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Title of the presentation: "First childbearing at higher ages in Sweden and Poland."

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Background and purpose:
In the last decades, the mean age at first birth increased significantly in most European countries, while fertility has been below (or much below) the replacement level. While economic theories, theories on ideational changes, etc. provide explanations for the postponement of first birth, it is less clear why individuals who have not become a parent by their mid- or late twenties would do so later on in their lives. In our exploratory study, we seek to shed more light on the mechanisms of first childbearing at higher ages in the period of the mid-1970s - late 1990s. We apply a comparative research design, and focus on Sweden and Poland given the differences in their family formation patterns and family-level gender relations as well as the similarities regarding female labour force participation and policies that support the combination of employment and family responsibilities. In our theoretical framework we rely on the life-course approach, taking into account that normative pressures for parenthood have weakened and competing demands of education, paid work, etc. as well as new opportunities render childbearing to be a choice among many other choices individuals make in their lives.

Data and methods
Data extracted from the Swedish Level of Living Survey (waves 2000 and 1991) and the Polish Retrospective Survey of 2001 are analyzed. We start with a descriptive analysis using non-parametric methods (i.e. life-table estimation for first childbearing). Then the method of hazard regression is applied where we use a stepwise approach for the model fitting. First we include only individual background characteristics (cohort, religious activity level, childhood family type, number of siblings). Next, we add to the model our variables of partnership behaviour (length and types of former and current partnerships). Finally, we include measures of current situation (educational attainment, employment status and calendar period). Such stepwise introduction of factors into the model reflects the sequence in which they appear in a respondent's life. This, in turn, determines their causal proximity to the current circumstances of the respondents. In addition, our

procedure allows us to exclude those factors that do not have a significant direct impact on first childbearing at higher ages as new group of factors are added to the model.

<u>Main results and conclusion:</u>
Both the main effect models and the interaction terms show that the most important mechanisms of the late transition to parenthood work via partnerships, both former and current ones, and via age given the increase of fecundity impairment with increasing age (biological aspect) as well as the increasing importance of social and/or cultural obstacles (normative aspect). Also educational attainment and employment status are important but there are differences in the effects by country and gender. In sum, both the policy context and individual priorities matter for first childbearing at higher ages.