

# Not Only Births, But Also Intentions: The Decline of Fertility Intentions and Increasing Uncertainties in Sweden, 2012-2021

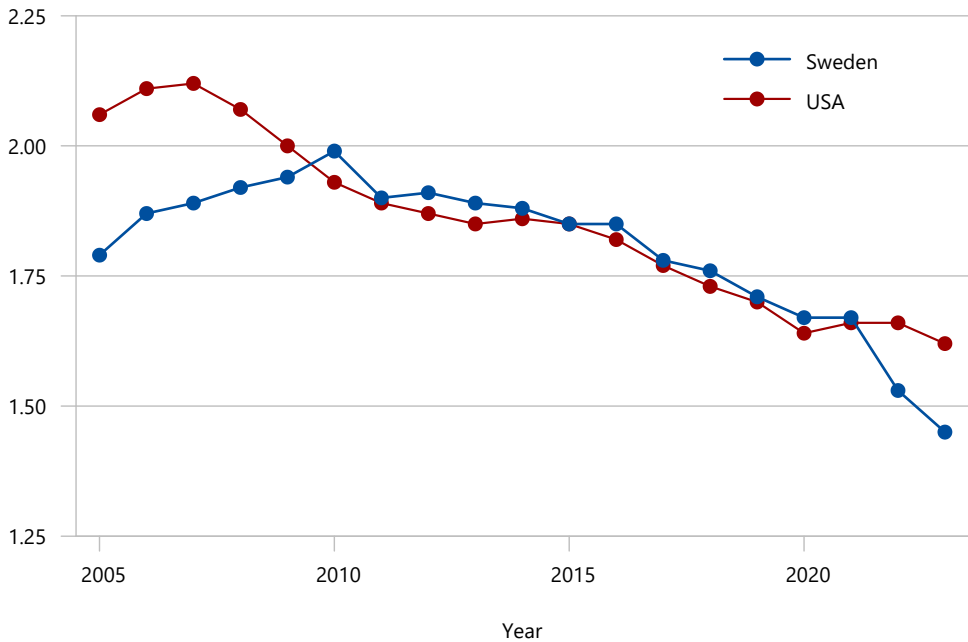
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**Abstract:** The decline in total fertility rates in Western countries, particularly the Nordic countries, has puzzled demographers. Researchers assume that the decline is associated with increasing perceptions of uncertainties about the future. In this study, we explore whether childbearing intentions have also declined and whether individuals have become more uncertain about future childbearing. To do so, we compare childbearing intentions expressed by participants in the 2012 and 2021 Swedish Generations and Gender Surveys. We present multinomial logistic regressions of respondents' answers to the question whether they definitely or probably intend to have a(nother) child in the next three years and (if not) whether they (ever) intend to have a(nother) child in the future. Our findings indicate that the intentions to definitely have a(nother) child have declined across socio-demographic groups, and that uncertainties about future childbearing have increased. These changes were particularly pronounced among young people and among childless respondents, indicating a growing indecision as well as a growing tendency to remain childfree among groups that are relevant for future fertility development. The decline in intentions and the increase in uncertainties about childbearing indicate that the ongoing fertility decline cannot be classified as a temporary phenomenon. Rather, the results suggest that the decline will continue, because childbearing intentions are rarely fully realized. Our results are a step toward unraveling the puzzle of declining fertility in the Nordic region and beyond. The findings reveal that individuals have become more uncertain about future childbearing and that they have become more likely to retreat from childbearing.

**Keywords:** Fertility · Fertility intentions · Fertility decline · Childbearing · Sweden

## 1 Background

Since 2010, many developed societies across the world have experienced a continuous decline in their total fertility rates (TFR). In several countries, including Sweden, the TFR has fallen to the lowest level ever recorded (Sweden, 2025: 1.42). This simultaneous decline in fertility rates has surprised demographers. In the case of Sweden, the

**Fig. 1:** Total Fertility Rates, Sweden and the USA, 2005-2023

Source: The Human Fertility Database

decline is particularly astonishing, because Sweden is often regarded as a model country of how to retain fertility through gender-egalitarian, employment-oriented family policies. The declines seem unrelated to local conditions. They are observed in countries with very different fertility levels and different social, economic, and welfare contexts, such as Latin and North America, Southern and Western Europe, and East Asia. As an example, Figure 1 demonstrates the synchronized declines in total fertility in Sweden and the USA during the 2010s.

Analyses of Swedish register data show that fertility rates have declined across all regions, ages, and socio-economic groups. However, this decline is primarily due to childless couples staying childless (*Ohlsson-Wijk/Andersson 2022, 2025; Cantalini et al. 2024*). Similar developments have been observed in the other Nordic countries (*Hellstrand et al. 2021, 2022*). Because there are no evident structural causes of the decline, such as a recession, demographers assume that couples' motives for childbearing may have changed. Specifically, perceived uncertainties about the future may have become a more pertinent factor in childbearing decisions (*Vignoli et al. 2020a/b; Comolli/Vignoli 2021; Comolli et al. 2021; Neyer et al. 2022; Comolli 2023*).

If uncertainty about the future is a driver of the fertility decline, one would expect individuals' intentions to have children to become more uncertain as well. If so, intentions to "definitely have a(nother) child" should decrease, and intentions to "probably have or probably not have a(nother) child" should increase. An increase in

“probably have a(nother) child” may reflect the postponement of childbearing, while an increase in “probably not have a(nother) child” may signal individuals’ growing reluctance to have (more) children. Our study pays particular attention to changes in such uncertainties regarding intentions to have a child.

A related study from Norway demonstrates a recent decline in the positive short-term and general fertility intentions in that context (*Dommermuth et al.* 2025). In our study, we focus on Sweden, a country that, like Norway, has had a favorable socio-economic environment for childbearing throughout the period of fertility decline. We extend the focus of the Norwegian study to address the extent to which uncertainties in childbearing intentions have increased during the recent period of fertility decline. Our study is based on comparable data from the Generations and Gender Surveys that were fielded in Sweden in 2012 and 2021, covering the crucial phase of the recent fertility decline. In our study, we compare intentions voiced in 2012 and 2021, differentiated by common demographic indicators. To assess the implications of our results, we first briefly recapitulate some essentials of fertility intentions, before presenting the data, core results, and our conclusions.

## 2 Essentials of fertility intentions

Demographers commonly regard fertility intentions as a valid proxy for future childbearing outcomes (*Westoff/Ryder* 1977). They also agree that short-term intentions, that is intentions to have a(nother) child within a specified foreseeable time period, are a more accurate predictor of actual behavior than intentions voiced with no given time frame (*Ajzen/Klobas* 2013). We additionally consider the certainty or uncertainty of any expressed fertility intentions, and the degree to which intentions are realized.

To capture the certainty or uncertainty of individuals’ childbearing intentions, fertility surveys usually ask respondents if they definitely or probably intend to have a(nother) child (*Thomson/Brandreth* 1995). An increase in “probable” responses indicates greater hesitancy or ambivalence about having a child (*Barker/Buber-Ennser* 2024). To assess whether individuals are more uncertain about having children or have withdrawn from having any (further), one needs to look at short-term and long-term changes in “definite” as well as “probable” childbearing intentions.

Studies on the realization of fertility intentions consistently show that the intention to not have (any more) children is a reliable predictor of subsequent childbearing behavior. Between 94 percent and 98 percent of women with negative intentions do not give birth in the subsequent three to five years (*Noack/Østby* 2002; *Spéder/Kapitány* 2009; *Régnier-Loilier/Vignoli* 2011). In contrast, positive intentions to have a(nother) child systematically overestimate actual childbearing. Only between 30 percent and 50 percent of women who state that they intend to have a child, and about 66 percent who definitely intend to have one, realize their plans in the next three to five years. Even when observed over the rest of their reproductive life course, only three-quarters of women who intend to have a(nother) child actually do have one (*Noack/Østby* 2002; *Spéder/Kapitány* 2009; *Régnier-Loilier/Vignoli* 2011;

*Schoen et al.* 1999; *Toulemon/Testa* 2005; *Buber-Ennser et al.* 2014). Any decline in the intentions to have a(nother) child, and any increase in the intentions not to have one, is a clear sign that fertility is or will be declining. Similarly, any increase in uncertainties about having a(nother) child signals a fertility decline, because only some of the positive intentions will be realized.

### 3 Childbearing intentions in Sweden during the 2010s: data and method

We used data from wave 1 of the Swedish Generations and Gender Surveys from 2012 (GG2012) and 2021 (GG2021). The GG2012 is part of the first round of the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) and was carried out via telephone interviews with a connected postal or online questionnaire. 9,688 women and men aged 18-79 participated in the telephone interview, with a response rate of 54 percent (*Thomson et al.* 2015). The GG2021 is part of the second round of the GGP and was a web-based survey with the option of postal participation. 8,082 women and men aged 18-59 participated in this survey, with a response rate of 27 percent (*Neyer et al.* 2024b). The response rate in 2021 was thus lower than in 2012, but in the range of other EU-countries that participated in the second round of the GGP (*Gauthier et al.* 2025). Both Swedish GGs are linked to register data that provide information on, e.g., respondents' age, marital status, place of residence, educational attainment, employment, and number of children. We concentrated on women and men aged 20-40 who answered the questions on childbearing intentions. The fertility intentions of persons under 20 may reflect social norms rather than realistic future plans, and being under 40 is a requirement for women for receiving IVF treatment in Sweden. 20-40 is therefore an age range in which intentions to have a child (in the next three years or ever) have a credible chance of being realized. For consistency, we applied the same age range to both women and men. Respondents who claimed that they or their partner were definitively unable to have a child or who were pregnant were not asked about fertility intentions and were thus excluded from the analyses. We also excluded those with missing intentions or missing values for any of the other variables that we looked at. The final sample comprises 2,618 respondents of GG2012 and 2,580 participants of GG2021.

Both Swedish GGs asked whether participants intended to have a child in the next three years, with the same response options "definitely yes", "probably yes", "definitely not", "probably not". Those who chose "probably not" or "definitely not" (1,635 respondents in GG2012 and 1,708 in GG2021), were asked whether they intended to have any (more) children at all, with the same four response options. The Swedish GG is the only survey that kept these options unaltered between the two survey rounds; other countries followed the GGP script to add a new category "Unsure" to the set of intention questions.

In our presentation, we first present the overall weighted frequencies of childbearing intentions as voiced by the survey participants in 2012 and 2021. We then proceed to present the results from a set of multinomial logistic regressions based

**Tab. 1:** Sample sizes for our study

	GGS	
	2012	2021
Origin sample	9,688	8,082
Step 1: keep respondents aged 20-40	3,184	3,284
Step 2: exclude those (or partner) currently pregnant	2,967	3,068
Step 3: exclude (a) those (or partner) physically unable to have children & (b) missing values in fertility intentions indicators	2,626	2,643
Step 4: exclude those with missing values in other variables	2,618	2,580

Source: own calculation

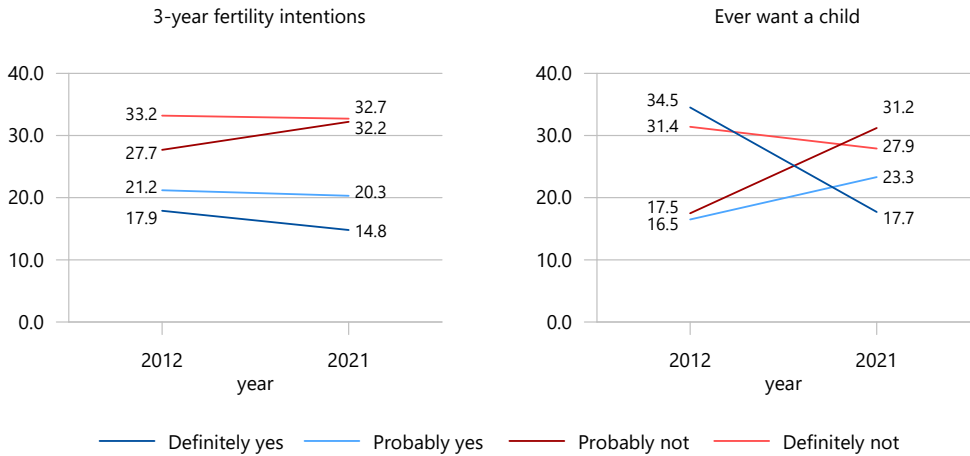
on the distributions of the four intention options and a set of socio-demographic variables that comprise: survey year, gender, age group, educational attainment, childbearing parity, and partnership status. The results are presented as predicted probabilities based on the interaction between survey year and each variable of interest, with controls for the remaining variables. The corresponding univariate statistics are provided in Appendix Tables A1 and A2, see also *Neyer et al.* (2024a).

#### 4 Intentions of GGS respondents to have a(nother) child in 2012 and 2021

We first present the distribution of the respondents in 2012 and 2021 for the intention to have a child in the next three years or ever in the future in Figure 2. Among all respondents in our final sample, intentions to “definitely” have a child in the next three years decreased by 3.1 percentage points, and intentions to “probably not” have a child increased by 4.5 percentage points (Fig. 2, left panel). These changes appear relatively modest in comparison to the changes in the long-term fertility intentions among those who did not intend to have a child in the next three years: The latter group has become much more reserved about ever having one (Fig. 2, right panel). Their intentions to “definitely” have a child later on declined by 16.8 percentage points, and the intentions to “probably not” have a child increased by 13.7 percentage points.

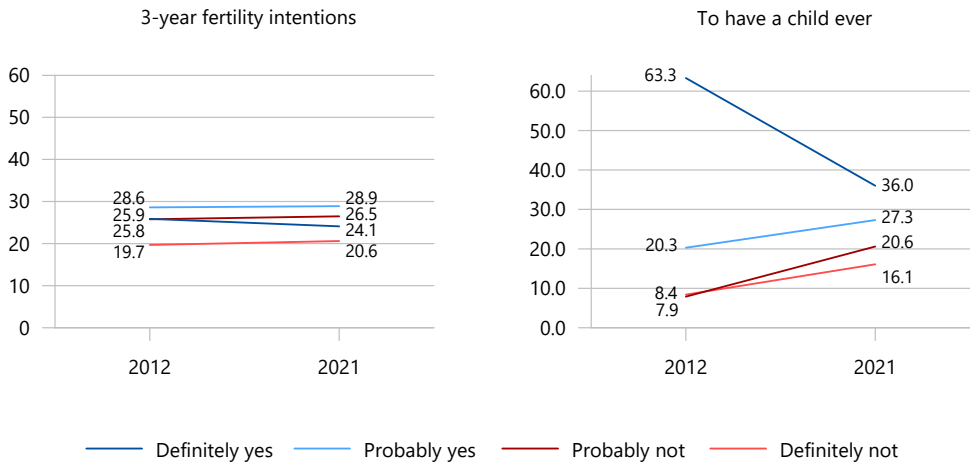
Because previous research found the fertility decline in the 2010s to be concentrated among childless couples (*Ohlsson-Wijk/Andersson* 2022, 2025; *Cantalini et al.* 2024), we also introduced the corresponding frequencies for childless individuals living in a union (Fig. 3). We found hardly any changes in the short-term intentions of childless individuals who are cohabiting, married, or in a living-apart-together relationship (Fig. 3, left panel). In 2012 and 2021, slightly more than half of them intended to have their first child in the next three years. Among those who did not plan to have a child in the near future, however, intentions to ever become a parent declined markedly and intentions to “definitely not” or “probably not” ever have a child increased (Fig. 3, right panel).

**Fig. 2:** Intentions to have a child in the next three years or ever (for those not planning to have a child in the next three years), 2012 and 2021 (%)



Source: The 2012 and 2021 Swedish Generations and Gender Surveys, own calculation

**Fig. 3:** Intentions to have a child in the next three years or ever (for those not planning to have a child in the next three years), men and women in childless couples, 2012 and 2021 (%)



Source: The 2012 and 2021 Swedish Generations and Gender Surveys, own calculation

We now proceed to present the results of our multivariate analyses, with the results for short-term fertility intentions displayed in Table 2, and those for long-term intentions among those with negative short-term intentions in Table 3. Looking at changes in the short-term intentions, we found that the option “definitely yes” has declined across all groups of respondents. However, these declines were not accompanied by a shift towards the option “probably yes.” For almost all socio-demographic categories, the “probably yes” option also declined. The results thus indicate that respondents in 2021 were clearly less inclined to have a(nother) child in the upcoming three years than were respondents in 2012. Instead, compared to 2012, the GGS2021 participants were leaning distinctly more towards “probably not” have a(nother) child in the next three years. In 2021, respondents in all presented categories, expressed greater doubts about (further) childbearing in the next three years than the respondents in 2012.

The changes in the intentions to have a(nother) child in the next three years may indicate that postponement became more widespread during the 2010s. If so, this should be reflected by an increase, or at least stability, in the intention to have a(nother) child later in the life course among those who did not plan to have a child in the next three years. Table 3, however, reveals no sign of an increase in the plans for future childbearing, which would have suggested a potential reversal of the fertility decline. On the contrary, between 2012 and 2021, the proportion of individuals who opted for “definitely” having a child later in life declined markedly among those who did not intend to have a child in the next three years. This trend was led by the 20-30-year olds and the childless, two categories that are particularly relevant for future fertility development. There is also a growing uncertainty. In particular, the intention to “probably not” ever have a(nother) child increased substantially (i.e., 8-36 percentage points) across all socio-demographic categories. The overall development of childbearing intentions thus points to a further decline in fertility rather than an end to it.

## 5 Conclusion and implications

This study demonstrates that the fertility decline observed in Sweden since the beginning of the 2010s was paralleled by a drop in childbearing intentions and an increase in uncertainty about having (further) children. The study confirms the findings of decreasing fertility intentions observed in Norway (*Dommermuth et al.* 2025) and underlines the role of increasing uncertainty in childbearing considerations. Our findings may also be exemplary for other countries with similarly declining TFRs during the past decade.

Three results are particularly noteworthy. First, short- and long-term definite childbearing intentions have declined across all socio-demographic groups. This aligns with the socio-economically homogeneous decline in childbearing propensities that occurred in Sweden in the 2010s (*Ohlsson-Wijk/Andersson* 2022, 2025). The decline in intentions to “definitely have” a(nother) child suggests that the depressed fertility of the early 2020s will likely persist in the near future. We also

**Tab. 2:** Predicated probabilities of intentions to have a child in the next three years, 2012 and 2021, by gender (a), age group (b), education (c), parity (d), and partnership status (e)

	2012		2021		Diff (%)		2012		2021		Diff (%)	
<b>(a) Gender</b>												
	Men						Women					
Definitely yes	13.6	(11.9,15.3)	11.6	(9.9,13.4)	-2.0		20.4	(18.4,22.3)	16.4	(14.7,18.2)	-4.0	
Probably yes	21.0	(18.8,23.1)	18.7	(16.5,21.0)	-2.3		20.1	(18.0,22.2)	20.0	(18.0,22.0)	-0.1	
Probably not	30.7	(28.2,33.2)	33.5	(30.8,36.2)	2.8		24.9	(22.6,27.2)	32.0	(29.7,34.4)	7.1	
Definitely not	34.8	(32.3,37.2)	36.1	(33.5,38.8)	1.3		34.7	(32.3,37.0)	31.5	(29.3,33.7)	-3.2	
<b>(b) Age group</b>												
	20-30						31-40					
Definitely yes	17.3	(15.7,19.0)	12.0	(10.6,13.5)	-5.3		16.7	(15.1,18.3)	16.3	(14.8,17.9)	-0.4	
Probably yes	22.9	(21.0,24.9)	20.3	(18.4,22.2)	-2.6		17.7	(15.9,19.4)	18.7	(17.0,20.5)	1.0	
Probably not	28.4	(26.4,30.4)	34.6	(32.3,36.9)	6.2		26.9	(24.8,29.0)	31.0	(28.9,33.1)	4.1	
Definitely not	31.3	(29.3,33.3)	33.0	(30.8,35.3)	1.7		38.7	(36.5,40.9)	33.9	(31.9,36.0)	-4.8	
<b>(c) Education</b>												
	Upper secondary						Post -secondary					
Definitely yes	14.0	(12.5,15.4)	10.0	(8.7,11.3)	-4.0		16.2	(13.0,19.3)	12.2	(9.6,14.8)	-4.0	
Probably yes	18.8	(17.0,20.6)	16.3	(14.5,18.2)	-2.5		18.9	(15.3,22.4)	16.7	(13.5,19.9)	-2.2	
Probably not	28.3	(26.3,30.4)	33.6	(31.1,36.1)	5.3		28.2	(24.2,32.1)	33.3	(29.0,37.6)	5.1	
Definitely not	38.9	(36.8,41.1)	40.1	(37.6,42.5)	1.2		36.8	(32.7,40.9)	37.7	(33.5,42.0)	0.9	
	Tertiary											
Definitely yes	21.5	(19.6,23.5)	17.9	(16.2,19.6)	-3.6							
Probably yes	23.3	(21.1,25.5)	22.3	(20.3,24.2)	-1.0							
Probably not	26.8	(24.6,29.0)	31.9	(29.7,34.0)	5.1							
Definitely not	28.3	(26.2,30.5)	28.0	(26.0,29.9)	-0.3							

Tab. 2: Continuation

	2012	2021	Diff (%)	2012	2021	Diff (%)
(d) Parity						
		0		1		
Definitely yes	17.3 (15.7,18.9)	14.2 (12.8,15.7)	-3.1	42.0 (38.0,46.0)	36.8 (32.8,40.8)	-5.2
Probably yes	23.7 (21.7,25.7)	21.7 (19.9,23.5)	-2.0	27.8 (24.2,31.5)	28.0 (24.3,31.7)	0.2
Probably not	28.6 (26.6,30.7)	33.3 (31.3,35.4)	4.7	17.0 (14.2,19.9)	21.6 (18.2,25.0)	4.6
Definitely not	30.3 (28.3,32.3)	30.7 (28.8,32.7)	0.4	13.2 (10.6,15.7)	13.6 (10.9,16.3)	0.4
		2+				
Definitely yes	5.7 (4.4,7.1)	3.7 (2.8,4.7)	-2.0			
Probably yes	11.4 (9.6,13.2)	9.8 (8.1,11.4)	-1.6			
Probably not	30.7 (28.0,33.3)	36.4 (33.5,39.4)	5.7			
Definitely not	52.2 (49.3,55.1)	50.1 (47.0,53.1)	-2.1			
(e) Partnership		Single/LAT			Cohabiting	
Definitely yes	6.6 (5.3,7.8)	4.4 (3.5,5.4)	-2.2	27.3 (24.9,29.7)	22.2 (20.1,24.4)	-5.1
Probably yes	18.9 (16.8,20.9)	15.5 (13.7,17.3)	-3.4	27.1 (24.6,29.5)	26.4 (24.1,28.7)	-0.7
Probably not	34.1 (31.7,36.6)	39.2 (36.5,41.8)	5.1	22.8 (20.7,25.0)	28.5 (26.2,30.9)	5.7
Definitely not	40.4 (37.9,43.0)	40.9 (38.3,43.5)	0.5	22.8 (20.8,24.8)	22.9 (20.9,24.9)	0.1
		Married				
Definitely yes	19.2 (17.1,21.3)	17.3 (15.3,19.4)	-1.9			
Probably yes	14.4 (12.4,16.5)	14.1 (12.0,16.1)	-0.3			
Probably not	24.6 (22.1,27.1)	28.9 (26.1,31.8)	4.3			
Definitely not	41.8 (39.0,44.5)	39.7 (36.8,42.5)	-2.1			

Note: point estimates and 95% confidence intervals in parentheses.

Source: The 2012 and 2021 Swedish Generations and Gender Surveys, own calculation

**Tab. 3:** Predicated probabilities of intentions to ever have a child among those not planning to have a child in the next three years, 2012 and 2021, by gender (a), age group (b), education (c), parity (d), and partnership status (e)

	2012	2021	Diff (%)	2012	2021	Diff (%)
<b>(a) Gender</b>						
		Men		Women		
Definitely yes	37.8 (35.4,40.3)	17.7 (15.3,20.2)	-20.1	29.2 (26.9,31.4)	18.9 (16.8,21.1)	-10.3
Probably yes	17.3 (14.9,19.8)	24.7 (21.9,27.5)	7.4	13.9 (11.6,16.2)	18.4 (16.1,20.7)	4.5
Probably not	17.2 (14.8,19.6)	32.3 (29.2,35.3)	15.1	18.7 (16.1,21.3)	31.7 (28.9,34.5)	13.0
Definitely not	27.6 (25.2,30.1)	25.3 (22.4,28.1)	-2.3	38.3 (35.5,41.0)	31.0 (28.2,33.7)	-7.3
<b>(b) Age group</b>						
		20-30		31-40		
Definitely yes	63.1 (60.0,66.2)	35.8 (32.6,39.0)	-27.3	4.2 (2.9,5.4)	1.8 (1.0,2.7)	-2.4
Probably yes	22.7 (19.9,25.6)	35.1 (31.9,38.3)	12.4	8.6 (6.7,10.4)	8.2 (6.5,10.0)	-0.4
Probably not	7.2 (5.5,8.9)	15.9 (13.4,18.3)	8.7	28.6 (25.6,31.7)	47.3 (44.0,50.6)	18.7
Definitely not	7.0 (5.3,8.6)	13.2 (11.0,15.5)	6.2	58.6 (55.4,61.9)	42.7 (39.5,45.9)	-15.9
<b>(c) Education</b>						
		Upper secondary		Post-secondary		
Definitely yes	40.4 (38.0,42.7)	24.0 (21.2,26.8)	-16.4	42.0 (35.9,48.1)	26.7 (20.9,32.6)	-15.3
Probably yes	15.7 (13.4,18.1)	26.0 (23.0,29.0)	10.3	18.3 (12.7,24.0)	27.8 (21.7,33.9)	9.5
Probably not	15.3 (13.1,17.5)	25.3 (22.4,28.3)	10.0	16.6 (11.3,21.8)	24.6 (18.7,30.5)	8.0
Definitely not	28.6 (26.3,30.9)	24.7 (21.8,27.5)	-3.9	23.1 (17.8,28.3)	20.9 (15.5,26.2)	-2.2
		Tertiary				
Definitely yes	20.4 (17.9,22.8)	11.1 (9.2,13.0)	-9.3			
Probably yes	14.7 (12.0,17.5)	15.3 (13.0,17.6)	0.6			
Probably not	22.5 (19.2,25.8)	40.0 (36.7,43.3)	17.5			
Definitely not	42.4 (38.9,45.8)	33.6 (30.5,36.7)	-8.8			

**Tab. 3:** Continuation

	2012	2021	Diff (%)	2012	2021	Diff (%)				
(d) Parity										
				0						
Definitely yes	60.9	(57.8,63.9)	30.5	(27.8,33.2)	-30.4	9.9	(4.5,15.3)	0.9	(-0.8,2.5)	-9.0
Probably yes	23.3	(20.5,26.1)	32.7	(29.9,35.6)	9.4	17.8	(10.6,25.1)	11.2	(5.6,16.8)	-6.6
Probably not	8.5	(6.7,10.2)	20.0	(17.7,22.4)	11.5	23.8	(15.5,32.0)	60.3	(51.5,69.2)	36.5
Definitely not	7.3	(5.7,9.0)	16.7	(14.5,18.9)	9.4	48.5	(39.2,57.9)	27.6	(19.5,35.7)	-20.9
	2+							1		
Definitely yes	1.2	(0.4,2.0)	0.2	(-0.2,0.5)	-1.0					
Probably yes	5.2	(3.5,6.8)	2.8	(1.5,4.2)	-2.4					
Probably not	29.5	(26.1,33)	47.6	(43.5,51.7)	18.1					
Definitely not	64.1	(60.5,67.7)	49.4	(45.3,53.5)	-14.7					
(e) Partnership										
				Single/LAT						
Definitely yes	54.8	(51.7,58.0)	27.0	(24.1,29.9)	-27.8	29.7	(26.6,32.7)	18.4	(15.6,21.3)	-11.3
Probably yes	24.0	(21.0,27.0)	33.2	(30.0,36.3)	9.2	12.6	(9.6,15.7)	16.2	(13.2,19.3)	3.6
Probably not	9.5	(7.6,11.5)	22.8	(20.0,25.5)	13.3	20.2	(16.6,23.8)	35.5	(31.5,39.4)	15.3
Definitely not	11.7	(9.6,13.7)	17.1	(14.6,19.6)	5.4	37.5	(33.6,41.3)	29.9	(26.1,33.6)	-7.6
				Married						
Definitely yes	2.6	(1.4,3.9)	1.0	(0.1,1.9)	-1.6					
Probably yes	4.8	(2.9,6.8)	3.7	(1.9,5.5)	-1.1					
Probably not	29.5	(25.3,33.7)	46.1	(41.3,51.0)	16.6					
Definitely not	63.0	(58.6,67.3)	49.1	(44.3,54)	-13.9					

Note: point estimates and 95% confidence intervals in parentheses.

Source: The 2012 and 2021 Swedish Generations and Gender Surveys, own calculation

need to consider that only a fraction of positive intentions are realized. The average number of intended children in the GGSs dropped from 2.26 in 2012 to 1.79 in 2021<sup>1</sup>, even though the mean number of respondents' children was higher in 2012 (0.81) than in 2021 (0.63). Together, these findings support previous projections of fewer children being born and a continuation of the fertility decline (*Hellstrand et al.* 2021).

Second, compared to 2012, respondents in 2021 were more uncertain about whether to have a(nother) child in the next three years or ever in the future, and they moved more towards "probably not" have a(nother) child than towards "probably have" one. These increases in childbearing uncertainties may reflect a growing feeling of uncertainty in the population, as hypothesized by *Vignoli et al.* (2020a).

Third, definite intentions to ever have a(nother) child have declined particularly strongly among the young (20-30-year old) and the childless respondents. This suggests that remaining childfree has become an option for an increasing group of individuals, a tendency that was also found in the Norwegian study by *Dommermuth et al.* (2025). The retreat from envisioning future parenthood signals a fundamental, and perhaps generational, shift in family planning intentions and behavior in Sweden and the Nordic region (see also *Bergström* 2019; *Mollborn/Billingsley* 2024; *Obern et al.* 2025).

One may contend that the GGS2021 was carried out during the final phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, which may have negatively influenced childbearing intentions. During the months of the fieldwork (March to July 2021), however, Covid-19 infection rates were low, and enrollment in vaccination programs peaked. *Bujard and Andersson* (2024) argue that uncertainty about the effects of the vaccination on pregnancies motivated some women to postpone pregnancy until after they had received their vaccination. This should have increased the number of intentions to have a child in the next three years or ever in the future, rather than decreased it.

Our results have significant implications for fertility research. Despite the comprehensive Swedish family policies and Sweden's strong economy, individuals have become less definite and more uncertain about having children. This underlines the need to seek explanations beyond the common economy-policy frames. The recently ventilated notions of economic uncertainty (*Vignoli et al.* 2020a/b), intensified parenthood (*Mollborn/Billingsley* 2024), subjective turns (*Neyer et al.* 2022), and social-media influence on partnership formation (*Bergström* 2019) are promising directions to capture newly emerging phenomena and provide insight into why people have become more hesitant or unwilling to have children.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2012, the question on the number of children ever wanted was only answered by those who filled in an additional postal questionnaire. The average number of children is thus calculated from a smaller sample than the one we otherwise used.

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## Appendix

**Tab. A1:** Intentions to have a child in the next three years, 2012 and 2021, by gender (a), age group (b), education (c), parity (d), and partnership status (e)

	2012	2021	2012	2021	2012	2021
(a) Gender	Men		Women			
Definitely not	33.3	35.5	33.1	30.1		
Probably not	30.3	33.0	24.9	31.4		
Probably yes	21.9	19.6	20.5	20.9		
Definitely yes	14.5	11.9	21.5	17.6		
(b) Age group	20-30		31-40			
Definitely not	27.8	36.1	39.9	29.5		
Probably not	29.5	32.6	25.4	31.8		
Probably yes	23.9	20.0	17.9	20.5		
Definitely yes	18.7	11.2	16.8	18.3		
(c) Education	Upper secondary		Post-secondary		Tertiary	
Definitely not	35.2	40.2	34.1	36.2	29.6	23.7
Probably not	28.6	32.8	29.9	31.7	25.5	31.5
Probably yes	20.8	16.2	18.5	18.4	22.7	25.2
Definitely yes	15.4	10.8	17.5	13.7	22.1	19.5
(d) Parity	0		1		2+	
Definitely not	27.8	32.1	14.1	11.5	53.4	46.2
Probably not	30.2	31.5	15.9	23.8	28.1	38.7
Probably yes	24.8	21.4	24.8	32.2	12.2	10.6
Definitely yes	17.2	15.0	45.2	32.5	6.3	4.5
(e) Partnership	Single/LAT		Cohabiting		Married	
Definitely not	37.4	43.5	23.0	20.2	40.7	35.3
Probably not	34.1	38.9	23.9	26.8	22.3	29.4
Probably yes	20.5	13.8	26.4	29.6	15.3	15.7
Definitely yes	8.0	3.9	26.7	23.4	21.8	19.7

Source: The 2012 and 2021 Swedish Generations and Gender Surveys, own calculation

**Tab. A2:** Intentions to ever have a child among those not planning to have a child in the next three years, 2012 and 2021, by gender (a), age group (b), education (c), parity (d), and partnership status (e)

	2012	2021	2012	2021	2012	2021
(a) Gender	Men		Women			
Definitely not	26.2	25.7	37.6	30.2		
Probably not	16.9	30.4	18.2	32.0		
Probably yes	17.9	26.2	14.8	20.1		
Definitely yes	39.0	17.7	29.3	17.6		
(b) Age group	20-30		31-40			
Definitely not	7.3	15.3	57.5	41.4		
Probably not	7.3	17.4	28.6	46.0		
Probably yes	23.4	35.4	9.0	10.2		
Definitely yes	62.0	31.9	4.8	2.4		
(c) Education	Upper secondary		Post-secondary		Tertiary	
Definitely not	28.3	26.6	20.8	21.1	41.0	31.3
Probably not	15.6	26.5	15.7	27.2	22.0	39.0
Probably yes	16.7	26.5	18.7	28.0	15.4	17.4
Definitely yes	39.5	20.4	44.8	23.7	21.5	12.3
(d) Parity	0		1		2+	
Definitely not	7.7	18.0	45.1	26.3	63.6	48.9
Probably not	8.7	20.6	23.7	58.7	29.3	47.1
Probably yes	23.5	33.6	20.4	14.2	5.6	3.7
Definitely yes	60.1	27.8	10.8	0.8	1.5	0.3
(e) Partnership	Single/LAT		Cohabiting		Married	
Definitely not	12.7	18.5	36.2	28.9	61.3	48.6
Probably not	9.8	22.8	19.4	36.2	29.9	44.5
Probably yes	23.8	34.2	13.9	17.3	5.7	5.4
Definitely yes	53.7	24.5	30.5	17.7	3.1	1.5

Source: The 2012 and 2021 Swedish Generations and Gender Surveys, own calculation

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