

## **Lost Children.**

**Review of scientific literature on planned but not born children**

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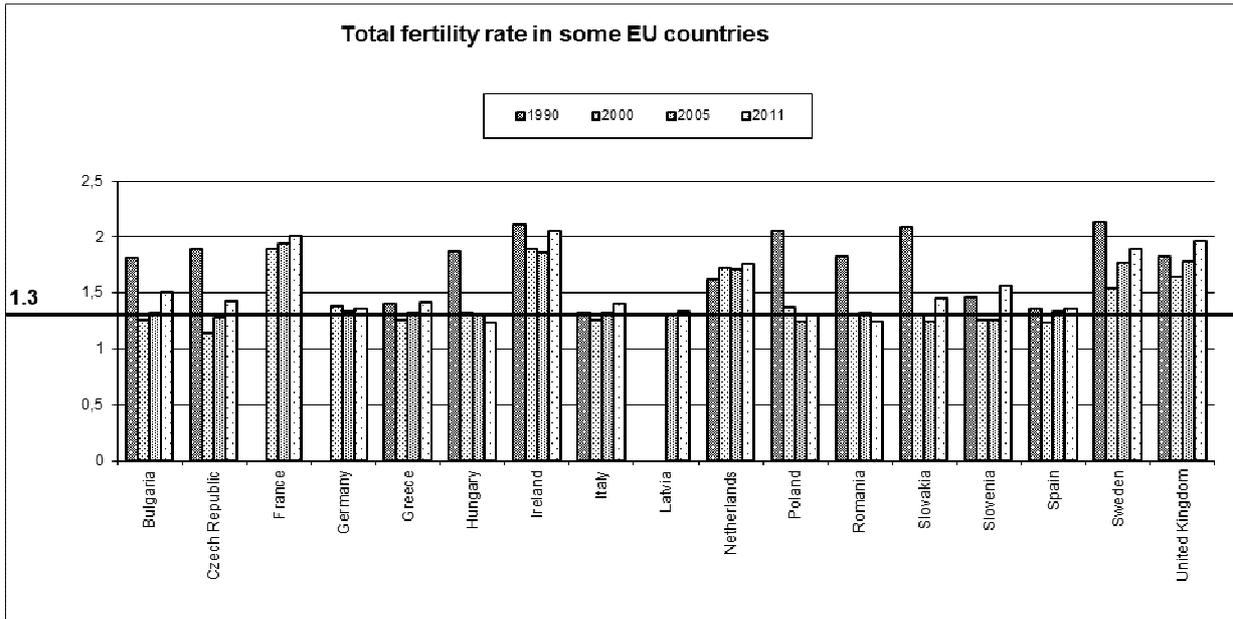
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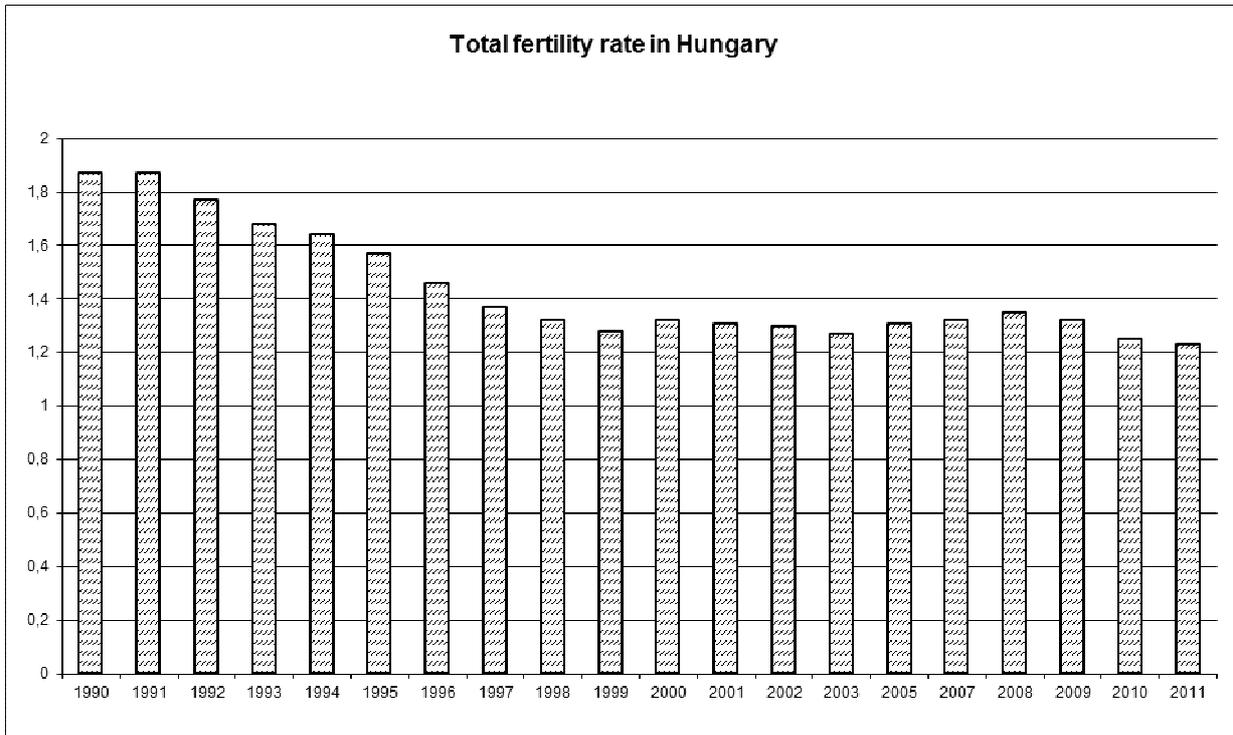
Not so long ago, the expression used in the title referred to the fetuses unborn because of the great number of abortions. Nowadays, however, the issue of missing children is not limited to the aborted ones. In civilized societies, the situation of children is changing. They are losing their advantageous position; potential parents have individual aims in which children do not play a central role. Childbearing is no longer the inalienable condition of happiness or of a fulfilled life. Couples choose to live a whole life without any children or with only one, so a huge number of children who should be born to replace the population of these societies will be lost. According to projections, Hungary will lose four hundred thousand children within the next 50 years. We can thus state that a great crowd will not be born, children who should be the pillars of the future.

### *Ageing European population*

One of the biggest challenges the European Union has to face is the ageing of its population. None of the EU countries has a total fertility rate ensuring the replacement of its population. At the same time, life expectancy at birth is increasing in every state, so the population pyramid will change into a rhomboid. From a sociological point of view, this means that more and more elderly will depend on fewer and fewer young people. Life expectancy increased by an average of 5 years in EU countries between 1980 and 2004. After World War II, Eastern Europe had far higher fertility rates than Western European states. Since then, there was a permanent decline all over the continent, but it was after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, that the societies of the former Eastern bloc suffered a huge fall in their fertility figures. While most EU countries have been able to stabilize their statistics thanks to family policy actions, Hungary and its neighbouring countries continue to show decline.



Source: [www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu](http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu)



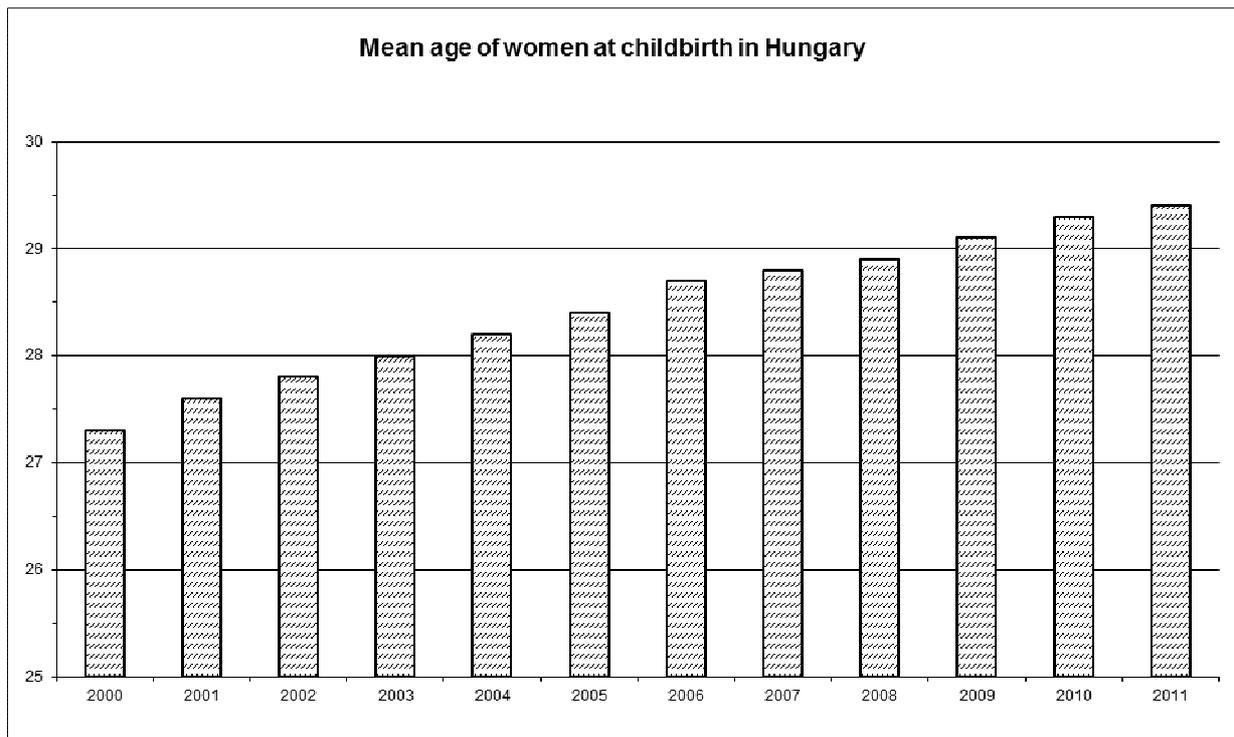
Source: [www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu](http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu)

Higher life expectancy together with low fertility will cause huge changes in population structure, which might generate political, economical, and social tensions as well. The EUROPOP convergence scenario predicts that the population of the EU will increase until 2035 (partly due to migration), and then gradually start to decline. At the same time, the median age is projected to rise from 40.4 (in 2008) to 47.9 (by 2060). In the scenario, Hungary shows a continuously declining population, by 2060 the number of its citizens will have fallen back to 8.7

million. Looking at the decline in the population aged 0-14 years, the situation seems to be more alarming. In 50 years, the number of children will have decreased from 1.5 million to 1.1 million. By 2060, Hungary will have 27% fewer children compared to a 9% loss in the EU.

### *The postponement of childbirth*

One of the reasons for declining fertility is the smaller size of average families. From the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fewer families had third/fourth/fifth children. Similarly to Western Europe, the family model with two children started to spread and become general. Another reason for the issue is the delaying of the first childbirth, which lessens the prospects of further children to be born and increases the risk of a pregnancy with an abnormal course. While under the age of 30 a woman has the prospect that her desired conception will have a birth outcome, over 30 this rate continuously declines. According to certain calculations, at the age of 30 a healthy woman has a 75% chance of conceiving within a year; this ratio recedes to 66% at the age of 35 and to only 44% at the age of 40. Before 1990, the mean age of mothers in Hungary was far below the European average, but the political transition had a great effect on this number too. Before 1990, more than half of the women who gave birth were under the age of 25. In ten years, this proportion lessened to one third, and by 2010 only one fifth of the mothers belong to that age group. Simultaneously, women aged over 30 are more likely to give birth. While in 1992, the mean age of first-time mothers was 23, in 2010 this average rose to 28-29. There is a remarkable growth in the number of women giving birth after the age of 35. In 2000, their rate was 7.5%, and within a decade it increased to 17.5%. However, this doesn't mean that we are observing a simple age-shift. Although a growing number of older women are giving birth, they are not able to counteract the missing births of the younger women. Thus the change we are investigating doesn't simply suggest that the planned children are born later but they are less in number and born later. Researches also predict that this changing fertility behavior has not stabilized yet; the mean age of women giving birth is still increasing.



Source: [www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu](http://www.epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu)

### *Lower number of planned children*

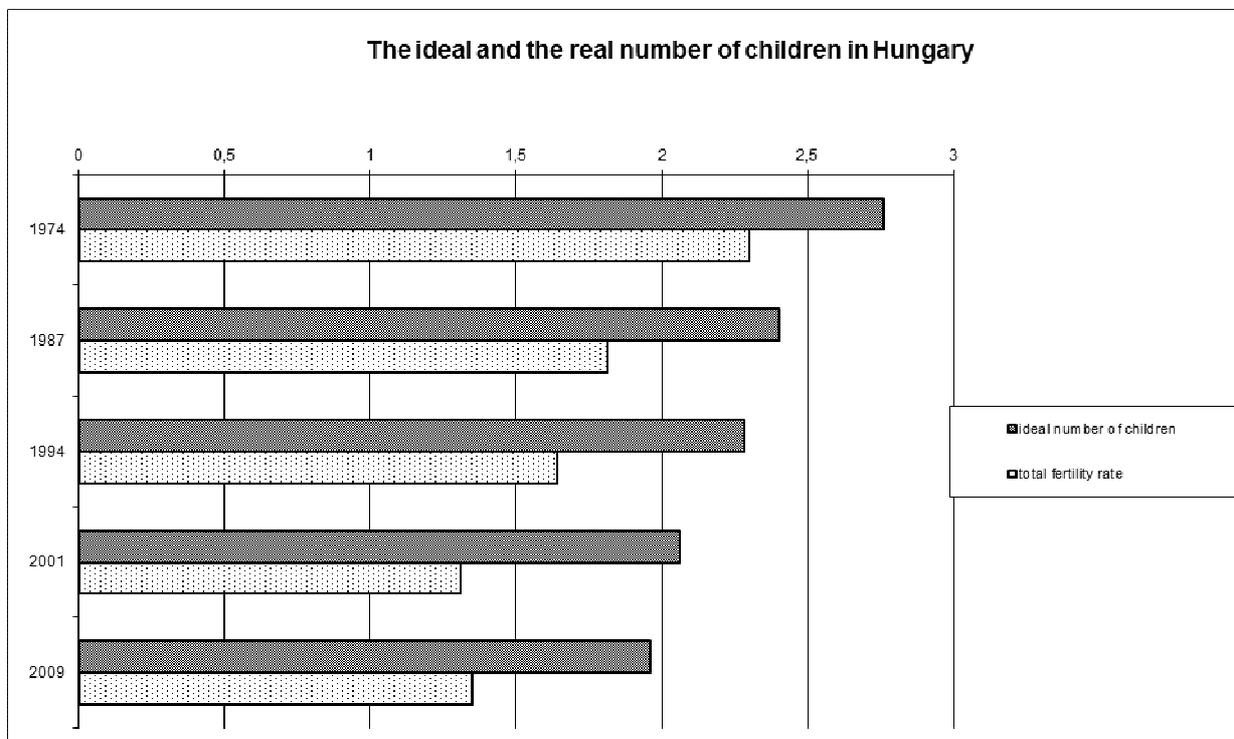
According to inquiries, Hungary has a family-centered population with traditional values, yet both the ideal family size (number of children in the family) and the actual number of planned children are decreasing. Until now conscious childlessness was not considerable in Hungary contrary to western societies, but recent studies show that we can observe a growing number of youth not planning to have any children at all. In the 2012 Youth Survey, 5 % of the youth aged between 15 and 29 had that opinion. Though the majority of the population still prefers the family model with two children; the number of those who think that a couple can live a happier and more complete life with only one child is growing. Over the last decades the ideal number of children in a family has been declining as well. While in 1974, the ideal family had 2.74 children according to public opinion, by 2009 this number fell back to 1.96, which is below the minimum replacement level.

### *Realization of childbirth intentions*

In Hungary, there has been a continuous decline in total fertility rate. In 1990, the rate of 1,87 put us in a leading position in Europe, but within 21 years we arrived at the last but one place with a rate of 1,23. Scientific

literature calls rates under the limit of 1,3 lowest low fertility, which is a very rare, but not unique phenomenon. Around the millennium, Eastern European countries had such fertility rates, but in the following years most of them could improve their statistics. Lowest low fertility means that if the rate lasts for many years a stable population is reduced into half every 45 years. After the crisis years of the millennium, fertility rates started to rise slowly, then stabilized somewhat higher, but they then fell again unexpectedly in Hungary and Latvia as opposed to surrounding countries. As the data of the longitudinal survey “Turning Points of Life” shows, much fewer children are born in Hungary than originally planned. The postponement of childbearing is dangerous, because older women cannot realize their plans as successfully as younger ones. Women in their twenties have a greater chance to fulfill their wishes than women aged 30-34.

It has long been observed, that the ideal number of children according to public opinion is always higher than the actual mean family size in a society, but not as high as the previous generation’s fertility. As if the people said: have children, but not too many. The difference between the figures of planned and born children has always been 0.5-0.6 since it started to be measured. It is obvious that there are many who turn out to have more children than originally planned; still they are not able to counterweight the number of missing children.



*Source: S. Molnár*

## Conclusion

The stunning prospects drawn by this short review of the researches on the issue of unborn children give scientists two principal tasks. On the one hand we have to prepare societies for a total change in their age-structure. On the other hand we have to make all efforts to slow down, stop or even reverse the tendencies if possible. To do so, it is essential to understand the background factors that may influence the image of an ideal family size, one's childbearing intentions, and their realization. It is necessary to explore every possible extrinsic or intrinsic motivation to get closer to answer the question why people have or should have children. There has already been much research to study the factors behind the decision, the characteristics of women who plan to give birth to more than two children and are actually able to realize their plans. Besides, we are lucky to be able to observe the phenomenon with the help of a longitudinal family study initiated by the Sociological Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences just before the political transition in 1989. The families were first interviewed before the arrival of their first child, and accidentally before the Hungarian fertility statistics started to decline. The family members were asked in three waves, and the information gathered might help us understand the individual turning points behind the rough figures counted by a demographer.

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