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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BIRTH PROMOTION MEASURES IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA AND EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the study of birth promotion measures in the RA and European countries. Birth rates throughout the world have dropped dramatically in recent decades. The above-mentioned issue is highlighted in European countries. In 2019 the fertility rate was 1.5 in EU member countries. The same issue exists in Armenia. Since 1990 the birth rates have dropped dramatically in Armenia.

Various measures have been carried out and implemented in European countries to promote the birth rate. However, only a few countries have managed to increase the birth rate through state socio-demographic measures and register positive trends.

According to the domestic and foreign professional literature, there are two groups of measures of birth promotion (statutory leave and benefits) in the socio-demographic policies of each country.

Numerous measures have been developed in Armenia, but by 2014 they had more of a social than demographic component; they did not provide the desired result.

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Introduction. According to Demographic encyclopedia (2013) (p. 212) Demographic (family) policy is the targeted activity of the state bodies and other social institutions aimed at regulating the processes of reproduction of the population. The aim of the latter is to create a favorable way of reproduction for the country. Many countries around the world have adopted policies to boost the birth rate in the 21st century, as one of the challenges of the century is population aging. Childbirth and childcare benefits among demographic policies play a significant role in the context of solving social issues of society and are an important tool for achieving demographic policy goals. In addition, in many countries around the world, targeted loans have been established for young families to purchase housing, property, children's clothing, and so on. However, we have to take into account that the cost of promoting the birth rate depends on the economic capacity of each country.

Creating opportunities for the possibility of combining work and childbirth is one of the priorities of modern socio-demographic policy. As the employment rate of women has increased, countries with birth promotion issues have begun to expand the types of support provided to working parents. Various types of support can be provided, including maternity leave, parental leave, kindergarten services, flexible work schedules, etc. In this regard, the tools adopted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) have played an important role in the targeted regulation of

social rights and in clarifying the obligations of the countries¹. It should be noted that the Conventions developed and adopted by the ILO on the protection of motherhood (Convention N3 in 1919, N103 in 1952, N183 in 2000) on childcare leave, financial benefits, and maintenance of the workplace brought positive changes in women's work and child care. Over the years, the core concerns of the ILO have been to ensure that work performed by women, in all its forms and situations, does not pose risks to the health of the woman and her child and to ensure that women's reproductive role does not compromise their economic and employment security and subject them to undue discrimination*.

In the above-mentioned context, the purpose of the research is to analyze and compare the birth promotion programs of European countries and Armenia.

Literature Review. In the literature related to the promotion of birth rate, numerous authors have argued that families will strive to have more children if job security and sustainable benefits are guaranteed².

According to the domestic and foreign professional literature, there are two groups of measures of birth promotion (statutory leave and benefits) in the socio-demographic policies of each country. In general, the socio-demographic policies of European countries include the following measures:

- maternity leave (minimum leave is set by ILO Convention on Maternity Protection No. 183, then revised by ILO Recommendation No. 95),
- paternity leave,
- child care (parental leave) leave and benefits,
- cash and other benefits for families with children,
- one-time childbirth allowance,
- tax benefits for families with children,
- subsidies for childcare in various areas,
- providing a flexible work schedule,
- part-time job opportunities for parents raising a child, etc.

Providing paid maternity leave is an established practice in many countries, making it difficult to evaluate its impact on the decision to have children. However, differences in its duration and periodic changes in timeframes allow economists to draw some conclusions. According to Adsera (2004), "Changing fertility rates in developed countries. The impact of labor market institutions" (p. 17-43) studies have shown a positive effect of maternity leave and according to D'Addio and d'Ercole (2005), "Trends and Determinants of Fertility Rates: The Role of Policies" and Olivetti, Claudia, and Barbara Petrongolo (2017), "The Economic Consequences of Family Policies: Lessons from a Century of Legislation in High-Income Countries." a number of researchers haven't confirmed this conclusion based on experimental data from various sources (D'Addio and d'Ercole 2005, Olivetti and Petrongolo 2017).

Studies show that paid parental leave and child benefits can alleviate the conflict between career and children rearing, moreover, the adoption of paternity leave allows distributing the childcare time more balanced between the two parents. On the other hand, parental leave has a positive effect on a child's health and development. At the same time, however, according to Andersson G., Duvander A.-Z. (2005) "Gender Equality and Fertility in Sweden: A Study on the Impact of the Father's Uptake of Parental Leave on Continued Childbearing" childcare allowances, which depend on the amount of the salary, may delay the birth of the first child until a higher income level is reached.

Researches made in Austria has shown that if labor law doesn't provide special conditions and guarantees for employees with family responsibilities, it reduces the incentives for the birth of a second or third child, while it doesn't significantly affect the likelihood of having a first child. According to Castles F. G. (2003), "The world turned upside down: below replacement fertility, changing preferences and family-friendly public policy in 21 OECD countries" (p. 209-227), the flexible schedules of working people had a positive effect on the birth rate.

¹<https://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/%D5%8D%D5%B8%D6%81%D5%AB%D5%A1%D5%AC%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%AB%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%BE%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6%D6%84%D5%B6%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%A8-%D5%80%D5%80-%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B4.pdf>, p. 20:

* ILO Convention No. 183 (2000) on Maternity Protection stipulates that maternity leave must be granted for a period of not less than 14 weeks, including 6 months of compulsory maternity leave. ILO (2014), "Maternity and paternity at work; Law and practice across the world" (p. 9) https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_242615.pdf

²<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=EU>

Thus, it can be emphasized that the relationship between socio-demographic policy and reproductive behavior is quite complex, and the results of policy effectiveness assessment are contradictory. It is quite difficult to analyze the impact of social benefits and the social assistance system, isolating them from other factors. Therefore, a positive result can be achieved only if we take into account the norms and value orientations, cultural features, social characteristics, gender stereotypes related to the role and responsibilities of men and women, etc.

Materials and methods. The theoretical, methodological, informational basis for the study was the conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO), the legislation of the Republic of Armenia and European countries, as well as the researches of domestic and foreign authors. Measures most widely used in socio-demographic promotion policies are generally divided into two major groups: statutory and benefits (financial support, services, and tax benefits).

Taking into account the purpose of the research, the summarization, description, grouping, as well as comparative methods have been used in the paper.

Results and discussion. The birth rate in any European country does not ensure a simple reproduction of the population currently. According to the World Bank, expanded reproduction in European countries was recorded in 1965 when the fertility rate was 2.7, but in 1975 it reached the level of simple reproduction - 2.0, and it has already reached the level of narrowed reproduction since 1985 with 1.6 fertility rate¹. The trend of narrowed reproduction in European countries in recent decades continues. According to the Eurostat database, the fertility rate in the EU member states was 1.5 in 2019 (the lowest fertility rate was recorded in Malta - 1.16, and the highest one in France - 1.86)². It should be noted that only some European countries have managed to increase the birth rate to some extent through separate state social programs aimed at improving the demographic situation. It is mostly implemented the policy of increasing the birth rate in countries with narrowed population reproduction. Thus, in most the European countries (29 countries), there is a policy of raising the birth rate, in four countries - a policy of conservation, in four - a policy of non-intervention, and in seven countries there is no any state policy (Table 1).

Table 1. Types of birth policies in European countries and Armenia by birth rate³

	Raising State Policy	State Conservation Policy	Non - interference State policy	Lack of state policy
Europe	30	4	4	7
Northern	Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia	Iceland	Great Britain	Denmark, Ireland, Norway, Finland, Sweden
Western	Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, France	Monaco	Netherlands	Belgium, Switzerland
Eastern	Belarus, Bulgaria, Moldova, Poland, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Armenia*			
Southern	Vatican City, Greece, Spain, Italy, Macedonia, Malta, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Hungary	Albania, Andorra	Bosnia and Herzegovina, San Marino	

Pregnancy and maternity leave is a type of policy measure that is granted in all European countries (ILO Convention No. 183), with a minimum period of 14 weeks (Table 2).

Table 2. Classification of European countries and Armenia by maternity leave, 2020⁴

Number of weeks	Number of countries	Countries
Up to 14	3	Sweden, Norway u Portugal
14-20	26	Belarus, Romania, Ukraine, Poland, Russia, Finland, Latvia, Iceland, Denmark, Lithuania, Estonia, Croatia, Malta, Slovenia, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Austria, France, Austria, France Armenia
21 and more	7	Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Ireland, England, Italy

¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=EU>

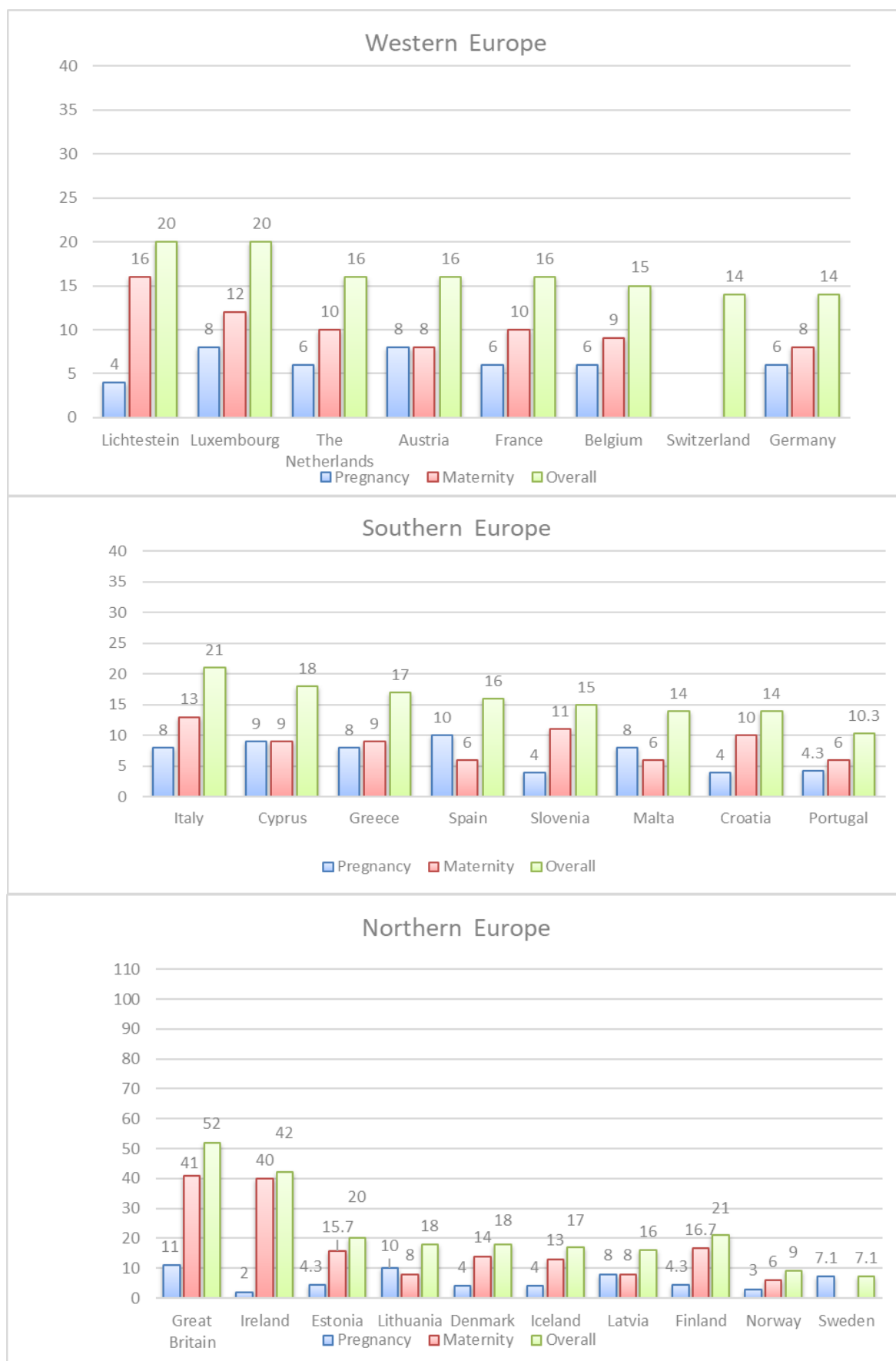
² https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Fertility_statistics

³ Compiled by the authors based on the study of professional literature.

* Partly in Armenia

⁴ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---normes/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_c183_ru.htm

It should be noted that although pregnancy leave is mostly half of maternity leave, there are time-specific features in some European countries (Figure 1).



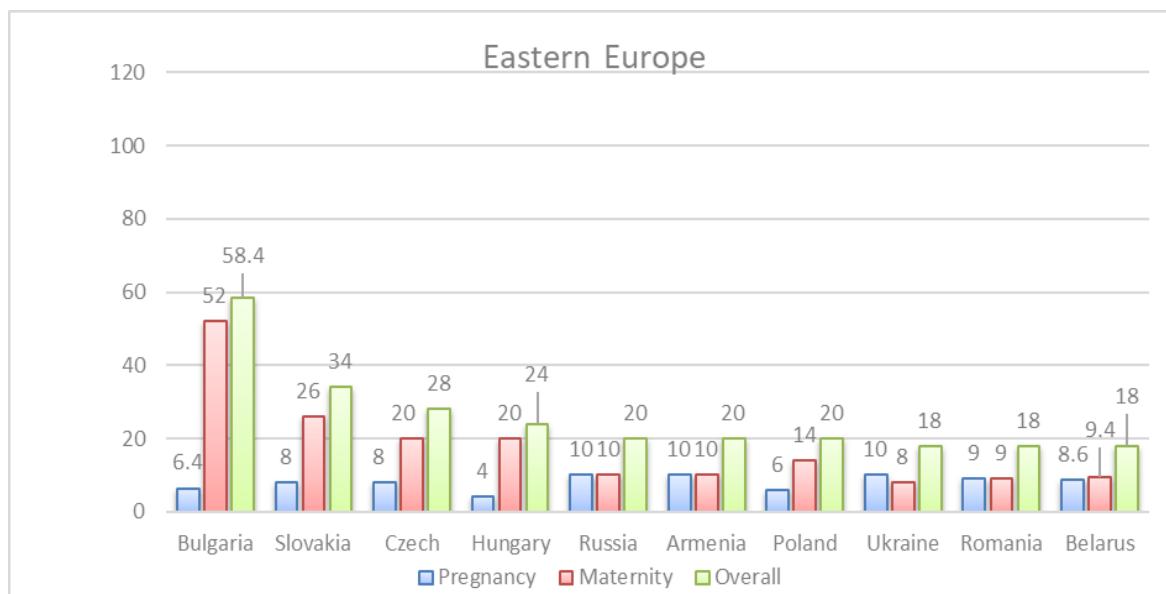


Fig. 1. Structure and duration of pregnancy and maternity leave in European countries, 2020¹

Figure 1 illustrates that the longest leave period and the biggest gap between the countries are in the Eastern and Northern European countries. For example, the lowest leave period in Northern Europe is 7.1 weeks in Sweden and the highest one is in Great Britain with 52 weeks. As for the Eastern European countries, the leave period here varies from 18 weeks (Belarus) to 58.4 weeks (Bulgaria). Pregnancy and maternity leave are from 14 weeks to 20 weeks in Western Europe. In southern European countries, the minimum length of maternity leave is set at 10.3 weeks in Portugal and the highest at 21 weeks in Italy. The above figures were 17 weeks in Greece and 18 weeks in Cyprus respectively.

The duration of pregnancy and maternity leave will increase in case of having one or more children mainly with 2-4 weeks in some European countries. However, there are some countries where a longer period is set for this indicator, for example, it is 7.7 weeks in Russia, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia - 9 weeks, in Poland - 17 weeks (Figure 2). Armenia is similar to Portugal in its index, and it is defined as 4 weeks in Austria, Germany, Cyprus, and the Netherlands too.

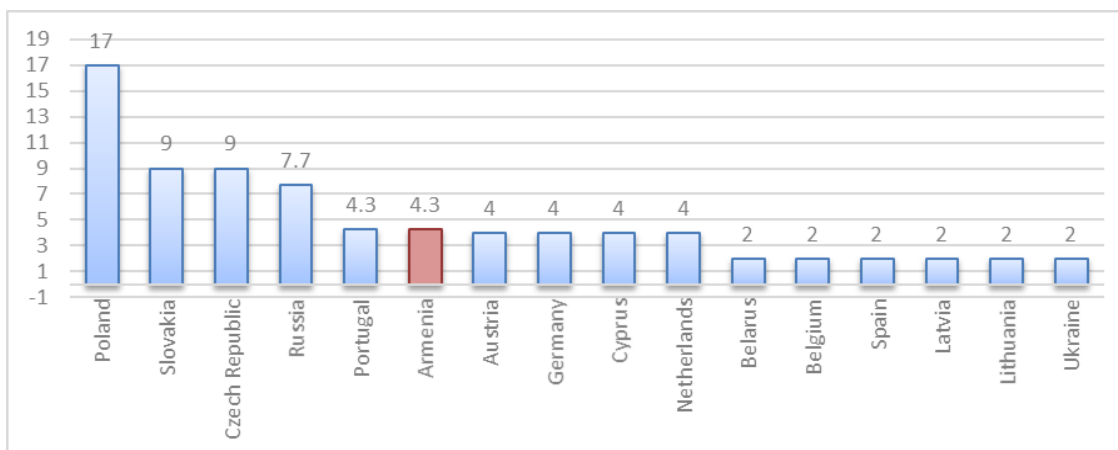
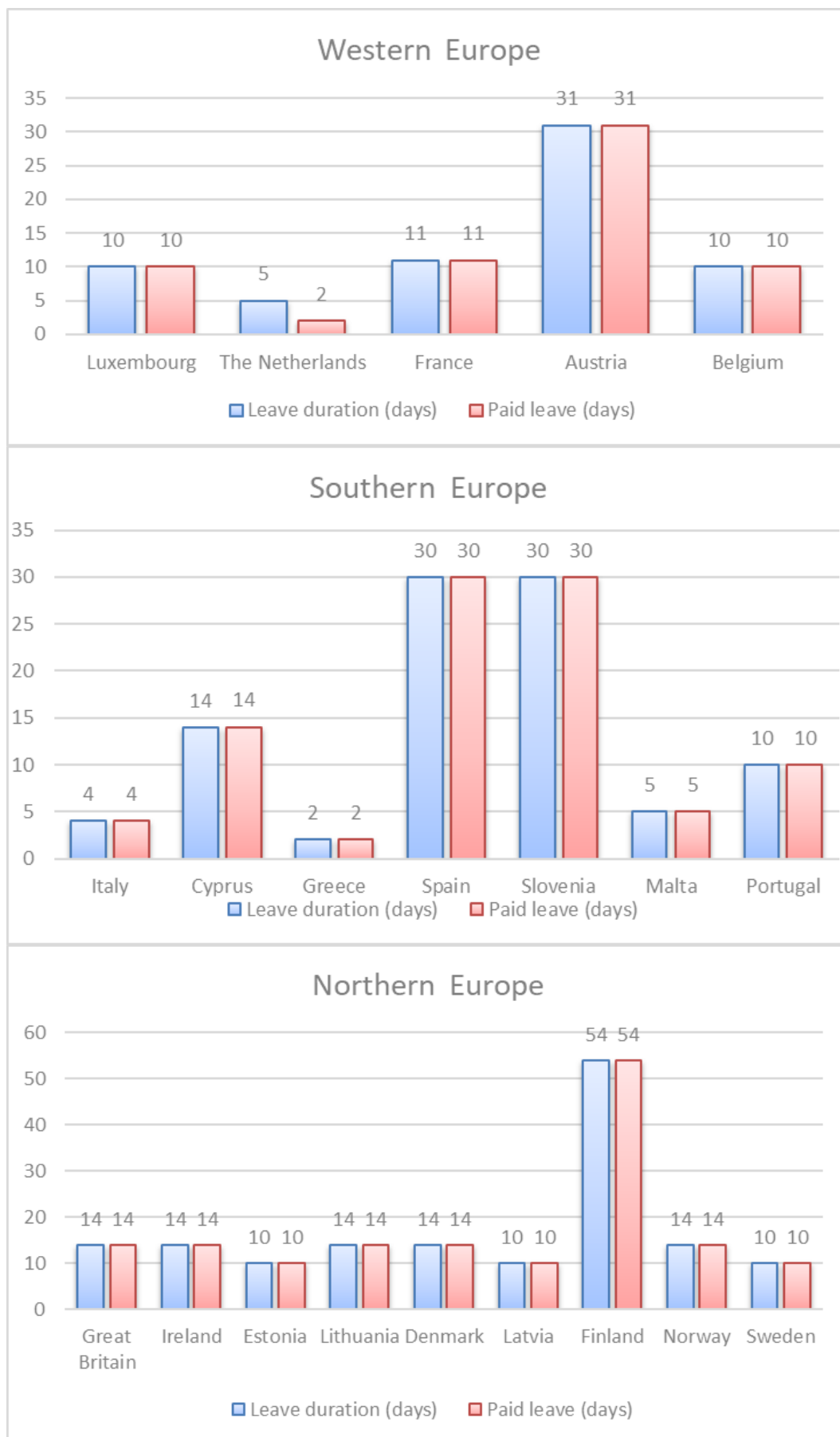


Fig. 2. Extra pregnancy and maternity leave, 2020²

A number of studies have shown the impact of fathers' care on children's development. Therefore, in order to involve fathers childcare, paternity leave has been legislated in a number of European countries, the duration and terms of payment of which vary according to the legislation of each country (Figure 3).

¹ Dmitrievich B. E. (2020), "Maternity, paternity and parental leave in Europe", Strategic tasks of demographic development: priorities and regional features, p. 506.

² Compiled according to the following source: Dmitrievich B. E. (2020), "Maternity, paternity and parental leave in Europe", Strategic tasks of demographic development: priorities and regional features, p. 506.



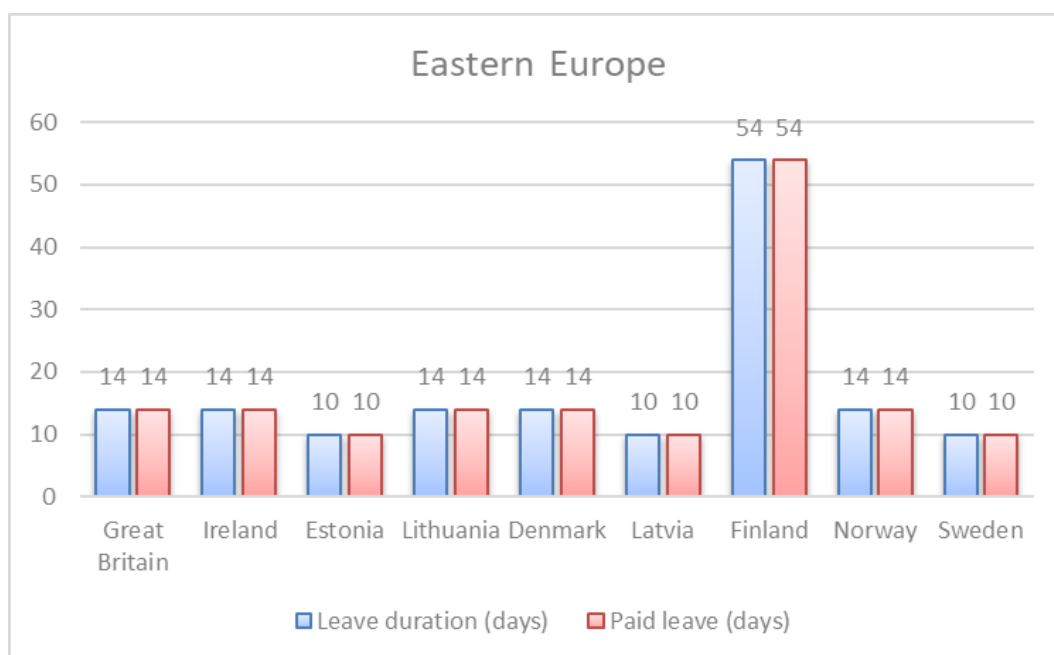


Fig. 3. Paternity leave and paid leave days in European countries, 2020

The longest period of paternity leave in Western Europe is set at 31 days in Austria and the lowest one is in the Netherlands at 5 days, of which only 2 days are paid. The shortest period of paternity leave in Southern Europe is set at 2 days in Greece, the highest one is in Slovenia and Spain at 30 days. Finland stands out from the countries of Northern Europe with 54-day paternity leave. As for the Eastern European countries, the range of the above index varies from 5 (Armenia, Hungary) to 15 days (Bulgaria).

In some European countries, the periods during which paternity leave must be used are officially defined. Paternity leave must be used for four months in 19 of the 26 European countries, in Italy for 5 months, in Ireland - 6 months, in Slovenia - 12 months, and in Finland and Poland for 24 months.

According to Article 176 of the Labor Code of the Republic of Armenia unpaid paternity leave was provided only for the husband of a woman who was on pregnancy and maternity leave, as well as for a child under one year of age until 2020. However, the total length of that leave may not exceed two months. A new change came into force on September 29, 2021, and according to RA Labor Code Article 176 at the request of the baby's father, a five-day paid leave is provided within 30 days after the birth of the child, for each day of which the employer pays the average daily wage of the employee.

Unlike pregnancy and maternity leave, there are many ways to apply for parental leave.

There are two approaches defining the length of leaves that are used in the practice of European countries regulating childcare leave:

- leave until the child reaches a certain age,
- leave, in certain lengths, expressed in days (weeks, months).

Leave for the care of a child under three years of age is provided and fully paid in Hungary, Belarus, Slovakia, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic. Only a part of the parental leave is paid in some countries, in particular 2 years in Lithuania, 1.5 years in Russia, 1.2 years in Estonia, and 1 year in Germany. The minimum period for a parent to be unemployed is two months to receive Elterngeld (child support for a non-working parent) in Germany. It is paid for one year, at a rate of 65% of net salary, but can not exceed 1800 euros per month. However, at the request of the parent, it can be extended up to 24 months, agreeing to the condition of receiving the number of benefits twice less (i.e., 900 euros per month)¹.

The French government has taken a number of measures to support the family over the past decade, including:

- child monthly allowance: is paid from the birth of the child, and in the case of the third child it reaches its maximum value,
- a guaranteed minimum level of family income has been introduced,

¹<https://www.elterngeld.net/download/Betreuungsgeld-Flyer.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1OjewBOEtRkcfGSUdX3jNf3DQcF9DU5VcOr5RNI-UfKeOUmTj-BBcAa1s>

- subsidies: the lowest income families receive them and preference is given to families with three children,
- certain benefits after paying income tax. given to families depending on the number of children,
- one-time allowances given before and after childbirth, which are pretty high for a third child,
- the amount of maternity leave is set at 16 weeks and in the case of a third child - 26 weeks,
- single mothers raising children are given a guaranteed minimum income for the entire period of pregnancy and for the first three years of a child's life,
- providing loans for starting a family. A part of the loan is repaid at the birth of each child and 90% of the loan is repaid at the birth of the fourth child,
- significant compensation of families' annual expenses for children's education is provided,
- mothers with three children immediately become insured in the state pension system,
- a comprehensive education system (outside the family) has been established, ensuring children attend private or public pre-school institutions and schools (all day), especially with affordable prices.

A system of family tax benefits has been placed since 2004 in France to help organizations pursue family-centered policies. It contributes the employer to take measures in the interests of the families of its employees, as they also have a material interest.

It was developed a "Demography" program in Russia for 2019-2024, which consists of several sections¹:

- material care for families for the birth of a child,
- promoting women's employment by creating conditions for pre-school education for children up to 3 years old,
- development and implementation of a system for improving the quality of life of elderly citizens and providing regular assistance,
- creating a motivating system of a healthy lifestyle for citizens,
- creating opportunities for physical education and sports for all groups of the population.

This section is also included in "The sport is the norm of life" state program.

It is noteworthy that the vast majority of the allocations in the "Demography" program are directed to the implementation of the first part of the program, that is, financial assistance to families with children, which includes maternity capital payments, monthly childbirth allowance for firstborn children, provision of monthly benefits for the birth of a third and each next child, mortgage loans to families with more than 2 children at an annual interest rate of 6%, etc. From the above mentioned we can assume that although the country wants to ensure a healthy lifestyle in the country, a good life for the elderly, but the main emphasis is on raising the birth rate.

It should be noted that a passive socio-demographic policy was implemented in Armenia until 2014, the main purpose of which was to provide various forms of social assistance to needy families. Birth promoting measures can be considered active since 2014.

The following types of leaves and benefits are defined in the Republic of Armenia in order to promote the birth rate:

- pregnancy and maternity leave,
- pregnancy and maternity benefits,
- childcare leave for up to three years old,
- childcare allowance for children up to 2 years old,
- paternity leave,
- one-time childbirth allowance,
- childcare allowance for unemployed and working mothers living in rural areas for children up to 2 years old.

A new tool will be implemented to promote the birth rate in Armenia from 2022: for the third and each subsequent child will be paid 50,000 AMD per month until the child turns 6 years old².

Thus, many state programs have been developed and implemented by the people in charge of the sphere in Armenia in the last decades, but they did not provide the desired results, as they mostly had a social component.

¹ <https://mintrud.gov.ru/ministry/programms/demography>

² <https://www.mlsa.am/?p=29966&fbclid=IwAR2S9MdhcMcuE9vvyjPJ685IVQdWaX7Lmcd72kbeZ-lb-lqUz5DolGYYamjU>

Depending on the leave payment chosen model, the parent can be paid for childcare until the child reaches the age of three, but the leave period is set at two years in Austria.

The length of parental leave for childcare established in other European countries does not depend on the age of the child. In many European countries, the benefit is increased for the third and each next child.

Sherbakov, Mdinradze, Nazarov, Nazarova (2017) note that there are also special fees for students in Sweden and The Netherlands (except the family allowance). To help the family in general means to provide the conditions for the birth and upbringing of children in harmony with the professional employment opportunities of both parents. There are legally defined benefits for families with children in Northern European countries (regardless of the condition). Canada is also adopting a general approach, but a number of other countries have begun to gradually abandon universalism and currently pursue policies to support vulnerable and needy families. In addition to the above measures, a flexible work schedule also has a significant impact on the promotion of fertility in the first years of a baby's life. The latter gives an opportunity to combine both work and child care, contributing to the preservation of women's work, and the desire to have the next child in the future.

Examining the experience of European countries, it can be noted that some of the important birth promotion measures are not included in the Armenian demographic policy. There are the following:

- family tax benefit system depending on the number of children,
- significant compensation of annual family expenses for children's education,
- compensation of expenses related to training programs for employees on parental leave.

Thus, the goals and methods of demographic policy differ from country to country; this is due not only to the historical features of the development of the countries but also to the socio-economic situation.

Conclusions. In general, the interrelationships of socio-economic and demographic processes affect the reproductive behavior of the population. It should be noted that although the demographic policy is part of the overall policy pursued by the state, however, the latter also has a special direction, that is, to create a desirable model of population reproduction through the multifaceted influence of socio-economic factors.

Summarizing the experience of a foreign country's demographic policy, we can state that the demographic problems are different in each country. Therefore, when carrying out the socio-demographic policy, it is necessary to take into account the cultural, religious, and psychological peculiarities of the country.

In general, a social birth promotion measure is considered effective if the amount of the defined benefits corresponds to the average family expenses (child care, upbringing, etc.).

It should be noted that developed and developing countries are currently allocating financial resources to the implementation of socio-demographic measures within their capabilities.

However, the real tangible results will be visible in the society and economy after some period, as current births will reach working age in at least 15 years.

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