



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS N° 30

U-SHAPE LINK BETWEEN EDUCATION AND CHILDLESSNESS - AN EMERGING CENTRAL EUROPEAN PHENOMENON

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Childlessness is more prevalent among highly educated women than among less educated ones in Western and North European countries, as researchers have pointed out. The latest results highlight, however, that the educational gap in childlessness between high and low educated women has narrowed in the past 20 years in these countries, primarily due to the fact that the gap between low and medium education was converging. There has also been an expansion of the secondary and tertiary education in this period. How has the level of childlessness changed in the past two decades in Hungary and in Central Europe? Does this change follow the same pattern for low, medium and highly educated women?

To find answers for these questions we explore the relationship between childlessness and education in Hungary as well as in Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania. We define women aged 46–50 as those who are ultimately childless and use a three-category classification of completed education: low (ISCED-97 levels 0–2), medium (levels 3–4) and high (levels 5–6).

The data show a U-shape in the education-childlessness nexus for the 1961–65 cohort in Hungary. The level of childlessness is the lowest among medium educated women, the highest

among the high educated women and it is in between among low educated women.

This U-shape can be observed for the 1951–55 and 1961–65 cohorts in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and a similar pattern can be expected for Romania as well. The share of low educated childless women converged to the share of middle educated ones in Romania and even exceeded it in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Moreover, their share already exceeded the share of high educated childless women in the Czech Republic.

One possible explanation for the increasing share of low educated childless women could be due to the selection effect, as women with low education became less and less numerous in Europe. Another hypothesis could be a socio – economic one. Hungarian national census data from 2011 drew our attention to a bipolar aspect of childlessness. The level of childlessness was high not only among the high educated and women living in the capital city, but also among those women, who live in insecure economic and housing conditions. Further work is needed to check if this bipolar aspect of childlessness found in Hungary is present in other Central European countries as well.

Figure: Childlessness at age 46–50 for female cohorts born in 1941–1965 by educational level, in four Central-Eastern European countries

