Fertility decline in France since 2014

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Context

After a peak in 2010 (Total fertility rate, TFR, of 2.03 children per woman), the total fertility rate has decreased to its lowest level for almost 25 years in France (1.80 in 2022), with an especially rapid decline being observed since 2014. Since that time, all age-specific fertility rates before the age of 32 have fallen, while those after are stable or rising very slightly - Average number of children (Figure 1)- this fall has been accompanied by a steady rise in the average age at childbirth (from 29.9 years old in 2010 to 31.0 in 2022).

Previous work has shown that the fertility decline between 2014 and 2019 was homogenous by level of income, when controlled for place of birth of the mother (Reynaud, 2022); whilst strongest among women aged under 25 years old (Breton et al., 2021), which explains in part the marked reduction in parity 1 fertility (Reynaud, 2022) i.e. childless women's entry into motherhood.

Social differences in fertility rates in France are complex. Reynaud (2022b) showed that fertility by standard of living was following as U-shape, fertility being the lowest at deciles 4 and 5 (TFR=1.65), and the highest for the wealthiest decile D10 (TFR=1.98) and the poorest (TFR=2.27). This U-shape can be disentangled when other variables are included in the model. Age and parity were used to estimate life tables by standard of living (in order to take into account the relation between the number of children and standard of living). Considering, in addition to these variables, place of birth and education: fertility increased with income for women born in France, especially among highly educated women. On the contrary, it decreased with income among women born abroad, especially among women with a lower education. No effect of standard of income was found for low educated women born in France, nor for highly educated women born abroad (Figure 2).

These results were obtained through complex measures: fertility life tables by age and parity, relative standard of living estimated at each age. They are partly biased for women born abroad due to an overestimation of immigrants' fertility (Toulemon 2006; Reynaud 2023), especially for lower educated women more often coming through family reunification permits.

Nevertheless, a major result was that the large decline after 2014 occurred at all levels of standard of living (Figure 3).
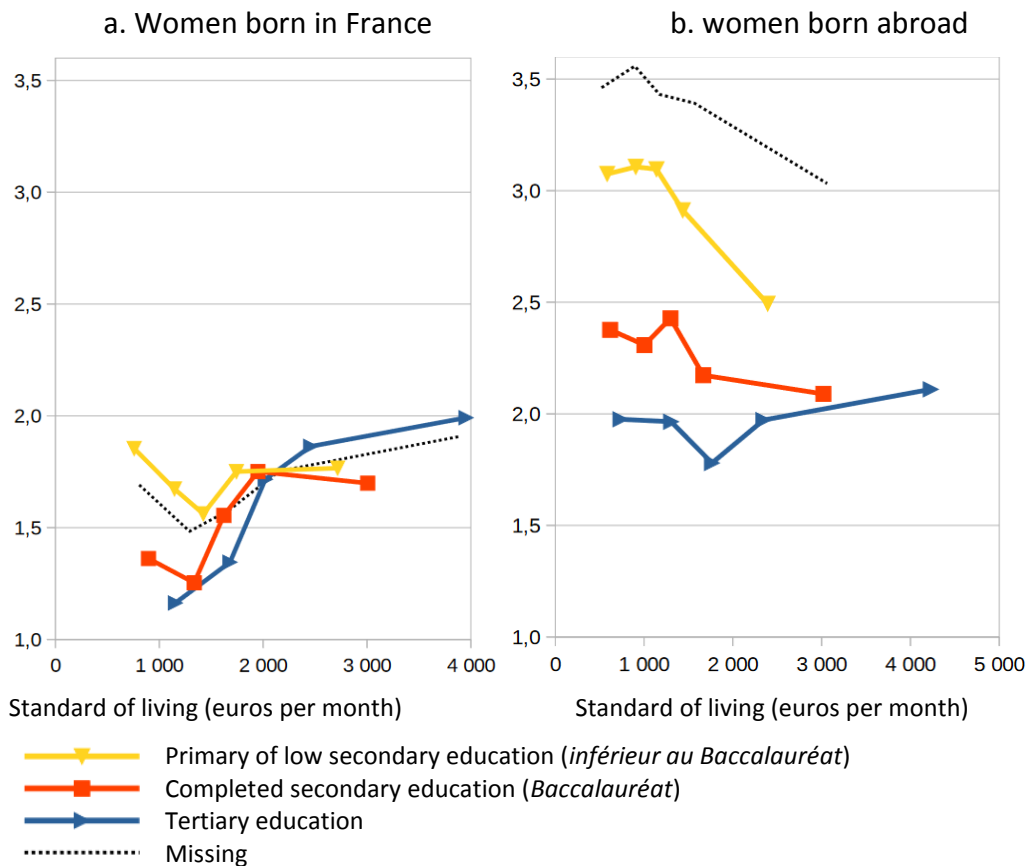
The aim of the paper is to produce new results on fertility in France with focusing on two new aspects. First, to assess the weight of different ages and parities in the recent decline in the TFR. Second, to focus on young childless women's fertility, in order to investigate whether the decline in fertility at young ages is related with a decline among young childless coresident couples (married or not) or with a delay in couple formation.[2]

Figure 1. Age-specific fertility rates and TFR in France, 2000–2022
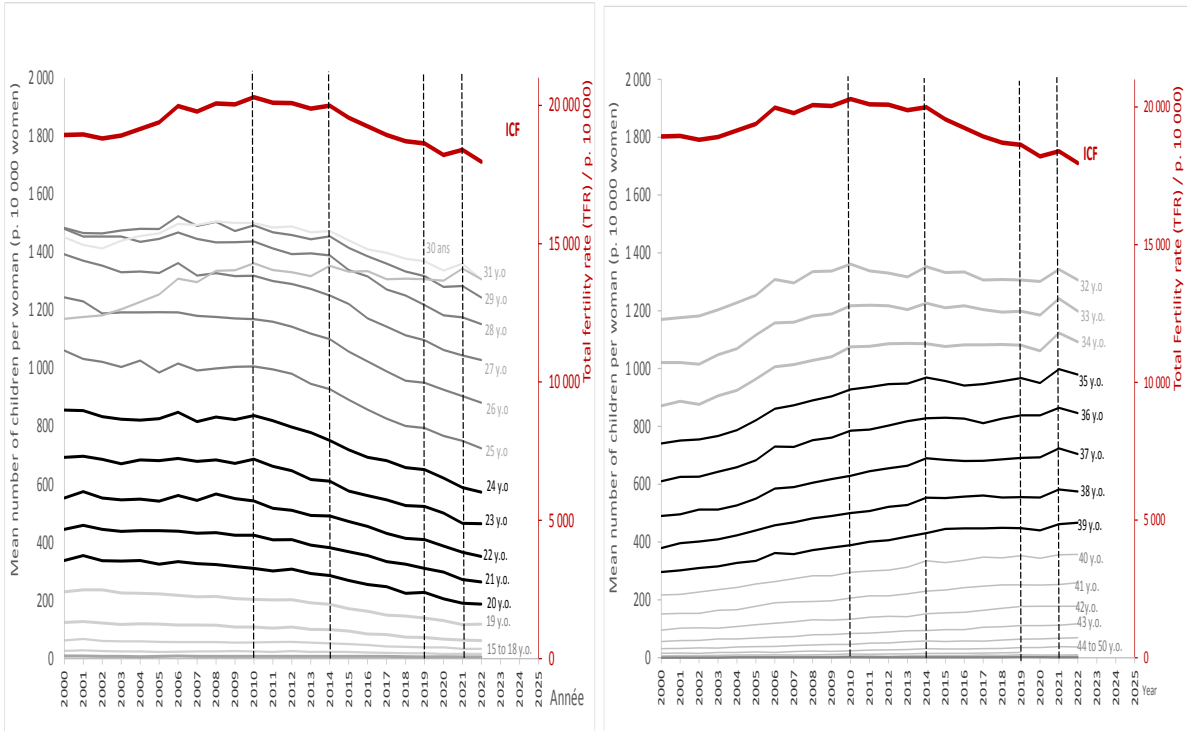
Source: Insee.

Figure 2. Total fertility rate by place of birth, level of education, and standard of living. France, 2011-2017

a. Women born in France

b. women born abroad

Standard of living (euros per month)

Standard of living (euros per month)

Primary of low secondary education (*inférieur au Baccalauréat*)

Completed secondary education (*Baccalauréat*)

Tertiary education

Missing

Note: Translated from Reynaud, 2022, Figures 46 and 47.

Figure 3. Total fertility rate standard of living. France, 2014-15; 2016-17; 2019-19
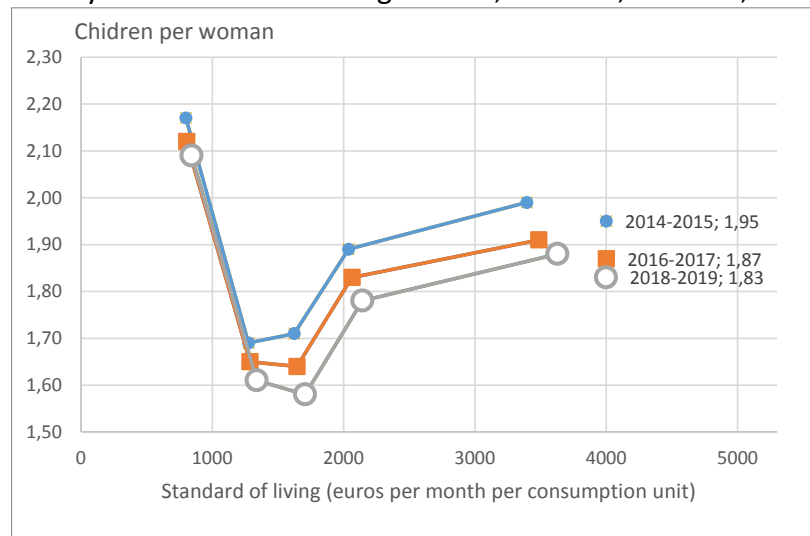
Source: Reynaud 2022b, Figure 4. French demographic panel.

Data and methods

French birth registration data does not include reliable information on birth order making parity specific fertility analysis impossible via this traditional data source. The French demographic panel (*Échantillon démographique permanent*, EDP) provides a novel source to study parity specific fertility. The EDP follows 4% of the French population and combines vital event data with information from censuses, civil registration, tax files, and employment data.

EDP data thus enables the estimation a fertility index based on fertility by age and parity (see Reynaud, 2022). Using the couple status available in annual tax data, the EDP makes it possible to precisely assess the decline of fertility by couple status, in addition to age and parity whilst controlling for education, place of birth and standard of living.

Expected findings

1. The current decline of fertility at young ages is related to both a delay in couples' fertility and a delay in couples' cohabitation

2. This renewed postponement of entry into motherhood is observed across the spectrum of educational attainment.

3. The postponement of entry into motherhood has an effect on fertility at higher parities. This effect is larger for the progression to third births, showing an steady two-child norm. progression to third births.

References

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