

# Low Fertility and Demographic, Socio-Economic Changes in Southern European Countries

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## Summary of the Study

This area study group conducted a comparative analysis on demographic trends and family polities in four EU member countries around the Mediterranean Sea, namely, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. Due to limited data and documents, focus was placed on Italy and Spain with larger populations. The fertility in these countries belongs to the lowest group among industrialized countries. To clarify the reasons for their low fertility is the central concern of the report of this study group.

## Fertility trends and Proximate Factors for Fertility Rates

The fertility transition in countries in Southern Europe began 10 to 15 years later than Northern and Western Europe, and completed in the 1940s. Later, baby booms continued for some time in Southern Europe just like other European regions, and in the latter half of the 1970s, their fertility rates began falling at once to fall below the replacement level in the early half of the 1980s (This second fertility decline came behind Northern and Western Europe by around 10 years.) Fertility rates continued to fall until they recorded the lowest among developed countries ranging from 1.18 (Spain) to 1.46 (Portugal).

The fertility declines after the late 1970s are caused, as in other developed countries, by higher ages at marriage and childbirth (late marriage and late childbirth). In Italy and Spain, average ages at first marriage and at childbirth have been delayed by 3 to 4 years in the past 20 years from around 1980. Accordingly, rates of unmarried people in their 20s remarkably increased in the same period. As non-marital couples and extra-marital childbirths are not spread in Southern European countries, the rise in the unmarried, late marriage and late childbirths directly affected to lower fertility in these countries. Furthermore, at least in Spain, the traditional high parity childbirths (more than three children) dramatically fell and parity of one or two came to the main, which contributed to the fall of fertility rates.

It is considered that the fall in period fertility rates in Southern Europe has been caused not only by changes in the time of childbirths (late childbirth) but also by the lowered completed cohort fertility rate. In the region, modern contraceptives are not spread as in other parts of Europe, and traditional methods are relatively dominantly used.

## Socio-Economic Changes

Behind the rapid increase in unmarried, late marrying, late childbearing people and small families is a rapid increase in women participating in the labor market in each country. From around 1980, women advancing to higher educational institutions increased and more women than men acquire

higher academic qualifications. Women's labor participation has continued to rise (in Spain, for example, labor participation rate of women aged 25-29 rose from one of four to three of four between 1965 and 1999). Against this rapid labor participation by women, efforts to accommodate their needs in working environments, childcare services, institutional facilities to support women for commuting and housing have lagged behind. This can be regarded as one reason for the fall in fertility.

Other factors include the prolongation of schooling years in the region that delays the age of employment, higher youth unemployment rates, and housing problems in large cities. More young people stay in their parents' house longer and depend on their parents economically. This phenomenon is also contributory to the increase in young people remaining single.

In this region of Europe, people have deeply rooted traditional views on family including gender role divisions. Even after women's participation in work force expanded, efforts to readjust the workload of household work and childcare between male and female members of a family have not been made, which made it difficult for women to work and keep household at the same time.