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Fertility of Immigrants: A Two-Generational Approach in Germany

by Nadja Milewski
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In 2007, population growth in Europe (EU-27) amounted to 2.6 million persons, comprising a net increase of 2.1 million persons resulting from migration and an increase of 0.5 million due to natural growth (Eurostat 2010). The limited share of natural increase in population growth is related to Europe's fertility rates being persistently low in recent years (ranging from 1.45 in 2002 to 1.55 in 2007). As a result, net migration has become the main factor driving population change in the EU-27 over the last decade, particularly since 2002 when net migration rose to levels around 1.8 million from 0.6 million in 2001 (Eurostat 2010). Apart from this direct effect on population growth, however, migration may have an important indirect effect by affecting fertility levels in both the short (fertility of first generation immigrants) and long run (fertility of 1.5 and second generations). Unfortunately, these short and long-term effects of migration on fertility are often difficult to document, because vital statistics on births and fertility routinely consider current nationality, whereas a substantial number of first- and, particularly, second-generation immigrants eventually acquire citizenship of the destination country. By considering the fertility of immigrants in Germany from a two-generational perspective, Milewski thus addresses an increasingly important question for population change in Europe (see also Sobotka 2008).

The monograph provides a broad overview of the main theories and hypotheses that exist regarding the fertility of migrants, considering both internal and international migration. In her review of the literature, Milewski focuses on the empirical evidence supporting or contradicting a wide range of hypotheses—thus drawing evidence from a variety of countries and settings—rather than focusing on the integration of such causal mechanisms at a more theoretical level. For the first generation—those who experienced the migration themselves as adults—the monograph centers on five hypotheses. The *socialization hy-*

pothesis draws attention to the effects of socialization of immigrant women in an origin country characterized by a tradition of high fertility that may account for higher fertility after migration, even in the case of migration into a low-fertility context such as West Germany. A second theory—the *hypothesis on the interrelation of events*—also predicts a fertility stimulating effect, particularly shortly after migration, by stating that migration and household formation are interrelated events taking place at the same time in the life-course. The monograph does not explore in detail, however, the possible mechanisms connecting migration and family formation, or the effect of contextual factors on such connections (e.g., the relation between migration, legal status, and demographic events). Other theories consider the fertility-reducing effects that migration may have, such as the *disruption hypothesis* (focusing on the disruptive effect of the migration process and its related difficulties), the *adaptation hypothesis* (focusing on the growing importance of living conditions and the larger societal framework as the duration of residence increases) and the *selection hypothesis* (suggesting that immigrants are a non-representative subset of the population in the origin country characterized by limited fertility intentions). For the second generation—who have not experienced migration themselves—the monograph additionally draws on work concerning the fertility behaviour of minority groups. In line with the hypotheses concerning migration and fertility, higher or lower fertility can be hypothesized for women belonging to a minority group, depending on the composition of the group (*hypothesis of group characteristics*), their economic situation, as well as experience of discrimination and uncertainty (*hypothesis of minority status*) and the maintenance of distinct fertility norms (*hypothesis of a subculture*).

For the analyses, Milewski uses data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (GSOEP) that provide retrospective information on women's birth histories, as well as on immigration and marriage histories, allowing the transition to first, second, and third births to be studied from a life-course perspective. Entry into motherhood and progression to second and third births are studied for women born between 1946 and 1983 before or during their first marriage. Although biographic information and birth histories could be reconstructed for 3,932 West German non-immigrant women, sample sizes are limited to 728 women for the first generation and 828 women of the second generation, combining all five origins considered in the study (i.e., women from Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain, and former Yugoslavia). Particularly for the transition to second and third births, the numbers of immigrants included in the analysis typically become rather small (Hartung and Neels 2009). As a result, sources such as the GSOEP in practice do not always allow the differentiation of fertility patterns and covariate effects by generation or nationality of origin, despite the importance attached to such factors in the literature. In cases where more detailed distinctions were feasible, results have not consistently been included in the monograph, although such results may be particularly relevant to international readers who study similar groups in different settings (e.g., tests for similarity of baseline functions for West Germans, first and second generation immigrants; tests for similarity of covariate effects such as education, birth cohort, marriage duration, … across generations and nationality groups).

Turning to the main findings of the monograph, Milewski finds that first-generation immigrants have 2.5 times higher first birth risks than West German women, particularly shortly after migration, whereas the differential is limited to a factor 1.2 for second-generation immigrants. Marriage status turns out to be the most important covariate accounting for this differential, stressing the endogeneity of the first marriage and the birth of the first child. Controlling for the socio-economic characteristics (education, employment) of immigrant women further reduces the observed differentials. Such compositional differences are even more important for the second generation. Socio-economic characteristics of the partner, on the other hand, seem to matter less. For second births too, birth risks are 31 per cent higher for the first generation than for West German women, particularly if women had their first child in the country of origin. This differential is only partially accounted for by characteristics of immigrant women such as younger ages at first birth, lower levels of education and higher unemployment. Also among women of the second generation, the proportion of women having a second child is somewhat higher than among West German women, but the difference in second birth risks between the two groups is not significant. Finally, for third births, clear differences emerge between immigrant groups and West Germans: among the latter group the proportion of women progressing to a third birth is limited to 30 per cent, whereas this proportion reaches 50 per cent among women of both the first and the second generations. Third birth risks are 27 per cent higher for first generation women—even higher for the small group of women who had one or both previous births abroad—and 24 per cent higher for the second generation, compared to West German women. Differentials relative to West Germans are no longer significant, however, when controlling for the younger age of immigrant women at the birth of their second child and the lower levels of education of both the women themselves and their spouses. Only for Turkish women of the first and second generation do significant differentials persist, pointing in the direction of a socialization effect.

To summarize, the results presented in the monograph suggest that fertility of immigrants is higher shortly after migration—discrediting the disruption hypothesis and supporting the hypothesis that migration and family formation are interrelated events as well as the idea of selective migration—but also that this effect erodes as the length of residence increases (first generation) and particularly with the turn of generations (second generation). The latter result—together with the finding that fertility of immigrants reacts to factors as education, employment status, union formation, … in ways similar to persons of the host society—supports the hypothesis of adaptation and the role of socialization in the host society. Apart from the direct effect of immigration on population growth, there may thus be a substantial indirect effect in the short term by increasing fertility levels, but the latter effect is expected to diminish substantially in the long run. Another important conclusion—likely to be particularly relevant for a large set of European countries—is that small sample sizes for immigrant groups in datasets like the GSOEP severely limit the possibilities to test some of the hypotheses considered in greater detail. The analysis of fertility patterns among immigrant communities is likely to benefit from more detailed distinc-

tions between nationality groups (readily allowing comparison with similar groups in other immigration contexts) and further distinction between patterns of the first, 1.5, and second generations. Given the importance of migration as a factor driving population change, larger (administrative) datasets that include information on foreign descent and migration background are called for, in order to monitor the outcomes of immigrant groups over time.

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