of wedlock, etc.) are becoming more tolerated, society is not confident in, and rather cautious about, many of them. A more liberal attitude to some family changes is intertwined with conservatism and an unwillingness to give up traditional moral standards and behaviours. Therefore, attitudes towards many new social phenomena are more neutral than positive. For example, the increasing number of cohabiting couples and the children born to these couples most frequently are assessed neutrally, i.e. “neither good nor bad” (46 and 48 percent of respondents), but only 15 and 10 percent of respondents give a positive assessment to these trends. A deeper analysis of the responses has shown that age is the strongest differentiating factor for attitudes. The older generation is clearly more conservative than the younger. Even in this younger generation, however, the respondents, in fact, seldom voice approval of all the family changes (by giving “good” or “excellent” evaluations). In this respect, some inconsistencies might be observed. That, at the beginning of the changes, economic hardship and instability were prevalent, forcing young people to adopt new forms of matrimonial behaviour, allows one to assume that society was simply pushed into the new conditions, while the value-cultural surroundings for this type of behaviour were not yet ready to the extent required.

Thus, apparently the decline in fertility has been affected by a number of transformation related factors, the housing shortage, the importance of which, due to the sky rocketing prices of dwellings, has grown larger during the transition to a market economy, loss of life long employment guarantees, and weakened educational opportunities and social guarantees. Anomy has obviously been an important cause of family transformation and fertility decline too.

3.3 Determinants inherited from the Soviet system

The economic and cultural determinants inherited from Soviet times are also very important factors limiting matrimonial and childbearing behaviour. The issue is that paternalistic orientations and expectations regarding the social policy of the state (including family policy) still persist in society. For example, the findings of the PPAS show that people still basically view the growth of financial support or extension of other economic forms of support as a priority in the further development of family policy in Lithuania (Stankuniene et al. 2003). These priorities reveal not only the urgency of economic problems to families, but also the vitality of paternalistic orientations; the concept that somebody, primarily the government, must take care of everyone and of each family is still very much alive. The legacies of paternalistic thinking can be found in almost all segments of society, from policymakers to the family, the consumers of family policy. Here it is useful to note once again the serious shortage of housing, which was inherited from the Soviet regime and has persisted, as a crucial determinant, seriously restricting matrimonial and procreative behaviour.

3.4 Demographic determinants (emigration of youth, family transformation; postponement of marriage and childbearing, family de-institutionalisation, etc.)

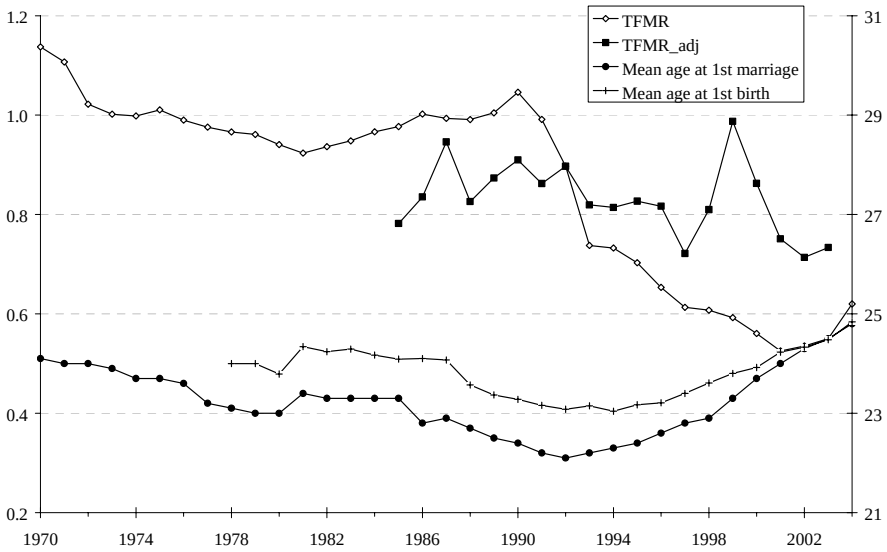
In Lithuania, the migration flows of the population and the ongoing family transformation are important demographi*c* determinants of decreased fertility. Since the middle of the previous decade, matrimonial and childbearing behaviour in Lithuania has been significantly altered by the greatly expanded mobility of young people. Family transformation was initially accelerated by the intensive, short term migration flows that emerged in the mid 1990s between Lithuania and Western countries. Then high unemployment in Lithuania pushed people (mostly the young) into a large scale exodus to search for jobs (often illegal) and incomes. These were additional factors for postponing family formation and childbearing, destabilising existing families, weakening ties between family members (between partners and between migrating parents and children) and adopting (or imitating) a new lifestyle. According to data from Statistics Lithuania, more than 300,000 people have left Lithuania over the past fifteen years, and most of them are young people 20 to 34 years of age (Statistics Lithuania 2005).

One of the main proximate determinants of fertility is marriage. Thus, it is not surprising that changes in matrimonial behaviour (changes in timing of marriage and diffusion of cohabitation) also have a significant reducing effect on the period indices of fertility.

In Lithuania, childbearing has traditionally been related with marriage. Until the late 1980s, family formation, through its official registration, was universal in character and marriage was still rejuvenating. Consensual unions and childbirth outside marriage were poorly tolerated by society and quite uncommon. Since the early 1990s, however, attitudes towards the institution of marriage and marital behaviour have experienced considerable changes. In 1991 marriages started decreasing rapidly (see Figure 12). It is noteworthy that directly before the decrease, marriage rates had suddenly risen, especially among people of the youngest marriageable age. This rise, as explained earlier in Section 2.2 Cohort fertility trends, was largely caused by the attempts of young men to escape service in the Soviet army in the politically complicated years just before and after Lithuania's declaration of independence. Soon afterwards the marriage rate decreased. The total first marriage rate (TFMR) for women fell to 0.53 in 2000. Thereafter, marriage rates began rising again, but the increase was rather moderate compared to the pre-transformational period. In 2004 the TFMR was 0.62, implying that almost two-fifths of all women would never marry. Furthermore, marriages, which had been rejuvenating in Lithuania throughout the whole post war period, began to be delayed to an older age in the 1990s. The mean age of women at first marriage increased from 22.1 years in 1992 to 24.8 years in 2004 (for men it increased from 23.8 years to 26.9 years) (Statistics Lithuania 2005).

As in the case of the total fertility rates (TFRs), it is suggested that the decline in the period TFMRs recently experienced by many countries is partly due to the postponement of marriages, and it is illustrated by estimated, tempo adjusted measures (see, for example Philipov and Dorbritz 2003, Winkler-Dworak and Engelhardt 2004). Figure 12 provides the tempo adjusted TFMRs of Lithuanian women for the period 1985 to 2003, estimated using the Bongaarts and Feeney formula. The comparison of the period and adjusted indicators allows us to assume that indeed the decline in the number of marriage observed since 1991 may, to a certain extent, be a result of tempo distortions.

Figure 12: Female observed and adjusted TFMR, mean age at first marriage and at first birth



Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2005; Statistics Lithuania 2007; Eurostat New Cronos Database.

In addition, a considerable part of the fall in the TFMR can be explained by the increase in cohabitation. An indirect indicator of its spread is the increasing share of extramarital births. For a long time before the 1990s, the proportion of extramarital births in Lithuania ranged between 5 and 7 per cent of the total, and since the early 1990s the numbers have grown fourfold, reaching almost 30 per cent in 2005 (Statistics Lithuania 2006). Increasingly more children born outside marriage are registered by both parents instead of a lone mother, showing that more children have been born to cohabiting couples.

3.5 Determinants of the second demographic transition in the transformational environment (individualisation, emancipation, increasing freedom of choice, modern methods of contraception, etc.)

The effect of the determinants typical of all post-communist countries experiencing transformational challenges was strongest in Lithuania in the 1990s, especially in the first half of the decade. Later, however, they became kind of supplementary determinants and gave way to other types of determinants. Second demographic transition factors, cultural factors (shifting values) and new technology (availability of modern methods of contraception), have an increasingly stronger effect on the fundamental family changes and low fertility. Among these factors, the most important are diffusion of individualisation due to the consolidation of market relations, increasing freedom of choice due to the democratisation of the society, and the liberalisation of value-orientations and lifestyles.

3.5.1 Individualisation

It can hardly be assumed that social changes characteristic of Western countries, such as individualisation and increasing individual rights and freedoms, those identified by the authors of the second demographic transition theory, could have had any influence on changes in family and fertility in Lithuania in the early 1990s. It is hardly possible, since Lithuania had just started liberating itself from the Soviet era ideology of collectivism and the authoritarian rules of that time. Later however, beginning in the mid-1990s, the deepening of individualisation became obvious. Changes in the value-orientations, preferences and life style of young people are particularly noticeable. Young people spend more and more time studying, looking for opportunities to realise themselves, and developing a professional career. Increasing importance is attached to quality of life, hedonistic aspirations, and consumption. Although, as shown by the findings of the European value surveys (Mitrikas 2000a and 2000b), and by the results of the PPAS, the family is still regarded as the highest value in life, the importance of such values as a good job, sufficient income, friends, leisure time, etc., has been increasing in Lithuania since 1990. All this consequently fosters the postponement of family formation and childbearing or even solidifies the decision to remain single and childless. A comparison of the results obtained from the LFS (2005) and the PPAS (2001) reveals that the reasons for not wanting a first child, or another child, have also changed significantly and individualistic explanations, such as unwillingness to give up leisure time interests, fear of being unable to enjoy life as much as before, and

professional responsibilities, are much more frequently mentioned than before (Gedvilaite et al. 2005).

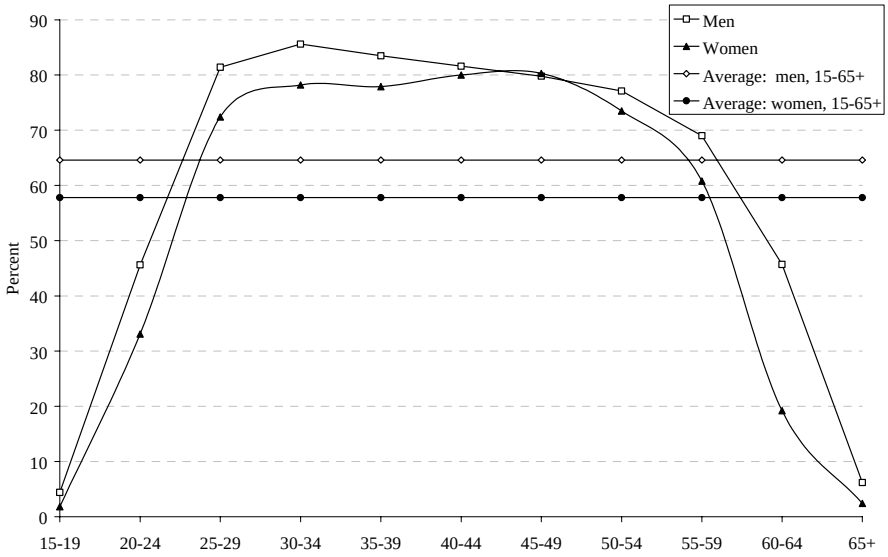
3.5.2 Female emancipation

Female emancipation during the years of transformation progressed in a highly controversial way in Lithuania. It was, and still is, developing, along with the preservation of the traditional/patriarchal attitudes towards gender roles. During the transformations, the conflict between traditional/patriarchal gender role expectations and actual female roles became more visible. Lithuania is notable for its high employment rate of women (Figure 13). Furthermore, the educational level of women exceeds that of men and during the transformational period the difference increased even more (because of the devaluation of higher education in the early-1990s, when it yielded a lower income and consequently attracted fewer male students to universities). According to data from the 2001 census, the proportion of women with a higher education is almost 1.5 times higher than that of men in all age groups before 50 (Figure 14). Meanwhile, during the transformational period, particularly at the beginning, attitudes about the primary role of women as the tender of hearth and home became stronger. Although in recent years these attitudes have become less pronounced, they still remain popular. At present, nearly half the men and women (55 per cent of men and 49 per cent of women according to PPAS data (2001) and 48 and 45 per cent according to Lithuanian Family Survey data (2005)) agree that *"a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family"*. Besides, in many Lithuanian families an asymmetrical distribution of responsibilities between the spouses (partners) has survived; household chores and caring for and looking after the children are mostly the responsibility of the woman (Stankuniene et al. 2003).

There is an evident contradiction between the high rate of female employment and education and the dominant patriarchal attitudes in Lithuania. However, the spreading manifestations of female emancipation, including longer lasting studies, search for career opportunities, striving for a strong material position and economic independence and varied leisure activities, call for essential social changes and adequate policy responses. Extended educational participation and the high level of employment of women observed in Lithuania do not leave space for uncertainty about the need and importance of well functioning work/family reconciliation policies. Society's delay in adapting to the new female roles forces women to work out certain new strategies, which they use to the best of their needs and abilities, to solve the problem of reconciling the varied challenges of daily life. They postpone childbearing for a later period, have fewer children, or refuse to have children altogether (van Doorne-Huiskes, den Dulk

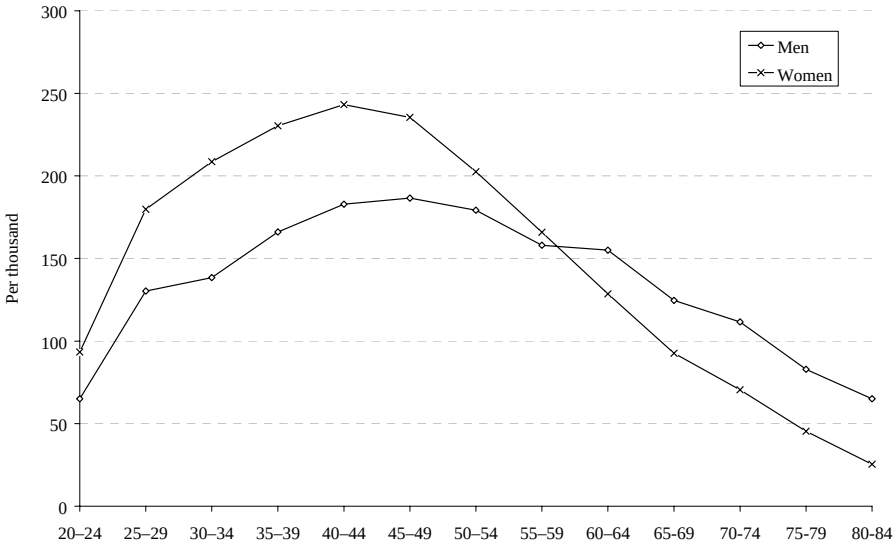
and Schippers 1999). Against such a background in Lithuania, are clearly voiced the ideas of McDonald (2000) that alongside the modernising, public gender system (female employment, education), the private gender system (in the family) remains traditional, preserving the asymmetries (in distribution of functions, partner relations, etc.). It is natural that fertility falls to the lowest low level under such circumstances.

Figure 13*:* Employment level by sex and age in 2004 (per cent)



Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2002b (2001 census data); Statistics Lithuania 2007.

Figure 14*:* **Women and men with higher education by age in 2001 (per 1000 men and women)**



Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2002b (2001 census data); Statistics Lithuania 2007.

3.5.3 Modern methods of contraception

It is very difficult to estimate the usage of modern methods of contraception in Lithuania. The available data are very poor and unreliable. The number of studies conducted in this field is rather insufficient. We would argue that one of the most reliable sources of information about the contraceptive behaviour of the Lithuanian population is the Lithuanian FFS (Stankuniene et al. 2000). However, the survey data reflect the situation in 1994/95, and at that time modern contraceptives were not yet in common use in the country. About 4 per cent of females and males aged between 25 and 34 years indicated that the couples were using the pill, and about 17 per cent of females and 14 per cent of males indicated use of an intrauterine device (IUD) (Stankuniene et al. 2000). On the basis of the 2005 survey, "Use of contraceptives",[7]

[7] The survey "Use of contraceptives" was commissioned by the Family Planning and Sexual Health Association (Lithuania). The survey was carried out by RAIT Ltd., and included questions about contraception on a regular RAIT omnibus survey. Fieldwork took place in 2005.

which was rather limited in scope (in terms of the number of questions included), but representative, it could be maintained that the pill is presently much more popular, 29 per cent of 25 to 34 year old males and females mentioned using it as against 4 per cent of females and males of this age who indicated use of an IUD (RAIT 2005).

The significant decline in the abortion rate could also be considered an indicator, although indirect, of the increasing use of modern methods of contraception. Over the past 15 years, the abortion rate (number of abortions per 1000 women aged 15 to 49 years) has decreased to approximately one-quarter of the 1991 level (Table 1).

Table 1: Legally induced abortions

	Per 1000 women aged 15–49
1991	43.5
1995	34.6
2000	18.4
2005	11.2

Sources: Statistics Lithuania 2002; Statistics Lithuania 2006.

4. The development of family policy in Lithuania: problem of priorities

The development of modern family policy in Lithuania started after the country entered a new stage of historic development; after independence was regained and the country stepped onto the paths of implementing a market economy and democratisation. Understanding the essence of family policy and working out the conceptual foundations and strategy was even more important than the development of a system of measures. However, the activities of the government in this field were inconsistent from the very beginning, and, not infrequently, policies were adopted and implemented in the absence of a strategy and clearly defined goals.

At the end of the 1980s, with the emerging national revival, and at the beginning of the 1990s, after independence was regained, family and children as key national values and a guarantee of survival were elevated against the background of universal euphoria. All this encouraged efforts toward the development of measures for family support. For example, as early as 1989, although a vision for the development of family policy was still absent, the length of paid childcare leave was considerably extended. Simultaneously, the development of the conceptual basis for family policy was

foreseen. In 1990, the *Programme of the Lithuanian Population,* containing three sub-programmes addressing family policy issues (*Fertility and Family*, *Occupational and Home Conditions of Women*, and *Social Care of and Provision for the Elderly and Disabled*), was submitted to the government. The basic ideas of the *Programme of the Lithuanian Population* concerning the development of family policy were to assist families with children (with the objective of extending the possibilities for parents to combine parental duties with professional activities) and to provide an opportunity to choose between different types of care for small children (at home or in pre-school institutions). The development of a system of family benefits and an improvement of family planning services was also foreseen.

The *Programme* was never implemented, however. As early as 1990, on the initiative of the ruling Conservative Party, family policy took a different turn. In pursuit of the patriarchal ideology of preserving the traditional family, a policy of granting various benefits to families to encourage mothers to stay at home with the children was launched. Running parallel to that, pre-school institutions were closed down. In the period 1990 to 1992, a lot of different benefits were provided and received by numerous families, and a considerable amount of money was allocated for the purpose. In accordance with the predominant patriarchal ideology of the time, women were supposed to go back home and become "nurturers of the family hearth", while men had the obligation to work and serve as breadwinners for the family. But the ideas of such a family policy had few prospects of taking root in a society engulfed by deep economic crises, and they were at variance with the pattern of a two-salary-family, which had been consolidated in Soviet times. Meanwhile, setting up small benefits was, all in all, a policy of "providing a morsel" and had no perceivable effect upon family welfare. The realities of life also proved the importance of childcare institutions in the general system of family policy.

In 1993, with the coming to power of the Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party (which later merged with the Social Democratic Party), the priorities for family policy were changed. The government's attitude towards pre-school institutions started changing and the renaissance of those institutions began. In 1994, the benefit system for families was considerably rationalised. Multiple, small benefits were eliminated. In 1994, national and international initiatives (International Year of the Family, the *Action programme* of the ICPD conference in Cairo, etc.) gave rise to a new stage in the development of Lithuanian family policy. The elaboration of the *Concept of Family Policy* began and was later approved by the government in 1996. The main ideas and patterns of the *Concept* were close to the family policies of social, democratic, welfare states.

The Concept stressed the necessity of improving conditions for parents to reconcile work and family. The family policy also envisaged actions leading towards

the consolidation of equal rights for men and women, the development of care facilities for young children, family planning, maternal and infant health, child protection, the welfare of the elderly and the integration of the disabled into society (Family Policy 1996, UNICEF 1998).

But in the autumn of 1996, the Conservative Party again came to power in Lithuania and formed a new government. The *Concept of Family Policy,* which was closer to social democratic ideas, therefore no longer served as the basis for subsequent decisions on family policy. No new strategy for family policy was adopted either. The development of family policy became inconsistent and slack. Furthermore, its development was mostly oriented towards the expansion of the benefit system (for example, a benefit for families fostering children was introduced), while other schemes were given inadequate treatment.

In 2000, just before the new election to the Seimas (Lithuanian parliament), the *Programme of Support to Families with Children* was prepared, but no consistent implementation followed. In the period 2003 to 2005, the improvement of the system of conceptual bases and measures of family policy again intensified in Lithuania. The *Concept of the State Child Welfare Policy* (2003) and the *Strategy for the National Population Policy* (2004) were approved and the *Law on Benefits to Children of the Republic of Lithuania* (2004), introducing child benefits in Lithuania, was passed. Nevertheless, inconsistencies and the lack of coordinated actions still persist. To date the strategic goals that were formulated have not been systematically implemented.

To sum up, there is an increase in the number of conceptual documents prepared by the joint efforts of scientists and policymakers, but the strategic goals formulated are not systematically implemented in Lithuania. Contrary to international family policy development trends and even the conceptual principles available and approved by the Lithuanian government, priority is still given to providing more financial support for families. The development of measures that would enable better reconciliation of work and family, which, in the context of the growing economic activity and professional aspirations of women, receive increasing attention in more advanced welfare states (Gauthier 2002 and 2004, Neyer 2003 and 2005, Castles 2003), are considered to be of secondary importance. The economic situation is stabilizing in Lithuania, and the demographic behaviour of the population is more and more influenced by long term factors of social change, such as the deepening processes of social individualization and emancipation, liberal value-orientations and behaviour norms, and the growing importance of self actualization. Thus the disregard for the increasing demand for wider opportunities to combine the needs for individual (professional) self realization and family life will only lead to the further postponement of family formation and childbearing and to the decrease in fertility intentions and the probability of their realization.

The main measures of work/family reconciliation available in Lithuania are maternity leave, parental leave, childcare leave and public childcare facilities for pre-school children. The system of maternity leave, parental leave and childcare leave is fairly well developed and corresponds to international recommendations and EU directives. However, the network of childcare facilities for pre-school children, as already mentioned, clearly requires more attention. Problems of the availability, quality, and variety of the service are still present. Besides, there is a lack of initiatives aimed at promoting private and other alternatives to the childcare services provided by the state. Flexible working patterns are also poorly developed; in essence they cannot be considered as a functioning means of family support.

The work/family reconciliation depends not only on favourable structural, but also on cultural conditions, that is, on the prevailing values, norms and expectations regarding gender roles in a society (Liefbroer and Corijn 1999). Some modified gender equality ideas were promoted in Lithuania during the Soviet era, but they were basically directed to the stimulation of women's employment. The role of females was widened in scope by adding some more responsibilities and obligations, while the role of males remained the same. In other words, in Lithuania the basics of gender equity in individual oriented institutions (education and employment), a term introduced by McDonald (2000), were created in Soviet times, but the family was not the object of gender equality policy, and parallel changes in gender relations did not occur. Thus, filling this gap and seeking higher gender equity in both individual oriented and family related (including the family itself) institutions (McDonald 2000) should be an important part of the family policy of Lithuania in the sphere of work/family reconciliation.

All in all, the multidimensional changes that the family has been undergoing in recent years need a correspondingly diverse policy response (Daly 2005). Not a single policy measure, but a well balanced system of different measures and actions, consisting of financial incentives, work/family reconciliation facilities, and various initiatives aiming at creating a family and child friendly environment in society (McDonald 2002) is necessary today for building conditions favourable for bringing up children.

5. Concluding remarks

In Lithuania since the beginning of the 1990s, fertility has dropped significantly and the institution of the family has been experiencing essential changes, such as destabilization, the weakening of family bonds and an increase in the variety of family types. The prerequisites for the emergence and spread of the problems are related to basic, socioeconomic transformations. There is a lack of social adaptation to the market economy. The population faces economic difficulties, particularly its younger segment (in seeking education, entering the labour market and acquiring a dwelling). Problems have arisen caused by inadequate social and family policies, coupled with changing value-orientations, lifestyles and matrimonial and procreative behaviour. All these have been advancing against the background of growing individualism and a liberalising environment. Families lack the external and internal strengths required for them to adapt to the new conditions and to rise to the new challenges confronting them. The rapidly changing family is one of the most topical social problems of today and will continue to be into the future, the more so in that it is interrelated with all spheres of life. Additionally, the market economy has forced families to become more self-reliant in an attempt to safeguard their welfare. Society has been experiencing difficulty reorienting itself from a paternalistic environment to one regulated by market relations, where the success of the family is increasingly more dependent on the active position of each individual and as well as the family as a whole. Furthermore, specific social problems are topical since a rather high proportion of families with children are poor and have been shifting into social exclusion. With no external support, socially disadvantaged families are losing their autonomous state because they are unable to perform their natural functions of bringing up, educating and socializing their children. At the same time, the insufficiency of social security guarantees may further aggravate the problems and the social exclusion. All this necessitates the improvement of current family policy.

The development and improvement of support for families with children has been a very topical issue in Lithuania since the first years of the socioeconomic transformations. The inconsistency of the ideology of Lithuanian family policy and the constantly changing motives, however, have resulted in family policies being developed in a rather fragmented manner. Family policy was first of all formed as a reaction to family problems without trying to comprehend the long term factors of changes in the family or without having a clear vision or strategy for a desirable model of family policy. The implementation of measures that would allow a better reconciliation of work and family has received inadequate attention. Although there is a quite well developed scheme of leaves (maternity, parental and childcare), which corresponds to international recommendations and EU directives, problems concerning the

accessibility, quality and variety of childcare services remain unresolved and pressing. Flexible working patterns are also poorly developed and rather inaccessible. In general, family policy has been mostly targeted at solving families' financial and economic problems, which, while also very important, can in no way be solved solely by increasing financial provisions to families. The experience of more advanced welfare states shows that family policy regimes that stimulate the economic activity of both parents, help them to combine work and family responsibilities, and promote a symmetrical, two income family model are the most effective both in terms of family welfare and fertility level. Thus economic stability, an adequate and coherent system of family support measures, conditions favourable for the economic activity of the parents and its reconciliation with family duties, the promotion of gender equity, and a child friendly social environment should be some of the most important objectives for Lithuanian policymakers.

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