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## **PREPRINT**

**Full title:** Do Europeans want children? The significance of job-related spatial mobility

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Job-related spatial mobility and its effects on the preponderance of occupational reasons for not having children in four European countries

**Abstract:**

Job-related spatial mobility (JRSM) has implications both for labour market relations and for embarking on parenthood. This article aims to determine the reasons given for not having children during the early years of the Great Recession were affected by JRSM based on data collected on the occasion of the ‘Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe’ panel survey. Conducted in 2007 and 2010-12, it comprised a sample of 1735 respondents between the ages of 28 and 59 in France, Germany, Spain and Switzerland. The sub-sample of 257 childless people was analysed using multivariate logistic regression. The findings suggest that initially a switch from non-JRSM to JRSM intensifies the importance attached to occupational reasons for not having children, although to a greater extent in Germany and Spain than in France.

**Keywords:** Job mobility, spatial mobility, childlessness, working conditions, family life, Great Recession

## **Introduction**

Job-related spatial mobility (JRSM) has implications both for labour market relations and for embarking on parenthood. This article aims to determine how JRSM affected childless persons' reasons for not having children during the early years of the Great Recession. The novelty of the study lies in the findings on the impact of the change in job mobility status on the arguments wielded by the childless for not having children. It also compares the effects of that change in European countries whose cultures, welfare coverage and the impact of the Great Recession differ.

The article is divided in to five sections: Background, Aims and Hypotheses, Dataset and Methods, Results and Discussion and Conclusions. The first, Background, reviews research on childlessness trends in Europe as well as on job-related spatial mobility (JRSM) as the conceit is used hereunder and its effects on family planning. Building on that review, the second introduces the research aims and hypotheses, whilst the third describes the dataset and methodology deployed. The fourth discusses the findings under two subheadings: a description of the dependent (importance accorded occupational reasons for childlessness) and independent (variations in JRSM) variables; and a multivariate analysis-based interpretation of the results. The conclusions drawn are listed in the fifth section, along with proposals for possible future lines of research.

## **Background**

### **Childlessness trends in Europe**

Childlessness is one of the lifestyles characteristic of the limitation of family ties, an element of individualisation. Beck and Beck-Gersheim (2002) noted that the desire to have children must compete with the choice to have a life of one's own. Those trends can be viewed as

components of the Second Demographic Transition (Van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe, 2010), which explains how social change, including the relaxation of social control and technological innovations such as effective contraception, favours variety in family planning and enhances the feasibility of childlessness. Nonetheless, the percentage of childless women in the 1970 cohort is not much higher than among women born in the early twentieth century (Sobotka, 2017).

Childlessness may be a temporary or permanent status whilst the self-definition of being permanently childless varies with social status, sex, age and marital status (Connidis & McMullin, 1996). Social convention weighs more heavily on women's than on men's caring and reproductive decisions (Bodin, Plantin & Elmerstig, 2019; Connidis & McMullin, 1996). That same system of values penalises voluntary childlessness more in men, however, perhaps because women bear the brunt of the parenthood burden (Rijken & Merz, 2014).

Unstable partnerships adversely affect the intention to have children, raising childlessness rates (Tanturri & Mercarini, 2008, Miettinen 2010; Beaujouan, Reimondos, Gray, Evans & Sobotka, 2019). Students are less likely to become parents, although high educational levels do not clearly favour childlessness. Whereas extending education both in terms of the number of enrollees and duration of schooling entails a delay in age at first childbirth (Neels, Murphy, Bhrolcháin & Beaujouan, 2017), higher academic levels raise the likelihood of reaching fertility goals (Beaujouan et al., 2019). The effects of level of schooling also differ between countries with different social protection coverage (Präg et al., 2017).

Job-related reasons for not having children lie on the blurry borderline between voluntary and involuntary childlessness. On the one hand, resorting to occupational reasons denotes pursuit of a lifestyle against the backdrop of the dichotomy between professional and family life demands. On the other, while standing at a distance from traditional involuntary causes, such as partner-lessness or infertility, the need to keep one's job may to some extent

require people to forgo having children. Miettinen (2010) noted that financial reasons carry greater weight in forgoing parenthood than the voluntary decision not to have children and that such reasons are wielded by the youngest demographic groups. Park (2005) contended that job-related reasons are important in parenthood decisions but vary with sex, with women focusing more on their careers and men more concerned about the financial implications.

Based on a qualitative study conducted in Sweden, Peterson (2015) concluded that financial reasons for not having children may not be socially acceptable in countries with generous job protection for mothers, such as in the Nordic countries. Bodin et al. (2019), however, found male Swedes to put forward reasons both for and against parenthood, with job insecurity or long working hours among the most prominent obstacles. In Italy the reasons for childlessness most commonly given by women included unstable partnerships and financial considerations. Concerns were also expressed around careers, although more commonly among voluntarily childless women than among those postponing motherhood (Tanturri & Mercarini, 2008).

France is characterised by low childlessness, whereas rates are high among German-speaking countries, particularly among highly educated women. In southern Europe childlessness has risen steeply albeit non-uniformly (Basten, Sobotka & Zeman, 2014). González and Jurado (2006) also found the French institutional context to favour earlier age at first childbirth than in Italy, Spain and western Germany. Those authors noted that such effects might be attributed to the more favourable institutional context in France, which would lower the direct and indirect costs of motherhood and therefore shorten the postponement of first childbirth. In the same vein, Köppen, Mazuy and Toulemon (2017) stressed that French State and societal contribution to work-family life balance would lower childlessness rates, but also heighten the social pressure to have children. A high proportion of Spaniards and Germans but

a low percentage of French people plan to have no children (Miettinen, Rotkirch, Szalma, Donno & Tanturri, 2015).

Matysiak, Vignoli and Sobotka (2020) studied the effects of the Great Recession and concomitant rise in unemployment on fertility in a number of countries. They suggested that unemployment had a more adverse effect on fertility during the Great Recession and that the countries whose fertility rates were more heavily impacted during that crisis were the ones with steep economic downturns and low levels of social protection (Matysiak et al., 2020). High sustained unemployment rates have also been associated with postponement of first childbirth (González & Jurado, 2006; Adsera, 2011; Köppen et al., 2017).

In Germany where childlessness rates have been observed to stabilise among women with high educational levels but rise among those with lower levels of schooling, the cause may be the greater impact on the former of the most recent measures to balance work and life, including parental leave (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2017). Despite Switzerland's high childless levels, behaviour varies widely among French-, German- and Italian-speaking regions: people in German-speaking regions are more likely to remain childless than their French-speaking compatriots, mirroring the difference between France and Germany.

According to Eurostat (2020) data (Table 1), there are clear differences in total fertility rates (TFR) among the countries studied here, with values of <1.4 in Germany and Spain, the two with the lowest TFR, in both the first and second waves (2007 and 2010/2011). The decline during the crisis was steepest in Spain, as corroborated by Lanzieri (2013), who contended that the effect of the Great Recession was greater in the southern European countries due to the heavy impact of the economic crisis and sharp rises in unemployment. Switzerland, in turn, had a TFR of around 1.5, whereas France exhibited a value (1.98) close to the population regeneration rate. TFR rose between the two waves in all the countries studied except Spain, where it fell by 0.04 points to 1.34, the lowest TFR recorded. Fertility data must be analysed

cautiously as a proxy for childlessness, however, for the correlation is not always consistent (Präg et al., 2017).

Unemployment (Table 1) differed widely among the countries analysed. In Germany but in none of the other countries, unemployment followed a downward course, from 8 % in 2007 to 6.5 % in 2010. The impact of the economic crisis on unemployment was particularly harsh in Spain, with rates rising from 7.2 % in 2007 to 19.9 % in 2011. In France unemployment rose by only one percentage point and although Eurostat furnished no data for Switzerland in 2007, in 2011 the level was lower than in any of the other countries studied, at <5 %.

Table 1. Total fertility and unemployment rates in France, Germany, Spain and Switzerland (2007-2010/2011)

	Total fertility rate		Unemployment rate (% of active population aged 25 to 54)	
	2007 (W1)	2010-11* (W2)	2007 (W1)	2010-11* (W2)
Germany	1.37	1.39	8.0	6.5
Spain	1.38	1.34	7.2	19.9
France	1.98	2.01	6.6	7.7
Switzerland	1.46	1.52	n.d.	4.1

Source: formulated by the author from Eurostat (2020) data. \* The second wave includes data for 2010 in Germany and 2011 for France, Spain and Switzerland, the years when second wave fieldwork was performed.

### **Job-related spatial mobility (JRSM) and its effects on family life**



Just as childlessness is the outcome of certain elements of social change such as individualisation, job mobility can be attributed to changes in an increasingly liquid, flexible labour market and short-termist life planning (Bauman, 2000; Senett, 1998). The reduction of space-time in a number of realms of life renders configuring mobility even more complex (Urry, 2000).

Job-related spatial mobility (hereafter JRSM) includes all types of mobility with an occupational component and significant effects on worker time, costs and energy (Limmer & Schneider, 2008). It is a prominent element in the decision to have children, whilst any form of job-related mobility, irrespective of the distance involved, lowers the likelihood of becoming a parent (Rüger, Feldhaus, Becker & Schlegel, 2011). Meil (2010) observed spatial mobility to favour childlessness in women but not in men.

Recent empirical research suggests that given the social and economic costs of mobility, that some groups, in particular those with no children or family, are more readily mobile than others (Vidal & Huinink, 2019). JRSM research has also shown such mobility to raise stress levels and hinder social networking (Limmer & Schneider, 2008). In a longitudinal analysis, Meil and Romero (2017) showed that engaging in JRSM increases stress and reduces occupational satisfaction, whereas switching back to non-mobility enhances job satisfaction. Commuting has an adverse subjective impact on mothers' well-being, although its effects on inter-partner relations are greater on fathers (Brömmelhaus, Feldhaus & Schlegel, 2019). Nonetheless, except where long-distance partnering is involved, JRSM has no significant effect on partnerships in terms either of satisfaction or conflicts, perhaps because mobile workers and their families ultimately adapt to the demands of mobility (Viry, Widmer & Kaufmann, 2010).

Mobility is over-represented in men and does not affect the two sexes in the same way. Nisic and Kley (2019) suggested that long-distance commuting may have a beneficial impact on men's and an adverse impact on women's social relations. Women with partners, in turn,

are less willing to accept mobility than men with partners or single women (Abraham, Bähr & Trappmann, 2019). JRSM lowers working couples' ability to balance work and child-rearing, with higher costs among mobile women than mobile men (Lück, 2010).

In France, people engaging in JRSM have fewer children and greater regard for their careers than those who do not (Bonnet, Collet, Dragus, Maurines & Orain, 2008). Although JRSM rates are high in Germany, traditional attachment to a specific place hinders mobility and non-mobile women, particularly mothers, are more reluctant to accept mobility than non-mobile men (Schneider, Ruppenthal, Lück, Rüger & Dauber, 2008). In Spain as in Germany, cultural components penalise long-distance mobility that reduces social contact, although in the former mobility does not entail rejection of partnerships or parenthood. It does, however, exacerbate the obstacles to establishing work-life balance, with a significant impact on women's postponement of first childbirth with the concomitant reduction in family size (Meil, Ayuso & Mahía, 2008). Whilst mobility is favoured in Switzerland by the type of labour market and infrastructures in place, it is hindered by the country's political division into cantons. It is also greater there among the childless but not among mothers with no stable partner, who are over-represented in the group of mobile workers (Viry, Kaufmann & Widmer, 2008).

Mobile childless respondents, and women more than men, are more apt to cite occupational circumstances as a reason for not having children than the non-mobile childless (Meil, 2010b). In the study cited, Meil (2010b) compared family planning among mobile workers in different European countries. The findings showed that job-related reasons for childlessness ranked higher than other factors among mobile men in France, Germany and Switzerland, but not in Spain, and likewise higher among mobile French, German and Spanish but not Swiss women. Meil (2010) also compared the effects of postponing age at first childbirth in a number of countries, observing the effect of mobility on postponing fatherhood to be greatest among Swiss fathers and on postponing motherhood among Spanish mothers,

although in terms of maternity fulfilment mobile German women were the ones most likely to be childless.

### **Aims and Hypotheses**

This study can be positioned within the line of research on childlessness that explores the reasons for that status (Shapiro, 2014). Its novelty lies in the approach, for to the author's knowledge to date the impact of job-related spatial mobility (JRSM) on the financial reasons given for not having children has not been tested. The article also compares the situations in countries with different welfare cover, cultures and unemployment rates. The first wave of surveys covered the year immediately prior to and the second the years early into the Great Recession.

The aims include determining the effect of JRSM and changes in workers' mobility status on their reasons for not having children. Secondly, it aims to ascertain the effect of national context in France, Germany, Spain and Switzerland on the importance attached to job-related reasons in the decision to forgo parenthood. Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 below were explored in connection with the first objective and hypotheses 4 and 5 with the second.

H1: an initial switch to mobility raises the importance accorded occupational reasons for not having children. JRSM is associated with having a fewer number of children (Rüger et al., 2011) and entails economic and social (Vidal & Huinink, 2019) as well as time and energy (Limmer & Schneider, 2008) costs, work-life imbalance (Lück, 2010), stress and subjectively lower well-being (Meil & Romero-Balsas, 2017). In light of the high cost of JRSM, a change in status from non-mobile to mobile would be expected to induce workers to attach greater importance to job-related reasons for not having children, for it would raise the costs associated with work-life balance.

H2: the change from mobility to non-mobility lowers the importance attached to occupational reasons for not having children. The second hypothesis is the reciprocal of the first. When JRSM costs are no longer perceived, occupational considerations would carry less weight among childless persons' reasons for not having children.

H3: long-term mobile workers do not deem occupational reasons for not having children to be more important than their non-mobile counterparts. Despite the aforementioned JRSM-associated costs, a study conducted by Viry et al. (2010) found intra-partner satisfaction to be unaffected by one of the partner's job mobility, contending the possible reason to be adaptation by workers themselves as well as their families. Inasmuch as the present sample comprised childless people who had been either mobile or non-mobile for at least 3 years, the expectation was that such continued mobility would have necessitated adaptation that would reduce the importance accorded occupational obstacles as reasons for not having children.

H4: job-related reasons would carry greater weight in countries where the economic crisis had a heavier impact on employment. The rationale for this hypothesis lies in the steeper decline in fertility during the Great Recession in countries with higher unemployment and lower levels of social protection (Matysiak et al., 2020), along with evidence to the fact that high unemployment favours postponing age at first childbirth (González & Jurado, 2006; Adsera, 2011; Köppen et al., 2017). Greater importance is therefore expected to be attached to occupational reasons for not having children in Spain than in the other three countries studied.

H5. The impact of job-related reasons would be lower in countries with greater social protection and lower childless rates. Childlessness is low in France (Basten et al., 2014) due to institutional protection for parenthood (González & Jurado; 2006) and high social pressure to have children (Köppen et al., 2017). The intention not to have children is likewise fairly rare in that country (Miettinen et al., 2015). Taken together, those facts suggest that occupational

reasons for not having children are less prominent in France than in the other three countries analysed.

### **Dataset and methods**

The panel survey used for this article, ‘Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe’, is available for academic use in the GESIS<sup>1</sup> virtual repository. The survey attempted to establish the forms, causes and implications of job-related spatial mobility (JRSM) in a number of European countries. The present analysis used the panel dataset containing information on 1735 respondents between the ages of 28 and 59 in France, Germany, Spain and Switzerland. The sample contained respondents’ information for 2007 (first wave) and 2010-2012 (second wave). Fieldwork for the second wave was conducted in 2010 in Germany, 2011 in Spain and Switzerland and 2011 and early 2012 in France. The sample included 254 respondents in France, 508 in Germany, 552 in Spain and 444 in Switzerland.

The subsample used for the multivariate analysis comprised childless French, German, Spanish and Swiss respondents in both waves. More specifically, it included 390 respondents who were childless in the first and second wave or 22.7 % of the total sample in the two waves of the Job Mobilities and Family Lives panel survey. By country, the subsample comprising people who were childless in the second wave accounted for 15 % of the total respondents in France, 29.8 % in Germany, 30.5 % in Spain and 15.7 % in Switzerland.

According to Sobotka (2017), the very high childless rate in Spain in the 2011 census (nearly 20 % in the 1965 cohort) may have been impacted by the number of childless immigrants living in the country at the time. The even higher rate detected here was primarily

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<sup>1</sup> The first wave of Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe surveys can be accessed on: <https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/SDesc2.asp?DB=E&no=5065> and the second on: <https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/SDesc2.asp?DB=E&no=5066>. For detailed information on the survey see: <https://www.bib.bund.de/EN/Research/Surveys/JobMob/Job-Mobilities-and-Family-Lives.html>

attributable to the fact that the present sample was not limited to the permanently childless, under the assumption that childless respondents would have children in future. The high proportion of childlessness observed in this study was in any event consistent with reports that Spain has the highest percentage in Europe (Sobotka, 2017).

In this subsample childlessness was lowest in France, likewise consistent with its ranking in Europe (Köppen et al., 2017). Although Switzerland has one of Europe's highest childlessness rates (Burkimsher & Zeman, 2017), in the present sample the value was similar to the one recorded for France.

The data were weighted in two ways for the analysis conducted here: one for all the respondents as a whole and the other for the country-by-country breakdown. Where all the data were processed jointly, equal weighting was used, which normalised all national sub-samples to the same size. As Skora, Rüger and Schneider (2013) explained, such sample size weighting adjusts for the unequal impact of macro-level contexts on the behaviour of individual respondents where data from two or more national samples are analysed jointly. Equal weighting may be appropriate when establishing relationships between two or more variables for more than one country. In contrast, national scale weighting was performed for the inter-country comparisons. Skora et al. (2013) noted that such weighting corrects for bias attributable to selective drop-out between waves and skewing stemming from first-wave sampling. It therefore adjusts the distribution of the panel sample to the distribution of the weighted first-wave sample.

Multivariate logistic regression, the statistical technique deployed here, predicts the effect of one or more independent variables on the response variable and estimates the model's capacity to explain variation (Escobar, Fernandez & Bernardi, 2009). Here the dependent or response variable was the importance attached to job related reasons for not having children and the ordinal responses were regrouped into two categories: 'wholly unimportant or

unimportant’ and ‘important or very important’. The reason for such recoding was that it established a distinct difference between what is and what is not important and given the size of the subsample, the nuances inferred in the original ordinal responses would have been imperceptible.

Recurrent mobility (Limmer & Schneider, 2008) was the type envisaged, i.e., forms of mobility in which subjects return to their permanent residence after an absence. The independent or explanatory variable was job-related spatial mobility in the two waves, where the response categories were: ‘not mobile in either wave’; ‘mobile in the first but not the second’; ‘not mobile in the first wave’; and ‘mobile in the second and in both waves’.

The control variables gathered information on sex, age, level of schooling, working conditions, partnership conditions and family planning. Level of schooling and the respective inter-wave variations were deduced from replies to the question ‘Which is the highest educational level that you have achieved so far?’, in which the categories ‘upper-level secondary / high school’, ‘tertiary / university / college’, and ‘PhD, postdoctoral’ were recoded as ‘high level of schooling’ and the categories ‘none’, ‘primary / compulsory / elementary school’ and ‘lower-level secondary’ as ‘low level schooling’.

The control variables on working conditions included present duration of and changes in work week, type of employment contract and sector. The number of hours worked per week was based on the original item ‘How many hours do you usually work per week?’, with the replies recoded into two categories: fewer than and more than 35 hours. Type of employment contract (coded as open-ended/fixed-term) was gleaned from the replies to the original item ‘Do you have a fixed-term or an open-ended work contract?’ Sector (with categories public or semi-public / private sector) was surmised from the replies to the item ‘Is that a private or a public employer?’.

Partnership status and changes were derived from the item ‘Do you currently have a stable relationship?’ (yes/no). Parenthood plans were inferred from the second-wave responses (yes/no/I don’t know/I don’t want to say) to the survey question: ‘Do you intend to have or adopt a child within the next 3 years?’.

## **Results and Discussion**

The findings are discussed in three sections: first, a description of the dependent variable analysed, job-related reasons for not having children; second, a description of the independent variable, the change in JRSM status between the two waves; and third, the multivariate analysis data and results.

### **Occupational reasons for not having children**

The categories for the dependent variable ‘inter-wave changes in the importance accorded occupational reasons for not having children’ included respondents according no importance to such reasons in either wave, those who found them important and those for whom importance rose or declined between waves.

Job-related reasons for remaining childless were deemed more important in Spain and variation was wider there than in the other three countries. Such wider variation may be the outcome of the heavier impact of the crisis on employment in that country. The low fertility rate in Spain was a further indication that it is one of the European countries where the obstacles to parenthood are most daunting. Although Switzerland did not have very high natality rates, its low level of unemployment may explain why it was the country where least importance



(although barely less than in France) was attached to occupational reasons for not having children.

Table 2. Inter-wave change in the importance accorded occupational reasons for not having children

		France	Germany	Spain	Switzerland
No importance accorded in either wave	N	82.2	22.5	95.2	37.2
	%	64.0%	76.3%	43.5%	77.8%
Decline in importance accorded	N	15.6	4.3	18.1	7.1
	%	11.5%	10.5%	13.0%	6.3%
Rise in importance accorded	N	18.0	4.9	20.9	8.2
	%	12.2%	5.3%	18.0%	6.3%
Great importance accorded in both waves	N	23.2	6.3	26.9	10.5
	%	12.2%	7.9%	25.5%	9.5%
Total	N	139.0	38.0	161.0	63.0
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: formulated by the author from the Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe survey 2010-2012 dataset

### **Changes in job-related spatial mobility (JRSM) status**

The independent variable, inter-wave change in job-related spatial mobility (JRSM), comprised different types of recurrent mobility, described in detail in the monographs on the first wave of the Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe survey edited by Schneider & Meil (2008) and Schneider & Collet (2010). One group was long-distance commuters, who invested at least one hour in each trip to and from work at least three times a week. A second was overnigheters, who slept outside the home at least 60 nights a year for occupational reasons. This group was

subdivided into subsets: a) shuttlers, who kept a second home near their place of work because their primary residence, used on weekends, was located at a distance incompatible with daily commuting; b) people maintaining long-distance relationships who did not share a home with their partners for occupational reasons and their respective homes were at least one hour apart; and c) vari-mobiles, who engaged in irregular overnighing at random intervals, often business trip-related. A fourth subset comprised multi-mobiles who engaged in at least two of the preceding types of mobility.

The independent variable was inter-wave change in mobility. Most of the respondents were non-mobile in both waves, with Spain exhibiting the highest rate, at 84 %. The steepest inter-wave decline in mobility was recorded in France (14.5 %) and the highest rise in Switzerland (6.6 %). The country with the highest rate of mobile workers in both waves was Germany, at 9.3 %.

Table 3. Inter-wave change in spatial mobility status

		France	Germany	Spain	Switzerland
Not mobile in either wave	N	404.6	205.1	431.2	353.1
	%	77.9%	76.9%	84.0%	81.1%
Mobile in the first but not in the second wave	N	47.0	23.8	50.1	41.0
	%	8.2%	14.5%	8.8%	8.4%
Not mobile in the first, mobile in the second wave	N	25.0	12.7	26.6	21.8
	%	4.6%	5.9%	3.5%	6.6%
Mobile in both waves	N	26.4	13.4	28.1	23.1
	%	9.3%	2.7%	3.7%	3.9%
Total	N	503.0	255.0	536.0	439.0
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: formulated by the author from the Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe survey 2010-2012 dataset

## **Multivariate Analysis**

Table 4 summarises the two logistic regression models defined, in which the dependent variable was the importance attached to job-related reasons for not having children. The first model analysed the sample when the data for the four countries were pooled, whereas the second included a variable to control for country.

In the first model switching to mobile status, i.e., moving from non-mobility in the first to mobility in the second wave, induced those concerned to attach greater importance to occupational reasons for not having children than non-mobiles (odds ratio 4.48 with  $p < 0.1$ ). That result was in line with the costs of mobility (Vidal & Huinink, 2019; Limmer & Schneider, 2008; Meil & Romero-Balsas, 2017), where greater importance to job-related reasons for not having children was accorded by childless people changing to recurrent mobility. Although that would confirm the first hypothesis (H1), according to which occupational reasons for not having children would be deemed more important after a switch to JRSM, the findings must be interpreted with caution, given the p-value calculated as a measure of significance (up to 0.1).

Although the findings for the switch from mobility to non-mobility suggested a decline in the importance attached to such reasons, as the differences observed were not significant, the second hypothesis (H2) had to be rejected. That JRSM is no longer a means for professional promotion but rather a way to avoid downward social mobility (Limmer & Schneider, 2008) may have hollowed out any decline in JRSM-related costs. In other words, if the change from mobility to non-mobility comes at the cost of poorer working conditions or lower promotional expectations, occupational reasons for not having children may not be attenuated.

Mobile respondents in both waves accorded greater importance to occupational reasons for not having children than non-mobiles, but the margin was not significant. That corroborated the third hypothesis (H3) to the effect that mobiles did not deem occupational reasons to be more important than non-mobiles in either wave. As Viry et al. (2010) suggested, mobile workers and their families may adapt to their recurrent mobility, mitigating the importance accorded the work mobility-related burden.

The findings for the control variables, in turn, showed that childless women were more likely than childless men (odds ratio 4.48 with  $p < 0.05$ ) to attach importance to occupational reasons for not having children. Inasmuch as mobility is more costly in terms of work-life balance (Lück, 2010) and has a more adverse effect on social relations (Nisic & Kley, 2019) for women than men, whilst disposition to engage in mobile arrangements is lower among the former (Abraham et al., 2019), occupational reasons carry more weight among childless women than among childless men.

The cohorts nearing the end of the reproductive age (38 to 48) were less likely (odds ratio, 0.353 at  $p < 0.05$ ) to attach importance to work-related reasons for not having children than younger respondents (28 to 38). One interpretation of that finding might be that childless people aged around 40 have made firmer decisions in connection with fertility and their childlessness may be informed by non-occupational reasons. No significant differences were observed between the oldest (48 to 59) and youngest groups, however.

The data were also analysed in terms of working conditions and inter-wave changes in those conditions. Somewhat surprisingly, neither working conditions nor variations were found to have much of an effect on the importance accorded by the childless to occupational reasons for not having children. In addition, when working conditions were observed to have some effect, significance in terms of the p-value was  $< 0.1$ , denoting a need to treat such results with caution. In both waves, respondents who worked over 35 hours/week in both waves were less

likely to wield occupational reasons as important in the decision not to have children (odds ratio 0.353 with  $p < 0.1$ ) than those working fewer hours. Although those findings are anti-intuitive, for people who worked fewer hours (or whose hours changed between waves) access to sufficient job stability to have children may have been elusive, whereas steady, full-time work may be a proxy for greater job security. That interpretation would be consistent with the contention in the literature that occupational reasons underlie forgoing or postponing parenthood (Miettinen, 2010; Park, 2005; Bodin et al., 2019; Tanturri & Mercarini, 2008).

Another proxy for occupational stability is the type of contract, for which the findings also suggested that with job instability occupational reasons for not having children were deemed more important. Respondents working under an open-ended employment contract in the first wave and a fixed-term contract in the second were more likely (odds ratio, 2.95;  $p < 0.1$ ) to vest job-related reasons for not having children with importance than those with open-ended contracts in both waves, denoting greater stability. Interestingly, respondents with fixed-term contracts throughout the period did not attach greater importance to such reasons than those with more stable employment, perhaps because they had adapted to less job insecurity. No differences were observed between public and private sector workers, possibly indicating that employer's sector may not be a precise enough parameter to serve as a proxy for job security.

Another variable controlled in the model, childless persons' level of schooling, was found not to affect the importance accorded occupational reasons for not having children. The effects of academic level on childlessness have been reported to vary across countries (Präg et al., 2017).

The consensus opinion in the literature on the effect of partnership status, in turn, is that instability induces greater childlessness (Tanturri & Mercarini, 2008, Miettinen 2010; Beaujouan et al., 2019). The present findings suggest that such instability has a similar effect on the importance vested in job-related reasons for not having children. Respondents who had

partners in one of the two waves (after controlling for country) were more likely to attach importance to occupational reasons for not having children than those not involved in a stable relationship. It may be that at the outset of a relationship, occupational reasons acquire greater importance because one of the most prominent criteria for having children has been met. Loss of a partner may also be partially the result of occupational obstacles to having children.

The study also controlled for the short-term (3-year) intention to have children. No relationship was found between more or less firm plans to have a first child and the importance attached to occupational factors for not having one.

The second model included a variable to identify the country studied to test for the effect of national context in the early years of the Great Recession in countries impacted differently by the economic crisis. Confirmation of the fourth hypothesis (H4) was consistent with reports in the literature, according to which high unemployment and scant social protection retard age at first childbirth (Matysiak et al., 2020; González & Jurado, 2006; Adsera, 2011, Köppen et al., 2017). Childless Spaniards were more likely (5.57 with  $p < 0.05$ ) to contend that occupational reasons were an important factor in not having children than their French counterparts.

The fifth hypothesis (H5), whereby in countries with low childlessness rates occupational factors for not having children would be deemed less important, proved to be partially true. Respondents in both Spain (odds ratio, 15.57;  $p < 0.05$ ) and Germany (odd ratio, 9.44;  $p < 0.05$ ), where childlessness was higher than in France, lent greater importance than the French to job-related reasons for not having children. That same effect was not observed in Switzerland, however, where childlessness was also higher than in France. Low unemployment in the former may explain those findings.

In both models the subsample consisted in 257 childless people aged 28 to 59. Both models fit the data acceptably, with a Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of 0.303 for the first and a somewhat higher value, 0.394, for the second.

Table 4. Multivariate logistic regression models on the importance accorded occupational reasons for remaining childless (both waves)

	Model 1	Model 2
Non-mobile in both waves (Ref.)		
Mobile in the first wave, not in the second	0.427	0.647
Non-mobile in first wave, mobile in the second	4.488*	5.819*
Mobile in both waves	2.260	1.386
Female (Ref. male)	2.184**	2.788**
Age in second wave: 28-37 in D, 29-38 in E, F, CH (Ref)		
Age in second wave: 38-47 in D, 39-48 in E, F, CH	0.353**	0.290**
Age in second wave: 48-58 in D, 49-59 in E, F, CH	0.814	0.794
35 working hours or under in both waves (Ref.)		
Over 35 working hours in W2 only	0.356	0.477
Over 35 working hours in W1 only	0.771	0.839
Work week >35 hours in both waves	0.378*	0.253**
Open-ended employment in both waves (Ref.)		
Open-ended employment in W2 (fixed-term or other in W1)	1.307	1.050
Open-ended employment in W1 (fixed-term or other in W2)	2.945*	1.812
Fixed-term or other in both waves	1.319	0.738
Public sector in both waves (Ref.)		
Public sector in W1 (private in W2)	2.825	1.447
Public sector in W2 (private in W1)	1.134	0.884
Private sector in both waves	0.811	0.603

Lower level of schooling in both waves (Ref.)		
Lower level of schooling in W1, higher in W2	4.293	3.873
Higher level of schooling in both waves	1.499	1.244
No partner in either wave (Ref.)		
Partner in W2 only	3.866**	4.482**
Partner in W1 only	2.600	5.692**
Partner in both waves	1.056	0.812
Intention to have children in next 3 years (Ref.: No/don't know/Don't want to say)	0.932	0.840
France (Ref.)		
Germany		9.442**
Spain		15.576***
Switzerland		4.408
Overall statistics	0.232	0.065
N	257	257
Nagelkerke's R <sup>2</sup>	0.303	0.394

Source: formulated by the author from the Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe survey

2010-2012 panel dataset. Equal weighting (w\_panel\_equal) was applied in Model 1 (no country variable). Weighting for national scale analyses (w\_panel\_nation) was applied to model 2. \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p > 0.1$



## Conclusions

This article analyses the effect of job-related spatial mobility and changes in its status on the importance attached by childless French, German, Spanish and Swiss people to occupational reasons for not having children. It also addresses the implications in that regard of the context prevailing in those countries in the early years of the Great Recession.

The fact that the importance accorded occupational reasons for not having children only varied among workers switching from non-mobile to mobile arrangements may be an indication that transition to mobility accentuates the added burden imposed by mobility, with insufficient time to adapt family life to the new circumstances. The opposite transition, i.e., from mobile to immobile arrangements, did not lower the importance claimed for job-related reasons, perhaps because non-mobility may entail less favourable working conditions (Limmer & Schneider, 2008). Long-term mobile workers did not deem occupational reasons for not having children to be more important than non-mobile workers, possibly as a result of adaptation by both the mobile subjects concerned and their families.

The national context early into the Great Recession, the social protection afforded parenthood and the variable impact of the economic crisis on unemployment led to differences in the perception of occupational reasons for not having children among the childless. In France, where parenthood is afforded broad social protection, social pressures to have children is high, the intention to remain childless is fairly rare and childlessness rates are low, job-related reasons for not having children are deemed less important than in Germany or Spain.

This study benefitted from the use of a specific international panel survey on job-related spatial mobility, which featured the advantage of the availability of data on how mobility and the other variables evolved in the four countries analysed. One of the limitations of the study, however, was the inability to distinguish the impact of different types of mobility on the dependent variable. Although long daily commutes would not be expected to induce the same effect as

relocation, for instance, sample size precluded any such detailed analysis. In any event, an understanding of the role of the change in mobility status in the aggregate sheds provides insight into the impact of the decision not to have children, for all types of mobility may thwart parenthood plans. The sample size likewise ruled out any solvent detailed country-by-country analysis of the impact of JRSM on the childless.

One of the questions to be explored in future research will be the effects of job-related spatial mobility on the importance granted occupational factors in the decision not to have children against the backdrop of the covid-19 crisis and its impact on mobility and job opportunities. A corollary study would consist in comparing the social, occupational and fertility implications of that crisis in countries with different welfare arrangements.

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