

## FERTILITY AND REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOR

### Sample survey accompanying Census 2021

Birth rates and migration are among the main factors that influence the number and structures of the population in any country. Given the demographic situation in Bulgaria and the need for more detailed information in order to make informed management decisions, the Census 2021 program included two sample surveys.

The study 'Fertility and reproductive behavior' aims to support the development of appropriate demographic and social policy by clarifying the reproductive ideals and problems of persons of reproductive age; learning about intentions, future plans and expectations; the behavior of the man or the woman, as well as the relationship between them in relation to the birth and upbringing of children.

The survey included all women aged 15 - 49 and all men aged 15 - 59 living in 7 386 randomly selected private households. 4 368 persons in the indicated age groups were successfully surveyed.

**The reproductive ideal** is people's subjective idea of how many children a family should have in Bulgaria. The answer to this question largely depends on the characteristics and value system of the individual, as well as on the socio-economic conditions in the country. In the study, the ideal was evaluated through the answers to the question 'How many children do you think a family should have in Bulgaria?'

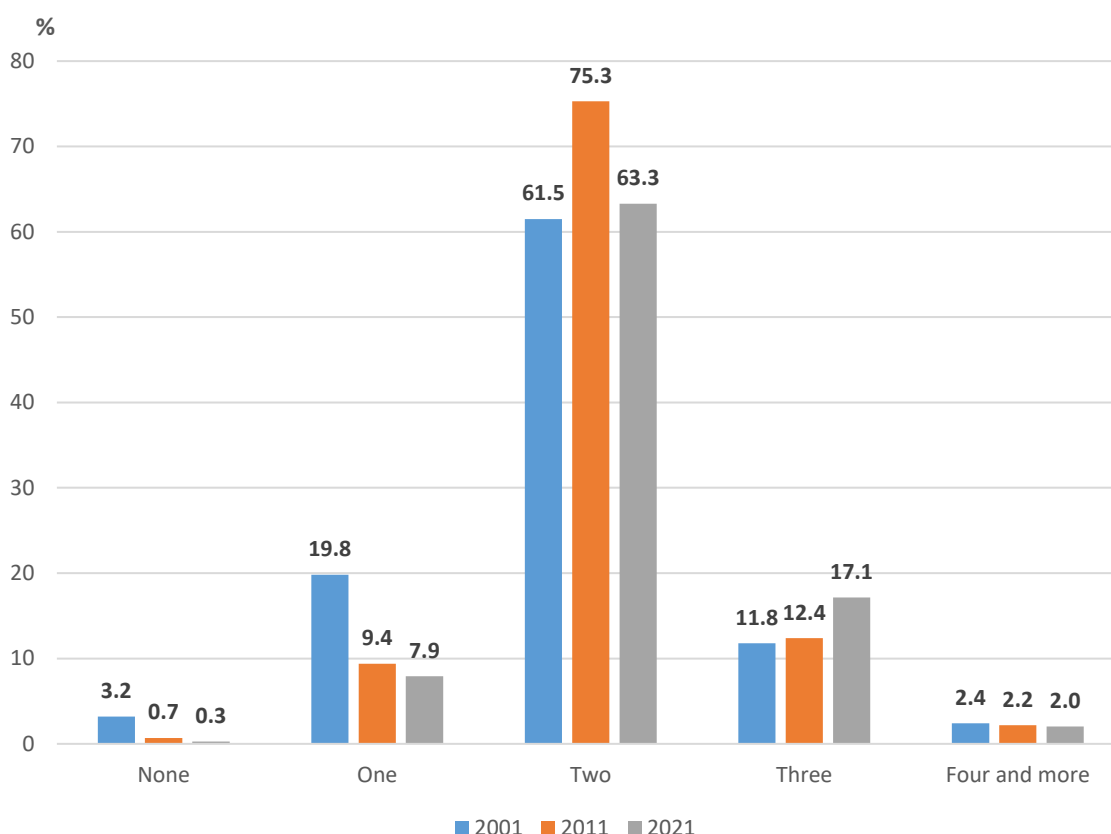
The results of surveys conducted in recent decades show that the two-child family model is preferred by people of reproductive age in our country. In 2021 also, the majority of men and women believe that the family should have two children - 63.3%. However, this share is significantly lower than in 2011, when for 75.3% of the population in the studied age groups, the ideal family included two children.

At second place in the distribution is the opinion that a family should have three children (17.1%), followed by a family with one child (7.9%). In 2021, 9.4% of persons of reproductive age cannot estimate how many children a family should have in Bulgaria. The multi-child model of a family with four or more children is a priority for 2.0% of people.

The change in the reproductive ideal of men and women in Bulgaria over the last twenty years is in a positive direction, bearing in mind that:

- the share of people who believe that a family should have three children is increasing - from 11.8% in 2001 to 17.1% in 2021;
- the share of men and women with the ideal of a one-child family has more than doubled - from 19.8% to 7.9%;
- the share of persons who believe that the family should not have children significantly decreases - from 3.2% to 0.3% in 2021.

**Fig. 1. Reproductive ideals during the period 2001 - 2021**

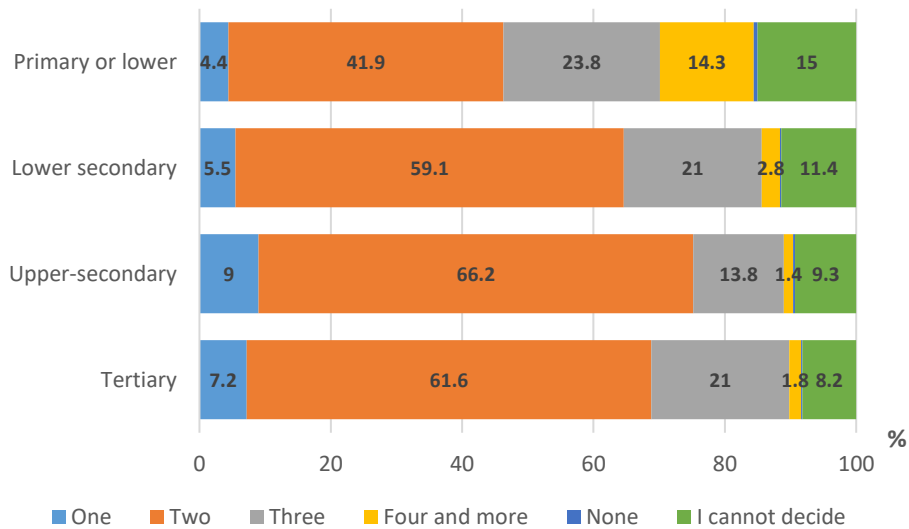


The reproductive ideals of men and women hardly differ. The two-child family model is equally preferred by both sexes (63.3% each). The difference regarding the ideal of one child in a family is insignificant - 7.8% of men and 8.1% of women. Women more often express the opinion that a family should have three children (18.5%), while among men the share of those who cannot estimate how many children a family should have is higher (10.4%).

The age of the persons does not have a significant influence on the arrangement of the ideal number of children. Two children is the ideal for a family for 62.1% of young people aged 15 - 29, for 62.9% of people aged 30 - 44, as well as for 64.7% of those at the end of their reproductive age. Among young people, the share of those who believe that a family should have one child is higher (9.1%), while among people over 45, it is 6.9%. Persons up to the age of 29 more often answered that they could not decide (11.2%) compared to the other two age groups, for which this share was 8.7 and 8.9%, respectively.

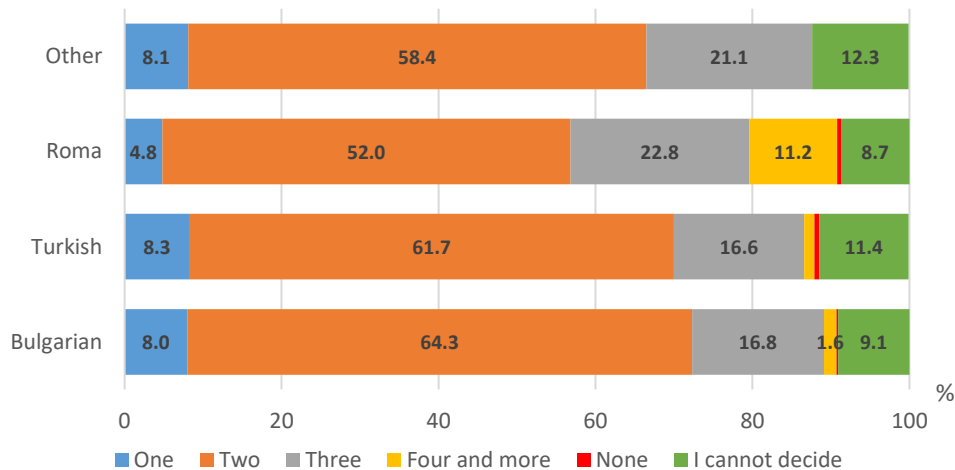
Differences in reproductive ideals are more pronounced depending on the level of education, although the two-child family model is leading in all analyzed groups. While among highly educated persons, its share does not differ significantly from the national average, only 41.9% of persons with elementary or lower education believe that a family should have two children. Among the less educated persons, the shares of those for whom the reproductive ideal is a large family are larger. There are significant differences regarding the answer 'Four and more children', which is indicated by 14.3% of persons with primary or lower education and only by 1.4% of those with upper-secondary and 1.8% of persons with tertiary education.

**Fig. 2. Reproductive ideals in 2021 by level of education**



The distribution of persons depending on their ethnic group is of interest. The leading two-child family model is ideal for 64.3% of self-identified Bulgarians, for representatives of the Turkish ethnic group - 61.7%, and for a significantly smaller part of the Roma (52.0%). The relative share of persons who believe that a family should have one child is similar for self-identified Bulgarians (8.0%), Turks (8.3%) and representatives of other ethnicities (8.1%). However, it is almost twice as small among the Roma - 4.8%. The reproductive ideals of Roma much more often include three (22.8%) and four or more children (11.2%) compared to other ethnic groups.

**Fig. 3. Reproductive ideals in 2021 by ethnic group**

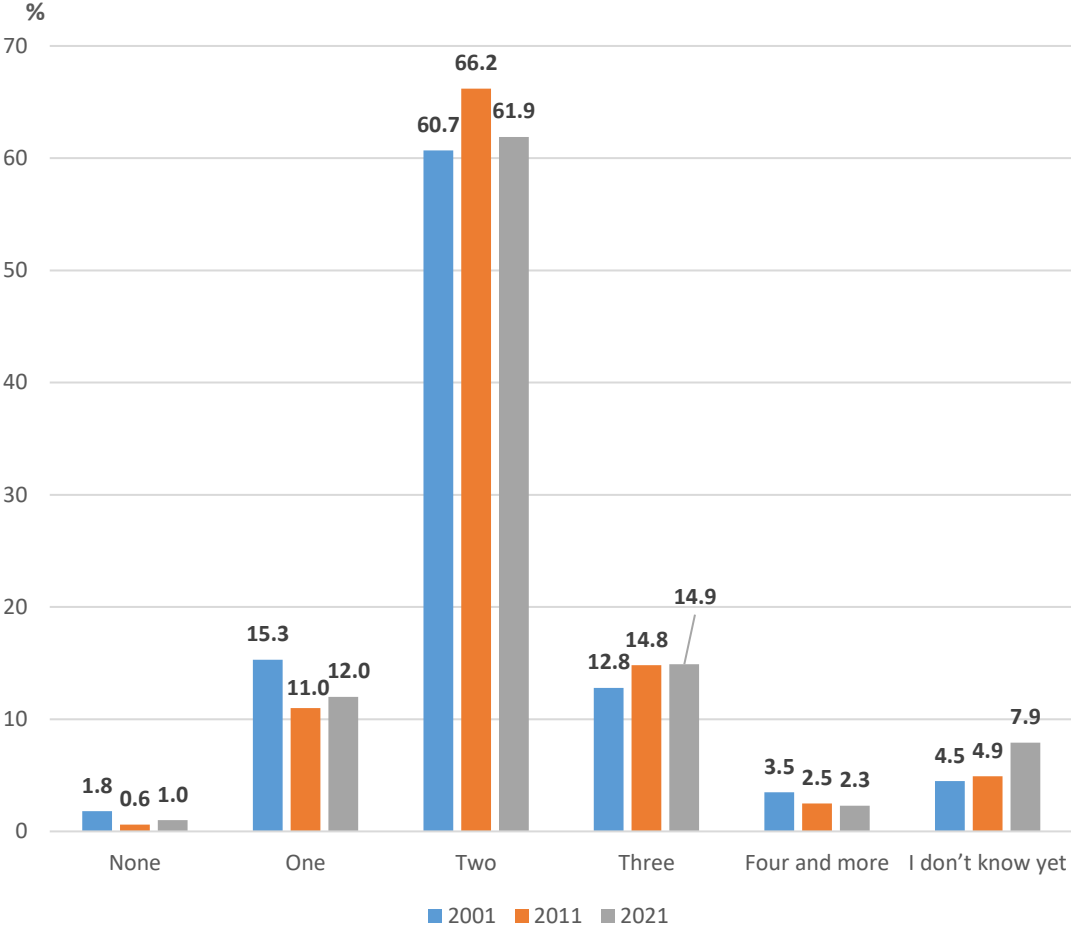


**Reproductive attitudes** were assessed using the question ‘How many children do you want/wanted to have in your lifetime?’. The survey results show that to a certain extent, people's attitudes repeat their ideal of a family. Leading is the desire for two children in the family (61.9%), followed by the preference for three children (14.9%). The one-child family model is desired by 12% of individuals, and the multi-child family model, with four or more children, by 2.3%. 7.9% of people of reproductive age do not yet

know how many children they would like to have, and 1.0% are categorical that they do not wish to have children.

Following the change of the indicator over the last ten years, we can note a certain decrease in the answer for the desire for two children (by 4.3 percentage points compared to 2011) mainly on the account of the increased share of persons who still cannot give a specific answer.

**Fig. 4. Reproductive attitudes during the period 2001 - 2021**

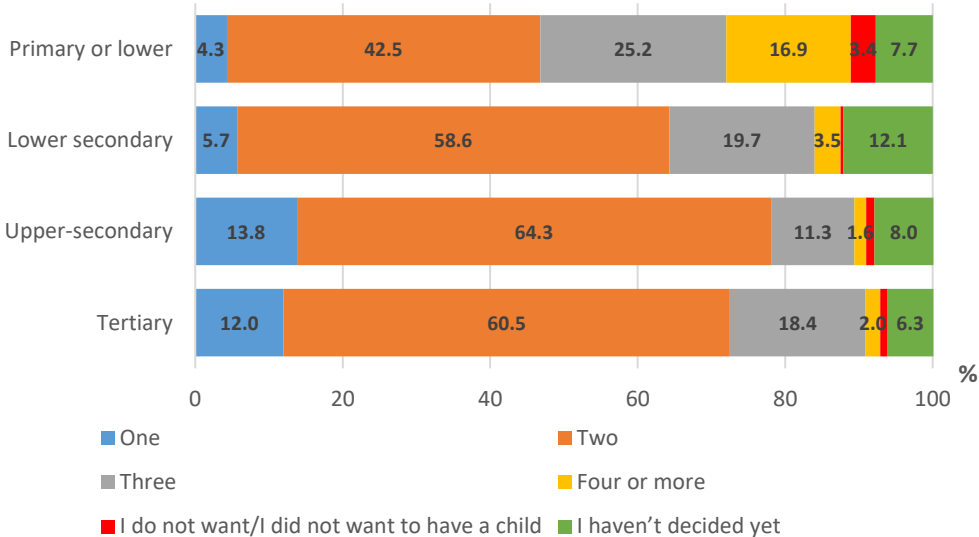


Data analysis shows that there are no significant differences in reproductive attitudes by sex. Two children are desired (or desired) by 61.6% of men and 62.2% of women, and one by 12.2% of men and 11.7% of women, respectively. The difference is greater regarding the preference for three children, expressed by 13.8% of men and 16.3% of women. Men more often cannot answer yet (8.6%), while for women this share is 7.0%.

However, depending on the age of individuals, certain differences in reproductive attitudes are observed. Those wishing to have two children are the least among the youngest (57.3%), while among the other two groups, this share is 62.5% for 30 - 44 year olds and 64.3% among persons aged 45 and over. Among persons aged 15 - 29, the share of those with reproductive attitudes towards one child is also lower (10.6%), and with increasing age, the share changes to 11.6% in the 30 - 44 age group and 13.5% among the most adults. A significantly smaller proportion of young people wish to have three children (12.7%), while among persons aged 30 - 44, this share is 16.8%.

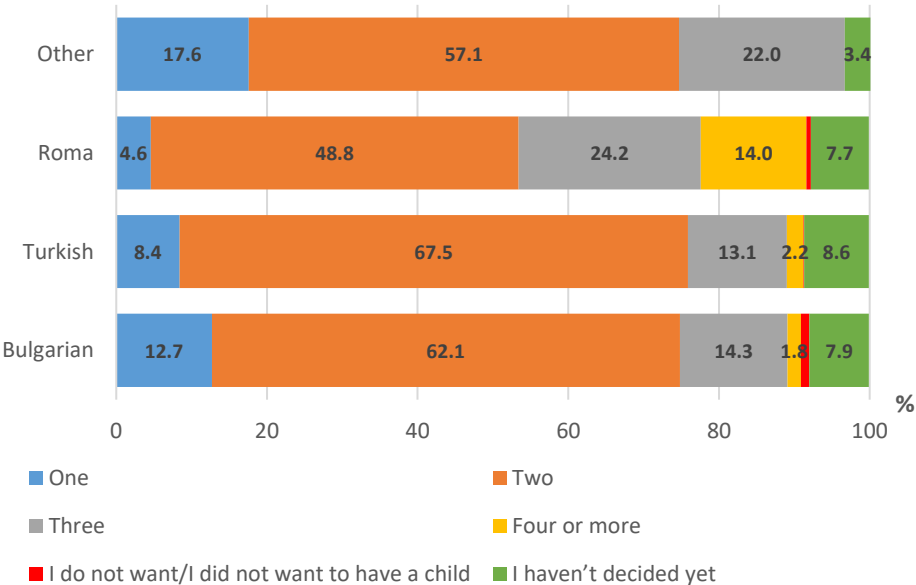
Among young people under the age of 29, the largest share is those who have not yet decided how many children they wish to have (16.2%). These results are largely consistent with data from vital statistics and confirm the trend of recent years of continuous postponement of events related to the reproductive behavior of the young. Thus, in 2021, the average age of women at birth of their first child is 27.5 years.

**Fig. 5. Reproductive attitudes in 2021 by level of education**



The reproductive attitudes of individuals, depending on their education, largely repeat their reproductive ideals. The two-child family model is preferred by all analyzed groups. But while among highly educated persons its share is close to the national average (61.9%), only 42.5% of persons with elementary or lower education want/wanted to have two children.

**Fig. 6. Reproductive attitudes in 2021 by ethnic group**



Among low-educated persons, the shares of those who prefer to have a large family are larger. There are significant differences regarding the answer ‘Four and more children’, which is indicated by 16.9% of persons with primary or lower education and only by 1.6% of those with upper-secondary and 2.0% of persons with tertiary education. It should also be noted the high share of persons with higher education who would like to have three children (18.4%).

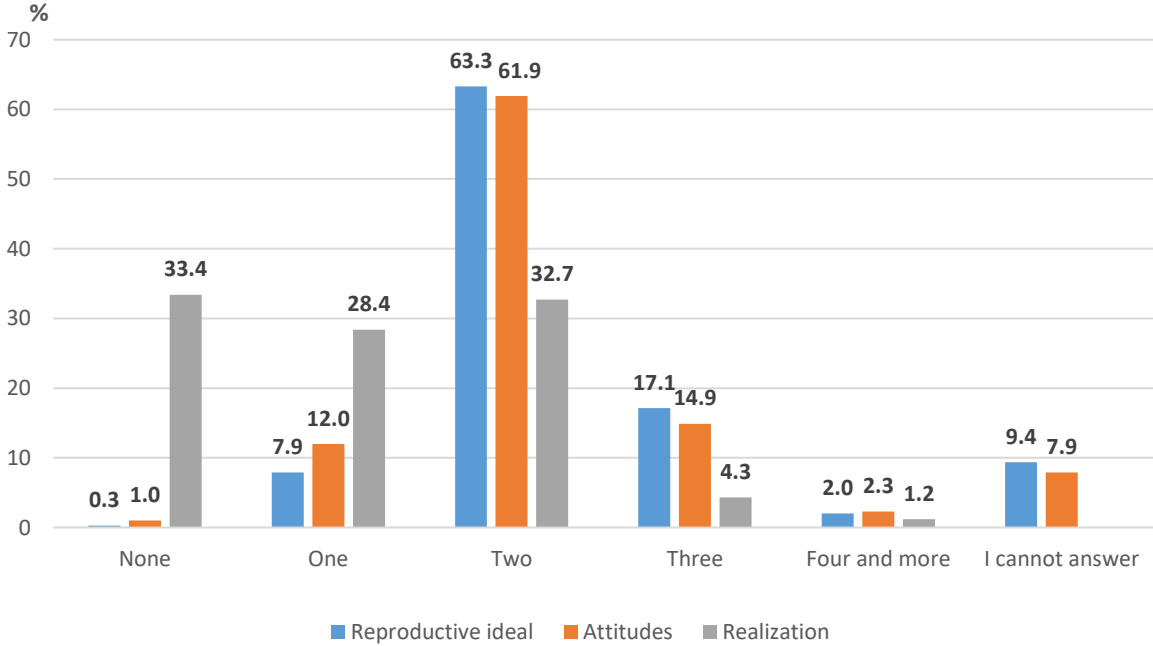
The distribution of persons according to their reproductive attitudes and their self-determination by ethnicity is similar to their ideals. A desire for two children is expressed by 62.1% of Bulgarians, more than two-thirds of those who define themselves as Turks (67.5%) and less than half of Roma (48.8%). Among other ethnic groups, this share is 57.1%.

There are significant differences by ethnicity when expressing a desire for one child. While 12.7% of Bulgarians express such an attitude, for Roma this is the desire of 4.6% of persons. The multi-child family model is most preferred by the Roma, 24.2% of whom wish to have three, and 14.0% - four or more children.

People's reproductive ideals and intentions very often differ from **the actual number of children** in families. The results of the study show that although the ranking of the ideal and desired number of children coincides, there is some discrepancy in their relative shares. The discrepancy is significantly greater when we compare it with the actual number of children in the family.

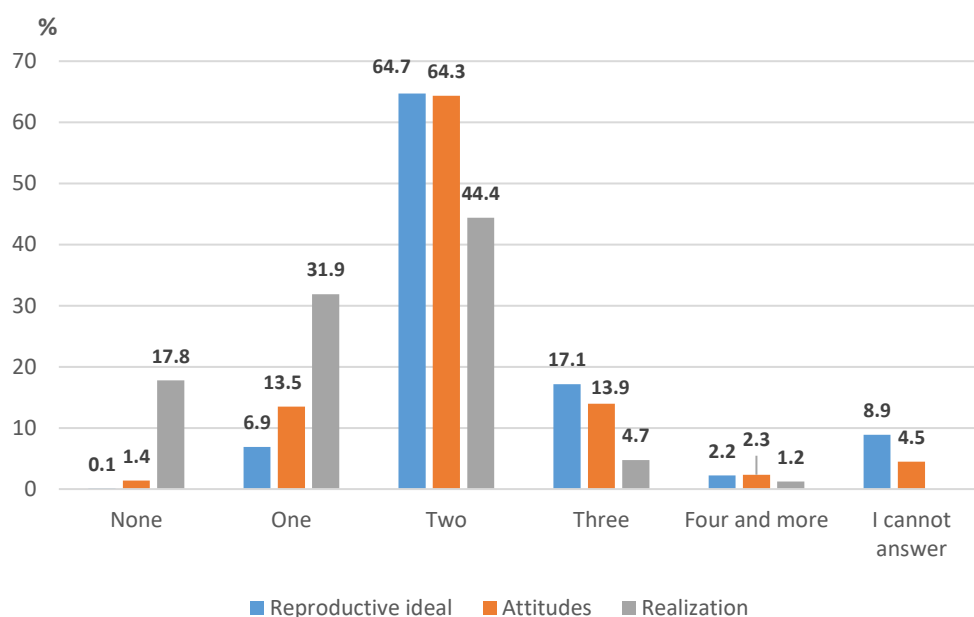
The two-child model is both the ideal for a family (63.3%) and the most desired (61.9%). Among all persons of reproductive age, however, only about half have reached it (32.7%). A family with three children is the ideal for 17.1%, but a smaller share of individuals prefer it (14.9%). Significantly fewer, only 4.3%, actually have three children. One child is the ideal number for 7.9% of women aged 15 - 49 and men aged 15 - 59. This share is larger when it comes to personal intentions - 12.0%, and a significantly larger share of individuals have one child (28.4%).

**Fig. 7. Reproductive ideals, attitudes and actual number of children, 2021**



The analysis of the data is supplemented by tracking the three indicators only for persons over the age of 45, as it can be assumed that the reproductive process has already ended for them.

**Fig. 8. Reproductive ideals, attitudes and their realization among persons aged 45 and over, 2021**



The main conclusions are the following:

- the share of persons without children is extremely high (17.8%) compared to those who have this ideal (0.1%) or prefer this family model (1.4%);

- the share of persons who remain with one child (31.9%) is significantly higher compared to the ideal of a one-child family (6.9%) and those who wish to have one child (13.5%);

- the ideal (64.7%) and desire (64.3%) for two children in the family are not actually realized. 44.4% of persons over 45 years of age have two children;

- three children is an ideal for 17.1%, reproductive intentions for 13.9%, but it is actually realized by a much smaller share of persons at the end of their reproductive period, only 4.7%.

The unrealized reproductive desires of individuals raise the question of the reasons why this happens. The data show that the leading factor in the structure of **reasons for not wanting to have (another) child** is the lack of a partner (15.5%). It is more often mentioned by men (18.4%) than by women (11.1%). In second place are financial reasons (14.8%), respectively for 14.3% of men and 15.7% of women. For 13.6% of men and 16.4% of women, the desired number of children has been reached. Health problems (personal or partner's) are the reason for not having (another) child for 4.4% of persons of reproductive age.

## 1. Reason for not having/not wanting (another) child, 2021

(%)

Reasons	Total	Sex		Age groups		
		Men	Women	15 - 29	30 - 44	Aged 45 and over
Problems related to your health (reproductive or otherwise)	2.9	2.4	3.7	1.1	3.8	3.4
Problems related to the health of your spouse/partner	1.5	1.8	1.0	0.9	1.9	1.4
Work-related reasons	2.3	2.1	2.6	2.4	2.8	1.7
Financial reasons	14.8	14.3	15.7	11.6	17.8	14.0
Insufficient housing and household insurance	5.5	4.6	6.8	5.0	7.0	4.2
I don't feel ready to become a parent (again).	5.7	4.9	6.8	10.4	5.7	2.3
We have reached the desired number of children	14.7	13.6	16.4	5.0	17.3	19.0
I do not wish to have a child/more children	3.9	3.4	4.8	1.9	5.2	4.0
My spouse/partner does not want a child/more children	1.0	0.9	1.1	0.4	1.3	1.1
Old age	12.7	14.3	10.3	2.3	7.3	25.9
I don't have a partner	15.5	18.4	11.1	26.7	14.4	8.5
I haven't finished my education/I'm still studying	5.1	4.4	6.3	18.6	0.4	0.4
I don't want to answer	14.4	15.1	13.3	13.6	15.2	14.1

There are certain differences in the structure of reasons depending on the age of the persons. Among young people aged 15 - 29, the main reasons for not having children are lack of a partner (26.7%), 'I have not finished my education' (18.6%) and 'I do not feel ready to become (again) a parent' (10.4%). These results again confirm the conclusion that can be drawn on the basis of indicators calculated from vital statistics of the postponement of reproductive intentions.

Among persons aged 30 - 44, the main reason for not having (another) child is 'Financial reasons' (17.8%), followed immediately by 'We have reached the desired number of children' (17.3%). The share of persons who answered that they do not have a partner is also considerable (14.4%).

For people at the end of their reproductive age, over 45, the main reasons are advanced age (25.9%), having reached the desired number of children (19.0%), but also financial reasons (14.0%).

A person's decision to become a parent is a choice resulting from a complex process of motivation that can be influenced by multiple factors. To a greater extent, however, it depends on personal attitudes and desires, and interaction with loved ones, relatives, friends and colleagues. To a lesser extent, the social environment and government policies to promote birth rates also have an impact. The importance of these factors in relation to the decision to have (another) child was also investigated within the survey.



The results of the research show that the financial situation (14.7%), the presence of a suitable partner (14.4%) and suitable housing conditions (14.1%) most often influence the decision to have (another) child. The possibility to share the responsibilities with the partner in household care would have an impact on the choice of 13.7% of the individuals, and the combination of family and professional obligations - on 12.2%. Unwavering in their choice are 5.3% of the persons.

## 2. Personal attitudes and desires that would influence the decision to have (another) child, 2021

(%)

Personal attitudes and desires	Total	Sex		Age groups		
		Men	Women	15 - 29	30 - 44	Aged 45 and over
I must have a suitable partner	14.4	14.5	14.1	15.1	14.2	13.9
My financial situation must allow raising a child/another child	14.7	14.7	14.8	14.8	14.9	14.5
I need to live closer to relatives and/or loved ones	5.6	5.6	5.6	5.5	6.1	5.0
I need to be able to combine family and professional obligations	12.2	12.1	12.4	12.3	12.4	12.0
I should be able to combine my personal interests and hobbies with the role of a parent	8.2	8.2	8.1	8.4	8.2	7.9
My partner and I have to share household responsibilities	13.7	13.6	13.9	13.8	13.6	13.8
My partner and I must be psychologically prepared to have a child/another child	11.7	11.8	11.6	12.1	11.8	11.4
We must have suitable living conditions for raising a child/another child	14.1	14.1	14.1	14.3	14.0	13.9
Nothing would influence my decision to have a child/another child	5.3	5.3	5.4	3.5	4.8	7.6

To a lesser extent, but still, the measures and state policies undertaken with a view to increasing the birth rate in the country have an impact. Most often, people answered that they would change their decision if the quality of health services and access to them improved for children and their parents (12.0%). The increase in social assistance funds would have impact on the choice of 11.6% of individuals, and guaranteed access to nurseries, kindergartens and pre-school forms of education - on 11.0%.

**3. Measures and government policies that would influence the decision to have (another) child, 2021**

(%)

Measures and government policies	Total	Sex		Age groups		
		Men	Women	15 - 29	30 - 44	Aged 45 and over
Ability to work reduced/flexible hours or home office	8.4	7.9	9.3	9.2	8.8	7.3
Guaranteed children's access to nurseries, kindergartens and pre-school forms of education	11.0	10.8	11.2	11.8	11.0	10.3
Increase in funds for social assistance in childbirth and raising a child	11.6	11.6	11.6	11.4	11.9	11.3
Removing the income limit for receiving family allowances for children (child allowances)	10.0	10.2	9.7	9.5	10.2	10.1
Improving the quality of health services and access to them for children and their parents	12.0	12.0	12.0	11.7	12.5	11.6
Reduction of taxes for parents depending on the number of children in the family	10.7	10.7	10.6	10.7	10.7	10.7
Facilitation in granting/using consumer and/or housing credit for parents	9.9	10.1	9.6	10.2	9.7	9.9
Daycare for school-aged children before and after school and during school holidays	9.8	9.7	10	9.8	9.9	9.7
Creating an environment and conditions for appropriate organization of free time for young people and families with children	9.7	9.6	9.9	10.3	9.4	9.6
Nothing would influence my decision to have a child/another child	6.9	7.4	6.2	5.4	5.9	9.4

Studying the reproductive behavior of men and women in Bulgaria, we should not limit ourselves to issues related to the birth of (another) child. Relationships between men and women in relation to raising children are also important. Therefore, in the present survey, a module of questions is included that allow analysis of the main aspects of daily care and activities related to raising children up to 14 years of age.

The results show that more often the mother is involved in the daily activities and care of the child (feeding, bathing, sleeping), taking care when sick, or helping the child with school activities. To a greater extent, games and walks are shared with the father, as well as the commitment to support (take to, pick up from, take extra care of) the child in performing extracurricular activities (sports, language, art, etc.).

#### 4. Childcare, 2021<sup>1</sup>

(%)

	Children age	
	Up to 14	Aged 0 - 3
Who usually provides daily care for the child (feeding, bathing, dressing, putting to sleep)?		
The mother	54.3	69.7
The father	..	-
Both parents	31.1	26.4
The child does it alone	11.0	..
Who usually takes care of the child during the day when he is sick?		
The mother	65.9	74.9
The father	2.4	..
Both parents	24.1	17.9
Who usually plays with the child (play at home, walks, recreational activities)?		
The mother	35.5	43.1
The father	4.7	..
Both parents	46.6	50.1
Grandmother and/or Grandfather	2.8	..
Who usually helps the child with learning activities (homework, learning new skills, knowledge)?		
The mother	47.5	52.3
The father	3.2	..
Both parents	39.1	42.3
Grandmother and/or Grandfather	2.5	..
Who usually supports (takes to, picks up from, takes extra care of) the child in performing extracurricular activities (sports, language, art, etc.)?		
The mother	35.8	42.9
The father	9.5	6.7
Both parents	41.6	46.0
Grandmother and/or Grandfather	5.2	..

‘..’ - Estimates are not published.

<sup>1</sup> When disseminating the data, the following rules apply:

- Estimates are not published if they are based on less than 20 cases of sample observations or the relative share of non-respondents exceeds 50%;
- Estimates are published with a note if they are based on 20 to 49 cases of sample observations or the relative share of non-respondents is over 20% and is less than or equal to 50%;
- Estimates are published if they are based on more than 50 cases of sample observations or the relative share of non-respondents does not exceed 20%.