



## ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF NATALITY AT THE BEGINNING OF XXI<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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The 21<sup>st</sup> century is facing a decline in birth rates all over the world, the reasons being the same in any country, although the percent may vary from one region to another depending on the political, economic, religious or health context. New family paradigms, changes in the gender roles, the distance from the extended family (from the tribe that traditionally helps to raise children), but especially the change in the mentality of resources invested in children, have led to a predominant society with families having a maximum of 1-2 children. The family is still one of the most important factor in making life choices for most Romanians, but the lack of time and financial problems made impossible for them to think about the possibility of having a large family, especially that the interest in ensuring good living conditions and education increased. Even if both parents work, the costs of providing a proper house, education, health and a balanced diet for children are difficult to cover even for families with 1-2 children in the new socio-economic conditions.

*Keywords:* birth rates, family, education, mentality.

The reasons for the decline in birth rates around the world have been analyzed by anthropologists, sociologists, doctors or public policy experts in recent years, as this imbalance will affect the social and economic situation of future generations. Among the main reasons identified worldwide, urbanization occupies an important place. The last century saw the largest migration in human history, which is still in full swing on all continents. If in 1960 a third of the world's population used to live in urban areas, today it is estimated that about 60% of the population lives in cities. Migration from village to city has greatly contributed to changing the family paradigm on several levels. From a **financial / economic** point of view: rural families needed a large number of children as workforce for households, so they became useful to their families from an early age, by receiving various age-appropriate household responsibilities. In urban areas, on the other hand, children become just an “expense”, with parents having to invest significant amounts of money for care and education in the relatively long term.

The last century is marked by two phenomena that have directly influenced the dynamics of the population: on the one hand medical discoveries have visibly extended life expectancy from one generation to another around the globe, but on the other hand the population pyramid has suffered changes due to the decrease in the number of births in parallel with the discoveries in the scientific field. The transition from the “traditional” family model characterized by a large number of births, out of which a relatively small percentage of children reached the age of sexual maturity, to the “modern” model in which the family rationally decides to have children based on the new socio-cultural and economic challenges they face.

Ensuring a mentally and physically healthy birth rate depends to a large extent on consciously assuming the role of “parent”, realistically balancing the resources (financial, time, energy, etc.) which the couple is willing to invest into the next generation. Given that the baby needs the longest care time to survive, out of all animal species, so the calculations related to ensuring healthy development must be made for long periods of time. Under these conditions, the

planning of the next children is even more difficult, especially since the age at which the child can become independent (economically and socially) has increased on average by at least five years compared to 50 years ago.

The increase in women's educational level has also influenced the decline in birth rates on two levels: on the one hand, women have conditioned the age when they start to build their own family because it depends on their graduation, and on the other hand, they have had access to information on contraceptive methods. At the same time, women have realized that the "well-being" of families is not ensured by the number of children, but by their access to resources. The division of the *time* resource between family, career and other social obligations has become the main challenge for a modern woman.

If a century ago we could speak of an early model of fertility in the Romanian population, with the highest values in the age category 20–24, since 2000, we are witnessing the increase of birth rates at ages over 25. Given that the maximum reproductive potential is considered to be between 20–25 years for women, decreasing as they get older, there has been an increase in the number of people seeking fertility treatments. If for a healthy woman between the ages of 20 and 30, the monthly chances of conceiving are about 25%, they fall below 10% for women over 35<sup>1</sup>. The link between decreased fertility in females and aging is closely related to the quantitative and qualitative decrease in oocytes. The stages of ovarian aging include the appearance of irregular menstrual cycles, followed by the absence of some of them and finally by the onset of amenorrhea<sup>2</sup>. The average age of menopause onset is around 50 years, but it is estimated that an accelerated decrease in fertility occurs 13 years before its onset<sup>3</sup>. With age, the frequency of genetic malformations increases and so can appear conception products with various aneuploidies, most of which are incompatible with life. The most common aneuploidy related to advanced maternal age is Trisomy 21 (Down Syndrome). It is common in older women with maternal meiotic nondisjunction.

Between April and May 2018, the Romanian Association for Human Reproduction (ARUR) has conducted an online study aimed at identifying the medical problems faced by infertile couples, as well as their socio-economic situation.

According to the ARUR study, from the subjects who have been trying to have children for more than a year, 81% are married, 25% are from Bucharest/Ilfov, 74% of those with potential infertility have university or postgraduate studies, 47% have an income over 5.000 lei net per family, and 76% of those who do not currently manage to have a child have a personal home. These figures outline a profile of couples who wish to have children and have a social status above the national average.

Although men can theoretically procreate without an age limit, both the quality and quantity of semen decrease over time. For a long time, women were considered to be the main culprits for fertility problems, but recent studies have shown that 40–60% of infertility causes are of male pathology<sup>4</sup>.

A study published in the "First International Journal of Andrology" in April 2007 showed that sperm motility in men over 55 is 54% lower than in those aged 30–35<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, another study of 80 subjects without associated pathologies concluded that the advanced age of men increases the risk of alteration of genetic material in sperm, and men who delay reproduction have an increased risk of producing embryos with various pathologies<sup>6</sup>.

The transition from an *authoritarian* model of education (in which the parent was limiting the child's freedoms to the maximum, decisions being made without explanation and imposing rules of conduct which did not take into account the emotional development of children), to a more balanced educational model was due to the fact that parents have understood that their role is to educate by emphasizing the emotional development of the child. But this new model of education involves more time that parents allocate to their children in the educational process, compared to the traditional model in which "the child grows up anyway" or in which older siblings took care of the little ones.

The country's economic development has brought with it new demands on families. Access to a different economic level and the transition to a democratic society have brought Romanians the opportunity to benefit from new resources that have significantly improved their lifestyle, increased life expectancy, offered children the chance to enjoy education in the most renowned universities of the world, things that, unfortunately, came with costs in terms of decreasing the number

of descendants / family members. If about 50 years ago only one family member could provide basic income to support a household financially, under the new conditions both adults in the family have had to contribute to the household budget.

Another important change is the **change of the women status**: in the city, women remained the main ones responsible for the care of children and the home, but in addition they took over new roles (profession, new social challenges) which led to an overcrowding of time and, implicitly, to the inability to care for a large family.

**Lack of a living space**: if in the village the customs used to regulated quite clearly the origin of the living space for a young family, in the urban world, for most cases, the main problem of a couple at the beginning of the road is the purchase of a building. In the conditions in which the prices on the real estate market at the level of the big cities in Romania is in a continuous increase, implicitly the age at which the young people manage to buy an apartment and to start a family is pushed higher and higher. At the same time, the relatively small space of the apartments and the impossibility of extending them, as was possible in the case of houses in rural areas, limits the number of descendants that the family would think of.

**The help provided by the extended family characteristic of the traditional rural environment disappears**: in the village world, the customs also regulated the help offered by the family members to the young mother and the children in the first years of life. The disappearance of the “village” from the life of the young family brought with it a greater pressure on the shoulders of the future

parents and implicitly the decrease of the number of desired descendants.

Daniel David, in “The Psychology of the Romanian People”, uses the six-dimensional model developed by Hofstede to characterize the cultural model of the population<sup>7</sup>. One of the dimensions analyzed in this study is the one that describes the relationship between collectivism and individualism encountered in the current population of Romania. Based on Hofstede’s cultural model, Romania appears as a collectivist country/culture with a score of 30 (between 0-collectivism and 100-individualism), without having a very high degree of collectivism. In comparison, Slovenia has a score of 27 for collectivism and Poland a score of 60 for individualism – a trend towards individualism. Of the EU countries, only Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal and Romania have a collectivist profile<sup>8</sup>.

An individualistic culture emphasizes individual achievements and rights that must be thought of and sustained autonomously and assertively, and the individual expresses his or her own desires and goals. In the collectivist culture the behavior of the individual is influenced by his position in a group, often the family one. The individual expresses his desires and goals in the form agreed by the community<sup>8</sup>.

This theory proves to be real for the Romanian people: According to the questionnaires applied by the World Values Survey<sup>9</sup>, at the question related to the importance of the family in one’s life, out of the 1503 Romanian respondents, 93.1% chose the “very important” option, the most high percentage in this category among the countries analyzed by us (WVS, 2010–2014) (Table 1).

Table 1

The importance of family in one’s life in the analized countries (WVS, 2010–2014)

	The country				
	Poland	Romania	Slovenia	Spain	Ukraine
Very important	92.1	<b>93.1</b>	88.7	91.1	92
Important enough	6.4	5.5	10.1	8.4	6.6
Not very important	0.3	1.1	0.6	0.2	1.3
Unimportant	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1
I do not know	0.6	0.1	0.3	0	0
I do not answer	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0
(N)	<b>966</b>	<b>1503</b>	<b>1069</b>	<b>1189</b>	<b>1500</b>

Religion is an archetype characteristic of the Romanian people, a constant that, more than any other influence of modernity, establishes the rules of family organization, especially in rural areas. The main customs in the life of a Romanian family are formalized in the church or according to the church specific rituals.

According to the World Values Survey Wave (WVS, 2010-2014), Romanians have one of the highest degrees of religiosity (81.4%) among the countries analyzed in Europe (EU countries, but also outside the EU). At the same time, Romania has the lowest percentage of declared atheists (1.1%) (Fig. 1).

Perhaps the tendency of the Romanian people towards the collectivist side of the questions related to the values transmitted by the family in childhood, and which still remain important, is best observed. Among the analyzed countries, Romania

obtained the highest score when asked about the importance of meeting parents' expectations even in the child's adult life. This pride is specific to Romanian culture and is a constraint that has been passed down through the generations. This stereotype has not disappeared in time because it was considered *valuable*, bringing image benefits to families. Behind this custom, each family could accumulate all the desired values and principles (Fig. 2). The aspiration to meet the parents' expectations is an extrinsic value, assumed in light of the hypothetical desires of the community. In the rural world of Romania, one of the strongest sanctions of the community is the formal exclusion from the sphere of families with a *good image*. But this "good image" has changed over time, including today, in addition to an economic situation and a professional success achieved through a long-term education of children.

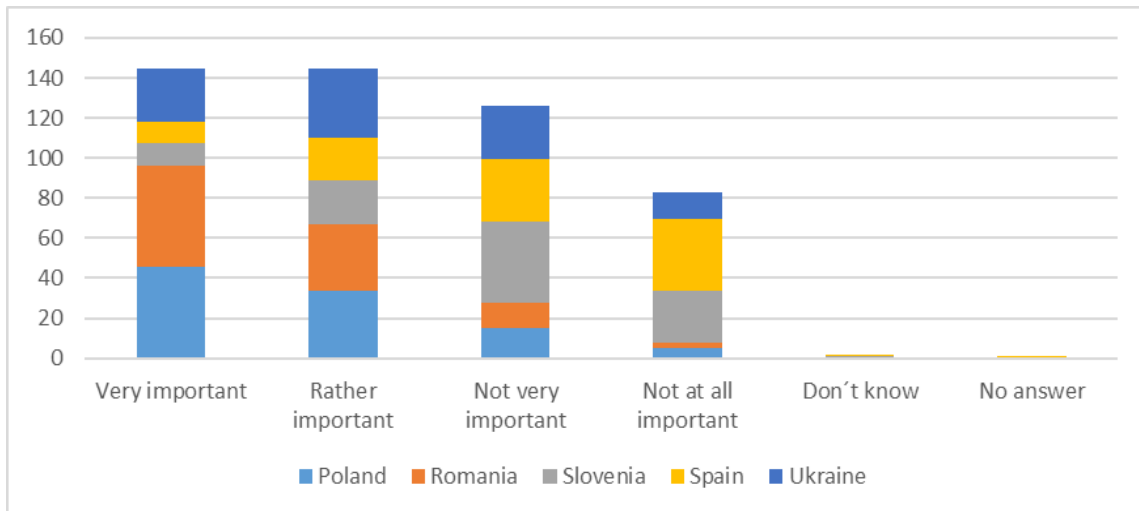


Figure 1. The importance of religion in the analyzed countries (WVS, 2010–2014).

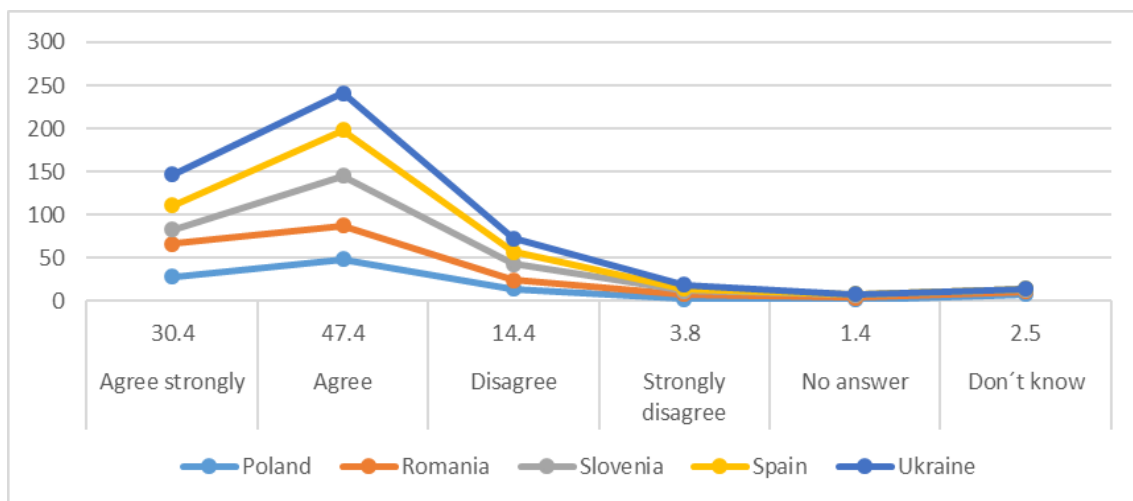


Figure 2. One of my main goals in life was to make my parents proud of me (WVS, 2010–2014).

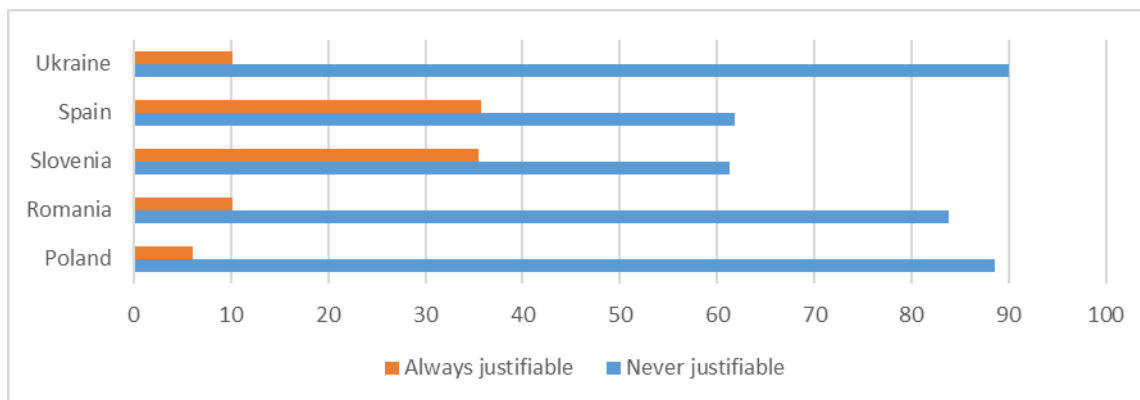


Figure 3. Approval/disapproval of divorce in the analyzed countries (WVS, 2010–2014).

According to the National Institute of Statistics, in 2020, 81,343 marriages were registered in Romania and 22,785 divorces. Despite the high percentage of registered divorces, Romanians consider the divorce to be justifiable in small measure, having a statistically significant score ( $p < 0.05$ )<sup>8</sup>. Respondents did not consider that divorce, a social issue with a negative connotation, could have any justification (79.3%). Investing in families (collectivist cultural character) Romanians are in opposition to the idea of divorce (Fig. 3).

The social transformations of recent years, the increasing global mobility, finding a partner outside the *tribe*, increasing women's access to higher education and changing their status from housewives to career women, have brought important changes in the families dynamics, the reorganization of priorities, but also a decrease in the number of children that a family agrees to take care of. Against this background, in recent years in Romania there has been an increase in the number of nuclear families with 1–2 children, an increase in partners' ages at the time they got married, an increase in the percentage of divorces relative to

the number of marriages and an aging trend specific to all European countries.

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