

Family and Family Policy in Hungary

A CHRISTIAN INTEGRATIVE PERSPECTIVE



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Studies dealing with the concept of the family, its situation and its future focus on the various subfields, according to the established scientific method. In contrast, Axioma's researchers wish to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation of families in Hungary. The simultaneous interpretation of the family's sociological, cultural, religious, biological, legal, and economic dimensions meets the requirements of the holistic approach derived from a traditional Christian perspective as well as those of academic rigor. This volume is a fundamental summary for professional debate, but can also be recommended as an introduction to anyone interested in the situation of Hungarian families, whether out of mere curiosity.

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In this volume, readers will find an important and thorough summary. It is important, because the family, as the cradle of society, deserves to have a place in public discourse and it is thorough, because the authors' interdisciplinary approach can form a worthy foundation and starting point for this topic.

Written with academic rigor yet in an accessible style, this study offers much more than the facts. It provides a perspective and context which can help one make sense of the societal, demographic, economic, legal, political, and even health-related phenomena of our age as related to the family, in harmony with our Christian worldview, while also serving as a guide to further reflection.

One of its particular strengths is its analytical, evaluative approach, which goes beyond a mere list of tools and results to interpret the effects of the answers offered to these phenomena. Its review of the international situation is of particular value, as it presents the differences arising from cultural, historical, economic and political deviations in addition to the universality of the family. In so doing, it places even greater emphasis on the similarities and universality of the interpretations based on the Christian value system. It is certain to awake in the reader a thirst for further discourse, whether in their local community or in society at large.

I wholeheartedly recommend it to both a professional audience and the general public.

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No one has as great an impact on a person as their parents. We learn much more from them than we think. A healthy relationship with our parents is essential in order to be able to live an integrated human life. Paying attention to this and healing these relationships helps us live a truly authentic life. The view we form of our parents affects our relationship with God just as the first, early experiences gained from them affect our entire life. If anything significant is lacking in our relationship with them or if these relationships are damaged and our view of our father or mother becomes distorted, we have to reckon with its unforeseeable consequences for the rest of our lives. This volume does not treat of these connections, but the principles articulated within it aim to assist in creating such an environment, which can serve as a home for our comprehensive human flourishing.

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1. Introduction

The family is an essential reality. Although throughout history it has effectively functioned as the basic unit of societies, in the last centuries, its importance, role and even whether it is a positive phenomenon have been called into question. In response to the consequences of the disintegration of families and declining fertility rates, an increasing number of contemporary right-wing parties have begun to champion the cause of families and to implement family policy measures. In these turbulent times, it is important for Christians to develop their position so that they can assert Christian values effectively at both the individual and societal levels.

A proper understanding of the situation is required in order to be able to develop such a position.¹ Assessing the situation of Hungarian families and family policy is, however, an extremely complex task. The theoretical part of this study offers an overview of Christian teaching on the family, providing an ethical foundation. The analytical part of the study takes a broad approach and complements the usual analytical perspectives (i.e., the legal, demographic, and economic fields) with the discussion of other, cultural and health-related, topics. Finally, we will offer a few supplementary suggestions and priorities, in addition to the conclusions drawn in the analytical part.

THEY CAN EFFECTIVELY
ASSERT CHRISTIAN VALUES
AT BOTH THE INDIVIDUAL
AND SOCIETAL LEVELS

Before beginning this examination, it is worth asking an important question: what goal is our social life oriented to? Salvation is a primary goal for Christians. It is not without reason that Christian political and social thinkers distinguish the (transcendent) primary goal from (immanent) secondary goals. This is necessary because without a proper source of light, we go astray not just in darkness but also in dusk. Christian family policy must define the secondary goals on the basis of the primary one. This does not mean that the

“ **IT SHOULD REPRESENT THE PRINCIPLE OF THE SANCTITY OF LIFE, THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION OF MARRIAGE, SUBSIDIARITY, AND THE DIGNITY OF WORK AND HOME**

secondary goals are of no importance: it is important for many—or at least enough—children to be born and material well-being is important as well. It is likewise essential that these secondary issues not

be approached in a narrow manner, whether demographic, economic, cultural, or health-related. **A Christian integrative approach is needed**, which is capable of addressing these secondary goals side by side so that we can ultimately come closer to the primary goal. **The key to this approach is to represent the principle of the sanctity of life, the constitutional protection of marriage, subsidiarity, and the dignity of work and the home as firmly as possible.** The goal of our study on Hungarian families and family policy is to grasp the theoretical but also practically applicable foundations of a Christian integrative family policy.

2. Christianity and the Family

2.1. Terminology

Ideally, the beginning and foundation of family and society² is marriage.³ Throughout history, marriage has served numerous social purposes, namely, fertility and economic, diplomatic, and tribal goals,⁴ as well as the restriction of the forms of sexual freedom with a socially destabilizing effect.⁵ Among all these purposes, however, **having children has always and everywhere been a constant, fundamental element.**⁶

According to the definition of the Roman jurist Modestinus, **marriage is the relationship between a man and a woman, a partnership for life, a community in accordance with divine and human law.**⁷ This definition is effectively identical with the approach of treating marriage as a category of natural law. Accordingly, the description of natural law in Roman Catholic Canon Law speaks of “**the matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring.**”⁸

MARRIAGE IS THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN,
A LIFELONG PARTNERSHIP

The existence and concept of the institution of marriage predate modern state law, yet marriage and the family are both subjects of positive constitutional law and enjoy its protection.

The essential elements of marriage—its lifelong, monogamous nature and its close connection to creating a family—have been established since before recorded history,

“**A MAN AND A WOMAN UNITED IN MARRIAGE, TOGETHER WITH THEIR CHILDREN, FORM A FAMILY**

even if certain cultures have permitted some deviation from their ideal of marriage to a certain extent. Our study considers as normative the definition of family that exists in natural law: “A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family.”⁹

2.2. Christianity, marriage, family

The very first pages of Scripture state that God created man and woman in His own image and likeness.¹⁰ The Creator blessed the first human couple and told them to be fruitful¹¹ and to fill the earth and take dominion of it.¹² Woman and man are equal to each other and were created for each other by God.¹³ The man leaves his father and mother for the woman and cleaves to her and **they shall become one flesh.**¹⁴

Jesus Christ, the second divine person, was born into a family,¹⁵ was an obedient child to his earthly parents and was ready to take part in the family life of his contemporaries. He

held women's dignity, intellectual abilities, and free will in high regard and showed particular respect towards children.¹⁶ With his divine authority, he reaffirmed that the Creator's plan for marriage was, from "the beginning," directed towards the unbreakable unity of the spouses.¹⁷

The Savior performed his first miracle at a wedding feast.¹⁸ A key point is that since God is love,¹⁹ the human beings created in his image and likeness are also ordained for love.²⁰ However, as a consequence of original sin, the vocations of man and woman are also marked by difficulties.²¹

Although marriage is a natural institution,²² the patriarchs and kings, subject to the rule of sin, did not explicitly reject polygamy and Moses even permitted a man to divorce his wife.²³ The pagan peoples of the Greco-Roman world often passed laws against the nature of marriage and confusion broke out within the institution of marriage as well. The man gained ownership over his wife and could treat her as an object to be used either to satisfy his sexual desires or for procreation.²⁴ Extramarital sex was extremely cheap and the masses of child slaves captured by the victorious Roman legions provided plentiful supply.²⁵ It was in response to this cruel reality that (St.) Paul called men to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, He who sacrificed Himself for her.²⁶ Paul emphasized that spouses bear mutual responsibility for the expressions of sexuality within their marriage, which, incidentally, he recommended as a remedy for sexual sin.²⁷ Paul also taught that extramarital

THEY SHALL
BECOME
ONE FLESH

sex, adultery, prostitution, and same-sex intercourse are immoral.²⁸

The principles that have influenced Western family law the most to this day were developed by Church Father (St.) Augustine in the 5th century. The Bishop of Hippo viewed sexual desire with worry due to the possibility of falling into sin, but he spoke out in defense of the goodness of the body.

His most important teaching on this topic concerns the benefits of marriage, which are children, fidelity, and indissolubility.²⁹ During the 13th century, (St.) Thomas Aquinas confirmed the sacramental nature of marriage. He supported the Augustinian view of marriage, but also taught that this relationship protects women and children, thereby promoting the common good. From this it follows that **the state has a role in the development of regulation in protection of marriage.**³⁰ If one looks East, then Church Father (St.) John Chrysostom deserves particular attention. He also emphasized the importance of sex and “companionship” within marriage.³¹ Within Catholic tradition, it was not until the Second Vatican

Council that marriage was formally described as a “community of love.”³²

Christian, and within it Catholic, teaching continues to uphold the particular importance of the family founded on marriage.³³ **The family is the cradle of faith, prayer, virtue, education, solidarity and love.**³⁴ After his election, Pope Leo XIV declared that the

“**THE STATE HAS A ROLE
IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF REGULATION IN
PROTECTION OF MARRIAGE**

18

family is founded on the stable covenant between man and woman, that it constitutes a small society that precedes civil society, and that it must be supported by the leaders of governments in the interest of harmonious and peaceful coexistence.³⁵ He also emphasized that marriage is not some kind of ideal, but rather is the measure of true love between man and woman and that the family is a special place of encounter with Jesus.³⁶

3. Legal Implications of Marriage and the Family

3.1. Protection of the institution of marriage

Numerous states establish the most important regulations and concepts pertaining to marriage and the family at the constitutional level.³⁷ The Fundamental Law of Hungary states that **marriage is a life partnership established between a man and a woman based on a voluntary (free) decision**.³⁸ The National Avowal (the preamble to the Fundamental Law) also affirms the family as the most important framework of living together, thereby elevating it alongside the nation. It does not, however, mention the institution of marriage.

“ **MARRIAGE IS A LIFE PARTNERSHIP ESTABLISHED BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN BASED ON A VOLUNTARY (FREE) DECISION**

The Fundamental Law makes it clear that marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman. This con-

dition, self-evident from natural law,³⁹ was no doubt included with a “preventative” intent,⁴⁰ given that an increasing number of states are opening the possibility of civil marriage to same sex couples. This phenomenon, described by Pope Francis as an “anthropological regression,”⁴¹ poses a challenge to the institution of marriage. According to its traditional definition,

marriage is directed towards creating a family. The regulation of marriage considers it more important to create a secure framework for the upbringing of the children to be born than to serve emotional connection.⁴²

Marriage, which 'by its nature' involves the creation of a family, has never presumed the fertility of the given couple. The fertile tension between the complementary male and female natures still belongs to the essence of marriage even in the case of a married couple without children. **Marriage as a covenant between man and woman is a value in itself.**

The law mandates the protection of marriage (and the family) due to their inherent value and dignity as well.⁴³ It thereby

indicates that marriage and the family are not deserving of protection solely due to their reproductive role and that the reason for this protection ought not to be sought in the fruits of the institution of marriage.

The stability of the family is therefore no trivial matter for the state, nor is the question of whether the couple lives in a civil marriage or as cohabiting partners. The state has no right to restrict the freedom of the latter, but what it should protect on the basis of the Fundamental Law is marriage. This also means that it does not equate marriage with cohabitation.⁴⁴ **It is the duty of the state to protect existing marriages and to create a legal environment which incentivizes its citizens to get married and have families.**

MARRIAGE AS A COVENANT
BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN
IS A VALUE IN ITSELF

Since there is no such thing as a marriage which is tied to certain conditions, a marriage made with the possibility of its dissolution—which is made for a certain period of time or which can be “dissolved” by one of the parties—cannot be made either. In other words, neither the right to remarriage nor the right to divorce can be deduced from the right to marriage.

Whether the right to marry “is revived” upon the cessation of marriage—whether through dissolution—is another question. Although Hungarian practice has become accustomed to allowing a quick dissolution of marriage on the grounds of the parties’ will, it still occurs through a lawsuit. In other words, the judiciary exercises control over the parties’ free decision, thereby representing the interests of the marriage (and of the weaker party) as well. Marriage is by its nature a lifelong union even if marriages frequently fall apart.

The “negative side” of the freedom to marry arises precisely from free will: marriage requires the free decision of a man

and a woman, i.e., no one can be forced to enter marriage. Neither engagement nor the existence of a child together constitutes a legal obligation to marry. In a broader sense,

the freedom to marry can be seen as the freedom to choose one’s marital status. However, this right does not necessarily extend to changing this state.

Marriage is a community of solidarity. Spouses owe fidelity to each other and are obliged to cooperate and support each other “in pursuit of their common goals.”⁴⁵ The obligation

“ MARRIAGE IS A COMMUNITY OF SOLIDARITY

of fidelity does not consist solely of refraining from adultery. It also includes an active duty, namely, the preservation of the marital community. The law elevates moral obligations to the level of law without attaching legal sanctions to neglecting these duties in themselves. Although many couples have rights to separate property as a consequence of a prenuptial agreement, marriage is governed, in economic terms, by a system of community property and a community of property exists between the spouses.

Even after they no longer live together, the question of financial support may arise between spouses or former spouses.⁴⁶

The Civil Code also enshrines the principle of equality between the spouses: **“In matters of marital life and the family, the spouses are equal before the law; their rights and obligations are equal.”⁴⁷**

The protection of the institution of marriage requires not only the preservation of the legal institution but also that the state play an active role in supporting the institution of marriage. Marriage is the state of life of the majority of the population. The state may therefore consider supporting it to be part of its socio-political role, whether it promotes it within the framework of public education, public service information campaigns or other programmes.

IN MATTERS OF MARITAL
LIFE AND THE FAMILY, THE
SPOUSES ARE EQUAL BEFORE
THE LAW; THEIR RIGHTS
AND OBLIGATIONS ARE EQUAL

3.2. Protecting the family

Compared to marriage as a legal institution which has a precise definition, the concept of the family is more flexible, as it is not primarily a legal institution.⁴⁸ Article L(1) of the Fundamental Law defines marriage or the parent-child relationship as the foundation of the family. However, it refrains from defining the family as such.

The two institutions—marriage and the family—cannot be confused with each other. A marriage entered into with the intention of creating a family is not yet a family: the married couple becomes a family through the gift of children. The Fundamental Law avoids taking a position regarding the composition of the family as well. A family with one parent —whether that parent is a widow(er) or is single for another reason—would be regarded as an incomplete family in the traditional meaning of the word, but this question is outside

the law. The parent-child relationship creates a family bond in itself. The constitutional protection of the family certainly cannot be enforced against the parent who lives separately because the Fundamental Law

**THE MARRIED COUPLE
BECOMES A FAMILY
THROUGH THE
GIFT OF CHILDREN**

recognises the existence of a family bond with respect to this parent as well. The concept of the family in the narrower sense of the word presumes an economic relationship. In other words, the child who enters marriage and starts a family thereby leaves the family of his/her parents. The perspective of the family and

the primacy of the child's interests may take precedent over individual interests. This faces many challenges in our age.⁴⁹

As recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, **the family is the natural, fundamental unit of society. The family community possesses intrinsic dignity.** "The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself."⁵⁰

According to its most general definition, the family is a community of life based on free will, with at least two members, connected by a true relationship, caring and dependence, and in which all parties have clearly defined rights and—with the exception of the children—duties.⁵¹ The family is therefore primarily an emotional and economic community, which results in ties of kinship and which establishes obligations of support. **The family is an institution which precedes the law,** which the law surrounds with regulations without making it a subject of the law itself. This definition, which emphasizes the family's nature as a community of life—an emotional and economic community—also reflects the fact that, in line with the Western cultural model, Hungarian law primarily defines the family as the nuclear family. A broader definition of the family, which includes several generations and perhaps even a wider network of kinship, is also accepted from a sociological perspective. Although Article L of the Fundamental Law

highlights the family's reproductive role, Act CCXI of 2011 on the Protection of Families (Csvt.) establishes, at the theoretical level, that the family also deserves protection by virtue of its inherent dignity.

The family, in its form of a constitutional value, requires the development of a family-friendly social environment in all areas of social and economic life, beyond the support and protection of individual families.⁵² Shaping social attitudes is

“
THE FAMILY IS
AN INSTITUTION
WHICH PRECEDES
THE LAW

partially the responsibility of the state, which can achieve this through modifying the legal system, using public administration, and guiding various areas of public service, including media service providers,⁵³ as well as through the system of public education.⁵⁴

The fact that a significant number of Hungarian citizens do not enter marriage and that a large proportion of the country's children are born outside wedlock cannot be ignored.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the constitutional provisions on these areas lead to the conclusion that the Fundamental Law—like the previous Constitution and human rights documents—protects marriage and the family with regard to each other, due to the strong connection between the two institutions: marriage is generally seen to be the basis of the family.⁵⁶

The Constitutional Court established at the very beginning of its operation that the family (together with marriage) is the most fundamental and natural community of the citizens who constitute society.⁵⁷ The Fundamental Law does not neglect the fact that a marriage is a “potential family.” Naturally, the

state cannot exercise guardianship over its citizens' lifestyle choices, but it has a constitutional obligation to protect the unity of marriages and families and to make them a promoted and supported framework of living together.

As the basis of society, marriage and the family are institutions deserving of protection and support due to their inherent value, not their use to society. This does not mean, however, that they do not have a relevant role as regards reproduction. Europe's population policy has been facing the challenge of maintaining population levels for decades, an aim which is the legitimate goal of every state's social policy.⁵⁸

It is natural that the stability of romantic relationships, including marriages, and support for families are closely connected to the incentivization of having children. The Fundamental Law establishes support for having children in a separate paragraph within the section which speaks out in defense of marriage.⁵⁹ This signifies both the close connection of the two and also the distinction between them: having children is not deserving of support only in the case of married couples. Further, the parent-child relationship creates a family relationship regardless of the nature of the relationship between the parents.

Not only must the state not allow people living in a family to be disadvantaged in favor of those who choose a different life-

THE FAMILY, IN ITS FORM
OF A CONSTITUTIONAL
PRINCIPLE, REQUIRES
THE DEVELOPMENT
OF A FAMILY-FRIENDLY
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

style, especially those who do not have children as a matter of personal choice, but supporting the former is a goal of the state. **Marriage and family are preferred lifestyle choices for the state.**⁶⁰ This preference is not arbitrary. It is based on natural law and conforms to the framework within which the great majority of society has lived for generations. The law is right to take as its starting point the supposition that the majority of the younger generations will choose marriage as their way of life, i.e. that it is not one of many equally valid choices but rather the normative rule from which alternative lifestyles, which naturally cannot be restricted, deviate as exceptions.

The Fundamental Law establishes the protection of the families from several perspectives. On the one hand, it mandates certain measures for the protection of families.⁶¹

“ **MARRIAGE AND FAMILY
ARE PREFERRED LIFESTYLE
CHOICES FOR THE STATE**

On the other, it requires the acceptance of a special Cardinal Act for the protection of families⁶² and even refers to family farms in

regard to the protection of natural resources, particularly arable land. The Fundamental Law requires the cost of raising children to be taken into account in regard to public burdens.⁶³ The state may not place families in such a socially disadvantageous position that their obligations to the state would render spouses incapable of rendering their obligations of solidarity to each other or parents of fulfilling their duty of care towards their children.⁶⁴

4. The Situation of Families in Hungary

In order to understand the situation of Hungarian families, a comprehensive approach is required. It is essential to become acquainted with the main demographic indicators that affect families,⁶⁵ but this study will also examine several key questions of economic, cultural and health policy which exercise a significant impact on the life of Hungarian families. Its aim is to provide a brief summary of the key topics and to provide insights which can improve the situation of Hungarian families.

4.1. The main demographic trends

4.1.1. Live birth—fertility

One of the positive developments of the 2010s in Hungary was the rise of the total fertility rate (TFR)⁶⁶ from its low point of 1.23 in 2011 through a steady increase to a value of 1.61 in 2021.⁶⁷ The change in the number of live births was less significant, given the continuous decrease in the number of women who give birth. However, the 2021 peak of approx. 93,000 live births is still a significant improvement over the approx. 88,000 from 2011. Briefly put, fewer women had more children, but, as reported by Századvég, “the significant rise in

Hungary's fertility rate counter-balances the decrease of the childbearing population, though it was only able to result in a moderate increase in the number of births.”⁶⁸

One reason for the increase, beyond the “catching up” which occurred after the recession of 2008–2009, was the predictable period of economic growth that followed it. Another was the family policy initiatives taken by the Orbán government (an analysis of which can be found in Chapter 5).

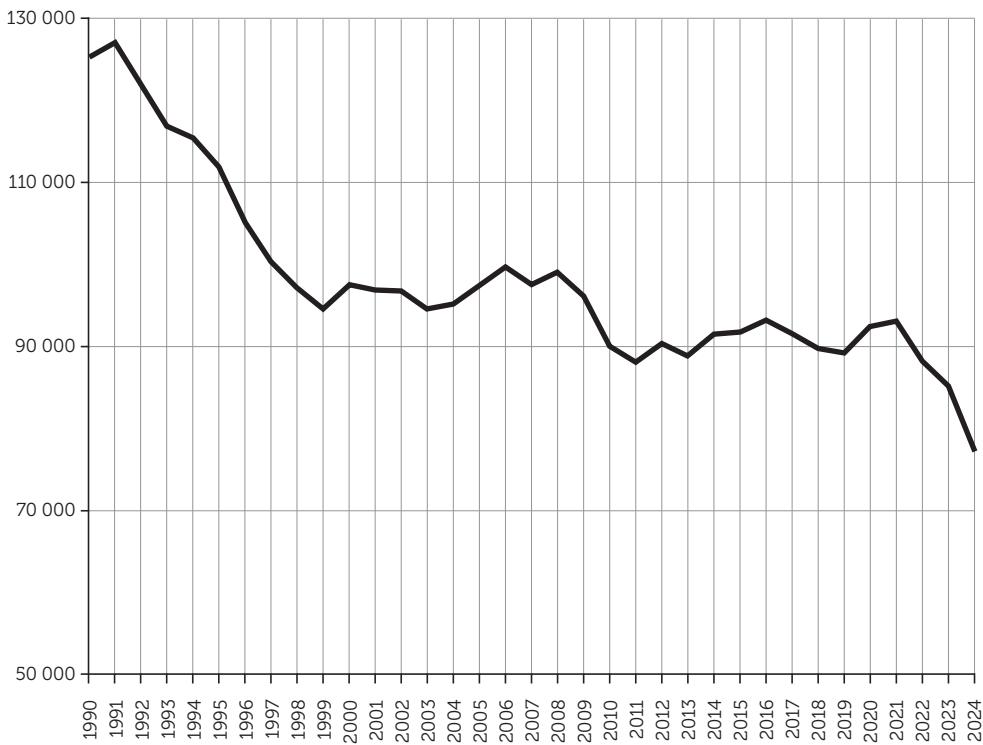


Figure 1. Number of live births between 1990 and 2024⁶⁹

Hungary climbed from bottom place in the European rankings in 2011 to above the European average (1.46) in 2022 and has settled in the middle of the rankings. At a regional level, the Hungarian data for 2022 (1.55) is below Slovakia's 1.57 and Czechia's 1.64 but above Poland's 1.27.⁷⁰

Significant differences exist at a regional, county and district level in live births and the TFR alike. The 2023 results show Budapest to have the lowest TFR (1.17) and the counties Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg the highest (1.82).⁷¹ Further differences exist at the district level and many have pointed out the relevance of settlement size (small villages usually had higher birth rates).⁷²

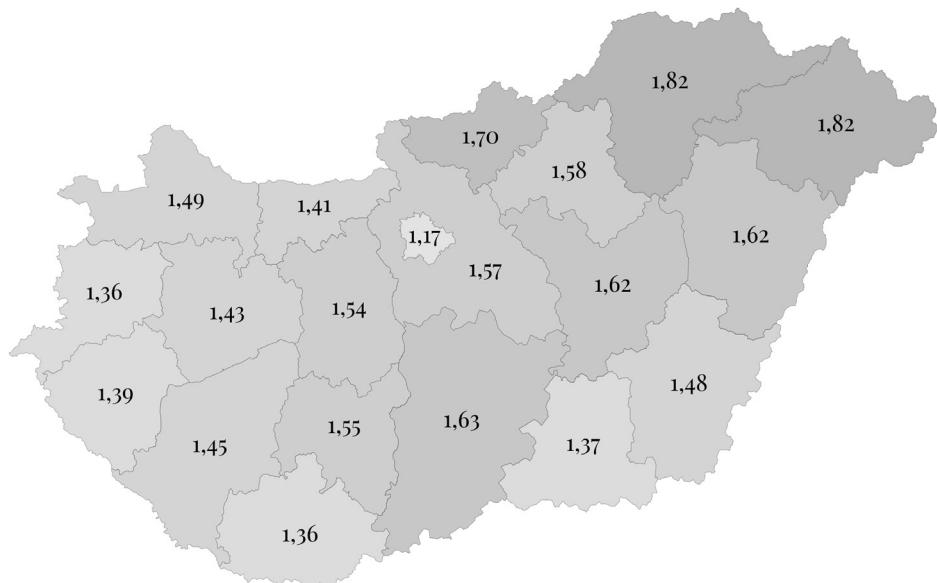


Figure 2. Total fertility rate by county (2023)⁷³

The average age of women giving birth is also increasing each year in Hungary.⁷⁴ At the time of the regime change, they were 23 years old on average at the birth of their first child and 25.67 at the birth of their children in general. In comparison, by 2023, these numbers had risen to 29.24 and 30.54, respectively. **Over the course of thirty-five years, the birth of the first child was delayed by more than six years —regarding the mother's age.⁷⁵** Naturally, it is worth taking a look at the details behind the average as well.⁷⁶

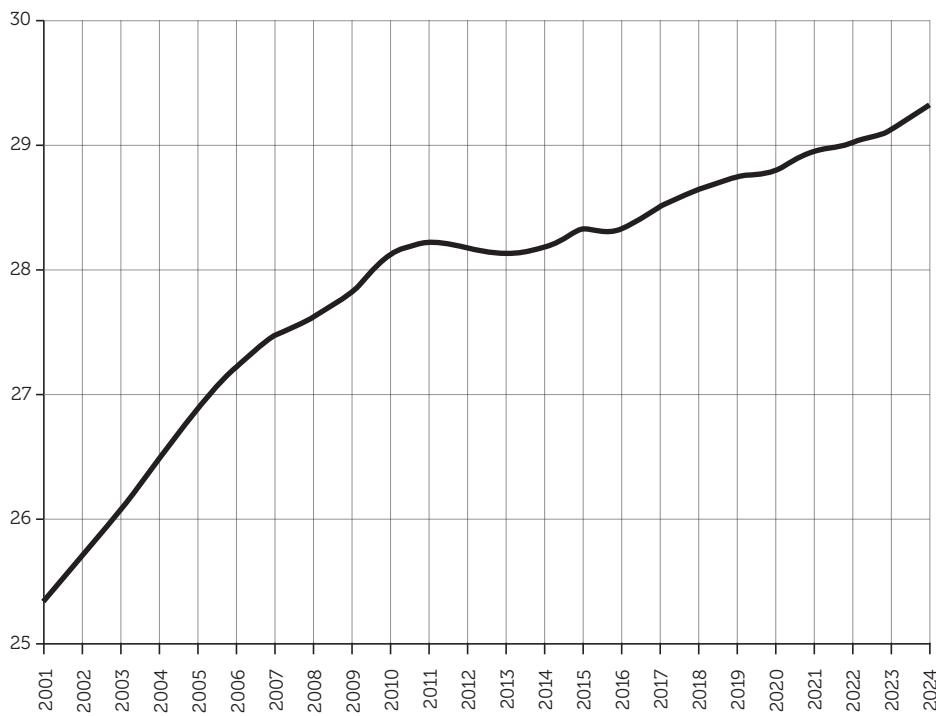


Figure 3. Average age of women at first birth between 2001 and 2024⁷⁷

Significant differences can be observed in the level of education completed, regarding the rate and time of birth as well as the extent of the increase that occurred in the 2010s. Those with only a primary education tend to have children earlier (but also later as well) and are characterized by a higher fertility rate. Their fertility patterns have hardly changed. Those with a secondary education but without a matura exam have children at both a young and an older age, and their fertility pattern is concentrated at the ages of 23-24. It is this group that registered the greatest increase in fertility between 2011 and 2022.

Those with a secondary education and a matura exam are most fertile around the ages of 29-30. They also experienced significant growth in fertility during the 2010s. Those with a tertiary education give birth later. Their fertility increased during their 30s, but to a lesser extent than those of the other groups. Their fertility patterns have effectively remained unchanged.⁷⁸

Is it possible to identify the factors with the greatest effect on the TFR? Demographer Géza Tóth has determined five clearly identifiable statements. He claims that “spatially lagged explanatory variables have the greatest effect. This means that the country has high-fertility hotspots, where the TFR is higher (independently of the other variables examined). It is likely that districts with a higher TFR are also bordered by districts with a higher TFR.”⁷⁹

The existence of this phenomenon (namely, the presence of high-fertility hotspots) has already been demonstrated. Journalist Anita Élő emphasizes the importance of taking into

account the variation among districts in addition to those among the counties.⁸⁰

She uses a comparison of the data for 2013 and 2020 to show that some districts experienced an exceptionally high increase in the number of births: 30% in Sárospatak District in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, 18% in the area of Szikszó and 29% in Hajdúnánási in Hajdú-Bihar County. Among county seats, the town of Győr, with its 17% increase, is worth mentioning.⁸¹ The regional variations among the data show that in order to be able to draw the necessary conclusions—whether descriptive or suggestive—one (also) needs to concentrate on smaller spatial units. Tóth's line of reasoning is that different strategies of encouraging people to have children would bear fruit in the different regions, as opposed to merely launching general, national campaigns.⁸²

According to Tóth, the second largest positive effect on the increasing TFR was exercised by mothers with three or

more children and the third by the proportion of Romani women within the total population. The latter is worth interpreting with care, because although the Romani population have a higher TFR than the general population,⁸³ sometimes “districts with a higher concentra-

“THE EXISTENCE OF THIS PHENOMENON (NAMELY, THE PRESENCE OF HIGH-FERTILITY HOTSPOTS) HAS ALREADY BEEN DEMONSTRATED

tion of Romani do not have a large population” and “many districts with a lower Romani population have a high TFR.”⁸⁴ The fourth measurable effect is religiosity, which has a positive

impact on fertility. However, due to its small size, this group is unable to exercise a significant impact on a societal level.⁸⁵

The final—and least significant—factor is per capita income. This has a negative impact on fertility: “fertility increases with the decrease of personal income.”⁸⁶

Demographic challenges would still have arisen even if the fundamentally positive developments had persisted, at least in the short term. One of the most serious of these challenges is that the number of women who give birth has fallen from 2.4 million to 2.2 million.⁸⁷ This factor is exacerbated by the trends of previous decades, such as the constant decrease in the number of births, a death rate that is high by Western European standards and a moderate net emigration rate.⁸⁸ **The Hungarian population has been in decline since 1981. The easy-to-remember population figure of 10 million from a few decades ago has decreased to 9.5 million by 2025.** The trends in certain regions, such as Békés County, are even more worrying, due to emigration both domestically and abroad.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the increasingly aging population will eventually force lawmakers to transform social security and health services (or to encourage migration).

In light of these developments, the recent rapid drop in the TFR has been even more alarming: it decreased to 1.51 in 2023 and 1.38 in 2024.⁹⁰ The decrease is naturally also visible in the number of live births, which fell to about 88,500 in 2022, 85,000 in 2023 and 77,500 in 2024. The latter is only 82% of the peak value achieved in 2021. The general reasons for this fall include demographic processes (e.g., the continuing

decline of the number of women of childbearing age) and the factors which lessen childbearing intentions (which are typically a combination of effects).

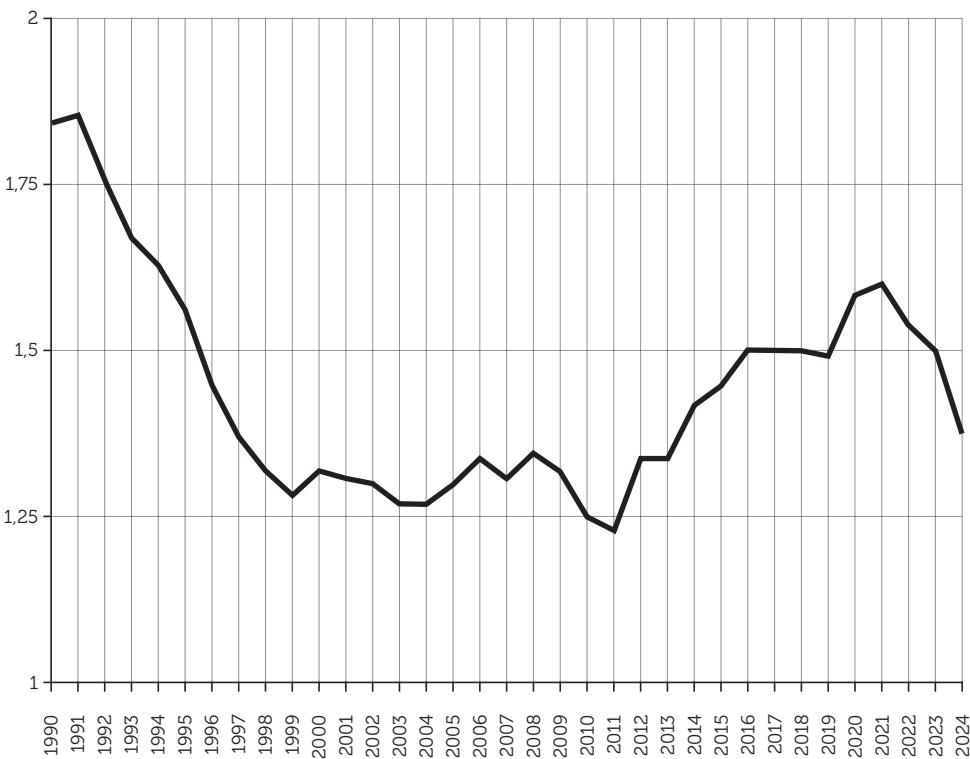


Figure 4. Total fertility rate between 1990 and 2024⁹¹

Naturally, many reasons exist for the latter. Spéder's analysis of four contributing factors provides some points of reference but reveals both the complexity of the issue and the lack of a straightforward answer.

According to the sociologist, interpreting the decrease as a **direct consequence of Covid-19**, whether due to fear over the virus or uncertainty regarding the vaccines might be an obvious choice. However, the analysis of monthly TFR data indicates that the decline began in late 2019. The same holds true of the **negative economic trends** after 2021: the increase of (food) inflation was significant in itself (over 20% in July 2022), resulting in a subsequent decline in the consumer confidence index as well. This does not explain the previous shift, but may be connected to the monthly decrease in the TFR since April 2023. The third explanation is that **the rise of the TFR from its low point ‘ran out of steam’**, as often happens to increases which are supported by

a family policy in former socialist countries. The fourth is a **change that may be interpreted as part of a European—or global—trend that began in 2021**, as the TFR has fallen in almost every single country, as a consequence of the economic downturn and, presumably, rising inflation.⁹² A change in these circumstances may naturally result in a reversal of this trend, which would ultimately “merely” result in couples delaying having children for the most part. However, such a delay can never be entirely made up, especially given that the decline of 2021–2022 was mostly limited to 35–39 year olds, who have a significantly lesser chance of making up for lost time.⁹³

THE FERTILITY RATE
HAS FALLEN IN ALMOST
EVERY SINGLE COUNTRY

4.1.2. Marriages

The development of the number of marriages to some extent resembles the trend in the TFR: **steady growth from a low point to a peak in 2021, followed by a significant drop in the last three years.** Roughly 35,500 marriages were registered in 2010 and 72,000 in 2021, **representing a doubling in the number of marriages in a decade.**⁹⁴ The last time such an increase was recorded was in 1986. The government's family policy, including its financial incentives, undoubtedly contributed to this increase. Demographers Zsolt Spéder and Lívia Murinkó emphasize the growth in the total first marriage rate (TFMR), which shows "the likelihood of someone marrying over the course of their life, if a given year's age-specific tendency to marry stayed constant."⁹⁵ TFMR was at 77% in the 1990s, then cohabitation and the delaying of marriages caused it to drop to 45% by 1998. It remained around 40% until 2014, then rose sharply until 2021, with a value of 101%. This means that every single man and woman in Hungary would marry at least once over the course of their lives. The last time this happened was in the 1970s and it is outstanding even at the international level.⁹⁶

In 2023, the average age for a first marriage in Hungary was 33.5 for men (37.5 across all marriages) and 30.9 for women (34.6 across all marriages).

Regarding first marriages, **in 1990, both men and women married nine years earlier on average.**⁹⁷ Differences in the average age at marriage can also be observed among counties:

the average age is highest in Zala County (the men are 38.9 and the women are 35.9 years old) and lowest in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (the men are 34 and the women are 31.2 years old).⁹⁸ The increased nuptiality (which was the most pronounced among 20–39 year olds) did not reduce the average age of subsequent marriages either, since the average age remained effectively the same.⁹⁹

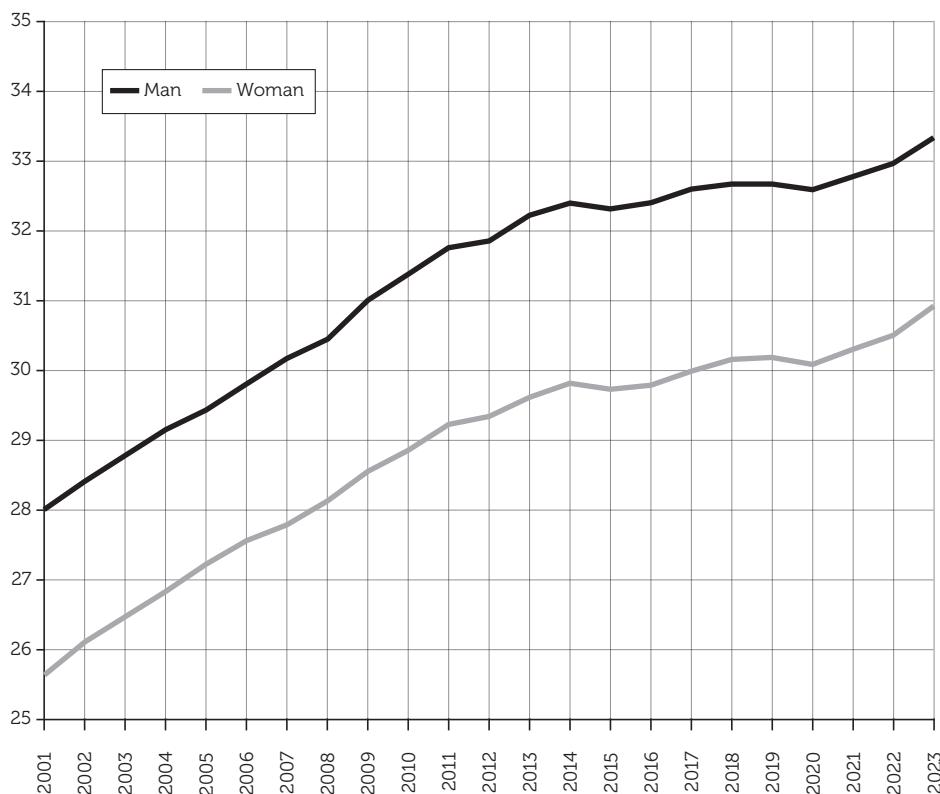


Figure 5. Average age at first marriage between 2001 and 2023¹⁰⁰

The increase in the number of marriages led to a sharp drop in the number of children born out of wedlock, a number that had previously been growing for decades. 24.3% of live births in 2023 were outside wedlock, down from about 48% in 2015.¹⁰¹ Married couples still account for the largest group regarding people's marital status, at 43.3%. A third of the population (34.6%) is single, 12.3% are divorced and 9.8% are widowed.¹⁰²

The negative tendencies of the last few years have caught up with marriages as well, leading to a decrease in both the number of marriages and the TFMR. About 46,500 marriages were registered in 2024, which represents a significant drop from the 2021 peak of about 72,000. **However, this is still above the value of 2015.** Apart from a few smaller deviations, the proportion of those who remarry has remained stable over the past 40 years at between 28% and 31%.¹⁰³

“
**THE NEGATIVE
TENDENCIES OF
THE LAST FEW YEARS
HAVE CAUGHT UP WITH
MARRIAGES AS WELL**

It is important to clarify that marriage is usually preceded by cohabitation: in the period between 2010 and 2017, 5.8% of couples who married by the age of 30 had not previously lived together, down from 75.7% over the past 40 years.¹⁰⁴

Murinkó further emphasizes that cohabitation lasted for a shorter period of time in the 1980s, being seen as a kind of “trial marriage.” In the 1990s and the 2000s, however, cohabitation became the alternative to marriage. The family policy initiatives of the mid-2010s led cohabiting couples to

marry quicker.¹⁰⁵ However, beyond making up the marriages delayed during the recession of 2008–2009,¹⁰⁶ the “marriage boom” may have been caused by the large number of cohabiting couples who could quickly react to the incentives to marry (this naturally led to a decrease in the number of cohabitations).

Although the “marriage boom” has seemingly come to an end, the desire to marry remains exceptionally high. To put this another way, one source of the boom, namely the number of existing cohabitations, has decreased (with these couples being less likely to marry), but not disappeared.¹⁰⁷

NUPTIALITY REMAINS
EXCEPTIONALLY HIGH

It is important to mention that the patterns of childbearing differ among married and unmarried women. According to Spéder, “the younger married women are, the likelier they are to have children; their likelihood of having children decreases steadily with age.” The same is true for unmarried women (who make up the majority of women under the age of 30). Further, “they are much less likely to have children at every age” than married women.¹⁰⁸

4.1.3. Divorces

Between 1988 and 2012, the courts dissolved between 21,500 and 25,000 marriages annually. The number of divorces began decreasing significantly after 2011 and has remained low. In 2023, only 16,791 divorces occurred in Hungary.¹⁰⁹

4. THE SITUATION OF FAMILIES IN HUNGARY

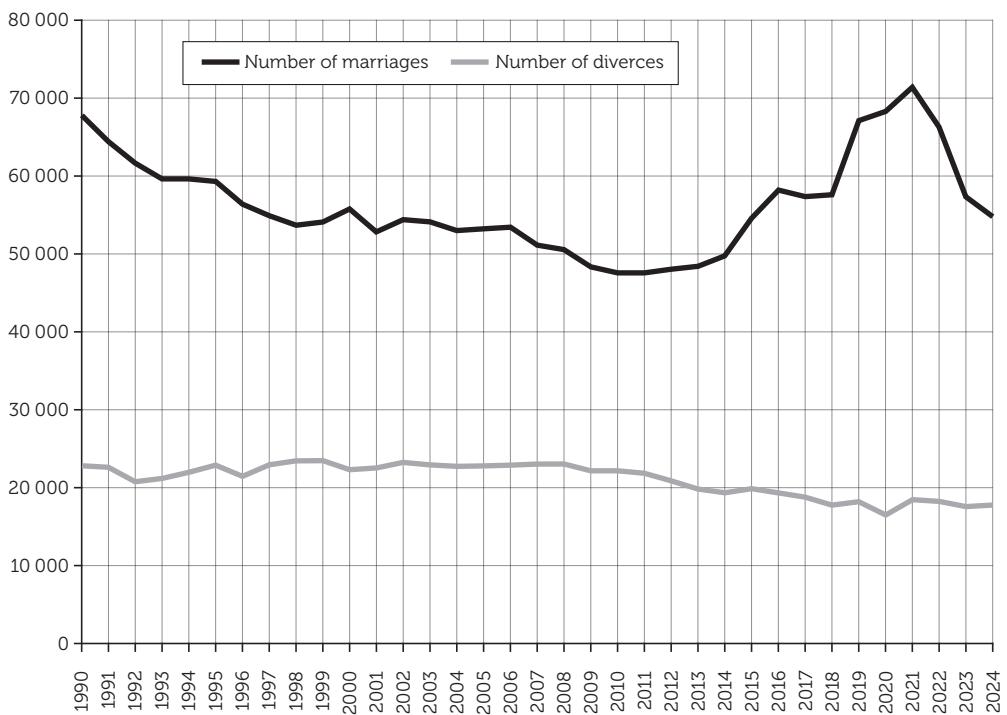


Figure 6. Number of marriages and divorces between 1990 and 2024¹¹⁰

The average age at divorce is on the rise, partially due to people marrying later as well. However, the rate of increase has recently slowed down. In 2023, it stood at 46 years for men and 42.9 for women. In recent years, the average length of marriage has remained almost unchanged at 14.6 years.¹¹¹ The proportion of marriages that end in divorce in Hungary has decreased since the value of 0.46 in 2010—apart from the fluctuations of the Covid-years—and has dropped to 0.37 in the last four years, i.e., **37% of marriages can be expected to**

end in divorce. This puts Hungary near the average European divorce rate.¹¹²

The proportion of women who are divorced is higher, the main reason for which is their longer life expectancy and that they are less likely to remarry. Two thirds of divorce proceedings are still initiated by women. Men live more frequently in one-person households, partially because divorced women live more frequently with their children: one third of divorced women raise their children as a single parent; the rate for men is 10%.¹¹³ This data point is also of significance due to the elevated risk of poverty faced by single parents (who are usually single mothers).

Fewer and fewer minors are affected by their parents' divorce, both in absolute numbers and as a percentage, but even so, 53% of divorced couples had at least one underage child together. 14,616 children experienced their parents' divorce in 2022. 72% of them were between the ages of 7 and 18.¹¹⁴ In this same year, 30% of divorces involved one joint child, 18% two children and 5% three or more children. Although in recent decades, fathers have been playing an ever larger role in raising their children after divorce in both Hungary and Europe, including their opportunities to make decisions (due to the spread of joint custody), in Hungary, custody of the children is still generally awarded to the mother (in 72% of cases in 2022).¹¹⁵

FEWER AND FEWER
MINORS ARE
AFFECTED BY THEIR
PARENTS' DIVORCE,
BOTH IN ABSOLUTE
NUMBERS AND
AS A PERCENTAGE

4.2. Economic factors

4.2.1. The significance of housing

“Having a home has much to do with a sense of personal dignity and the growth of families,” declares Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*.¹¹⁶ From a pragmatic perspective, the issue of housing is closely connected to decisions of childbearing and to family policy. In addition to employment and stable living conditions, housing is truly one of the economic factors with the greatest impact on the decision to have children.¹¹⁷ According to family researcher Patrick T. Brown, the United States’ post-World War II baby boom can partially be traced back to a building (or housing) boom.¹¹⁸ Housing is a complex issue in itself. Access to a home (whether as a tenant or an owner) is an important factor, which is

combined with numerous other aspects. Demographer Lyman Stone emphasizes the importance of the main features of an apartment or house: beyond the question

THE ISSUE OF HOUSING
IS CLOSELY CONNECTED TO
DECISIONS OF CHILDBEARING
AND TO FAMILY POLICY

of whether the couple live with their parents, their decision to have children depends on the number and crowdedness of the rooms and on population density. Furthermore, a combination of certain factors, such as crowdedness within the household and population density, leads to low fertility (as will be seen with regard to several Asian examples).¹¹⁹ Ultimately,

the property's location, immediate environment (e.g., public order, access to day care, schools, health care, services, etc.) also play a role in this decision and later have an impact on children's development.

Hungarian families typically want their own home and young people their own property.¹²⁰ Young Hungarians identified **owning their own flat and having a secure home as one of the most important factors in deciding to have a child**, following salaries.¹²¹ In other words, those who live with their parents—usually for financial reasons—have significantly fewer children.

Where do they live?	No children	One child	Two children	Three or more children	Overall
Between 18 and 35 years old					
In their own property	35,6	64,3	71,3	92,5	51,4
With parents	37,0	15,5	10,3	—	25,6
Rents *	23,5	17,9	14,9	2,5	19,3
Elsewhere **	3,9	2,4	3,4	5,0	3,7
Overall	100	100	100	100	100

* Has a landlord/landlady or lives in council housing

** Lives in a college; with acquaintances, friends or relatives for free; workers' accommodation; company housing or elsewhere.

Figure 7. Housing according to age and number of children (%, n = 998)¹²²

Affordable housing is therefore a key factor in starting a family. Among the most prominent policy tools are easily accessible and affordable mortgages, which are supported by the current government and which—alongside numerous disadvantages, such as an increase in property prices—have a proven effect on increasing fertility.¹²³ Maintaining and adapting this support to the current circumstances therefore remains a necessary public policy measure, especially in an economic system which often considers lonely and childless people as the ideal consumer.

Another tool could be a **developed institutional rental market, which is lacking in Hungary.**¹²⁴ The number of apartments in the country grows with each census, but so too does the proportion of uninhabited apartments within the total. In 2022, about 600,000 apartments were not permanently inhabited.¹²⁵ It would be worth conducting a nationwide assessment into the extent to which filling the existing vacant apartments through appropriate measures would serve as a solution to the current housing crisis (especially in the capital).

The Hungarian property market is affected by property purchases by foreigners and investors, which clash with the interests of families in a certain respect. Property investment contributes to an increase in the number and quality of apartments, but can also lead to a rise in their price as well. Property investment in Hungary is usually concentrated in

“**AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS THEREFORE A KEY FACTOR IN STARTING A FAMILY**

the inner city districts of Pest, the highland districts of Buda and the Balaton region.¹²⁶

It is clear that the improvement of the housing situation will enable young people to start families and thereby stay in the country, making it a crucial question for Hungary's future.

4.2.2. The work-family balance

According to the Christian approach, work is valuable in itself and is inseparable from human life.¹²⁷ It is important, however, for it to contribute to supporting the family.¹²⁸ The first Catholic social encyclical viewed men as breadwinners (single-income family model), in accordance with the social conditions of the time. It declared that the worker deserves his wage and respect for his private property, with which he can support his family.¹²⁹ Numerous encyclicals have reaffirmed and further developed this idea, for instance, with the need for saving money to a certain extent.¹³⁰ **The integration of women into the workplace (and the dual-income family model) naturally goes together with a search for balance between work and family.** Continual assessment at the individual, family and state levels is required in order to find harmony between the two spheres or at least prevent them from clashing with each other. The following will briefly summarize the main challenges facing Hungarian women and mothers in the workplace.

It is part of the natural order for a mother to stay at home with her child after its birth and to raise him/her in his/her infancy. Postpartum recovery and child-rearing require vast amounts of time and energy. Child-rearing is valuable in itself and deserves respect: “the work of women in the home [should] be recognized and respected by all in its irreplaceable value.”¹³¹ At the state level this means that all measures—e.g., concerning the labor market—which enable families to be started and to flourish, including the healthy development of the children, should be supported. Furthermore, a series of studies has shown that **women staying home for a certain period has numerous positive effects on the healthy development of their children.** Sociologist Zsuzsa Blaskó claims that, although individual considerations apply in the case of each and every child,

[I]f certain conditions are met, then after one to one and a half years, the risk of negative effects as a consequence of community care steadily decreases, then by the age of three, increased advantages begin to appear as well. The conditions are strict, however: universally accessible, high-quality institutions; a labor market that ensures that family and work fit together and for mothers who choose to work not to feel any guilt as a result of their decision.¹³²

A Norwegian study has shown that children whose mothers **stay at home** do better at school, go on to earn a higher salary¹³³

and their older siblings do better in school as well.¹³⁴ In the long term, having children is the foundation for maintaining the economy. This is important regarding both the national economy and social policy, especially for aging societies.

It still remains important to take into account circumstances, opportunities, and, therefore, economic necessities (and work culture) as well, at both an individual and a state level. It is true that staying at home after giving birth involves a continuous decrease in mothers' economic performance, a decrease or delay in their human and relational capital as regards work and increasing difficulties in (re)entering the workplace. At the same time, it is worth examining a prerequisite which plays a crucial role in the reality (as opposed to the ideal) of family unity.

Several Christian American authors justly argue that states should support the single-income family model, in which the father's—not sole, but primary—task is to make a living, while the mother's—not sole, but primary—task is to raise the children. This model is indeed worthy of support in the case of economic well-being and family unity. However, in the absence of sufficient income and the high probability of marriages falling apart (both phenomena which exist in Hungary), one should be careful in embracing it.¹³⁵

WOMEN STAYING HOME 
FOR A CERTAIN PERIOD
HAS NUMEROUS POSITIVE
EFFECTS ON THE
HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT
OF THEIR CHILDREN

It involves the risk of increased—partially financial—dependency and the impoverishment of single mothers after

divorce.¹³⁶ Policy must take into account the mechanics of the given country's labor market and the dynamics of its families. Pope Francis emphasizes that in addition to being led by general teaching (and the Spirit), there is also a need for knowledge of the local conditions (culture, traditions, needs)¹³⁷

“**IT STILL REMAINS
IMPORTANT TO TAKE
INTO ACCOUNT
CIRCUMSTANCES,
OPPORTUNITIES, AND,
THEREFORE, ECONOMIC
NECESSITIES**

and John Paul II highlights the importance of the family and the significance of freedom and equal rights.¹³⁸

4.2.3. Women's position in the labor market

Unlike in most Western societies, where mothers receive 6–18 weeks of maternity leave, in Hungary, the mother can take advantage of first CSED [Infant Care Fee], then GYED [Child Care Fee], until her child is two years old.¹³⁹ This is a family-friendly system even by European standards and especially in comparison to the United States (it is further supplemented by additional support, which will be discussed in Chapter 5).

Even so, women's improved position on the labor market (including having a job when deciding to have children, the opportunity to return to it afterwards and access to day

care and part-time jobs) tends to have a positive effect on the TFR.¹⁴⁰

In Hungary, in 2010, the employment rate of women aged 25–49 was 77.3% with one child in the household, 75.4% with two children and 48.4% with three or more children. Following this, mothers' employment rate gradually increased, partially due to the country's family policies. By 2024, these numbers had improved to 85.6% in the case of one child in the household, 84.8% with two children and 70.8% with three or more children.¹⁴¹ This is a positive development for the economy (and can be for the TFR as well). However, this leads to many women being subjected to a **double burden**.

The policy tool usually used to alleviate this burden is **flexible employment, including part-time work and remote work (home office)**. Couples' decisions on when to have children are greatly influenced by the changes brought by parenthood and the options of flexibility.¹⁴² Countries where **flexible work opportunities and the institutions connected to them (e.g., day care)** enable parents to harmonize work and children typically have a higher TFR.¹⁴³

Countries with a higher female employment rate generally see higher rates of part-time work as well; however, this is less true of Hungary.¹⁴⁴ The reasons for the inflexible labor market in post-socialist countries include the administrative burdens

THIS IS A FAMILY-FRIENDLY
SYSTEM EVEN BY EUROPEAN
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IN COMPARISON TO THE
UNITED STATES

placed on employment, the tax system and the poor access and inflexible opening hours of day care and preschool.¹⁴⁵

This often leads to women completely leaving the job market instead of working part-time.

Despite Hungary's family policy measures and the easing of administrative burdens by the Act on the Labor Code,¹⁴⁶ far more people still work full-time than are contracted on a part-time basis. In other words, employment contracts are usually for regular working hours and full-time work.¹⁴⁷ This is important because flexible working hours for women—as opposed to full-time work—have a positive effect on children's mental health.¹⁴⁸

Another option is hybrid work, such as home office, which became widespread during Covid. Nevertheless, in 2021, 11.6% fewer women were able to work at home in Hungary than the EU average.¹⁴⁹ The primary reason for this is the fear

of losing one's job or a lack of trust that the employee will perform their job well. This shows that **creating a family-friendly environment is not only the responsibility of the state. An accepting corporate culture and having a performance-based approach instead of a work-hours-based approach are also important. Fathers' roles**

and their contribution to families' health are of particular importance: father-specific tasks and duties exist in the home.¹⁵⁰

“**CREATING A
FAMILY-FRIENDLY
ENVIRONMENT
IS NOT ONLY THE
RESPONSIBILITY
OF THE STATE**

They can also be of great help in mothers' recovery after birth and in child-rearing. Unlike in Western Europe, post-socialist countries either have not introduced paternal leave¹⁵¹ or have minimally increased the number of days (for instance, it is ten days in Hungary).¹⁵²

4.3. Cultural Factors

4.3.1. The social perception and advantages of the family

The majority of the Hungarian population is not religious but rather culturally Christian.¹⁵³ In addition to the theoretical validity of the Christian worldview, it is therefore important to know what the majority of society thinks about families. A Századvég poll reveals that although families are considered important throughout Europe, the greatest consensus exists in Hungary: **in 2022, 89% of respondents considered the family to be very important and 9% to be rather important.**¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, although Hungary follows the “progressive” demographic patterns (a general decrease in the number of live births; later births), **social attitudes reflect traditional values and family-orientedness.**

IN 2022, 89% 
OF RESPONDENTS
CONSIDERED
THE FAMILY TO BE
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AND 9% TO BE
SOMEWHAT
IMPORTANT

56% of Hungarians between the ages of 15 and 29 completely or mostly agree with the statement that “there is no happy, complete life without children” and 86% of them consider it important for themselves to have children.¹⁵⁵ A kind of value (re)orientation has also occurred in the direction of supporting traditional relationships: the proportion of the population who considers marriage to be an outdated institution has slightly decreased over the past decade and the proportion of those who think a couple ought to marry before having children has increased. The proportion has also decreased of those who see nothing wrong in a couple living together without being married.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, **individualism, self-realization, individual freedom, and their impact on the TFR, marriage, and family structure remain present.**¹⁵⁷

But is it good and worthwhile to live in a family? People who live with their spouse typically score higher in studies that measure emotions (e.g., happiness, loneliness) and a sense of usefulness (in some respects, together with those in the ‘single’ category).¹⁵⁸ However, the levels of satisfaction of those who live in a family have increased over the past five years, eclipsing the levels of satisfaction of singles.¹⁵⁹ The majority of people consider having and raising children as belonging to the meaning of life.

Harvard happiness researcher Arthur C. Brooks lists four areas—beyond genetics and general circumstances—that determine people’s happiness and which can be influenced

through habit: **family, friends, work, and faith.**¹⁶⁰ He stresses that family relationships require serious attention, since family relationships are the most mystical kind of love, and you can't substitute anything for them.¹⁶¹ He argues that happiness and misery are both contagious and that within the family one must deliberately strive for the former. In short, one must work on creating a good family life, which later contributes to happiness.

Living in a family, however, is not only good at the individual level, but is also beneficial on a social level, argues economist Philip Pilkington. Although his research focuses on the United States and Great Britain, he argues convincingly from the data that numerous social issues are connected to the breakup of families, including a low TFR (and, consequently, reduced economic growth), mental health issues (such as depression), drug use, and crime.¹⁶² These arise partially due to the countless negative effects of dysfunctional families and family breakdown on children and their later—adult—life.¹⁶³ These are already problematic in themselves, but they also entail enormous financial costs and healthcare, social policy, and law enforcement burdens. **Pilkington argues not for a simple pronatalism but for comprehensive family policies:** it is necessary to support the creation of families (and the marriages that lead to them) and then these families need to be supported for the sake of social welfare.

4.3.2. Ideal, desired, and real

An important question regarding families and family policy regards the typical family model, the ideal, desired, and real number of children and the differences among them. The Western world is typically characterized by negative differences: couples do not have the number of children they consider ideal and the children they desire are not born. According to the calculations of Lyman Stone, globally, the number of desired but unborn children exceeds the number of undesired but born children.¹⁶⁴ Several studies have addressed the ideal

“ IN HUNGARY, IN 2016,
THE IDEAL NUMBER OF
CHILDREN WAS 2.2 AND THE
DESIRED NUMBER WAS 2 FOR
WOMEN AND 1.9 FOR MEN

and desired number of children in Hungary. In Hungary, in 2016, the ideal number of children was 2.2 and the desired number was 2 for women and 1.9 for men.¹⁶⁵

More people generally consider three or more children to be the ideal number in post-socialist countries than in Western Europe: this rate is 43% in Hungary, which is the most after Estonia and Latvia. According to the detailed breakdown, 3% consider one child to be the ideal number, 47% two children, 38% three children, and 5% four or more children.

Only 2% considered a childless family model the ideal.¹⁶⁶ According to a study conducted by KINCS, every second respondent (54%) considered two children to be the ideal number, three out of ten said three children (31%) and an

especially low number considered childlessness the ideal (1%).¹⁶⁷ Studies of the youth can assist in understanding future trends better and thereby in developing social policy. One study put the desired number of children at 2.5 among university student respondents, which is significantly higher than the TFR for people with a degree.¹⁶⁸

In brief, as summarized by Spéder, “although the ‘magic two’ continues to dominate the ideal family size and the number of those who consider childlessness to be ideal is negligible, the number of young people who do not desire children is on the rise and has passed 10%.”¹⁶⁹

The issue is therefore not primarily with intentions but with the fact that **the desired children are not born—for economic, social, cultural, and health reasons—and the ideal number of children is not realized**. At the level of the individual family, this may mean one child instead of two but can also mean childlessness.

THE DESIRED CHILDREN
ARE NOT BORN—FOR
ECONOMIC, SOCIAL,
CULTURAL, AND HEALTH
REASONS—AND THE IDEAL
NUMBER OF CHILDREN
IS NOT REALIZED

4.3.3. Childlessness

The demographic section of this study has highlighted several positive or at least periodically positive tendencies with regard to fertility. There exists, however, an increasingly worrying

tendency, namely **childlessness**, which **has increased significantly in a short period of time** in several Western European countries.

Among women born in 1967, childlessness stood at 10% at the age of 44. Given that everyone wanted children, almost without exception, this “may be considered a value that corresponds roughly to the proportion of women with health problems connected to conception.”¹⁷⁰ Among those born in 1977, the rate of childlessness was already 18.4%. This is projected to rise to over 25% among those born in 1983.¹⁷¹ This represents a 15% increase over the course of 15 years. More 40–49 year olds are childless than have three or more children. In Budapest, 32% of this age group had no children.¹⁷²

The reasons are diverse. One study of women identified four factors that increase the likelihood of childlessness: **a lack of relationships** (childlessness was thirty-three times as prevalent among singles than among long-term couples), **health concerns, intentional childlessness** (also thirty-three times more likely to not have children) and **the social and income situation** (childlessness is more likely among the highest income quintile, individual contractors, and unskilled laborers).¹⁷³

Obstetrician and gynecologist Dóra Versztergom attributes 10% of cases to conscious decisions, 10% to sterility, and 80% to delaying having children. The lack of a stable relationship was considered the main reason for the delay, while stable employment and a reliable economic situation were mentioned as important conditions of having children.¹⁷⁴ According to KINCS’s studies, people believe that career building, financial

considerations and sterility lead to childlessness, yet still mention **the lack of a stable relationship** as the main reason.¹⁷⁵ It is therefore unsurprising that Kapitány and Spéder both consider decreasing the rate of childlessness as an important goal alongside increasing the TFR.¹⁷⁶

4.3.4. Choosing a partner and its difficulties

The precondition of starting a family is choosing a partner based on commitment. Christian teaching states that human beings are lonely on their own, and their desire for a suitable partner is natural and contributes to the development of the individual and the community. Its practical importance is also evident: it is an important step toward having children. Furthermore, as already indicated, Hungarians who live in a long-term relationship and especially a marriage are more satisfied with their lives than singles are. Moreover, the sharing of resources that is involved in a relationship leads, in the long term, to greater well-being and stability and a greater chance of upward social mobility for future generations.¹⁷⁷ Choosing a partner as a social and personal process has undergone radical change by the 21st century, while the success of family policies depends fundamentally on whether the younger generations are even capable of developing long-term relationships directed towards marriage and having children.

Behind the difficulties of choosing a partner lie complex cultural processes. On the one hand, a crisis of identity and

role models is taking place among men. Several studies conducted by family researcher Brad Wilcox confirm that the disappearance of the traditional social framework for male roles, the relativization of the roles of provider and protector, and the weakening of community norms have led to an increase in emotionally incompetent types of men who are uncertain in their identity.¹⁷⁸

Significant changes have occurred on the female side as well. Many educated, career-minded women continue to employ a hypergamous strategy (choosing men with a higher status) to choose their partner. However, social mobility and

“**SIGNIFICANT CHANGES
HAVE OCCURRED ON THE
FEMALE SIDE AS WELL**

men’s identity issues have made it increasingly difficult to find a partner in this way. According to a 2022 TÁRKI study, the proportion of homogamous

(equal educational level) and hypergamous relationships (between a higher-educated man and a lower-educated woman) has decreased between 1980 and 2016 while the number of hypogam relationships (between a higher-educated woman and a lower-educated man) has grown.¹⁷⁹ Meanwhile, in Hungary, men are typically less educated than women (there are 12% more female university graduates among the 25–34 age group). Partially because of this, cities have a surplus of single women, while rural areas have a surplus of single men.¹⁸⁰

Added to this are the distorted expectations that characterize contemporary relationships, the dependence on going on dates, the constant search for new partners, the illusion

of the perfect partner and the spread of individualistic lifestyles.¹⁸¹ Some women consciously arrange their lives so as not to have to depend on anyone, especially men, which can make it harder to form a relationship based on a healthy, mutual dependence.¹⁸²

According to Wilcox and his colleagues, the rise of online dating—as the promise of a solution to this issue—makes it even more difficult to form lasting relationships. The vast supply of potential partners offered by online platforms has created a culture of decision paralysis, superficial dating, and fear of commitment. According to Wilcox's 2024 study, relationships formed through online dating are more likely to end in short-term relationships and less likely to lead to marriage than dating in a traditional community setting.¹⁸³

The spread of the consumption of pornographic content also worsens the situation. A previous study by the Axioma Center emphasizes that pornography does not complement sexual intimacy with one's partner, but rather competes with it, which often leads to pornography replacing it. Pornography consumers tend to be less committed to a relationship, poorer at communication and unfaithful to their partner at a higher rate. The divorce rate drastically rises among young couples after they start consuming pornographic content.¹⁸⁴

These factors all combine to worsen the decrease in the desire to start families and the demographic decline. The

THE SPREAD OF
THE CONSUMPTION
OF PORNOGRAPHIC
CONTENT ALSO
WORSENS THE
SITUATION

difficulties in choosing a partner therefore represent not only cultural crises but spiritual challenges as well. Without restoring the complementarity of male and female roles and the ethics of marriages (if the Catholic view is considered, then marriage as a sacrament) and relationships which exist according to the divine order, it is impossible to maintain social stability in the long term either. Wilcox states that society is unsustainable if it does not strengthen families and does not support young people in their choice of partner.¹⁸⁵

Without renewing emphasis on the Christian ethics of partner selection—including purity, commitment, fidelity, and respect for male and female roles—the family policy measures aimed at reversing demographic decline will continue to remain limited in effect.

4.4. Health Factors

4.4.1. Infertility and sterility

Infertility is an important issue that affects young couples and families. Infertility is defined as the inability to conceive after twelve or more months of regular sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. Infertility is not just a Hungarian phenomenon but a global crisis. According to a WHO report, one in six people, or 17.5% of the population, suffer from infertility or reproductive difficulties.¹⁸⁶ The WHO distinguishes periodic reproductive difficulties from permanent infertility.¹⁸⁷

Every fifth Hungarian couple experiences difficulties related to fertility, which thus affects 15-20% of those who want to have children.¹⁸⁸ Although we are aware of numerous individual cases in our circle of acquaintances, the issue is underdiscussed at a societal level. Beyond philosophical and theological arguments and legal, social, economic, and cultural perspectives, it is also necessary to address the healthcare aspect of this issue.

Infertility and reduced fertility can be caused by numerous physical and mental factors. Many experts attribute it to a—biologically—late maternal age. As already seen, the maternal age, particularly for the first child, has risen significantly in Hungary as well (connected to first marriages occurring later as well).¹⁸⁹ Its significance becomes even more clear in light of the fact that “the likelihood of a pregnancy occurring within a menstrual cycle (month) is 30% for women under the age of 35. This number drops to 10–15% for the same woman above the age of 35, while after the age of 40, the likelihood of pregnancy occurring through natural means drops to 5%.”¹⁹⁰ Further, as noted by the KSH, the risk factors for childbearing increase above the age of 30: only moderately until the age of 35, but then in increasing measure, including miscarriages and late fetal death. In 2018, 90% of desired pregnancies ended in a live birth for mothers aged 30, but only 65% for mothers aged 40.¹⁹¹

EVERY FIFTH
HUNGARIAN
COUPLE
EXPERIENCES
DIFFICULTIES
RELATED
TO FERTILITY



Although both biological¹⁹² and maternal¹⁹³ interpretations vary for the optimum maternal age, not to mention that each case needs to be evaluated on an individual basis, it is nevertheless clear that **delaying childbearing has serious consequences for fertility and infertility.**¹⁹⁴

In addition to the “time factor,” numerous environmental factors have a negative impact on male and female fertility, which can serve as a further explanation for the declining birth rate and especially for the difference between the number of desired and real children.¹⁹⁵ For instance, studies have demonstrated a connection between air pollution and a reduced sperm count.¹⁹⁶ **Air pollution leads to numerous health issues in itself**, within which it comprehensively determines fertility (for instance, it may cause inflammatory diseases, hormonal changes, and dangerous substances to pass through the placenta into the fetus)¹⁹⁷ and affects **children’s health** as well (for example, it can cause a low birth weight, infant mortality, and asthma).¹⁹⁸ Sociologists Árpád Stump and Ágnes Szabó-Morvai have conducted regional comparisons to show the effect of certain air pollutants on fertility.¹⁹⁹ This

is equally true of smoking; indoor smoking bans in restaurants have had a demonstrably positive effect on the health of children born to women who work there.²⁰⁰

Other non-specific factors exist as well. One worrying one for men is **the radical decrease in the maximum number and concentration of sperm.** According to the study by

“**AIR POLLUTION LEADS TO NUMEROUS HEALTH ISSUES IN ITSELF**

Levine et al., these two values decreased by about 50-60% in the West (North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand) between 1973 and 2011.²⁰¹ The 52.4% decrease in sperm density means that the sperm count of an increasing number of men is under the threshold for reduced fertility or sterility. This is not just a question of fertility but of overall health as well, since these results are connected to other diseases that affect men and to their negative tendencies (e.g., a decrease in total testosterone levels).²⁰²

A question that affects women more closely than men is that of **abortion, the effects of which on the life of the individual (including the fetus') and the family would deserve a separate study.** It is worth stating here, however, that the number of abortions in Hungary has been constantly dropping since 2010 and has in fact practically halved (from 40,449 to 20,250).²⁰³ Nevertheless, Hungary's abortion rate is still above the European average and no significant change has been made to the law—apart from the so-called heartbeat law²⁰⁴—in the past 15 years.²⁰⁵ Abortion means the ending of a human life.²⁰⁶

Only secondarily is it a **question of health and infertility.** **Induced abortion**, especially when done improperly from a medical point of view, has concrete physiological consequences that affect fertility. However, even abortions performed professionally and within a sterile environment can have severe mental and psychological consequences, namely an

THE NUMBER OF
ABORTIONS IN HUNGARY
HAS BEEN CONSTANTLY
DROPPING SINCE 2010

increased possibility of PTSD, depression and alcoholism, all of which have a direct effect on fertility (not to mention the life of the woman and the whole family). As emphasized by the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, numerous factors lead to abortion. However, “[a] general and no less serious responsibility lies with those who have encouraged the spread of an attitude of sexual permissiveness and a lack of esteem for motherhood, and with those who should have ensured—but did not—effective family and social policies in support of families, especially larger families and those with particular

“ HUNGARY’S ABORTION
RATE IS STILL ABOVE THE
EUROPEAN AVERAGE

financial and educational
needs.”²⁰⁷ Within the field of
family policy, it is essential
to raise awareness of and
communicate questions of

health and their mental and spiritual aspects²⁰⁸ (according to Vesztergom, less than 3% of the population possess sufficient information on fertility).²⁰⁹ This can also contribute to removing the need for artificial fertilization due to delaying having children or other health concerns.

4.4.2. Artificial fertilization

One logical consequence of infertility is a characteristically modern means of increasing fertility, **artificial fertilization**, which is supported by numerous governments in the interest of solving the demographic problem.²¹⁰

Numerous forms of artificial fertilization now exist. The most widespread is IVF (in vitro fertilization), during the course of which the egg is removed from the ovaries, fertilized in a laboratory, and then transferred into the uterus. During the hormone therapy applied as part of IVF treatment, GnRH can also be applied, which regulates the maturation of the eggs.

ICSI (Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection) is an IVF procedure during which a single sperm cell is injected directly into the egg's cytoplasm. This is the method usually employed when the man suffers from infertility, i.e., the biological quality of his sperm is low. Another, similar, method is microfluidic sperm sorting and sperm donation. If it is the woman who suffers from infertility, then the implantation of an egg donated by another woman may be recommended.

IUI (intrauterine insemination) is a procedure that requires less hormonal intervention than IVF but also has a significantly lower success rate. It involves placing the sperm directly into the uterus during ovulation. If the fertility issue is caused by a blockage in or damage to the fallopian tubes, surgical intervention can be applied, which makes conception possible.

Surgical intervention is not always successful, but is time-intensive and highly expensive. Professionals therefore often recommend IVF in such cases.

Other methods also exist, which seek not to promote fertility itself, but to postpone the possibility of conception to a later time. The most widespread of these is egg freezing, which claims to enable women to have children later without facing any biological obstacles. However, the biological quality

of the frozen eggs may deteriorate over time. Further possible solutions also exist, which raise serious ethical questions—even compared to those already discussed, though it is hard to establish degrees of unethical behavior here—such as embryo freezing.

In Hungary, Act CLIV of 1997 on Health regulates “special procedures directed towards human reproduction.” These include fertilization outside the body and embryo implantation (IVF), artificially introducing sperm with the spouse’s or partner’s gametes or the gametes of a donor (IUI), fertilization and embryo implantation outside the body using donated gametes, embryo implantation performed using embryo donation, and other methods that achieve and promote the fertilization of a woman’s own eggs and the implantation and development of the fertilized egg.²¹¹ In

“**IN HUNGARY, “SPECIAL PROCEDURES DIRECTED TOWARDS HUMAN REPRODUCTION” ARE REGULATED BY LAW**

Hungary, surrogacy is legally prohibited.²¹²

Regarding artificial fertilization, the main issue in many English-speaking and European countries is no longer social acceptance, but rather its availability for single women and same-sex couples, as well as “the maximum age for undergoing the procedure or ownership of the embryos and gametes.”²¹³ Acceptance rates are also high in Hungary: the overwhelming majority of the population (89.9%) considers in vitro fertilization generally acceptable.²¹⁴

Although differences can be observed between various denominations and it is necessary to show compassion in the face of the suffering arising from sterility, Christian teaching generally rejects artificial fertilization. Chronologically, the first issue is the separation of the sexual act from the act of conception. This alone involves the violation of the divinely ordained purpose of this act (that children are conceived through sexual union). Beyond this, far more serious concerns arise as well. **During IVF, embryos' lives are typically terminated, lives that are, according to Christian teaching (and to anyone who holds that life begins from conception), human lives. The Christian approach protects life from conception.**²¹⁵

Moreover, often even pragmatic considerations are not applied. Several studies argue that methods of artificial fertilization have a negative impact on fertility at a wider societal level.²¹⁶

The freezing of eggs (which many Western companies now treat as part of benefits packages) often carries the false promise that postponing giving birth has no consequences. This can be seen in the case precisely of those women who are at the ideal age for giving birth (or at least at a more favorable age than when they make use of the frozen eggs). Furthermore, the widespread use of artificial fertilization, a logical consequence of pure natalism, can easily lead to both psychologically and ethically worrying consequences, such as surrogacy, a rise in forced abortions²¹⁷ and—as has already begun to happen—“the abortion of spares.”²¹⁸ As recently

written by Michael F. Burbidge, Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Arlington, in a pastoral letter, “IVF is contrary to justice and remains replete with moral difficulties. [...] Every

“
UNDESIRED
BUT CONCEIVED
CHILDREN
SHOULD BE KEPT

successful IVF procedure results in a living child with many missing siblings.”²¹⁹

The spread of childlessness and sterility shows that one must ensure not only that—through teaching the use of contraception that conforms to Christian teaching—undesired children not be conceived (for instance, to teenage parents) and that undesired but conceived children be kept (abortion), but also that the desired but not conceived children be born.

5. Family Policy Measures of the Orbán Governments (2010–2025)

5.1. The main family policy measures

Family policies are usually distinguished according to who their target is: individuals—as parts of the family—or the family itself as a unity.²²⁰ Policies aimed at the family usually approach family and married life from a functional perspective, focusing primarily on starting a family, economic support, parenting, and institutional care. This is a mutually beneficial relationship: families contribute to national well-being, but only if the state and society provide the framework within which children can become healthy and virtuous adults.²²¹

Since 2010, the Orbán governments have gradually introduced numerous family policy measures (dependent partially on the economic opportunities). They have offered assistance to both individuals and families. These measures are naturally connected to one another; numerous measures have assisted families through improving the situation of mothers. However, some areas of family support are not awarded to all parents as a matter of right.

NUMEROUS FAMILY POLICY
MEASURES HAVE BEEN
INTRODUCED SINCE 2010

Family policy measures still include both (1) **statutory benefits** and (2) **employment-based benefits**. The names of the benefits directed towards the family have been changed one after the other. These changes were symbolic, signifying that they are not benefits but government incentives. It is therefore important to emphasize that, **in line with the concept of a labor-based society, employment—and its general increase—is closely connected to the support awarded to families.**

Family policy measures affect not only the family (for instance, CSOK [Family Housing Subsidy] affects the construction industry as well) and vice versa: regulations not usually considered family policy measures (e.g., the VAT rate) affect families as well. Applying a narrow definition of family policies, the following is a non-comprehensive list of the family policy measures introduced since 2010, in four categories.

5.1.1. Measures supporting the family as a unity

This category includes support available exclusively for couples with a valid marriage. It follows that if the criteria for support cease to exist (e.g., through divorce, not living in the CSOK-property, not having the promised number of children, etc.), then those who took advantage of it can expect to receive sanctions. These are mostly financial and take the form of interest.

The intention behind what is effectively retaliation is family unity and incentivizing couples to maintain the bond of marriage, since marriage is the best framework for raising children. This category includes:

1. Home creation subsidies (Falusi [village] CSOK, CSOK Plusz, Rural Home Renovation Program, Home Renovation Program, mortgage debt forgiveness)
2. Baby-expecting loan
3. Car purchase subsidy for large families
4. Discounts for first-time married couples

5.1.2. Measures supporting one parent or relative

This category includes measures concerning close relatives within the family (meaning primarily, but not exclusively, the parents). In many cases, the measure of support changes with the age of the children. Parents receive a greater amount of support for smaller children, thus providing them with the security needed to decide whether they want to stay at home or take on employment. However, getting a job does not mean losing the support, which in the case of certain measures thus constitutes a serious contribution to the families concerned. CSED, GYED and GYES [Child Care Allowance] are measures that only one relative can benefit from. They cannot be received in tandem.

Discretionary power is awarded to the entitled parties. The following forms of support belong in this category (the amount and duration of the support may vary if the child is chronically ill or seriously disabled or in the case of twins):

1. Family rebate on taxes and contributions (from the fourth month of pregnancy until the end of the child's public education)
2. Family allowance (from birth until the end of public education)
3. Infant care allowance (CSED) (for six months)
4. Graduate GYED (from birth until the age of two)
5. Childcare allowance (GYES) (from birth until the age of three)
6. Child-rearing allowance (GYET) (for at least three children, from the age of three to eight)
7. GYED for grandparents (from birth to the age of two)
8. GYED for foster parents (from birth to the age of two)
9. ÖFD and GYES for adoptive parents (for 168 days from the date of adoption, up to a maximum of three years of age)
10. Child home care allowance (GYOD) (regardless of the child's age)
11. Childbirth allowance (varies by local municipality)

5.1.3. Measures supporting the mother

The primary goal of these forms of support is to improve mothers' situations. It compensates them financially for the mental and physical changes of motherhood. Only mothers can take advantage of the following forms of support:

1. Maternity support (one-time allowance)
2. Suspension, reduction or forgiveness of student loan debt
3. Tax exemption for mothers under 30
4. Lifelong income tax exemption for mothers of three children
5. Tax exemption for mothers of two children, to take effect in 2026
6. *Women 40* program

5.1.4. Other support measures

This category includes other benefits and forms of support aimed at reducing the extra costs or other costs associated with raising children and running a household.

These include:

1. The permission to pay for home renovation with a SZÉP card
2. Baby bonds – setting children up for life

3. A refund of the driver's theory exam (KRESZ exam) fees and language exam fees
4. Child meal allowance
5. Nursery allowance
6. Childcare allowance
7. Additional leave days for parents with children
8. Free textbooks

Numerous Hungarian family policy measures have as their goal the alleviation of the financial burdens of raising children. The Orbán governments have been visibly committed to giving support to families who raise children in numerous areas of life and to preventing their financial situation from becoming worse than those of childless people.²²²

5.2. An examination of the family policy measures

Since taking office in 2010, the Orbán government has pursued a fundamentally **pronatalist family policy**, the goal of which is to **counterbalance population decline by supporting child-birth**. This is often presented in political discourse as the alternative to migration.²²³ Beyond this, however, lies a noticeable **aim to recognize the value of the family and to give parents the recognition they deserve**.²²⁴ These two goals should be separated from the level of success in achieving them, even if this is often difficult to do in the case of certain measures.

One indicator of the Orbán governments' commitment is the amount of funds allocated to family policy and how they are distributed, as well as their proportion of the total budget or certain subsections of the budget.

The traditional financial instruments of family support that existed before the regime change (e.g., family allowance, GYES, GYED) have been preserved and the state's nominal expenditures have been continuously increasing. As summarized by sociologists Dorottya Szikra and Szandra Kramarics in their analysis and the accompanying chart, new family policy measures have appeared and, by 2021, some of them (such as state-subsidized loans)

had even surpassed the preexisting category in spending.²²⁵ However, economic factors caused the state to reduce spending in these areas (especially the childbirth incentive loan and CSOK) in 2023. In 2024, the state followed the patterns of traditional family support instruments, though still

disbursing substantial sums. It should also be noted that the decline in the number of births itself reduces government expenditure. Moreover, major differences occur among families in terms of how they make use of financial incentives. Where the mother has a degree from an institute of higher education, “in the case of CSOK, the likelihood of support being received is twice the rate of mothers without a degree and several times as high for other forms of support.”²²⁶

ONE INDICATOR OF THE
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5. FAMILY POLICY MEASURES OF THE ORBÁN GOVERNMENTS

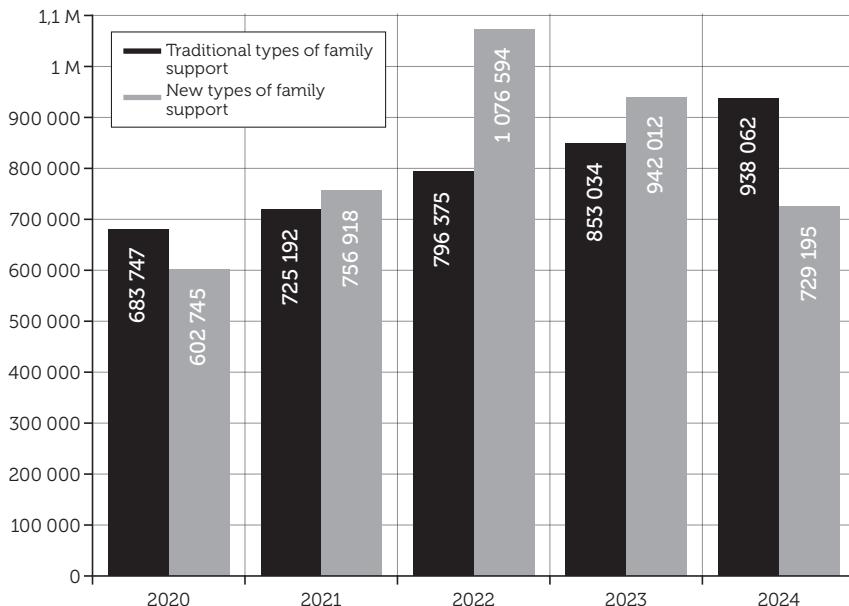


Figure 8. Budgetary expenditures on traditional and new types of family support (in millions of forints)²²⁷

From a demographic perspective, it is worth noting that **numerous studies deal with evaluating the results of the family policy measures**. While it is not possible here to examine each policy measure individually, it is nevertheless necessary to present a few significant perspectives.

Even data-driven studies with a rigorous methodology often highlight the limitations of research conclusions (e.g., due to demographic effects or difficulties in separating the effects of the individual measures). **An analysis conducted by the Hétfá Research Institute in 2019** (before the TTA-reduction

and therefore unable to examine later measures or the effects of CSOK due to its brief time interval) states that:

In the detailed analysis of the family policies, we find a significant positive effect in the first to the third year in the case of three types of family policies. The results indicate that an additional birth costs HUF 7.6 million of family tax credits, HUF 5.6 million for nursery school development and HUF 1.2 million for home ownership support. The rest of the policies do not seem to significantly affect fertility decisions. Nevertheless, some of them play other crucial roles, such as the reduction of child poverty.²²⁸

Financial incentives are therefore important, and certain forms of them have demonstrable effects, but they should be treated with caution. The same study shows that measures aimed at reducing financial burdens typically delay the birth of the first child but moderately increase the likelihood of a third child being born.²²⁹ Furthermore, while mothers' employment increases the likelihood of the birth of the first and second child, it is more likely to reduce the likelihood of having a third.²³⁰ At the same time, the effects of the financial support (targeted partly at achieving recognition of the status of full-time motherhood) available for families with three children are difficult to demonstrate.

**FINANCIAL INCENTIVES
ARE THEREFORE IMPORTANT
AND CERTAIN FORMS OF THEM
HAVE DEMONSTRABLE EFFECTS**

In the case of some groups, they have contributed to making a third birth more likely, namely through child-rearing support for those with the lowest level of education and through tax breaks for those with a degree.²³¹

Another common explanation that questions the significance of these effects claims that **the support measures have a greater impact on the timing of childbirth than on the number of children born** (roughly the same number of children are born, only at different times).²³² It is true that temporal effects appear in fertility dynamics.²³³ Economic crises are characterized by postponement, which is then naturally followed by a rebound (e.g., the children ‘missing’ during the 2008–2009 crisis were presumably ‘made up’ later). In some respects, however, ‘bringing it forward’ may also occur. According to Spéder, the introduction and conditions of the baby-expecting loan not only increased the number of marriages but also made the decision to have children sooner a more rational one. He claims that the baby-expecting loan is “an ‘external’ attempt to raise the TFR.”²³⁴

Fertility fluctuation is therefore a natural process over which governments have only partial influence.²³⁵ It nevertheless remains true that achieving public policy goals requires long-term, predictable, and comprehensive policy solutions. The final application deadline for the baby-expecting loan (originally 31 December 2022, before being delayed) caused uncertainty for many, as did the multiple changes to the age limit (the former issue occurred for the village CSOK as well).

“[T]he demographic issue of a falling birthrate is part of a larger sociological question”²³⁶ and the main family policy priorities must include—beyond financial incentives—“parental leave entitlement, childcare provision, part-time and flexible worktime regulations for mothers as well as high-quality childcare services.”²³⁷

The family policy measures announced in early 2025 are new government incentives for having children. The increase in family-related tax benefits mitigates the difficulties caused by inflation, while the lifelong income tax exemption granted to women with two or more children—upon meeting the expected conditions—is a logical step away from the one-child model and will represent serious financial assistance to the majority of families (and to mothers in case of divorce). The effects of the new measures, their connection to other family policy benefits, and their demographic impact can be addressed in the future.

In brief, the Orbán governments’ pronatalist goals have only been partially achieved. The increase in the TFR in the 2010s slowed the rate of population decline and the government’s family policy measures contributed to this. However, based on the trends of recent years, replacement level still seems worryingly—and increasingly—distant.

Another—likewise highly important—area of family policy is the increasing of the material and social recognition of families and of the mothers and fathers who contribute to their development. Establishing a fair system was already part of the government’s 2010 program, which declared that

“the labor market must not be an obstacle preventing families from having as many children as they want and can raise responsibly [...]. Our family policy therefore aims to award special recognition to the extra efforts of those parents who contribute to the nation’s growth and to maintaining the social market economy not only through work but also through the care and upbringing of children.”²³⁸ Fair treatment is well deserved, among other reasons, because families often devote energy to activities from which the state and society later benefit.²³⁹ Placing families at the center and introducing family policy measures and the accompanying financial incentives across multiple areas have—beyond being met with generally positive social responses²⁴⁰—significantly contributed to increasing fair treatment.

6. International Practice and Lessons Learned

The global population is approaching its peak.²⁴¹ In many places, the peak has already been reached and passed and the population is in decline. Societies around the world are therefore facing emerging or existing demographic crises. The world's total fertility rate was 2.3, according to 2022 data, but it is unevenly distributed (it is highest in Africa, parts of the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Pakistan). Two-thirds of the population is characterized by a fertility rate under 2.1.²⁴² Societies which are unable to maintain replacement level (a TFR above 2.1) must reckon with aging populations, along with all their political, social, economic, and cultural consequences. Numerous governments have already taken significant steps to counter demographic decline, with varying success.

In addition to a few Asian examples (Japan and South Korea),²⁴³ this study will analyze the situation and—partially legislative—solutions of the United States and France. These countries

are worth examining because they are already facing demographic decline and have chosen to address it. Their successes and failures can serve as valuable lessons for other countries, including Hungary, in developing their family policy.

THEY MUST RECKON WITH
AGING POPULATIONS, ALONG
WITH ALL THEIR POLITICAL,
SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND
CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES

6.1. Japan

Japan was confronted with the so-called '1.57 [demographic] shock' in 1989, when the TFR reached this level. This prompted the Japanese government to map out the possible ways of incentivizing childbirth.²⁴⁴ Since then, the country has introduced several series of measures designed to solve this challenge. The goals of the 'Angel Plan' of 1994 included reconciling work and child-rearing for mothers, expanding access to childcare and promoting governmental development in various sectors, including welfare, employment, education and housing.²⁴⁵ Five years later, the 'New Angel Plan' expanded

access to childcare, including health insurance services and child allowances.²⁴⁶ A 2005 law on promotions in

“ JAPAN WAS CONFRONTED WITH THE SO-CALLED '1.57 [DEMOGRAPHIC] SHOCK' IN 1989

the workplace also mandated employers to support their employees in having and raising children, in the hope that career advancement would increase their desire to have children.²⁴⁷ Finally, the 'Plus One Policy', based on the radically work-centered nature of Japanese culture, was explicitly aimed at ending the situation in which mothers had to choose between work on the one hand and marriage and children on the other.²⁴⁸

These pronatalist policies have largely failed. Japan's fertility rate is currently 1.2, the lowest in its history and well below the level of 1.57 that shocked the country.²⁴⁹ Overall,

therefore, Japan's population continues to decline, despite thirty years of pronatalist lawmaking.²⁵⁰

Japanese researchers are therefore compelled to actively engage in one of the main consequences of this decline: **life in an aging society.**²⁵¹ 9% of the Japanese population above the age of 65 currently suffers from dementia, a rate that is expected to continue rising.²⁵²

Overall success has therefore not been achieved, but the 'Japanese miracle' does exist at the local level. The town of Nagi, population 6,000, boasts a TFR of 2.95, more than twice the national average.²⁵³ Furthermore, almost half the local families have three or more children.²⁵⁴ Nagi owes its success partially to former prime minister Abe Shinzo, who spearheaded the national strategy against demographic decline. Nagi expanded on this national strategy with its own local policy measures and rethought mothers' employment. Family allowances were increased (to 15,000 yen/month for the first three years of the the first and second child's life and 10,000 until the age of eighteen; this increases to 30,000 yen in the case of three children).²⁵⁵ Mothers and the elderly were provided with flexible, contract-based employment opportunities compatible with raising children.²⁵⁶ The town provides free education, school meals, and textbooks until secondary school, along with affordable and subsidized childcare and housing and fertility treatments. In addition, it employs a holistic approach, where children are valued and where child-

THE 'JAPANESE
MIRACLE' DOES EXIST
AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

rearing is a welcome, natural part of life. The mothers of Nagi report being supported and encouraged.

Although at first sight, the latter appears less of a factor, in Japan's work-centered culture, children are often undesirable, disruptive factors. “[H]ere, we love the sound of children's voices,”²⁵⁷ says one resident. “[W]hen you look around and see families with three or even four children, you think, we can do that too.”²⁵⁸

6.2. South Korea

South Korea's fertility rate in 2022 was 0.77, which fell further to 0.72 in 2023.²⁵⁹ All the problems faced by Japan with regard to a shrinking workforce and an aging population are present here, but in an even more extreme form. According to the Korean Ministry of Data and Statistics, if the current trends continue, the country's current population of 51.7 million will decrease to 37 million by 2070. The proportion

of the population above the age of 65 will rise from today's 17.5% to 46%.²⁶⁰ These changes would halve South Korea's labor force, thereby presenting a security risk, given the country's geopolitical situation.

“
SOUTH KOREA'S
FERTILITY RATE
IN 2022 WAS 0.77

In response to this alarming data, former President Yoon Suk Yeol declared “a demographic national emergency” and in June 2024 established a new ministry tasked with **promoting higher birth rates**.²⁶¹ The Ministry of Population Strategy

Planning is responsible for developing a short-term and long-term solution for the demographic crisis, comparing the various government agencies' budgets related to the birth rate and directing a PR-campaign aimed at increasing the birth rate.²⁶²

Due to the rapid aging of the population, the ministry's tasks include formulating strategies that enable healthy aging. Its approach to this issue includes financial incentives offered to families (e.g., a 100,000-won bonus at childbirth and 18 months paid parental leave²⁶³), as well as efforts to reduce housing and education costs.²⁶⁴

Concrete forms of government support include financial benefits, childcare support and services, welfare services for the elderly, and paid parental leave. Unfortunately, these efforts may already have come too late. In the past 16 years, South Korea has spent 200 billion dollars on tackling the demographic crisis through measures influenced by Northern European, Scandinavian family policy. This approach is characterized by the aim of maximizing women's participation in the labor market and facilitating their reintegration into it after childbirth, so that they do not see it as an obstacle to their career. South Korea has adopted this model, at least in part, through making gender equality an important part of its family policy and attempting to create a balance between the father and mother regarding parental duties. This way of thinking has underlain the debates on reforming parental leave since the 2010s.²⁶⁵ Overall, South

UNFORTUNATELY,
THESE EFFORTS
MAY ALREADY HAVE
COME TOO LATE

Korea's family policy measures have not been successful and the country's fertility rate continues to fall.

Since the end of the 1980s, Japan and South Korea have both been struggling with a sharp decline in birth rates and both have passed pronatalist measures to address this demographic issue, with questionable success. Although these cases differ, one can establish, at a general level, that, due to their work culture, Asian countries are struggling to find the correct balance between work and private life. In the interest of solving this issue, they place great emphasis on a gender-neutral caregiving approach and on including fathers in child-rearing, thus helping **women to reconcile their career and motherhood**. This naturally reinforces the dual-income model: mothers need to earn money to support their families. This differs from the view that mothers stay at home in a full-time capacity (a dilemma discussed earlier). The question is **where the cause of this failure lies: in the model or in its application to a different context**. In addition, various other factors contribute to low fertility rates. Some of them are global (infertility, individualism, etc.), others region-specific (crowded housing, high population density, strong hierarchical parental ties). These Asian examples show that the demographic issue is present and is hard to manage, but that it must be addressed and that numerous public policy instruments are available for this purpose.

Furthermore, the case of Nagi has proven that—taking into account the national and local contexts—a combination of economic, social, cultural, and healthcare perspectives and measures contribute to success.

6.3. The United States

The birth rate in the United States dropped from 7.03 in 1800 to 2.06 in 1940.²⁶⁶ The steady decrease can be explained by numerous general factors that affected not only the United States, including the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, access to contraceptives, and the medical advances that decreased the frequency of infant mortality.²⁶⁷ Following the Great Depression and World War II, the economic boom of the 1950s led to a dramatic increase in the birth rate, which is today called the “baby boom.”

Between 1940 and 1960, the TFR rose to 3.58, then fell significantly over the following 20 years to 1.77 in 1980. This was followed by a period of slight growth, which peaked at 2.06 in 2010 before falling to 1.78 in 2020.²⁶⁸ The TFR has not changed much in recent years, increasing minimally to its current rounded value of 1.79.²⁶⁹

The TFR is therefore not particularly low in the United States, but the negative demographic trends have serious economic consequences.

As a consequence of the aging of the American population, a shrinking labor force will have to support an ever-increasing number of pensioners. Some believe that the economic aspect of the demographic crisis can be solved by the influx of migrants, since the number of providers would be increased by an easily available workforce. However, migration is a

THE BIRTH RATE
IN THE UNITED STATES
DROPPED FROM 7.03
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short-term solution, even among the “nation of immigrants.” With the election of Donald Trump, the political climate surrounding migration has changed. Thus, fewer people now refer to it as a possible solution to the demographic and economic problems.

Libertarianism has had an impact on how Americans relate to family policy. Libertarians argue for a **strictly limited government** which does not get involved in social policy at all: **they believe the social system should be dismantled.** The Republican Party in the United States has strong libertarian leanings, so many Republicans are not pleased at the importation of European style family policy into the American social system. The old guard of the Republican Party tolerates the American welfare system or advocate for its reform, but criticize pronatalist family support models, as they are excessively interventionist. This approach may change, depending on the policy pursued by the Trump government.²⁷⁰ In January 2025, Vice President JD Vance gave a speech at the ‘March for Life.’²⁷¹

In it, he demonstrated a commitment to **developing a family policy** for the United States, **which would support families and make it easier for them to have children.** He also listed the measures taken by the first Trump administration **to double the child tax credit and which had a positive effect on American families.**

Certain segments of the American population continue to resist the declining **trend in fertility and have children**, even without direct government support. These groups usually

belong to traditional religious communities, which include **traditional Catholics, evangelical Christians, and the Amish**. They often have large families and are open to finding or forming communities in which their families support one another.²⁷²

6.4. France

France has a long history of pronatalist approaches and policies. In 1939, the country adopted a family-friendly package of laws encouraging its citizens to have children, thus competing with its main rival, Germany, in the area of demographics as well. Since then, France has consistently maintained discourse on demographic questions and the French population shows an above average level of interest in natalist policies directed towards demographic goals.²⁷³

To this day, France has one of the highest fertility rates in Europe.²⁷⁴ Among OECD member-countries, its 2022 TFR of 1.8 put it in joint first place with Mexico.²⁷⁵ It is difficult to separate the effect of people with immigrant backgrounds, as these groups typically have higher fertility rates and although they eventually adopt the demographic behavior of the host country, this still represents a high fertility rate.²⁷⁶ Historically, French family policy has developed from the principles of pronatalism, social inclusion, and equality of lifestyle.²⁷⁷

FRANCE HAS
A WELL-SUPPORTED
CHILDCARE SYSTEM

It combines direct tax benefits²⁷⁸ with highly subsidized, flexible childcare options²⁷⁹ and the so-called ‘family quotient,’ a family friendly tax system.²⁸⁰ **France has a well-supported childcare system²⁸¹** and this can make a huge difference in the

everyday lives of families who choose to have more children.

“ **FRANCE BECAME THE FIRST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD TO ENSHRINE THE RIGHT TO ABORTION IN ITS CONSTITUTION**

France spends roughly 3.6% of its national budget on family policy, the highest expenditure among OECD countries.²⁸² However, France’s pronatalist orientation began to weaken as early as 2008.²⁸³

This tendency continued in 2013 with the reduction of early childhood care benefits and the introduction of a cap on the family tax allowance. At the same time, though, childcare benefits were increased for low income families and a commitment was made to develop more nurseries and childcare centers.²⁸⁴ These changes indicate a shift in focus from a **general family support system to income equality and the families most impacted by poverty.**

This shift suggests a growing tendency to maximize the redistributive power of French family policy in favor of supporting non-traditional family models, partially for ideological reasons and partially because single-parent households are more exposed to poverty.²⁸⁵

France’s fertility rate remains high, despite the fact that French culture is widely known for its secular values and pro-abortion stance. **On 4 March 2024, France became the first**

country in the world to enshrine the right to abortion in its constitution.²⁸⁶ The French model indicates that institutional reputation (of France as a successful pronatalist nation) and the long-term continuity of public policy are equally important. As a result of the discourse on demographic questions and natalism, **the French population has accepted a pronatalist outlook, which persists independently of religious beliefs.²⁸⁷**

7. Main Conclusions

Our principal findings are summarized below:

7.1. Christianity and the family

- The Christian worldview examines the immanent, family-related issues of this world (e.g., the number and well-being of children) in light of the primary, transcendent goal (salvation).
- Ideally, marriage forms both the origin and the foundation of society and the family and one of its main goals is to raise children. **According to natural law, marriage is the union of a man and a woman and it is for life.**
- Scripture and, within it, the story of Creation, **teaches that woman and man are equal**, were created for each other by God and possess complementary roles (the complementarity of the sexes).
- Christianity radically transformed the Greco-Roman world's sexual ethics and concept of marriage, which has shaped Western civilization until the present day.
- The Christian family is a unique place for an encounter with Jesus.

7.2. The legal implications of marriage and the family

- According to Hungary's Fundamental Law, marriage is a union between a man and a woman established by their voluntary (free) decision. This union is a value in itself and is therefore deserving of protection.
- Marriage is a community of mutual support. The spouses owe each other fidelity and are obliged to cooperate and support each other "in pursuit of their common goals." They have equal rights and responsibilities in matters of marriage and the family.
- Marriage, by its essence, is a lifelong bond, even if large numbers of marriages fall apart.
- The family is the natural, fundamental unit of society and a social institution that precedes the law.
- Hungarian law does not define the family; it is a fluid concept. A marriage entered into with the intention of starting a family is not yet a family: the married couple becomes a family through the birth of a child. At the same time, the parent-child relationship creates a family bond in itself.
- The stability of relationships, and therefore the support of the marital bond and of families, is closely connected to incentivizing having children. **Not only can those who live in a family not be disadvantaged compared to social groups who choose other ways of life, but supporting them is a goal of the state.**

- The stability of the family and whether people live in a civil marriage or in cohabitation are not matters of indifference to the state. Government must create a legal environment that encourages its citizens to enter marriage and start a family.
- The state may promote marriage through public education, public service broadcasting or other programmes.

7.3. Demographic trends

- In Hungary, during the 2010s, the number of live births and the total fertility rate both increased significantly. The TFR rose from its 2011 low point of 1.23 to a 2021 high of 1.61. This positive trend that continued until 2021 can be attributed not only to parents ‘making up’ for the children they did not have during the recession of 2008–2009, but also to general economic growth and the family policy measures of the Orbán governments.
- The average age of Hungarian women at the birth of their first child rises each year and now exceeds 30.
- Regional characteristics (fertility ‘hotspots’), women with three or more children, the proportion of Roma within the population, the level of religiosity, and per capita income all have a demonstrable impact on the TFR.
- Certain negative demographic trends (for example, the decline in the number of women of childbearing age) continued in the 2010s. In fact, the significant decrease

in the TFR and the number of live births in recent years has caused the situation to deteriorate even more. The factors for the decrease that have been studied are primarily Covid-19 and its consequences, the negative economic processes following 2021, the natural ‘exhaustion’ of regional growth and globally emerging cultural trends.

- **The number of marriages in Hungary doubled between 2010 and 2021 and the total first marriage rate significantly increased as well.** The Orbán governments’ family policy measures, their financial incentives and the high number of already existing cohabiting couples contributed to this.
- **The increase in the number of marriages significantly reduced the number of births occurring outside marriage.**
- Although the negative trends of the past few years have caught up with marriages as well, the desire to marry remains high.
- In 1990, both men and women married, on average, nine years earlier than today.
- **The number of divorces significantly decreased after 2011 and has remained relatively low.** The overall divorce rate has decreased, but 37% of marriages are still expected to end in divorce.

7.4. Economic factors

- **The issue of housing is closely connected to family policy and questions of fertility.** Beyond property ownership itself, its location and immediate environment are also important considerations for families.
- **Hungarian families typically aspire to own their own home.** Accessible and affordable housing loans are available as instruments of family support.
- **According to the Christian understanding of work, it is inherently valuable and one of its primary purposes is the maintenance of the family.**
- **It is part of the natural order for mothers to stay at home and raise their children after their birth.** Motherhood, fatherhood, and the childrearing connected to these roles are not just work: they differ in purpose from 'regular' work and are valuable in themselves.
- **Women staying at home for a certain period after giving birth has numerous positive effects on children's healthy development.** At the same time, circumstances and opportunities such as economic necessity (and work culture) must be taken into account.
- **Hungarian mothers' CSED and GYED allowances indicate a family-friendly system by European standards—and compared to the United States, even more so.**

- Women's improved situation in the labor market and the proper balance between work and family life have a positive effect on the fertility rate.
- The employment rate of mothers in Hungary increased throughout the 2010s. As a result, however, many women face a **double burden**. The proportion of mothers in full-time employment remains high in Hungary.

7.5. Cultural factors

- 89% of Hungarian society considers family very important and a family-oriented approach remains present in social attitudes.
- Those Hungarians who live in families are generally the most satisfied with their lives.
- Numerous studies indicate that a stable family life contributes to happiness at an individual level; further, that healthy families provide numerous (health, social policy, and security) advantages at the societal level as well. A **well-functioning family based on marriage is a strong safeguard for society**.
- Significant differences can generally be discovered among the ideal, desired, and actual number of children. The concept of the 'magic two' continues to dominate family planning. However, the desired number of children is not born—for economic, social, cultural, and health-related

reasons—and the ideal number of children is not born. 86% of the Hungarian youth consider it important to have children.

- **The steep rise of childlessness is a serious problem in the Western world and, increasingly, in Hungary as well.** Relationship and healthcare factors, intentional childlessness, and the social and income situation all play a role in childlessness.
- **The precondition of starting a family is choosing a partner based on commitment.** Behind the difficulties in choosing a partner lie complex cultural processes. A crisis of identity and role models can be noticed among men. Women generally seek higher status men; however, due to social mobility and men's identity issues, finding a partner according to this metric is becoming increasingly difficult.
- Other factors that contribute to this problem include a distortion in expectations of contemporary relationships, a dependence on dating, the illusion of the perfect partner, the spread of individualistic lifestyles and online dating, and the consumption of pornography.
- **The difficulty of choosing a partner is not only a demographic and cultural crisis, but also a spiritual challenge.** Without a renewed emphasis on the Christian ethics of choosing a partner—purity, commitment, fidelity, and respect for male and female roles—the impact of family policy measures aimed at demographic change will remain limited.

7.6. Health factors

- One important issue affecting young couples and families is **infertility**. Although this is a global phenomenon, it affects 15-20% of Hungarian couples wishing to have children. This is an issue that is underdiscussed at the societal level.
- Infertility and reduced fertility can have numerous psychological and physical causes. According to many experts, the main cause of declining fertility from a biological perspective is late childbearing.
- A range of environmental factors (such as air pollution, smoking, etc.) have negative effects on male and female fertility. The radical decrease of the sperm count and concentration raise concerns for men and the consequences of abortion for women.
- The number of abortions has been steadily declining since 2010, almost halving in that period. Nevertheless, Hungary still has an abortion rate that is above the European average. With the exception of the 'heartbeat' legislation, no significant changes have occurred over the past 15 years.
- Abortion is primarily a decision about ending a child's life, but it has further implications for health and infertility as well. Even abortions performed properly from a medical standpoint can have serious psychological consequences, which in turn have a direct impact on fertility.

- Numerous forms of artificial fertilization now exist, the most widespread being IVF (in vitro fertilization). In addition, other procedures exist which do not directly assist fertility but which aim to postpone the possibility of conception. The most well-known of these methods is egg freezing.
- The Hungarian legal framework permits numerous forms of artificial fertilization, but prohibits surrogacy. Public acceptance of IVF is high (90%), while attitudes to surrogacy are more divided.
- Christian teaching generally rejects artificial fertilization. IVF typically involves the 'loss' of embryos: human lives are terminated. Christian doctrine teaches the sanctity of life and therefore protects life from conception.
- In many cases, the expectations associated with artificial fertilization are not realized.

7.7. Family policy measures of the Orbán governments (2010–2025)

- When examining the family policy measures of the Orbán governments (2010–2025), it is customary to distinguish their various goals: some are directed at individuals, as members of the family; others at the family as a unit.

- From 2010 onwards, the Orbán government has provided support to both groups. Within the framework of a work-based society, employment—and its general growth—is closely connected to the support available to families.
- Hungarian family policy extends to several policy areas and is an important consideration in the operation of the government. In their understanding, it is no longer viewed as part of social policy but as an independent domain of policy.
- Since taking office in 2010, the Orbán government has pursued a fundamentally pronatalist family policy, aimed at counterbalancing population decline through supporting childbirth. Behind these policies lie an emphasis on giving the family and the performance of the parents the recognition they deserve.
- Among the Orbán governments' family policy measures, a distinction can be made between traditional financial instruments of family support (such as child benefits, GYES, GYED) and new family policy measures (state-subsidized loans).
- The nominal value of financial support increased until 2023 (between 2021 and 2023, expenditure on the new instruments exceeded expenditure on the traditional ones). However, fiscal tightening and a decline in the number of claimants reduced overall expenditure in the most recent year.

- Numerous studies have evaluated the results of Hungary's family policy measures. Some of them (family tax allowance, building childcare centers, increasing home creation subsidies) have had a demonstrable impact on fertility levels.
- According to some explanations, financial support has a greater impact on the time of childbirth than its number. In some cases (such as the Great Recession of 2008–2009), this is presumably making up for children not had, while in others (e.g., after the introduction of the baby-expecting loan) it involves bringing the decision forward. Fluctuations in fertility are part of a natural process which governments can only impact to a certain degree.
- The Orbán government's pronatalist goals have only been partially met. The rise of the fertility rate in the 2010s slowed the decline of the population and contributed to the generally positive demographic change. Based on the tendencies of recent years, however, replacement level seems worryingly far off.
- The other goal has been met, in that the concept of the family has been placed center stage. The family policy measures that extend to numerous areas and the financial incentives connected to them have considerably contributed to an increase in fair treatment.

7.8. International practice and lessons

- The global population is nearing its peak and has in fact reached and passed it and is in decline in many places. Thus, societies worldwide are struggling with an approaching or already present demographic crisis.
- Japan was confronted with the so-called ‘1.57 [demographic] shock’ in 1989, when the TFR reached this level. This forced the Japanese government to assess the possible means of incentivizing childbirth. It passed four policy packages which extended to numerous areas (reconciling work and childrearing, regulating employers, expanding childcare centers, and coordination among sectors), but they mostly failed.
- The ‘Japanese miracle’ does exist at the local level, however. The town of Nagi, population 6,000, has a TFR of 2.95, which is over double the national average. A combination of economic, social, cultural, and health perspectives and measures—bearing the national and local framework in mind—contribute to its success.
- In 2023, South Korea’s fertility rate dropped to 0.72; the country therefore experiences an extreme form of the symptoms of demographic decline. In 2024, former President Yoon Suk Yeol declared “a demographic national emergency.” Since then, South Korea’s leadership has approached this task through PR campaigns designed to increase the birth rate, as well as through financial incentives

and efforts directed towards decreasing living and educational costs.

- Overall, South Korea's family policy efforts have not met with success, as the fertility rate continues to fall.
- The **TFR in the United States** is not particularly low, but the negative demographic trends have serious economic consequences. The American right is characterized by philosophical differences among the adherents of libertarianism, those who wish to keep the welfare system to a minimum, and those who desire greater intervention, including in the area of family policy. Donald Trump's presidency may affect the direction taken by the country in the coming years.
- Even without direct governmental support, certain sectors of the American population are withstanding the trend of demographic decrease by having children. These parts of the population generally belong to religious communities. These include, among others, traditional Catholics and the Amish communities.
- **France has a long history of pronatalist approaches and policies.** To this day, it has one of the highest fertility rates of Europe, which is only partially due to migration.
- France spends approximately 3.6% of its GDP on family policy, the highest rate measured by the OECD. The French population has embraced a pronatalist perspective, which has endured regardless of their religious views.

8. Priorities and Suggestions

8.1. A Christian integrative perspective²⁸⁸

Narrowness of perspective presents a danger to social policy and, therefore, to family policy as well. When one consideration (e.g., demographic) wholly or at least excessively overrides the others (e.g., economic, cultural, and health concerns), it can happen that a noble goal (e.g., that more children be born) has unintended negative consequences even in the case of effective policy interventions (in this case, in the area of demographics). This is because such narrowness (such as a purely pronatalist approach) often displays a lack of awareness in other areas, e.g., of what circumstances the child is born in and into and the consequences of IVF. The integrative perspective does not deny the need for policy priorities (a guiding thread is required), but considers it important to conduct a comprehensive examination of the key issues it touches on.

However, a secular integrative approach is insufficient in itself, as it leads to a different kind of narrowness, namely one which does not take into account man's transcendental

A SECULAR
INTEGRATIVE
APPROACH IS
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IN ITSELF

dimension and the particular set of goals connected to it. **The Christian integrative perspective ‘connects’ human beings into this cycle**, defines the primary goal and treats the integrative policies of great importance in this earthly life accordingly.

Further, the goal of the Christian integrative perspective is for family policy to simultaneously be built on correct principles (idealistic) and to reflect pragmatically on reality (realistic). **The principle of the sanctity of life, the constitutional protection of marriage, subsidiarity, and the dignity of work and the home must all be represented in the most determined way possible.** This requires the cooperation of government, the Church, local councils, Christian NGOs, and media and the business world as well. **In our view, this ought to be established in a broad family policy strategy.**

8.2. The family as priority and unity

The biggest achievement of Hungarian family policy is arguably that it once again made families important and a matter of public concern in a manner perceptible at the international level as well. The Hungarian family policy measures have, along with the expenditures and political communication that accompanied them, effected a change in thinking about Hungarian families. The fact that the family is once again in the spotlight is a significant result and one

that increases the chance of the necessary social discourse and sufficient public policy decision-making.

This is by no means evident: numerous Western countries suffer from demographic, social, and economic problems (some of them have been doing so for decades), for which a family-centric approach could offer a sufficient solution, yet families are not at the center. This was also true of Hungary in numerous cases in the period before 2010.

Maintaining this result, i.e., treating families as a priority, requires further efforts. On the one hand, the focus should be on making social policy successful, as this is what determines the extent to which this issue remains on the political and public policy agenda or whether it becomes 'worn out,' a topic of simplified political debates. Our suggestion is for the legislature to aim to achieve a consensus on the importance of marriage and the family that transcends the political divide.²⁸⁹ In more precise terms, it is necessary to formulate not only family policy, but also a social policy that has the family at its center.²⁹⁰ "A family policy must be the basis and driving force of all social policies."²⁹¹

THE BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT
OF HUNGARIAN FAMILY POLICY
IS ARGUABLY THAT IT ONCE
AGAIN MADE FAMILIES
IMPORTANT AND A MATTER
OF PUBLIC CONCERN

8.3. Security and reliability

What mother would like to bring her child into a dangerous, unpredictable world full of crises? The experts are in agreement that security and reliability are of utmost importance in making decisions regarding having children.

This was evident in the case of Hungary as well, since the economy and the TFR mostly grew together until 2019. This growth was further supported by family policy measures, but these were clearly insufficient to prevent the post-2019 decline. **This does not mean that financial incentives are unnecessary or generally ineffective, but rather limited.** A clear connection between economic well-being and a higher TFR is lacking in both time and place; in fact, the general tendencies support the opposite conclusion.²⁹² Nevertheless, one can connect the two areas to make the claim that **it is essential for financial incentives to increase—long-term—security and reliability.** This is clearly most important for the groups for whom security—partially economic

and partially existential—or the sense thereof is low and unreliability is high. Securing the economic incentives which impact families is therefore important partially for the families'

“**IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR
FINANCIAL INCENTIVES
TO INCREASE LONG-TERM
SECURITY AND RELIABILITY**

dignity and partially from a pragmatic perspective, since “it was previously demonstrable that having children also meant resigning oneself to poverty.”²⁹³

Reliability cannot mean inflexibility. We therefore believe that the legislature acts correctly insofar as it strengthens a support system which fits the organic development of family life.

This takes into account the fact that what is most helpful at the beginning of married life is rental arrangements (which can be assisted by a comprehensive rental housing development program) while with the birth of children, security is provided by ownership of a larger property. Needs can also vary at a regional level and should therefore be taken into account.

One must naturally avoid falling into the trap of a narrow-minded way of thinking, in this case, economic reductionism, even in the case of security and reliability. Childbearing is a complex issue. It may happen that a couple's economic situation would allow them to have children but they nevertheless do not want to, due to real or perceived concerns of security or unpredictability (due, for instance, to climate anxiety, the polarization of society or the sense of ongoing war).

8.4. The capacities and responsibilities of the state

The Hungarian state has historically held great significance and a strong role in national cohesion. Even the socialist regimes, which disrupted organic development within the country's history, maintained the importance of the state,

albeit partially for reasons of power. This circumstance can give state leaders an opportunity—and, compared to countries with a libertarian outlook such as the USA, a relative advantage—in shaping society according to policy priorities—with a democratic mandate.

This also allows the state to take steps against ideologies which present an explicit or implicit danger to families.

The goals of the state include helping families with the tools at their disposal in the interest of serving the common good (especially if many of them are dysfunctional). At the same time, if the state ignores the principle of subsidiarity and

overreaches—even if driven by the noblest of goals—it can easily expand into areas originally outside its scope. This not only violates natural law (the autonomy of families) but can also result in a decreased feeling

“ THE HUNGARIAN STATE HAS HISTORICALLY HELD GREAT SIGNIFICANCE AND A STRONG ROLE IN NATIONAL COHESION

of responsibility among its citizens and in civil society, while expectations remain high. Once an issue has been ‘taken over,’ by the state, it is not easily relinquished, which in itself further fuels an activist, constantly interventionist mode of operation. In the case of certain matters—such as family and fertility—that are complicated and all but insoluble by their nature—this can lead to even more serious difficulties.

What is to be done? We believe that the legislature would be wise to assist the development of ‘bottom-up’ activity at the individual and community level (including economic

and ecclesiastical actors), alongside the state's habitual 'top-down' approach. It could then build on this to make further progress in family policy.

In other words, large-scale political, economic, social, cultural and health structures should be complemented by further layers at the levels of the communities.²⁹⁴ This can apply to economic actors as well, who could be incentivized to encourage the development of a family-friendly environment, including taking measures to provide mothers with flexible work opportunities and tax breaks. In our view, it would be worthwhile to introduce a graduate-level program in Hungary which would approach marriage and the family from a Christian integrative perspective (perhaps within an ecclesiastical setting), on the model of the training program already tested in the University of Navarra.²⁹⁵

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AT THEIR DISPOSAL IN
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THE COMMON GOOD

8.5. Communication, educational, and PR-campaign considerations

Christians often struggle with 'outreach problems.' Many (of us) believe that the lack of success in society at large is due not to the lack of truth in Christian beliefs, but to a **hostile environment or inadequate communication**. This is partially

true but it would be a mistake to take the first reason as an excuse and the second as unchangeable.²⁹⁶ In other words, **effective Christian social communication does exist**, as attested to by several historical and contemporary examples (for instance, in the United States). **Communication campaigns (whether run by the church actors, NGOs, or the state) must meet 21st-century professional content and audiovisual standards in order to be effective (or at least not counterproductive).**²⁹⁷

A key priority is to ensure that the role of the cultural factors that affect couples in their decision to start a family

are conveyed with appropriate tools, such as nationwide campaigns.

EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN SOCIAL COMMUNICATION DOES EXIST

In our view, communication can play an especially significant role in emphasizing the importance of partner selection, marriage, and having children. **The legislature could play an important role in this by incentivizing the multinational corporations that operate in the country to run family-friendly and marriage-promoting campaigns.**

Ideas exist which are equally valuable for Christians and non-Christians alike and these can serve as a bridge in communication. These include, among others, the factors with the greatest influence on relationships, such as trust, fidelity, honesty, intimacy, and love, as well as the human virtues, such as wisdom, justice, (inner) strength, and moderation. Long-term growth and flourishing, which can be realized within both the

8. PRIORITIES AND SUGGESTIONS

marriage and the family, can also be placed in this category.²⁹⁸ Finally, there is happiness, a complex concept with differing views on its nature and especially on the path that leads to it, but one which, after all, ultimately unites all people. **These factors can serve as a bridge in deepening dialogue between groups. The success of the Christian mission ultimately depends not only on teaching and knowledge of the truth, but also on dialogue.**

Notes

¹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio: Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World* (1981), 17. In the papal documents, especially the encyclicals, we have indicated the paragraph numbers.

² Ibid., 38.

³ Leo XIII, *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae: Encyclical on Christian Marriage* (1880).

⁴ Bernard Cooke, “Historical Reflections on the Meaning of Marriage as Christian Sacrament,” in *Marriage*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Julie Hanlon Rubio (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 8–21.

⁵ Edward Feser, “The Role of Nature in Sexual Ethics,” *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (2013): 69–76, <https://doi.org/10.5840/ncbq201313171>

⁶ Cf. Gergely Szilvay, *A melegházasságról. Kritika a klasszikus gondolkodás fényében [On Same-Sex Marriage: A Critique in Light of Classical Thought]*. (Budapest: Századvég, 2016), 153.

⁷ Dig. 23.2.1; Róbert Brósz and Elemér Pólay, *Római jog [Roman Law]*. (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1986), 153.

⁸ Péter Erdő, *Egyházjog [Canon Law]*. (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 2005), 505. “By its nature” naturally includes marriages which, for whatever reason, remain unfruitful; these also share in the nature of marriage that tends towards starting a family. CIC 1055, §1.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed.; Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 1666, 2202. In the Catechism, we have indicated the paragraph numbers.

¹⁰ Cf. Gen 1:26–27.

¹¹ As indicated by Pope Francis, large families are a source of joy to the Church and are expressions of the fruits of love. At the same time, he also emphasizes—in reference to Pope John Paul II—that parents have to take into account social and demographic realities and their own desires when deciding to have children and to act responsibly and wisely. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family* (2016), 166, <https://tinyurl.com/2yxja99h>

¹² Cf. Gen 1:28.

¹³ Cf. Gen 2:18; Gen 2:23.

¹⁴ Cf. Gen 2:24.

¹⁵ The Roman Catholic Church places special emphasis on the Holy Family as a role model. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 30.

¹⁶ Helen M. Alvaré, “Christianity and Family Law,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Law*, ed. John Witte Jr. and Rafael Domingo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 436, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197606759.001.0001>

¹⁷ Cf. Matt 19:4.

¹⁸ Cf. 1 John 2:1–11

¹⁹ Cf. 1 John 4:8–16.

²⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 11.

²¹ Cf. Gen 3:16–19.

²² Michael Pakaluk, *The Family: A True Society, Older than the State*, 2023 Edward Cardinal Egan Lecture (New York: Union League Club, 2023), *Magnificat Foundation*, <https://tinyurl.com/yvjxfxf7>

²³ Cf. Matt 19:8; Deut 24:1.

²⁴ Cf. Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 119–122.

²⁵ Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 46–48.

²⁶ Cf. Eph 5:25–26.

²⁷ Cf. 1 Cor 7:2–5.

²⁸ Cf. 1 Cor 6:9; Rom 1:18–28.

²⁹ Alvaré, “Christianity and Family Law,” 437.

³⁰ Ibid., 438–439.

³¹ Ibid., 437.

³² Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (1965), 47.

³³ Scott Hahn, *The First Society: The Sacrament of Matrimony and the Restoration of the Social Order* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2018), 17.

³⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1666, 2685; John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae: Encyclical Letter on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life* (1995), 93, <https://tinyurl.com/47nrupkp>; Francis, *Lumen Fidei* (2013), 43, <https://tinyurl.com/yt5xhee8>; Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 16; Francis, *Laudato Si': Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home* (2015), 213, <https://tinyurl.com/4dapsn24>

³⁵ Leo XIV, Audience to Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, 16 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y5w97666>

³⁶ Leo XIV, Homily, Saint Peter’s Square, 1 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc59exzn>

³⁷ Sarolta Molnár, “The Fundamental Right of Marriage in the Constitutions of European Countries,” *Central European Journal of Comparative Law* 2, no. 2 (2021): 181–196, <https://doi.org/10.47078/2021.2.181-196>

³⁸ *The Fundamental Law of Hungary*, Article L(1).

³⁹ Wolfgang Waldstein, *Ins Herz geschrieben: Das Naturrecht als Fundament einer menschlichen Gesellschaft* [*Inscribed in the Heart: Natural Law as the Foundation of Human Society*]. (Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich Verlag, 2010), 159.

⁴⁰ Zs. András Varga, “A házasságra és a családra vonatkozó rendelkezések változása az alkotmányozás során” [*Changes in the Provisions on Marriage and the Family in the Course of Writing the Constitution*], *Iustum Aequum Salutare* 2012/2: 119–121.

⁴¹ “Napi sajtószemle” [*Daily Press Review*], *Magyar Kurír*, 4 January 2014, <https://www.magyarurir.hu/hirek/napi-sajtoszemle-2703/>

⁴² Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George, *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012).

⁴³ Act CCXI of 2011, §1.

⁴⁴ Decision 154/2008 (XII. 17.) of the Constitutional Court of Hungary.

⁴⁵ Hungarian Civil Code (Ptk.), §§4:24.

⁴⁶ Hungarian Civil Code (Ptk.), §4:29.

⁴⁷ Hungarian Civil Code (Ptk.), §4:3.

⁴⁸ Jörn Ipsen, “Ehe und Familie” [*Marriage and the Family*], in *Handbuch des Staatsrechts*, vol. VII, ed. Josef Isensee and Paul Kirchhof (Heidelberg: C. F. Müller, 2009), 431, 458.

⁴⁹ Sarolta Molnár, “Egyenlőség és komplementaritás. Anyák és apák a családban” [*Equality and Complementarity: Mothers and Fathers in the Family*], *Iustum Aequum Salutare* 2022/3: 77–89.

⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 42.

⁵¹ Tímea Drinóczki and Judit Zeller, “A házasság és a család – alkotmányjogi értelemben” [*Marriage and the Family in Constitutional Law*], *Acta Humana* 2005/4: 80.

⁵² *Csjt.* (Hungarian Family Act) 6. § (1).

⁵³ *Csjt.* §5; see also Act CLXXXV of 2010 on Media Services and Mass Communication, §81(1)(c), which states that one aim of public service media is respect for the institution of marriage and the value of the family.

⁵⁴ Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education, which includes among teachers’ duties that they must educate children and pupils “to love and respect one another, to understand and appreciate the values of family life, to cooperate, to be environmentally conscious, to live a healthy lifestyle, and to be patriotic.” Cf. §62(1)(e).

⁵⁵ In 1989, 12.4% of mothers were unmarried at the birth of their child; by 2013 this share had risen to 46.2%. “Házasságon kívüli születések aránya” [*Proportion of Births Outside Marriage*], *KSH Népességtudományi Kutatóintézet*, <http://demografia.hu/hu/tudastar/fogalomtar/68-hazassagon-kivuli-szuletesek-aranya>. In 2015, the rate was 47.8%. Thirty years earlier, the father was officially

unknown in the case of the majority of births outside marriage (58%); by 2015 this had fallen to 23%, indicating that most parents of children born outside marriage live in cohabiting partnerships rather than casual relationships.

⁵⁶ Alexandra Ficzeréné Sirkó, “A házassági-családi viszonyokból eredő jogok és kötelezettségek alkotmányos szabályozása” [“The Constitutional Regulation of Rights and Obligations Arising from Marital and Family Relationships”], *Magyar Jog* 1995/8: 478.

⁵⁷ Constitutional Court Decision 4/1990 (III. 4.), ABH 1990, 28, 29.

⁵⁸ András Jakab, *Az új Alaptörvény keletkezése és gyakorlati következményei* [The Drafting of the New Fundamental Law and Its Practical Consequences]. (Budapest: HVG-ORAC, 2011), 194.

⁵⁹ *The Fundamental Law of Hungary*, Article L(2).

⁶⁰ Varga, “A házasságra és a családra...,” 119–127.

⁶¹ *The Fundamental Law of Hungary*, Article XV(S).

⁶² *The Fundamental Law of Hungary*, Article L(3).

⁶³ *The Fundamental Law of Hungary*, Article XXX(2).

⁶⁴ Cf. Paul Kirchhof, *Bundessteuergesetzbuch: Ein Reformentwurf zur Erneuerung des Steuerrechts* [Federal Tax Code: A Reform Proposal for the Renewal of Tax Law]. (Heidelberg: C. F. Müller, 2011).

⁶⁵ This study relies primarily on data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) and points out the main connections based on the most significant scholars of the field. Producing a complete picture of Hungarian family life would require producing and summarising a library’s worth of literature.

⁶⁶ According to the Demographic Research Institute of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office: “The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is one of the most commonly used fertility indicators. It shows how many children a woman would bear on average over her lifetime if the fertility rates of the given year remained constant.” “Teljes termékenységi arányszám (TTA)” [“Total Fertility Rate (TFR)”, KSH Népességtudományi Kutatóintézet, <https://www.demografia.hu/hu/tudastar/fogalomtar/38-teljes-termekenyseg-aranyszam>. For the limitations of TFR and measures of completed fertility, see Zsolt Spéder, “Gyermekvállalás” [“Child-bearing”], in Judit Monostori and Péter Öri (eds.), *Demográfiai portré 2024. Jelentés a magyar népesség helyzetéről* [Demographic Portrait 2024: Report on the Situation of the Hungarian Population]. (Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal – Népességtudományi Kutatóintézet, 2024), 51.

⁶⁷ “22.1.1.6. Live births, total fertility rate,” Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/en/nep0006.html

⁶⁸ Marcell Kovács and Gabriella Branyiczkine Géczy, “Demográfiai trendek Európában” [“Demographic Trends in Europe”], in Ádám Stefkovics and Péter Pillik (eds.), *Századvég Riport 2024. Tanulmányok gazdaságról, politikáról*,

társadalomról [Századvég Report 2024: *Studies on the Economy, Politics, and Society*]. (Budapest: Századvég, 2024), 387–410.

⁶⁹ “22.1.1.6. Live births, total fertility rate,” Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/en/nep0006.html

⁷⁰ For an overview of European demographic trends, see Kovács–Branyiczkiné, “Demográfiai trendek Európában.”

⁷¹ “22.1.2.9. Live births per one thousand females of corresponding age and total fertility rate by county and region,” Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/en/nep0042.html

⁷² Anita Élő, “Negyvenes vidéki nők szültek, Budapesten még csökkent a babák száma – a kormány népesedési politikájának mérlege” [“Women in Their Forties Gave Birth in Rural Areas, While the Number of Babies Actually Fell in Budapest – An Assessment of the Government’s Population Policy”], *Válasz Online*, 20 December 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/enmpcj28>

⁷³ “22.1.2.9. Live births per one thousand females of corresponding age and total fertility rate by county and region.”

⁷⁴ “Magyarország számokban, 2023. A nők átlagos életkora a gyermekük születésekor” [“Hungary in Figures, 2023: Average Age of Women at the Birth of Their Child”], Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, https://www.ksh.hu/infografika/2025/mosz2023-tarsadalom_hu.pdf

⁷⁵ In this respect, 2010 did not mark a turning point; general European trends continued. See: “22.1.1.7. Live births by mother’s and born infant’s characteristics,” Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/en/nep0007.html; and Kovács–Branyiczkiné, “Demográfiai trendek Európában.”

⁷⁶ Demographer Zsolt Spéder notes that after 2011, “the increase in fertility is strongest at older ages,” though fertility has also risen among women in their twenties. For the latter group, it is not yet clear whether this is a temporary process or a lasting trend. See Spéder, “Gyermekvállalás,” 41.

⁷⁷ “22.1.1.7. Live births by mother’s and born infant’s characteristics.”

⁷⁸ Spéder, “Gyermekvállalás,” 46–47.

⁷⁹ Géza Tóth, *A népszámlálások vallási adatainak eredményei térképeken. Térstatistikai elemzés* (Budapest, Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 2024), 106, <https://doi.org/10.15196/KSH202401>

⁸⁰ Élő, “Negyvenes vidéki nők szültek...”

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Tóth, *A népszámlálások vallási adatainak eredményei térképeken*, 106.

⁸³ Spéder, “Gyermekvállalás.”

⁸⁴ Tóth, *A népszámlálások vallási adatainak eredményei térképeken*, 106.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 108.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Kovács–Branyiczkiné, “Demográfiai trendek Európában;” 394; Spéder, “Gyermekvállalás,” 40.

⁸⁸ Kovács–Branyiczkiné, “Demográfiai trendek Európában.”

⁸⁹ György Kerényi, “Mennyire sikeres a magyar kormány családpolitikája? – Kapitány Balázs demográfus,” *Szabad Európa*, 27 September 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/Sx36j2bc>

⁹⁰ “22.2.1.1. Main indicators of vital events (monthly data),” *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*, https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/en/nep0064.html

⁹¹ “22.1.1.6. Live births, total fertility rate.”

⁹² Spéder, “Gyermekvállalás,” 46, 49.

⁹³ Ibid., 40–42.

⁹⁴ “22.1.1.15. Marriages, divorces,” *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*, https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/en/nep0015.html

⁹⁵ Lívia Murinkó and Zsolt Spéder, “Élettársi kapcsolatok, házasság” [“Cohabiting Partnerships, Marriage”], in Judit Monostori, Péter Öri, and Zsolt Spéder (eds.), *Demográfiai portré 2021. Jelentés a magyar népesség helyzetéről* (Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal – Népességtudományi Kutatóintézet, 2021) [Demographic Portrait 2021. Report on the Situation of the Hungarian Population], 10.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁷ “22.1.1.16. Main indicators of marriages,” *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*, https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/en/nep0016.html

⁹⁸ “A házasság hete 2025. február 9–16.” [“Marriage Week February 9-16 2025”], *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*, https://www.ksh.hu/infografika/2025/hazassag-hete_2025_hu.pdf

⁹⁹ Murinkó–Spéder, “Élettársi kapcsolatok, házasság,” 11–12.

¹⁰⁰ “22.1.1.16. Main indicators of marriages.”

¹⁰¹ “22.1.1.7. Live births by mother’s and born infant’s characteristics.”

¹⁰² Murinkó–Spéder, “Élettársi kapcsolatok, házasság,” 9, 13; Spéder, “Gyermekvállalás,” 42–43.

¹⁰³ “22.1.1.16. Main indicators of marriages.”

¹⁰⁴ Lívia Murinkó, “Az élettársi kapcsolatban élők típusai az új évezredben” [“The Types of People Living in Cohabiting Partnerships in the New Millennium”], *Szociológiai Szemle* 2023/3: 53–86, <https://doi.org/10.51624/SzocSzemle.2023.3.3>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Murinkó–Spéder, “Élettársi kapcsolatok, házasság,” 11.

¹⁰⁷ Murinkó and Spéder, “Élettársi kapcsolatok, házasság.”

¹⁰⁸ Spéder, “Gyermekvállalás,” 42.

¹⁰⁹ “22.1.1.15. Marriages, divorces.”

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ “22.1.1.19. Main indicators of divorces,” *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*, https://www.ksh.hu/statadat_files/nep/en/nep0019.html

¹¹² Zsuzsanna Makay and Laura Szabó, “Válás” [“Divorce”], in Judit Monostori, Péter Őri, and Zsolt Spéder (eds.), *Demográfiai portré 2018. Jelentés a magyar népesség helyzetéről* [Demographic Portrait 2018: Report on the Situation of the Hungarian Population] (Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal – Népességtudományi Kutatóintézet, 2018), 25, 29.

¹¹³ Ibid., 31–32.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 25, 33.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 34–35.

¹¹⁶ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 152; cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 44.

¹¹⁷ Ágnes Szabó-Morvai, *Evaluation of Family Policy Measures and Their Impact on Fertility* (Budapest: HÉTFA Research Institute, 2019), 8, https://hetfa.hu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2019_fertilitymodels-family-policy.pdf

¹¹⁸ “Family Formation and the Future – A Conference on the Geopolitical, Cultural, and Legal Dimensions of Demographic Change – Day 1,” *Danube Institute*, 4 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2zyywj5>

¹¹⁹ Lyman Stone, “More Crowding, Fewer Babies: The Effects of Housing Density on Fertility,” *Institute for Family Studies*, 4 June 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/yjr493au>

¹²⁰ According to research commissioned by the Maria Kopp Institute for Demography and Families (KINCS) and conducted by Társadalomkutató Kft., examining people aged 18–35, 87% of young Hungarians wish to own the home they live in by age fifty (23% preferring a flat, 64% a house). See Tibor Papházi, “Lakhatási helyzetkép – generációs metszetben” [“Housing Conditions from a Generational Perspective”], *Máltai tanulmányok* 2024/1: 37–63, <https://doi.org/10.56699/MT.2024.1.3>

¹²¹ Zoltán Csizmadia, “Az ifjúság anyagi helyzete,” [“The Financial Situation of Young People”] in Ádám Nagy (ed.), *A lábjegyzeten is túl – magyar ifjúságkutatás 2020 [Beyond the Footnote: Hungarian Youth Research 2020]* (Budapest: Szociális Demokráciáért Intézet – Excenter Kutatóközpont, 2022), 141.

¹²² Papházi, “Lakhatási helyzetkép.”

¹²³ Szabó-Morvai, *Evaluation of Family Policy Measures*, 8.

¹²⁴ Eszter Kovács, Beáta Szabó, Ákos Bereczki, Csaba Lados, and Sándor Winkler, *Lakáspiaci jelentés. 2024. május* [Housing Market Report, May 2024] (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Bank, 2024), 14.

¹²⁵ “Népszámlálási atlasz, 2022,” [“2022 Census Atlas”] *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*, https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/pdf/nepszamlalasi_atlasz_2022.pdf

¹²⁶ A significant share of foreign property purchasers naturally focus on these areas (and, because of commuters, on the settlements along the border). While between 2016 and 2024, the share of foreign homebuyers nationwide fluctuated between roughly 3–6%, in Budapest it was already around 5–11%. In the inner districts of Pest, the proportions are considerably higher (around 18% at the beginning of 2024), with marked swings (over 24% in spring 2019, then around 10% in early 2021). After 2021, the proportion of foreign buyers also increased significantly in Zala and Somogy counties. Foreign nationals may purchase property for various purposes (e.g., housing, employment-related reasons, speculation), which likewise exerts an upward pressure on prices both in Budapest and in rural areas (this is felt least in small rural towns). See: Kovács–Szabó–Bereczki–Lados–Winkler, cited above; and Balázs Szabó, Judit Székely, Mónika Bene, and Zoltán Kovács, “Külföldi vásárlók a magyarországi lakáspiacra, 2016–2022” [“Foreign Buyers in the Hungarian Housing Market”] *Területi Statisztika* 2025/2: 268–294, <https://doi.org/10.15196/TS650205>

¹²⁷ Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), 61, <http://tarsadalomformalas.kife.hu/xi-pius-papa-quadragesimo-anno/>

¹²⁸ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 24.

¹²⁹ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum: Encyclical on Capital and Labor* (1891), <https://tinyurl.com/bdhn8fbm>

¹³⁰ Among others, Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*; John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus: Encyclical on the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum* (1991), <https://tinyurl.com/bdhfr9ye>; Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 94; John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 58.

¹³¹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 23.

¹³² Zsuzsa Blaskó, “Meddig maradjon otthon az anya? A gyermekfejlődés szempontjai. Kutatási tapasztalatok és családpolitikai következtetések” [“How Long Should the Mother Stay at Home? Considerations of Child Development. Research Findings and Family Policy Conclusions”] *Esély* 2010/3: 89.

¹³³ Pedro Carneiro, Katrine V. Løken, and Kjell G. Salvanes, “A Flying Start? Maternity Leave Benefits and Long-Run Outcomes of Children,” *Journal of Political Economy* 123, no. 2 (2015): 365–412, <https://doi.org/10.1086/679627>

¹³⁴ Eric Bettinger, Torbjørn Hægeland, and Mari Rege, “Home with Mom. The Effects of Stay-at-Home Parents on Children’s Long-Run Educational Outcomes,” *Journal of Labor Economics* 32, no. 3 (2014): 443–467, <https://doi.org/10.1086/675070>

¹³⁵ Brad Wilcox—one of the best-known American Christian family-policy experts—made an especially striking remark in this case when reacting to Viktor Orbán’s lifetime income-tax exemption for mothers of two children. He argued that although the measure may appear conservative to many, it is

in fact progressive, because it focuses not on families in the abstract but specifically on mothers, thereby encouraging their participation in work, <https://x.com/BradWilcoxIFS/status/1894017237477982328>

¹³⁶ Szabó-Morvai, *Evaluation of Family Policy Measures*, 7. The Christian perspective does not question that sin and crisis often affect family relations as well, and it approaches impoverishment and intra-family problems (e.g., alcoholism and violence) with sensitivity. See Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 8, 49, 50, 54.

¹³⁷ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 3.

¹³⁸ “While it must be recognized that women have the same right as men to perform various public functions, society must be structured in such a way that wives and mothers are not in practice compelled to work outside the home, and that their families can live and prosper in a dignified way even when they themselves devote their full time to their own family.” John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 23. *Quadragesimo Anno* in this case followed an even more archaic understanding. Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 71.

¹³⁹ For the first six months, this is equal to 100% of the mother’s pre-birth wage, then 70% (without exceeding the upper limit).

¹⁴⁰ Szabó-Morvai, *Evaluation of Family Policy Measures*, 8.

¹⁴¹ 20.1.1.28. Employment rate of women aged 25–49 [%],” *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*, https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/mun/en/mun0025.html

¹⁴² Leen Marynissen, “Ready for a First Birth? Couple-Level Gender Dynamics in the Employment–Parenthood Link in France,” *Population* 77, no. 3 (2022): 386, <https://www.doi.org/10.3917/popu.2203.0411>

¹⁴³ Szabó-Morvai, *Evaluation of Family Policy Measures*, 7; Ágnes Nagy, “Az anyai munkavállalás és a gyermekfejlődés összefüggései” [“The Relationship Between Maternal Employment and Child Development”], *Kapocs* 2013/2, 14.

¹⁴⁴ Substantial differences exist in the rate of female part-time workers between Western countries and Central and Eastern European countries. In Western Europe, the rate ranges between 23% (France, Spain) and 61% (the Netherlands), while in Central and Eastern Europe it falls between 3% (Bulgaria) and 12% (Poland). See: Anna Lovász, “Childcare Expansion and Mothers’ Employment in Post-Socialist Countries,” *IZA World of Labor*, 2016, 8, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15185/izawol.319>

¹⁴⁵ For research related to nursery preferences, see, *Kisgyermekes anyák bölcsőde-választási preferenciái* [Daycare Selection Preferences of Mothers with Young Children], Kopp Mária Intézet, March 2023, https://www.koppmaraintezet.hu/docs/Bolcsodevalasztas_elemez_2023.pdf

¹⁴⁶ Steps have been taken to increase part-time employment: according to §61 (3) of the Labor Code, “upon the employee’s request, the employer is obliged to amend the employment contract to part-time work corresponding to half of

the general daily working hours until the child reaches the age of 4—or, in the case of raising three or more children, until the child reaches the age of 6.” Act I of 2012 on the Labor Code, §61 (3).

¹⁴⁷ Piroska Szalai, *Az üvegplafon is túl. Nők a magyar munkaerőpiacon* [Beyond the Glass Ceiling: Women in the Hungarian Labour Market]. Szent István Intézet, 2023, 13, <https://szentistvanintezet.hu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/uvegplafon.pdf>

¹⁴⁸ Marie Kopp, Marina Lindauer, and Susan Garthus-Niegel, “Association between Maternal Employment and the Child’s Mental Health: A Systematic Review with Meta-Analysis,” *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 33 (2024): 3025–3042, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-023-02164-1>

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²⁰¹ Hagai Levine – Niels Jørgensen – Anderson Martino (et al.), “Temporal Trends in Sperm Count: A Systematic Review and Regression Analysis,” *Human Reproduction Update* 23, no. 6 (2017): 646–659, <https://doi.org/10.1093/humupd/dmx022>

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ “22.1.1.13. Number and rate of foetal losses,” *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*, https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/en/nep0013.html

²⁰⁴ Under Decree 29/2022 (IX.12) of the Ministry of the Interior, a woman requesting termination of her pregnancy must declare that “the healthcare

provider has clearly and recognizably presented to the pregnant woman the factor indicating the functioning of the foetal vital signs.” This, by definition, refers to the foetal heartbeat.

²⁰⁵ “Number of Abortion Procedures Performed in European Countries in 2022,” *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/866423/abortion-rate-europe/>

²⁰⁶ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 58.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁰⁸ This applies to the cases mentioned earlier, as well as to topics that—partly for reasons of length—were not highlighted (the issue of preterm-infant rescue institutions; the question of natural birth vs. caesarean section, and, relatedly, the abolition of the free choice of doctor). Removing obstacles to natural conception (e.g., unhealthy lifestyle, negative environmental effects) is supported as a good aim by the Christian perspective, as is the teaching of the key information related to fertility.

²⁰⁹ Szász, “Minden harmadik nő gyermektelen.”

²¹⁰ Aitken, “Population Decline.”

²¹¹ Act CLIV of 1997 on Healthcare.

²¹² For a brief legal overview, see Ivett Szalma and Lóránt Pélyi, “A mesterséges megtermékenyítési eljárások társadalmi elfogadottsága Magyarországon” [“The Social Acceptance of Assisted Reproductive Technologies in Hungary”], *Demográfia* 2023/2–3: 205–233, <https://doi.org/10.21543/DEM.66.2-3.4>

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ Among single women, 64.7% consider it acceptable; among women over 40, 54.4%; and in the case of lesbian women, 50.6%. The high figures reflect an accepting attitude and do not mean that respondents would actually make use of these procedures; in the event of infertility, 55% would choose medical assistance, 27% would adopt, and 17% would accept childlessness. Responses regarding surrogacy were more divided: 17% find it fully acceptable, 56% find it acceptable to some extent, and 27% reject it completely. Among those who accept it, the majority (70.4%) consider medical necessity a legitimate reason (not fear of childbirth, nor this method of starting a family for two gay men). See: *ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2366–2372.

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²¹⁷ Carl Campanile, “Surrogate Carrying Triplets Sues to Stop Forced Abortion,” *New York Post*, 4 January 2016, <https://nypost.com/2016/01/04/surrogate-mom-carrying-triplets-sues-to-stop-forced-abortion/>

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²²⁰ Karen Bogenschneider, “Family Policy. Why We Need It and How to Communicate Its Value,” *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/egm11/Bogenschneider-paper.pdf>

²²¹ Miriam Cates, “Setting the Record Straight: My Full Thoughts on Family Policy,” *PoliticsHome*, 22 February 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/35aur27r>

²²² Michael N. Jacobs, “A Prudent Response to a Continent Going Mad. A Theoretical Analysis of Hungary’s Pro-Family Policies,” *Hungarian Conservative* 5, no. 1 (2025): 92.

²²³ For research related to this, see Gere, “Családszemlélet Európában.”

²²⁴ This arises in several debates, e.g., in Dénes Csurgó’s interview discussion with Szandra Kramarics and G. Csaba Tóth: “Az anyák adómentessége nem állítja meg a népességfogyást” [“Tax Exemptions for Mothers Do Not Halt Population Decline”], *YouTube*, 11 March 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZteUbEoLBLY>

²²⁵ Fruzsina Előd, “A forint borús kilátásaitól a születésszám megroggyásán át a szárnyaló piacokig – az év ábrájai 2024-ben” [“From the Forint’s Gloomy Outlook to the Slump in Birth Numbers and Booming Markets – The Year of 2024 in Figures”], *Telex*, 28 December 2024, <https://telex.hu/gazdasag/2024/12/28/elemezok-szerint-ezek-voltak-az-ev-chartjai-2024-ben>

²²⁶ Zsuzsanna Makay, Balázs Kapitány, and Fruzsina Ökrös, “Családtámogatás, női munkavállalás” [“Family Support and Female Employment”], in Monostori–Öri, *Demográfiai portré* 2024, 89.

²²⁷ Előd, “A forint borús kilátásaitól.”

²²⁸ Szabó–Morvai, *Evaluation of Family Policy Measures*, 8.

²²⁹ Ibid., 18, 54.

²³⁰ Ibid., 54.

²³¹ Zsolt Spéder, Lívia Murinkó, and Livia Sz. Oláh, “Cash Support vs. Tax Incentives: The Differential Impact of Policy Interventions on Third Births in Contemporary Hungary,” *A Journal of Demography* 74, no. 1 (2020): 39–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2019.1694165>

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²³³ András G. Tóth, “A népességváltozás mozgatórugói a visegrádi országokban 1990 és 2020 között” [“The Drivers of Population Change in the Visegrád Countries between 1990 and 2020”], in István György Tóth – András Gábor – Márton Medgyesi (eds.), *Társadalmi Riport 2024 [Social Report 2024]* (Budapest: Tárki, 2025), 285.

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²⁸⁸ In this case, the Christian integrative approach is not identical with Christian integralism (which is partially a matter of political philosophy).

²⁸⁹ Significant ideological differences exist on cultural issues and one can find good examples in the context of strong societal pluralism as well, see, Ivana Greco, “Finding Common Ground in Family and Childcare Policy,” *The Home Front*, 24 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4f4sxynr>

²⁹⁰ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 49.

²⁹¹ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 90.

²⁹² An examination of long-term trends reveals that people were not wealthier nor living in greater prosperity in 1950, yet more children were born. Géza Tóth’s study (Tóth, *A népszámlálások vallási adatainak eredményei térképeken*) also shows that growth in per-capita income correlates—although only slightly—with declining fertility. Renowned English expert Louise Perry likewise argues that for the existence of a link between increasing wealth and decreasing fertility: in countries that reach a certain level of economic prosperity, fertility almost inevitably falls. “Family Formation and the Future – A Conference on the Geopolitical, Cultural, and Legal Dimensions of Demographic Change – Day 1 Second Half,” *Danube Institute*, 4 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2uhawkb6>

²⁹³ Balázs Reizer, “A gyermekvállalás hatása a család jövedelmére Magyarországon” [“The Impact of Childbearing on Household Income in Hungary”], *Demográfia* 2011/2–3: 160–175, cited in Tóth, *A népszámlálások vallási adatainak eredményei térképeken* [*The Results of Religious Census Data on Maps*], 106.

²⁹⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1882

²⁹⁵ “Master’s Degree in Marriage and Family: Family Intervention and Research,” *Universidad de Navarra*, <https://en.unav.edu/web/masters-degree-in-marriage-and-family>

²⁹⁶ Even Pope Francis strikes a self-critical tone regarding the Church’s communication about families. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 41.

²⁹⁷ One can find good examples even among multinational companies that differ from “Have one more Hungarian”-type initiatives. “Best Ever Coca Cola Commercial (2013) – Coke Life from Argentina,” [youtube.com/watch?v=xPb1t3jU3sI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPb1t3jU3sI)

²⁹⁸ Pope Francis highlights the virtue of tenderness within marriage and the family. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 28.

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Axioma Center is a Christian think tank whose mission is to exercise an influence on society through research, education and media activity grounded in faith and reason. Our goal is individual and societal flourishing, the protection of human dignity and the promotion of the common good.

We believe that a responsible society is attentive to people's physical and spiritual needs. This outlook must be reflected in the legal order, culture and the activities of religious and civil communities alike.

We work for a civilization of love, where human dignity is protected. This is the purpose behind Axioma Center's third study, *Family and Family Policy in Hungary: A Christian Integrative Perspective*.

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This volume is a fundamental summary for professional debate, but can also be recommended as an introduction to anyone interested in the situation of Hungarian families, whether out of mere curiosity.

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Written with academic rigor yet in an accessible style, this study offers much more than the facts. It provides a perspective and context which can help one make sense of the societal, demographic, economic, legal, political, and even health-related phenomena of our age as related to the family, in harmony with our Christian worldview, while also serving as a guide to further reflection.

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The principles articulated within this volume aim to assist in creating such an environment, which can serve as a home for our comprehensive human flourishing.

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