

Cohort Fertility Differentials between Native and Foreign Born Women in a New Receiving Country: the Case of Greece

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Since 1990 Greece has started to transform from a traditional sending into a new receiving country. The 2001 census data reveal that foreign citizens constitute 7.3% of the total population of Greece, a figure 4.5 times that of the respective share a decade earlier. It has been estimated that over 97% of the population change that occurred during the intercensal period 1991-2001 was attributed to net-immigration. At the same time, low fertility has become a structural characteristic of the population of Greece and its future developments. The combined effect of late fertility and low child-bearing rates observed over the last 15 years led the period total fertility rates to very low under replacement levels (1.3 children per woman in 2004). Given the relative size of the migrant population, the fertility behaviour of foreign-born women may have under certain conditions – such as family structure, duration of residence in the country etc – a measurable impact on the overall fertility of the population. From the socio-demographic point of view, therefore, the study of the migrant fertility patterns and differentials are of considerable interest.

Data and method

The aim of this paper is to examine the differences in fertility patterns between native and foreign born women in Greece. The analysis is based on the reported numbers of children ever born alive by women in the 1950-1970 cohorts collected on the occasion of the 2001 population census. For the purposes of the study, special tabulations of census data were produced by the National Statistical Service of Greece which are

presented here for the first time. The data are cross-classified by birth-date and citizenship of mother, number of children ever born alive and by dates of first and second births. With respect to citizenship, special emphasis is given to Albanian and Bulgarian origin persons since they constitute the most numerous national groups of the migrant population of the country (52,2% and 6,1% respectively). All other citizenships (representing 41.7% of the total migrant stock) are treated combined in one separate category. Owing to the cultural diversity of that group and the small numbers for each ethnicity, results presented for that category are often ambiguous and should be treated with caution.

The analysis focuses on both the changing tempo and quantum of fertility, in particular for first and second birth orders. For each cohort of women, we observe differences in the proportions childless and in the fertility patterns across national groups and over successive cohorts. Fertility is analysed with respect to postponement of childbearing as well as changes in family size, calculating cumulative fertility measures and various mean ages of the fertility schedule. Birth cohorts from 1950 to 1970 are classified in four 5-year periods, i.e. 1950-54, 1955-59, 1960-64 and 1965-69. Since the age of the oldest cohort differs nearly 20 years from that of the youngest one, comparisons across successive cohorts refer to fertility levels achieved up to a certain age and not up to the end of the conventional reproductive period of women. Intensive immigration is a recent phenomenon for Greece thus, only first generation migrants are examined and no migration cohorts are identified.

Results

The analysis shows that migrant fertility of the 1950-54 and 1955-59 birth cohorts is 5%-6% lower than that of the Greek natives. However, noticeable differences exist between different national groups. Albanian women born during the above specified periods (1950-54, 1955-59) exhibit relatively high cohort fertility rates (2.31 and 2.17 children per woman respectively) compared to Greek female citizens (1.90 and 1.86), Bulgarians (1.64 and 1.60) and women of all other nationalities (1.48 and 1.43). Similar patterns are found for the younger cohorts (1960-64 and 1965-69). For instance, concerning first and second births only to women attaining age 35, the corresponding figures for the Albanian women are 1.62 and 1.49, for the Greek women are 1.44 and 1.22, for Bulgarians 1.24 and 1.06 and for the other entire citizenship category 1.06 and 0.94 children per woman, respectively.

The above patterns can be partly explained by the differences observed in the proportions childless reported by the women of the national groups under study. Considering birth cohorts 1950-54 and 1955-59, the percentages of childlessness among Albanian women are 7.6% and 8.1% respectively, compared to 11.6% and 12.2% for Greeks and to 18.2% and 19.0% for Bulgarians. Similar patterns are exhibited by women of younger cohorts.

Another aspect of fertility is the age at which women enter child-bearing. In this respect the available data failed to delineate the relationship between mean age of childbearing and fertility levels. Looking at cohorts 1950-54 and 1955-59, the average age at first birth is found to be lowest among Bulgarian women (21.5 and 21.2 years respectively), followed by Albanian (23.7 and 24.1) and Greek women (24.1 and 23.9). These differences can be partly explained by differences in the mean age at marriage; however, they do not explain the fertility differentials observed between

national groups. For instance, the relatively early fertility of Bulgarian women, does not lead to higher child-bearing levels as compared to the other populations under study. In fact, the first birth probabilities of Bulgarian women born in 1950-54 and in 1955-59 (0.82 and 0.81 respectively) are lower than those of the Albanians (0.92 and 0.92) and the Greeks (0.88 and 0.88). Similar differences can be observed for second births, as well. For instance, although the average age of Bulgarian women at second birth (24.1 years) is lower than that of Albanians (26.4 years) and Greeks (27.3), their cohort fertility rate for second birth is about 16% and 26% lower than that of these national groups.

Fertility differentials between the national groups increase for higher birth orders. Women born in Albania in 1950-54 and 1955-59 have significantly larger families than women of the other ethnic groups. Their cohort fertility for birth orders 3+ is between 70 and 180% higher than that of Bulgarian and Greek origin females, whereas the corresponding figures for birth orders 1 and 2 are higher only by 8% – 40%.

Examining reproductive behaviour across successive generations it is found that cohort fertility has been declining over time for both native and foreign born women. Comparing cumulative fertility rates for cohorts 1950-54 and 1965-69, the data show that the mean number of children ever born to age 35 dropped by 12% for Albanian mothers, 21% for Greek natives and 25% for Bulgarian female immigrants. Although it is rather difficult to explain cross-national differentials and over-time changes – due to significant differences in the composition of the birth cohorts with respect to ethnic, cultural, educational and socio-economic characteristics – our results suggest that fertility variations are to a certain extent associated with differences in the age at marriage and, mainly, age of entry to motherhood (timing effect). Taking into account a slow upward trend in the proportion of childlessness and a downward trend in the probabilities of having a third or subsequent birth, it is quite likely that the level of completed cohort fertility for women born during the 1960s will be lower than for those born during the first half of the 1950s.

Conclusions

This paper examines fertility patterns and differentials of foreign and native-born women in Greece using data from the 2001 population census on the reported numbers of children ever-born alive by citizenship. Immigration is a recent phenomenon for Greece with the majority of immigrants having arrived at the country during the last 10 years - the median duration of residence is estimated at 4.23 years at the time of observation (2001). With the available information, it is rather difficult to study the course of migrant fertility after arrival or to explore such socio-demographic aspects as the immigrant socialization, adaptation or disruption hypotheses. Even so, the material used is very valuable for calculating various cohort fertility measures and identifying possible migrant selection processes, even if tenuous.

Greek females exhibit somewhat higher cohort fertility than all other foreign-born women combined, though comparing successive cohorts it can be seen that fertility follows a declining trend for all ethnic groups. Albanian women have higher fertility levels compared to the native and all other foreign born women we studied, but Bulgarian females tend to have their first and second births earlier than other women. It is very difficult to make any plausible predictions regarding the long term

contribution of migrants to the overall fertility of the population. However, it is suggested that immigration may have in short-term a measurable effect on the period birth rates, because the composition of the migrant population by marital status (67% of migrants aged 15 and over are married) and age (69% of migrant women are in reproductive ages) will favor childbearing.