

The question of *when* to have children is certainly an important question that women willing to have children and at the same time actively participate in the labor market need to deal with. Nowadays women in Europe give birth to the first child when they are (on average) 29 years old but in some countries, such as Greece, Spain or Italy, this is already more than 30 years old. It is well documented and well known that over the last years women started to postpone their first birth – for Europe numbers show an increase from 25.9 in 1990 to 28.8 in 2016.

What is even more interesting than timing of the first birth is the timing of subsequent births, and particularly the timing of the second birth. *Why?* Because one child is “*not enough*” for a population replacement and we need women to have more children for the population to grow. Even if a working woman wants to have more than one child she is left with the questions: when should I decide for the next child? Is it better for me – as a working mum – to have it very soon or wait? How long should I wait? With this project we aim to answer these questions and investigate birth spacing strategies of women in relation to their labor market performance.

The goal of this project is to analyze time gaps between subsequent childbirths from the point of view of women’s situation in the labor market. Our project is based on empirical analysis of large database for over 20 countries and consists of three main steps.

In the first step we will analyze birth spacing strategies of women across various countries to see whether there are differences among countries based on their institutional characteristics. We are particularly interested in such institutional characteristics as the length of child related leaves and state support for working women in the form of child care services. We hypothesize that in countries, in which child related leaves are short and state support for working mothers is generous women tend to give birth to a second child faster than in the countries, in which leaves are long and mothers receive limited care support.

In the second step we aim to answer the question on the optimal – in terms of women’s labor market and career prospects – birth spacing. We aim to find out what is the “best” time gap between subsequent children for women’s labor market career. We are interested in the time between subsequent birth that is associated with the greatest probability of returning back to work, highest earnings and promotion prospects.

Finally, in the third step we will examine which strategies with respect to the length of time interval between births, translate into the most favorable labor market outcomes, in different groups of women based on their socio-economic status, such as education level, working status before the first birth, and age at first birth. We will also assess whether birth spacing patterns differ by the gender of the first child. We expect that birth spacing of the second child will depend on the gender of the first child, and in particular women whose first child is male will have longer time interval to the second birth than women whose first child is female.

The question on the timing of subsequent births is important not only from an individual point of view but also from a global perspective, because many countries are faced now with declining fertility rates. Eurostat data reveal that over the time 1976-2016 the fertility rate in Europe has decreased from 2.11 to 1.58, pointing to the drop in the number of children born to women and a gradual shift to 2+1 family model. Threatening decline in the fertility seen in these countries has called for policy actions and very often families with children are offered not only child related leaves and child care support in the form of nursery schools and kindergartens, but also monetary incentives to have (more) children. The results of our project will allow us to assess the effectiveness of policy regulations aimed at increasing fertility by incentivizing women to give birth to more children.