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Fertility decline in Albania: interplay with societal crisis and subsequent consolidation

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Abstract

Cross-sectional comparisons of the decline in fertility in former socialist countries point to a bi-phasic response with an initial crisis-induced limitation at higher parities, followed by the postponement of fertility during economic and political consolidation. Through the use of birth histories from the Reproductive Health Survey 2002 and the Demographic and Health Survey 2008/9, we investigated the extent to which this schematic model withstands a longitudinal investigation in Albania. Trends in synthetic parity progression ratios since 1993, as well as socioeconomic differentials, suggest the importance of the social and cultural context in terms of its influence on demographic responses to the crisis in the 1990s. The anticipation of marriage and births brought about an initial increase in fertility; childbearing at higher parities did not drop before the financial crisis in 1997. During the subsequent economic and political consolidation, more highly-educated city dwellers began to postpone their marriages and births, thereby sustaining the recent decline in fertility to sub-replacement levels.

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1. Introduction

Despite cultural and economic differences at the country level, cross-sectional comparisons of the fertility decline in former socialist countries point to a bi-phasic response with an initial crisis-induced limitation at higher parities, followed by fertility postponement during the period of economic and political consolidation (Philipov and Dorbritz 2003). Although fertility trends during the post-communist transition are well-documented in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), few studies have covered the Western Balkans, despite the fact that they experienced one of the sharpest social upheavals and economic crises. In this paper, we will investigate the extent to which the schematic model of crisis followed by consolidation withstands longitudinal investigation in Albania.

Completely isolated under communist rule, Albanians experienced what was perhaps the most dramatic social transformation during the post-communist era. Our analysis of annual and socioeconomic trends in parity-specific fertility between 1993 and 2007 therefore aims to provide answers to two questions: first, to what extent can the decline in the number of children, close to the replacement level in 2001, be attributed to the tumultuous events that characterised the first decade of the transition? Second, to what extent has the postponement of births played a role in the recent decline in fertility to sub-replacement levels (i.e. TFR of 1.6 in 2006-9; INSTAT et al. 2010)?

We will first introduce the Albanian context and then frame our case study with a discussion of family behaviours in former socialist countries which will motivate our hypotheses regarding change in Albania. After a description of the data and methods used, we will present our results, which will be discussed, taking into account the peculiar social and cultural context. Contrary to the trends in CEE countries, fertility in Albania initially increased following the change in political regime. A sociological explanation is proposed for the unexpected anticipation of marriages and births that led to this paradox. During the financial crisis in 1997, however, childbearing at higher parities significantly decreased. With subsequent economic and political consolidation, more highly educated women in cities began to postpone their marriage and births. However, the significant resistance within socioeconomic groups raises questions about the motives which have driven the recent changes in Albanian family formation behaviour.

2. The Albanian context

Albania is a small country in the Western Balkans, located on the borders with Italy (on the other side of the Adriatic Sea) and Greece (over the south-eastern mountains). After an ideological break with the outside world, Albanians lived in complete autarchy for several decades under Enver Hoxha's totalitarian regime. In 1989, two-thirds of the population was working in agricultural fields with minimal machinery, urban households were poorly equipped with sanitation infrastructure and price levels had remained stable since 1944. With a yearly demographic growth rate of 2.4% since the Second World War, the Albanian population of 3.2 million was very young (Meski and Iaquinta 1991).

Having been denied the right to move internally or abroad, thousands of young people, dissatisfied by the harsh living conditions and slow reforms, invaded Western embassies in the capital Tirana in July 1990 and were granted asylum in Europe. This first paroxysm in social upheaval was characterised by an anarchic context: inflation reached 200%, food was scarce because of a drought as well as strikes in cooperatives, and public riots destroyed governmental buildings and productive infrastructures. Within two years, nearly 10% of the population had illegally crossed the borders to Greece and Italy (mainly young men; INSTAT 1999) and a large rural exodus took place. After the ruling Socialist Party won the first multiparty parliamentary election in 1991, generalised strikes led to the collapse of the production system. In the spring of 1992, the elections were held again and were finally won by the opposition (The Democratic Party). Meanwhile, the population became dependent on international food aid throughout the following summer (Vickers and Pettifer 2000).

The Albanian economy – being the poorest in CEE – was the only one to experience rapid recovery, with the GDP growing from 1993 onwards (see Figure 1). As industrial production had been virtually interrupted and land had been redistributed on a per capita basis, youth employment in the agricultural sector increased alongside total output, even though the small plots often did not ensure the self-sufficiency of poor families (UNDP 2000). A large share of the economic growth can, in fact, be attributed to migrant remittances, which represented up to 20% of the GDP during the 1990s and significantly alleviated poverty (Zwager et al. 2005). However, insecurity continued to prevail throughout the country due to the rise of organised crime, the murders of political party representatives and disputes between new and former land owners (Vickers and Pettifer 2000). The collapse of state authority and regulation led to the re-establishment of old customary laws (the *Kanun*) in

some regions and generally increased the family's role as a major social safety net (INSTAT 2005). Due to this reliance on the extended patriarchal family structure and economy, women became subordinate to men after several decades of economic and legal gender equality under communism. This has become known as the “retraditionalisation” of Albanian society, especially in rural and peripheral areas (Fisher 1999). According to Nixon (2009), this “retraditionalisation” had its roots in both old customs that re-emerged as a form of anti-communist defiance and in a communist culture of collective shame: "the structure of collective family reputation, deriving from the communist period, provides the means to maintain the boundaries of the family unit. In this sense, neo-traditionalism has become interwoven with social norms and values developed under communism" (p. 116).

The second paroxysm of the Albanian crisis occurred in 1997, when several illegal pyramidal investment schemes collapsed. A large proportion of households and emigrants lost all their savings and the contestations resulted in civil turmoil. Weapons were stolen from the arsenal of Tirana and the international community intervened militarily in 1998 in order to prevent a civil war (Vickers and Pettifer 2000). However, once again, the economy recovered quickly, with prolonged GDP growth which continued until recently (average rate of 7%; World Bank 2007). This certainly contributed to the sharp increase in the human development index (from 0.71 in 1995 to 0.80 in 2005; Figure 1), although enrolment in secondary education significantly declined from 79% to less than 44% between 1989 and 2001 and only recently started to recover. However, tertiary enrolment increased throughout this period (from 7% to 17%), with a greater increase for women than for men (World Bank 2005). Poverty head counts fell by half to 12% between 2002 and 2008, although a great deal of this success was again due to the inflow of migrant remittances (INSTAT et al. 2009). New opportunities nevertheless emerged for young people in an economically active age, as evinced by the diversification of the labour market with a 2.5 fold expansion of the tertiary sector (see Figure 1).

Alongside this economic stabilisation, the country also consolidated politically. Starting with the negociations for the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe (SEE) in 2003, initiated by the European Union (EU), Albania became a member of NATO and applied for status as an EU candidate country in 2009. These changes, sustained by extensive transnational family ties with emigrants in Europe, contributed to the rapid modernisation of Albanian society as exemplified by the diffusion of car ownership (which was forbidden under communist rule), Western fashions and consumerism throughout the country.

3. Fertility decline in former socialist countries and hypotheses for Albania

With the shift from a one-party regime and central planning to democracy and a market-based economy, significant institutional and socioeconomic changes influenced the family domain. The new freedom, the rise of individualism and leisure activities, higher living costs and diversified and competitive labour markets increased the direct and indirect costs associated with childrearing. Couples therefore had to adapt their family behaviour to this new environment (Frejka 2008). Despite their similar institutional settings during socialism, both fertility levels in 1989 and birth order components of subsequent declines varied across countries. Two models were observed. In countries located on the European continent, fertility in 1989 was not necessarily higher than in the West (i.e. the two-child family model prevailed, with the exception of Albanian-speaking SEE). The postponement of first births sustained the fall in TFR to lowest-low levels in CEE during the 1990s (Sobotka 2004), and more recently in SEE and the former Soviet Union. Women in Central Asia and in the Albanian-speaking countries in SEE, by contrast, were characterised by a higher number of children in 1989 (often above three). In these areas which were hit hardest by the economic crisis, the decline in fertility after 1989 resulted mainly from birth limitation at higher parities. Even in countries where fertility fell to lowest-low levels, marriage remained early and the first birth remained a universal transition until recently (Sardon 2000; Sobotka 2003; Billingsley 2010).

Several authors have therefore suggested that the different stages of the political and economic transformation process determine the motives, and thereby also the patterns, of response in terms of family behaviour. The transition process can be separated schematically into two phases (Philipov and Dorbritz 2003). In the first phase of *structural caesura*, which is characterised by the collapse of the political and economic systems, the prevailing sense of uncertainty is assumed to cause a decline in fertility. Economic hardship, rising unemployment and the decline in social transfers have indeed led to temporary postponements of childbearing across historical settings and in contemporary developing countries (Reher and Ortega Osona 2000; Hill et al. 1993; Adsera and Menendez 2009). The disappearance of totalitarian regimes in former socialist countries exacerbated the crisis because it left a societal vacuum while democracy and the market economy were still only emerging. This absence of rules and widely accepted norms – referred to as *social anomie* – further motivated

people to postpone irreversible life decisions, such as the decision to have (additional) children (Philipov and Dorbritz 2003).

During the second phase, *consolidation*, the former socialist countries experienced major economic restructuration and became integrated into world trade and politics. If new economic opportunities emerged, individuals were required to make adjustments in order to take advantage of them, such as the development of appropriate skills. Deferring childbearing was therefore considered to be a rational response to longer amounts of time spent in education and, later on, increasing opportunity costs resulting from higher labour market returns (Kohler, Billari, and Ortega 2002). The postponement of first births has indeed been more important in countries where the economic context has significantly improved and where enrolment in tertiary education has increased the most (i.e. the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland; Billingsley 2010). Moreover, former socialist societies in Europe have been strongly West-orientated since 1990. Thornton and Philipov (2007) have therefore suggested a (re-)embracement of the so-called “development idealism” – a system of beliefs and values favouring the Western family model as a means to attaining a modern society. The social phenomena associated with the second demographic transition may therefore have diffused from Western to Eastern Europe, such as the individualisation of society, changing values of children and parenthood, gender equality, etc. Even if concrete manifestations through a diversification of life-courses and living arrangements is still rare in CEE, individuals living alone or in consensual unions seem to embrace more non-conformist values (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2002). Although there is a "lack of evidence for a marked change in values" to account for postponed parenthood (Sobotka 2008: 191), the different motives could also support each other: "whereas attributed to crisis, the changes [in family behaviours] have intensified in recent periods of higher prosperity and economic recovery" (Sobotka 2008: 208). The diffusion of new values regarding the family may also have been enhanced by socioeconomic change (Thornton and Philipov 2007).

If the economic and political transition in Albania has adhered to the bi-phasic model, we can expect fertility to have declined at higher parities during the 1990s, while postponed motherhood should have started more recently. However, this reasoning disregards specific changes in the private and public spheres and the specific position of women in these contexts. Considering the entire process of transition in the former socialist countries, Gal and Kligman (2000) have argued that, as a result of the economic crises in the later years of socialism, individuals increasingly distinguished their private sphere – where the family unit

struggled communally for economic survival – from the public one represented by the party and the nation of workers. If the former was idealised, the latter was distrusted because of state propaganda and persecution. The fall of the regimes primarily affected the public sphere. The private sphere, by contrast, represented continuity with the past and remained the main source of livelihood during the transition, particularly for women who withdrew en masse from the labour market.

Thus, traditional family structures have been found to be crucial in coping with crises and uncertainty, or alternatively, they may have blocked new opportunities and ideational change. Higher fertility among the unemployed when compared with active Russian women has indeed been explained by the role of starting a family in reducing uncertainty about one's future life course (Kohler and Kohler 2002). This interpretation has been rejected in the case of Ukraine, a rapidly ageing society. The maintenance of early family formation has not only been attributed to intergenerational flows of wealth and assistance from parents to children, but also to the parents' deteriorating health status. Young women would like to benefit from parental support with childrearing before having to assist them (Perelli-Harris 2008). In rural Mongolia, the tradition of transferring wealth at birth may also have leveraged constraints to early union formation (Spoorenberg 2009), while in Central Asia, the revival of religious traditions has been advanced to account for earlier marriages during the period immediately before and after the fall of the communist regimes (Dommaraju and Agadjanian 2008; Schumacher and Spoorenberg 2010). Although we have not observed a significant revival of Islam or any other minority religion in Albania, the cultural context appears to be oscillating between a return to tradition and the development of new influences from neighbouring Europe (not least by the emigrants). We can therefore expect large differentials in the timing of family formation according to educational levels as was observed in the Czech Republic and in Romania (Sobotka, Stastna, et al. 2008; Muresa and Hoem 2010). More highly skilled Albanians are probably less likely to be constrained in terms of both their ability to take advantage of economic opportunities and their freedom to adopt new family norms.

4. Data and methods

As there is some concern about the quality of the current demographic statistics in Albania (see next section), we have estimated trends in family formation and enlargement indirectly from 5697 and 7584 retrospective birth histories collected during the Reproductive

Health Survey (RHS) in 2002 and the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in 2008/9, respectively. Parity progression ratios (i.e. the probability of giving birth to another child) of annual synthetic cohorts have been estimated for the period 1993-2007 (see Feeney and Yu 1987; Ni-Bhrolchain 1987; Hinde 1998). Progression ratios to the $(j+1)^{th}$ birth occurring in a particular calendar year are conditional on the time elapsed since the previous $(j)^{th}$ birth: the number of women progressing to the $(j+1)^{th}$ birth during calendar year t after x exposure-years since the $(j)^{th}$ birth ($W_x^{j+1,t}$) is divided by the number of women who had a $(j)^{th}$ birth x years ago but who had not progressed further by the start of the reference period ($W^{j,t-x}$):

$$q_x = \frac{W_x^{j+1,t}}{W^{j,t-x}}$$

Using life-table properties, the conditional progression rates qx were cumulated over x exposure years in order to estimate a life-time (or ultimate) parity progression ratio:

$$a_j = 1-(1-q_0)(1-q_1)(1-q_2)...$$

Conditional birth rates were cumulated over 10 cohort years of exposure in order to obtain synthetic life-time progression ratios from marriage to the first birth and transitions up to the fifth birth. Conditional marriage rates were cumulated over 29 years starting at age 15. As urban areas were oversampled in the RHS, the national estimates derived for 1993-2001 were weighted and linked with estimates from the DHS for 2002-2007. The use of two independent samples was designed to limit selection bias which may have been caused by the high level of emigration observed during that period.

Period trends in fertility may result from both an effective decline in the number of children women have at the end of their reproductive life and a statistical artefact due to changing family formation calendars (Bongaarts and Feeney 1998). For example, when women defer the timing of births, these births are shifted into the future, thereby reducing fertility rates during the year of interest. The comparison of cumulative progression ratios between synthetic cohorts may provide insight into quantum and tempo effects. In order to further investigate the role of the social diffusion of birth postponement in Albania's recent fertility decline, socioeconomic differentials in family formation patterns were measured using similar life-table indicators which refer to the four-year synthetic cohorts preceding both surveys (i.e. 1998-2001 and 2004-2007). In accordance with Andersson and Philipov (2002), we used exact rather than cohort exposure-time in months and estimated ultimate

progression ratios, median and quartile ages according to the place of residence while distinguishing between two groups defined by their level of educational attainment (compulsory and post-compulsory). The mean age at marriage and at birth – based on life-table events – is the most sensible measure of tempo effects in the context of declining fertility.

5. Albanian family behaviours during transition

5.1 Decennial trends

Compared to other CEE and SEE countries, which were characterised by fluctuating fertility around the replacement level between 1970 and 1989, Albania's fertility transition was delayed by at least 15 years and followed a different path (Sardon 2000). The TFR in Albania declined from 6.8 in 1960 to three in 1990. This occurred in spite of a pro-natalist environment characterised by paid maternity leave, free access to clothes and health services for children and specialised infant and child care. Compulsory female participation in the labour force and women's role as housekeepers in a patriarchal society implied high burdens. Combined with significant progress in infant and child health, couples therefore decided to have fewer children. However, the principal factor was the spectacular increase in female education (Falkingham and Gjonca 2001). The Albanian fertility transition arose as a result of trends in both the spread of education among successive birth cohorts and the declining number of children born to women who remained poorly skilled. Women holding a post-compulsory diploma had a fertility rate that was close to the replacement level for several decades (Lerch et al. 2010). This explains why fertility declined within marriage and in rural areas during the 1980s (Dumani 1995).

Fertility continued to fall during the economic and political transition, and was close to the replacement level at the time of the last Census in 2001 (i.e. TFR of 2.3; Lerch et al. 2010). However, exactly what happened is unknown (see Figure 2). Official data indicate that there was an initial drop to 2.6 children per women in 1993, followed by a small recovery in the period until 1996 and a steep decline to replacement and subreplacement (1.4) levels in 1999 and 2004, respectively. Estimates from retrospective birth histories indicate a higher rate of recovery (up to 3.2 children per women) and a later completion of the first demographic transition after 2001. Indirect estimates based on the own children method applied to the 2001

Census are situated between the official and survey estimates. Thus, fertility seems to have been underestimated by official sources, which are affected by the underregistration of births and the difficulty of estimating the annual population of women, but may have been overestimated by retrospective birth histories because of selection bias, as only the remaining people were questioned after the high levels of emigration which have occurred since 1990. If sources indicate different fertility levels, it can be argued that the declining trend is confirmed.

Although fertility limitation at higher parities was standard practice among couples, the onset of motherhood remained early and universal across cohorts interviewed during the 2002 Living Standards Measurement Survey (Gjonca, Aassve, and Mencarini 2008). However, the life-table proportion of mothers estimated from the 2001 Census decreased compared to a decade earlier (respectively 86% and almost 100%), despite the fact that the mean age at first birth remained constant (i.e. 24.5 years; Lerch, Subashi, et al. 2010). This observation points to a quantum rather than a tempo-induced decline in motherhood. Fertility fell rapidly to 1.6 children per woman in 2006-2009 (with a TFR of 1.3 in urban areas and 1.0 in Tirana; INSTAT et al. 2010).

Our analysis starts after the first paroxysm in social upheaval which ended with the democratic elections in 1992. Figure 3 illustrates the trends in transitions to first marriage and subsequent parities. Two main features of Albania's final stage of the fertility transition can be highlighted.

First, until 1999, the decline in fertility resulted from lower levels of childbearing at higher parities. More interesting, however, is the timing of this behavioural response. Rather than decreasing, family enlargement to the third and, to a lesser extent, to the fourth birth initially increased in the period following the democratic elections: 65% of women who already had two children enlarged their family in 1995 compared to 52% in 1993, and progressions to the fourth and fifth birth fluctuated around 45% until 1996. These rates did not drop before the 1997 financial crisis, falling to 45% for the third birth and under 30% for higher order births. Although family enlargements temporarily recovered between 1999 and 2003, they did not reach their previous level (40% and less than 30% for third and higher order births, respectively, in 2007). In line with this short-term rise in marital fertility during the 1990s, marriage rates increased slightly as well.

Whereas marriage and fertility at lower parities remained nearly universal until 2000 (at least 95%), the new century marked a change in family formation behaviours. The first

union rate dropped to 81% in 2007, although there were some fluctuations in the declining trend. This was followed in 2005 and 2006 by a slight decline in progressions to the first and second births. As our survey estimates of progression ratios from age 15 to the first birth are consistent with the results of the 2001 Census[2], it seems that Albanian women either initiated a retreat from universal motherhood and/or delayed their family formation calendar.

The comparison of cumulative progression ratios between periods provides further insight into this question. Higher differences at a given exposure time – relative to the differentials in ultimate rates – indicate tempo effects. Interestingly, Figure 4 shows that while 46% of women married before the age of 22 in 1993, 62% did so in 1995. This anticipation of union formation was observed in rural and urban areas alike (not shown), and caused slightly inflated ultimate rates. With the subsequent postponement, the tempo-induced effect was eliminated through 1998. These shifts back and forth in the marriage calendar in the 1990s explain the similar mean ages at first birth estimated at the time of the last two censuses. The postponement of marriages intensified in the early 21st century: whereas 70% of women married before the age of 24 in 2000, only 40% did so in 2007. The comparison of this differential with the smaller variation in ultimate rates (i.e. 30 against 18 percentage points) confirms that some of the marriages were postponed, even if some Albanians did not marry at all.

The interval between marriage and the first birth is traditionally short in Albania (about one year). There was no change in this regard until 2000, but one can observe a tendency to anticipate higher order births between 1993 and 1995 (Figure 5). Similarly to marriages, this anticipation was eliminated through 1998, relative to the 1993 calendar.

During the second decade under observation, first births were further deferred: in 2000, 54% of women delivered in the year following their marriage, compared to only 42% in 2007. The difference is twice as high as the difference in ultimate ratios in the respective synthetic cohorts (12 against six percentage points). As far as second births are concerned, joint postponement and stopping behaviours occurred in the 2000s (Figure 5): cumulative progression rates after two years of exposure declined from 30% to 18%, and further declined after five years from 82% to 65%. Tempo effects did not influence progressions to the third and higher order births, as exemplified by a gradually increasing difference in duration-

[2] Our estimations of the direct transition rate to the first birth are respectively 94% and 84% in 2000 and 2001 compared to 86% during the 12 months preceding the Census in April 2001 (Lerch, Subashi, et al. 2010).

specific rates observed in 2000 and 2007. The decline in higher order births arose essentially as the result of a quantum effect.

5.2 Socioeconomic differentials

Table 1 presents the intensity of the first union formation along with mean and quartile ages at marriage according to place of residence and educational level. Marriage was universal throughout Albania and occurred on average at age 22.6 in 1998-2001. Socioeconomic differentials in the timing of the event were relatively small, with marriages occurring later among more highly skilled women in cities (mean age: 23.8) compared to women in rural areas (22 years). Interestingly, the lower-skilled urban dwellers married at younger ages than those women in the countryside (i.e. first quartile and median age under 19 and 20, respectively). A significant share of lower-skilled women in cities originated from the countryside and may have maintained their traditional family formation patterns.

Ultimate marriage rates only slightly decreased by four points at the national level and the mean age at union formation did not change much until 2004-7. However, changes were heterogeneous. Women under 20 tended to marry more frequently compared to their peers in 1998-2001, while women in their twenties postponed the event (as only median and third quartile ages increased). These age patterns resulted from contrasting socioeconomic dynamics. Poorly educated women in rural areas experienced a drop of only six points in their first marriage rate because the declining quantum was attenuated by an anticipation of events. All calendar indicators, except the third quartile age, declined during the 2000s. A similar but less marked trend was observed among rural residents holding a post-compulsory diploma, although particular caution is required for the interpretations of the results pertaining to this small group (cumulative progression rates were frozen at age 28).

The declining marriage trend in cities, by contrast, resulted from a different pattern. Although the more highly-skilled inhabitants stood out as having the lowest first union rate in 2004-7 (90%), this decline was mainly due to the effects of postponement among women under 30: the mean age at union formation significantly increased from 23.8 to 25.5 years old. However, a significant group of urban residents continued to marry early, especially those with low skills, for whom the first quartile age at marriage remained constant over both periods (18.5 years), as did the mean age. As more highly educated city dwellers were the

only social group postponing marriage, our results confirm their pioneering role in the historical changes in Albanian family behaviour.

At the turn of the 21st century, the first birth was still strongly linked to marriage (Table 2). Irrespective of the married women's socioeconomic profiles, motherhood was universal and occurred on average within a year following union formation. First birth rates then slightly declined by five points among the total population until 2004-7. This trend essentially resulted from a 10-point decline in the ultimate ratio in urban areas (and perhaps among the few more highly educated women in the countryside), as motherhood remained universal for low-skilled women in rural Albania. Birth postponement did not contribute to the decline in urban rates, as evinced by period differentials in birth intervals that gradually increased from the first to the third quartile. The postponement noted above in the aggregate trend may have resulted from a compositional effect. Similarly to marriages, a significant minority continued to have their first child early (in the same year as marriage), irrespective of their socioeconomic profiles.

As with the decision to form a family, progression to the second birth was nearly universal and did not differ much between socioeconomic groups in 1998-2001 (Table 3). Behavioural changes almost exclusively concerned more highly skilled women in urban areas, who experienced a decline of nine points in their progression ratio (i.e. 87% in 2004-7). This trend was partly due to a timing-effect, as evinced by the increase in the mean birth interval (from 3.6 to 4.4 years).

The most marked socioeconomic gradient in fertility in 1998-01 appears in the transition from the second to the third birth (Table 4): while 62% of low-skilled women in rural areas had an additional child, only 37% did so among the more highly educated women in urban areas. The minority groups in both contexts were situated between these two extremes. Although family enlargement did not significantly change at the national level until 2004-7, this can be explained by the different trends according to educational levels. The fertility of low-skilled women increased compared to 1998-02 because they anticipated third births: while the first quartile interval remained constant, the median decreased from 7.6 to six years in urban areas and, to a lesser extent, in rural areas as well. High-skilled women, by contrast, experienced a decline of more than 10 points in their enlargement ratios, equalling 46% and 25% in rural and urban areas respectively. While this trend resulted from birth postponement in the countryside (the mean interval increased from 4.2 to 5.7 years), declining

quantum was dominant in cities. Hence, the recent polarisation in higher order births follows an educational rather than an urban-rural gradient.

7. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we have documented Europe's latest fertility transition completed in Albania, and we postulated that fertility has adapted to economic and political transformations in two stages since 1991. Crisis symptoms were expected to temporarily encourage the decline in fertility at higher parities, whereas structural and ideational changes, it was assumed, would defer the onset of family formation during economic and political consolidation. Using synthetic parity progression ratios from survey data, we specifically questioned the extent to which the declining number of higher order births can be attributed to the tumultuous events in the 1990s and whether or not the recent fertility decline to subreplacement levels resulted from tempo-effects due to postponed childbearing.

Our descriptive analysis started after the first paroxysm of social upheaval, which ended with the second elections in 1992. The communist system and economy collapsed, the population became dependent on international food aid and hundreds of thousands of people left for Italy and Greece or moved to cities. At first, fertility unexpectedly increased! Even more surprisingly, this positive trend during the political and economic crisis was the result of a tempo effect due to the anticipation of marriages and births at all parities. It is true that high female unemployment as well as the declining quality of childcare institutions encouraged many women to shift towards full-time motherhood (INSTAT 2004). However, while uncertainty could have led to a rush in family formation patterns, it clearly fails to explain the anticipation of higher order births.

This apparent paradox could be resolved by accounting for the social and cultural context in Albania's first decade of transition. The economic crisis and social anomie inherent to the fall of one of the most rigid communist regimes in the world was alleviated by individuals’ reliance on extended kinship structures for economic and social security. This brought about a retraditionalisation of society that negatively affected women's freedom, as exemplified by several interviews with teenagers in rural and, to a lesser extent, urban areas. They complained of the "destructive power of public opinion" and gossip (Pritchett-Post 1998: 236). In a context of rapid modernisation after decades of isolation, young women became subject to stricter controls in order to prevent family dishonour in the patriarchal

Albania. Parents not only feared for their daughters' security in an uncertain context, but also for potential love affairs at school. Many teenagers were therefore pulled out from school and never returned while waiting for an early, and often arranged, marriage leading to a large family.

Moreover, the physical integrity of women was challenged by increasing spousal violence and revived family blood feuds. The return to "fanatic" gender roles, as described by a 16 year-old girl, may have been supported by male-"bread-winner" emigration and the privatisation of land which increased the need for female labour in order to sustain a living in the native environment (Pritchett-Post 1998). In addition, age at marriage among men increased throughout the country because of their time spent abroad before union formation. The widening age gap between the husbands and wives may thus have restricted female empowerment within couples. The social pressure on women to reproduce was further sustained by the increase in patrilocal and multigenerational living arrangements in urban areas which arose due to the cost of entering the emerging housing market (INSTAT 2005).

However, the second paroxysm of the Albanian crisis eliminated the initial fertility trend. Later than expected, the intensity of higher order births abruptly declined during the fall of the pyramidal banking schemes in 1997. Material constraints and civil disorder can explain the short-term fertility limitation which primarily affected women with large families. Despite a slight recovery among low-skilled Albanians, this stopping behaviour became a lasting pattern later on. The most recent economic shock may also have resulted in a call for society to provide more freedom to women, as marriage postponement emerged in the years immediately afterwards. Indeed, one adolescent interviewed in the 1990s predicted that her "generation [...] will go forward and put an end to this kind of mentality" (Pritchett-Post 1998: 236).

In line with our expectations, the postponement of marriages intensified in the 21st century and was quickly followed by deferred births within unions. This occurred alongside high economic growth, major structural transformations – such as sharp urbanisation and the tertiarisation of the economy – and the infiltration of Western lifestyles and consumerism into Albania. Family formation patterns also become increasingly heterogeneous. Marriage and birth postponement was concentrated in cities and, more specifically, among more highly skilled inhabitants who also increasingly adopted the one-child family model. Thus, the family formation calendar became more clearly differentiated between urban and rural areas, rather than according to educational groups. Although this polarisation could be explained by

the recentness of ideational change, it also points to the major importance of structural factors to which cities are more prone. Women in Tirana, as well as in cities along the coast, are more likely to pursue higher education in order to increase their chances in the local labour market, as the majority of foreign direct investments and opportunities in the growing tertiary sector are concentrated there.

Ideational change is slow in Albania. Gender equality has not advanced by much, as Albania ranks last in the 2009 Social Institution and Gender Index[3] among the former socialist countries. Compared to the past, women still face difficulties in accessing secure positions in the labour market and are poorly represented in parliament (7% in 2005 against 32% in 1990) as well as in the government and national institutions (INSTAT 2004; INSTAT 2007). Female empowerment has not increased by much either. The decision-making power of women within couples in 2008/9 increased with age and was highest among fertile women, meaning that marriage and motherhood remain crucial for a woman's social status. Pre-marital sex and cohabitation are very rare (INSTAT et al. 2010). Women were not only suspicious towards these new living arrangements due to the rise in human trafficking, but also highly value marriage and family as their "main focus of life" (Murzaku and Dervishi 2003: 231). Moreover, the use of modern means of contraception is only slowly emerging, with a prevalence rate of 24% in 2008/9, despite the fact that the majority of the population is aware of them and they have been accessible and free since 1996.

Hence, despite the strong Western orientation of the Albanian society and major changes in lifestyles, significant signs of the second demographic transition have yet to appear. In this regard, Albania has followed a pattern similar to that of other CEE countries (see Sobotka 2008). It is therefore not surprising to note resistance to the current changes. In rural areas and among the less educated people in cities, a quarter of women continue to marry and have children early on. Structural constraints leading to later family formation may be alleviated by a household’s income diversification strategy which allows social imperatives to be met: for example, women in migrant-sending households enter into motherhood earlier than those living in families without members abroad (Lerch 2009). As more highly skilled women in cities are less concerned with the resistance to emerging family patterns, we postulate that the recent postponement of marriage and fertility results mainly from structural changes and new opportunities in the labour market.

[3] This OECD index focuses on the root causes behind gender inequalities and is based on 12 social institutional variables characterising the family code, the women's physical integrity, preferences for a son, civil liberties and ownership rights (see http://genderindex.org/methodology).

To conclude, trends in family formation and enlargement in post-communist Albania correspond to the postulated bi-phasic model of fertility responses when the period since 1997 is considered. However, demographic responses during the preceding years of uncertainty indicate the importance of the social and cultural environment which tends to be neglected in a crisis context, despite the fact that such resources are probably the most crucial during bad times. Retraditionalisation in society not only increased the pressure on women to reproduce, but coping strategies at the household, rather than the individual, level may also have influenced or replaced fertility responses to the crisis during the 1990s. During the subsequent period of economic and political consolidation, the postponement of marriage and fertility rapidly emerged, as was the case in other CEE countries. We expect this postponement to intensify in the future, not only because more highly skilled women will become more numerous in cities, but also because this phenomenon started at a low mean age and may diffuse to other social strata. This would drive the drop in fertility to lowest-low levels, thereby accentuating the fast aging of Albania's population.

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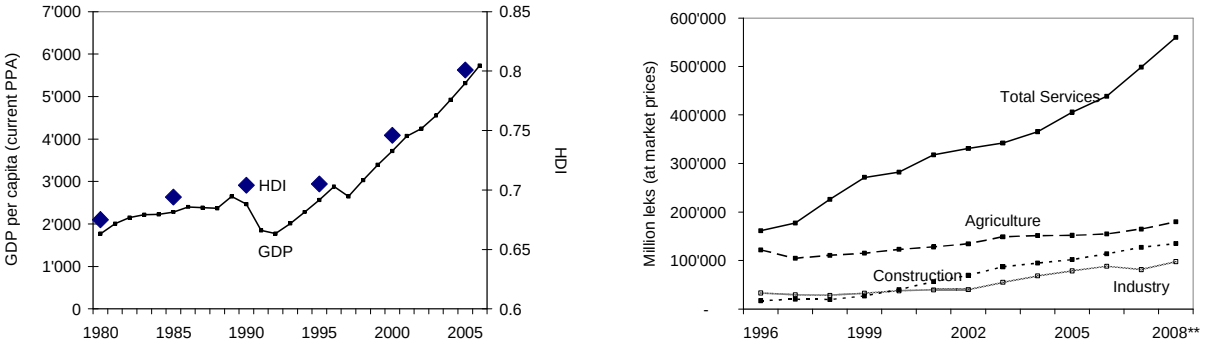
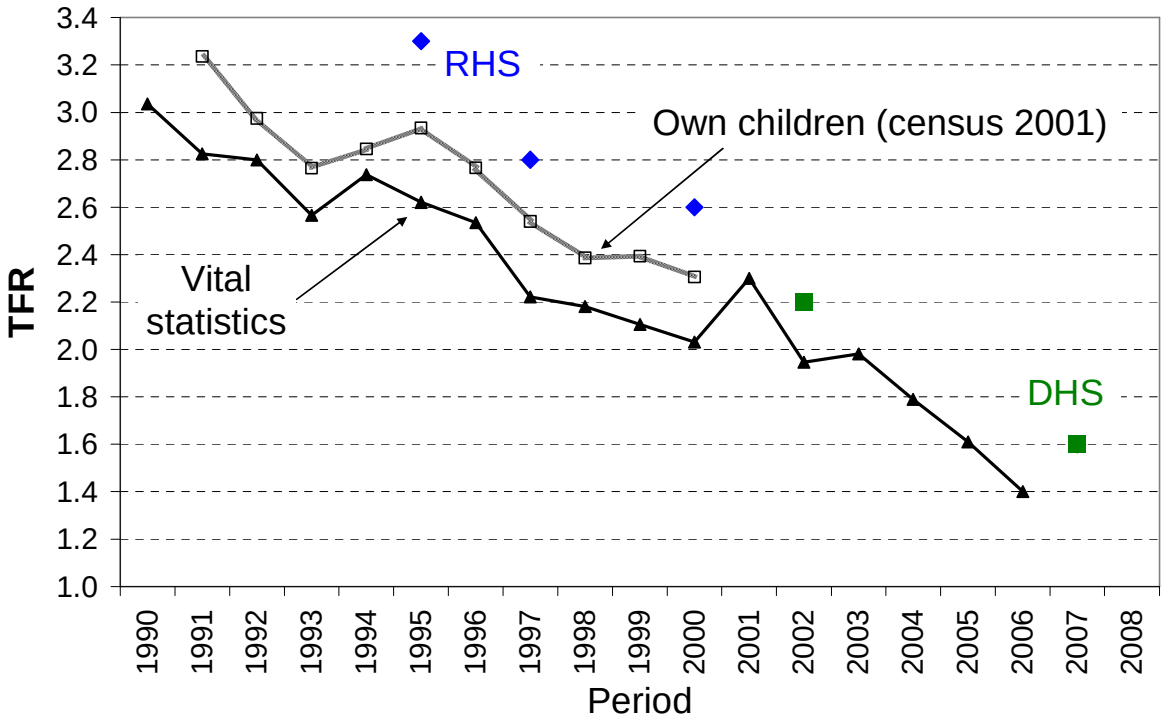
Appendix:

Figure 1: ***Gross domestic product per capita and human development index (left-hand side), GDP by economic activity (right-hand side), Albania 1980-2008.***



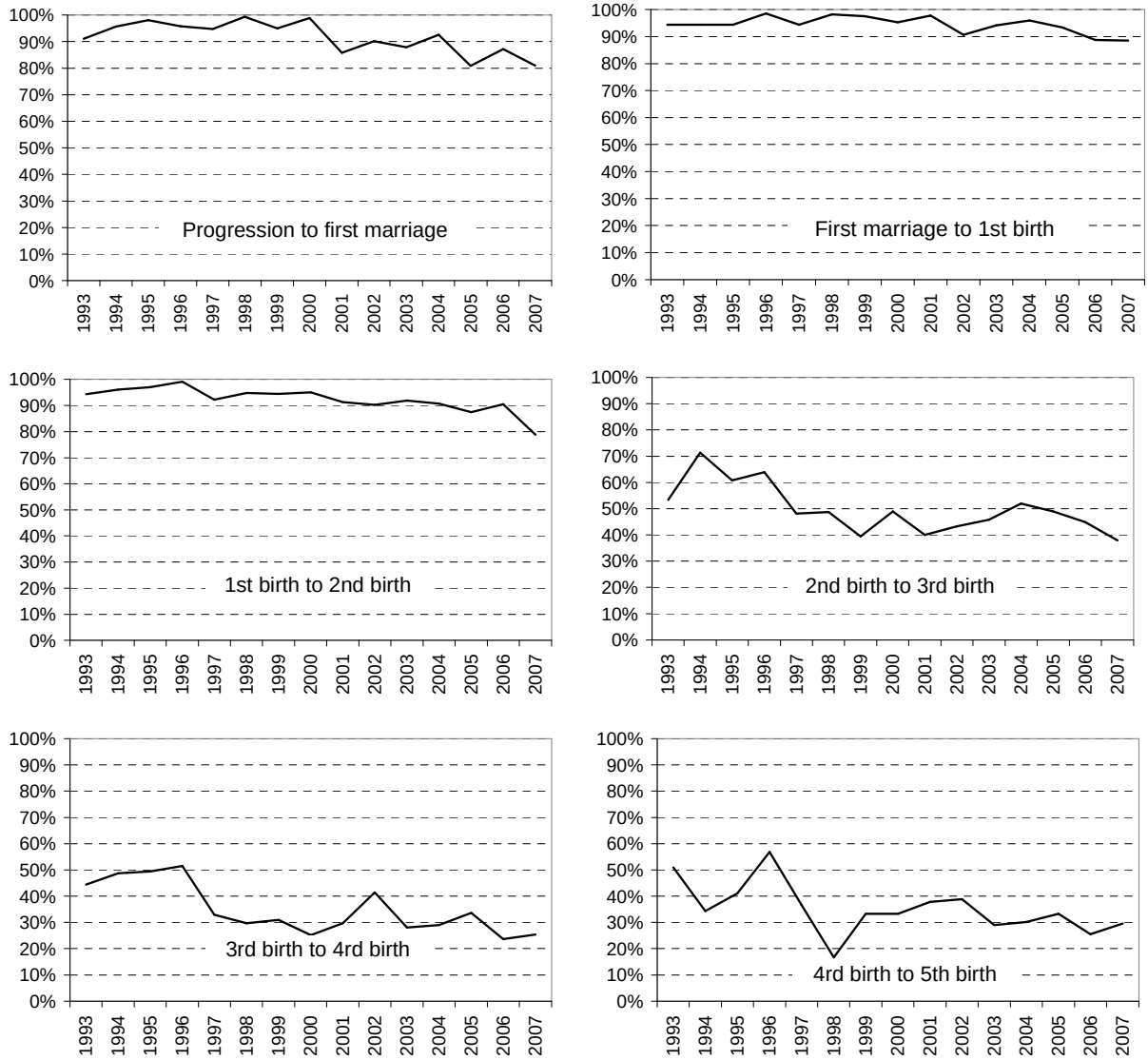
Sources: HDI trends, UN (WB estimates), INSTAT.

Figure 2: ***Total fertility rate, Albania 1990-2008.***



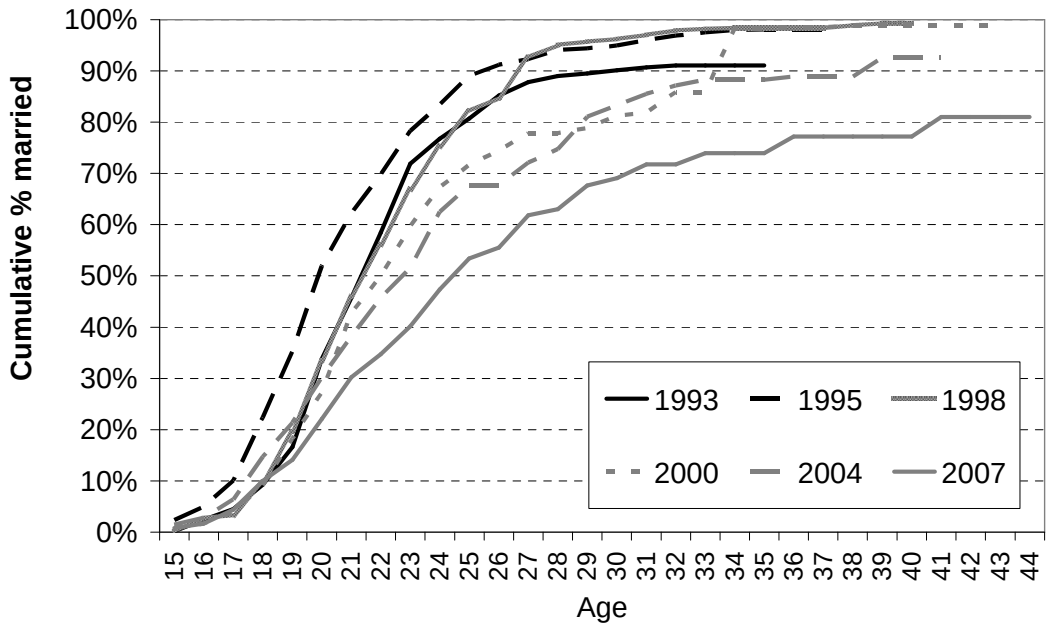
Sources: INSTAT, Morris et al. (2005), INSTAT et al. (2010), own calculations from the 2001 Census. Notes: Own children estimates refer to periods between 1 April and 31 March; the peak in official estimates (vital statistics) during the Census year 2001 may indicate an underestimation of the TFRs for the other years due to an overestimated number of women (beside at Census dates, the denominator of the TFR is estimated in relying on projected numbers of women).

Figure 3*: Life-time synthetic parity progression rates, Albania 1993-2007.*



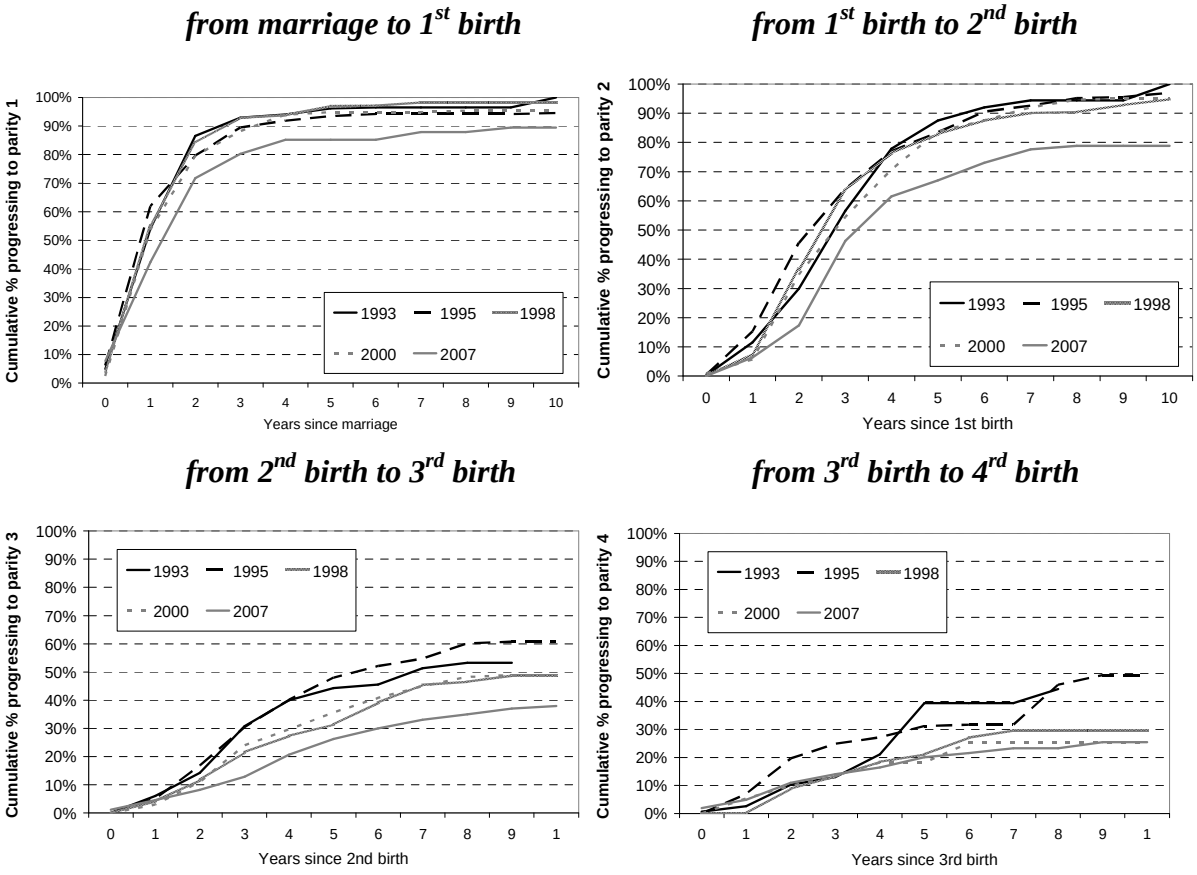
Sources: RHS 2002 (for 1993-2001) and DHS 2009 (for 2002-2007).

Figure 4: ***Cumulative progression rate to first marriage, Albania, selected synthetic cohorts 1993, 1995, 2000, 2004, 2007.***



Sources: RHS 2002 (for 1993-2001) and DHS 2009 (for 2002-2007).

Figure 5*: Cumulative progression rate to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4rd birth, Albania, selected synthetic cohorts 1993, 1995, 2000, 2007.*



Sources: RHS 2002 (for 1993-2001) and DHS 2009 (for 2002-2007).

Table 1*: Life-table indicators of first marriages by place of residence and educational level, Albania, 1998-2001 and 2004-07 synthetic cohorts.*

	Total		Rural compulsory		Rural post-compulsory		Urban compulsory		Urban post-compulsory	
Indicator	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07
Cum % at age 40	0.96	0.92	0.97	0.91	*0.82	*0.87	0.98	0.94	0.96	0.90
Mean age	22.6	23.0	22.0	21.4	22.2	22.4	21.3	21.2	23.8	25.5
Q1	19.8	19.5	19.5	18.6	20.3	19.7	18.7	18.3	21.2	21.7
Median	21.9	22.8	21.8	20.7	22.2	23.6	19.9	20.5	23.2	25.5
Q3	25.7	29.1	24.8	26.1	27.2	26.3	22.7	25.6	27.3	31.7
N	2211	2678	499	846	186	468	437	238	1089	1111

Source: RHS 2002, DHS 2008-9. Note: * refers to the cumulative rate at age 28; $^{+}$ mean age at marriages before age 28.

Table 2*: Life-table indicators of first births by place of residence and educational level, Albania 1998-2001 and 2004-2007 synthetic cohorts.*

	Total		Rural compulsory		Rural post-compulsory		Urban compulsory		Urban post-compulsory	
Indicator	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07
Cum % after 15y	0.99	0.94	0.99	0.98	*0.95	*0.84	*0.99	*0.89	0.99	0.91
Mean age	1.5	1.8	1.5	1.7	1.2	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.7	2.1
Q1	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.9
Median	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.0	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.5
Q3	2.0	2.6	1.9	2.3	1.6	1.8	2.0	3.1	2.4	3.7
N	901	785	226	227	54	74	241	124	380	253

Source: RHS 2002, DHS 2008-9. Note: * refers to the cumulative rate after 10 years since marriage.

Table 3*: Life-table indicators of second births by place of residence and educational level, Albania 1998-2001 and 2004-2007 synthetic cohorts.*

	Total		Rural compulsory		Rural post-compulsory		Urban compulsory		Urban post-compulsory	
Indicator	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07
Cum % after 15y	0.96	0.91	0.96	0.94	*0.94	*0.91	0.94	0.92	0.96	0.87
Mean age	3.4	3.6	3.1	3.4	3.5	3.2	3.4	3.5	3.6	4.4
Q1	2.0	2.1	1.8	1.9	2.4	2.2	1.7	2.4	2.2	2.7
Median	3.0	3.3	2.7	2.9	3.3	2.8	2.9	3.4	3.2	4.3
Q3	4.9	6.0	4.5	5.2	4.7	4.4	5.5	5.4	5.1	8.2
N	1474	1075	312	384	107	76	323	172	737	433

Source: RHS 2002, DHS 2008-9. Note: see note of Table 2.

Table 4: ***Life-table indicators of third births by place of residence and educational level, Albania 1998-2001 and 2004-2007 synthetic cohorts.***

	Total		Rural compulsory		Rural post-compulsory		Urban compulsory		Urban post-compulsory	
Indicator	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07	98-01	04-07
Cum % after 15y	0.53	0.53	0.62	0.68	*0.58	*0.46	0.57	0.65	0.37	0.25
Mean age	4.6	4.6	4.4	4.5	4.2	5.7	4.6	4.5	5.3	4.8
Q1	3.7	3.9	3.2	3.1	2.8	4.7	3.4	3.1	6.4	12.6
Median	9.3	9.6	6.2	5.3	5.9	-	7.6	6.0	-	-
N	2009	2146	391	609	148	241	394	346	1076	944

Sources: RHS 2002, DHS 2009. Note: see note of Table 2.