

Families in EU-15: policies, challenges and opportunities

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Österreichisches Institut für Familienforschung
Austrian Institute for Family Studies

Brigitte Cizek, Rudolf Richter (eds.)

Families in EU-15

*Policies, challenges and
opportunities*

Heft 23 | 2004



European Observatory
on the Social Situation, Demography and Family

MATTERIALE



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Foreword

This is the final report from the EU Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and the Family regarding developments concerning families in the EU15 member countries. It started in 1989 as an European Observatory on National Family Policies, changed its name in 2000 to the European Observatory on Family Matters and we completed the work under its present name. The name change symbolised a shift from concentration on family policy to a broader social science perspective which still took the family as its starting point.

In the last six years the observatory was coordinated by the Austrian Institute for Family Studies with a coordination team initially led by Helmut Wintersberger, followed by Rudolf Richter and finally Brigitte Cizek. The members of the final coordination team were Wolfgang Lutz, Christiane Rille-Pfeiffer, Johannes Pfliegerl, Rudolf Richter and Rudolf Karl Schipfer. Among other tasks, they decided to ask experts to write general monitoring reports about the situation of the family in their own country. This publication comprises the final reports, giving the essentials of the social situation of the family from the point of view of experts from the EU15 countries before enlargement.

The Observatory possessed many advantages and its structure is rather exemplary for scientific counselling. It consisted of independent experts, one from each of the EU15 countries. They were not representatives of their country, but excellent scholars in the fields of sociology, demography, statistics, economics and other social sciences. They have general expertise in their disciplines which is not nationally bound. But they had also detailed knowledge of the situation in their own country. Since they were not representatives of their country or any particular interest group, but are only responsible to their scientific knowledge, they could act and work independently and the European Commission appreciated this independent position.

The country reports in this volume cover different fields and are integrated in a synthesis report. All European countries face similar problems but these problems vary in their importance. Thus fertility is discussed as well as family forms, including leaving the family household, generational relationships, relationships between family members, especially the situation of young people. Children and the elderly, family policies, measures for reconciling work and family, pension and health systems are also among the numerous issues raised.

The reader will thus obtain fundamental knowledge about diverse and similar situations within the EU15 and will glean detailed knowledge of the countries by reading individual country reports. The publication can be seen as a handbook on the family situation in Europe before the enlargement.

In my role as coordinator and also as an expert, I would like to thank all members of the Austrian Institute for Family Studies who helped to coordinate 15 different experts. This task cannot be underestimated, as everybody who tries to organize scientists knows. Thanks are also due to the experts who tackled the different tasks asked of them, writing reports, preparing papers for a broader audience and participating in various events all over Europe, thus making this Observatory a challenging, intercultural and interdisciplinary organization, a truly European enterprise for everyone.

Finally, I want to thank the "heart" of our Observatory, Sylvia Trnka, who was not only in charge of administration but also took part in all the discussions, often guiding them with her calm sensitivity when practical work was required. We greatly appreciated her contribution.

I trust the reader will enjoy reading the final reports as much as we enjoyed working on the issues.

Rudolf Richter

Member of the Co-ordination Team and National Expert for Austria

Synthesis
(English, German)

WALTER BIEN

The situation of families in EU-15

A synthesis based on the national reports

Introductory considerations

The family is a cornerstone of European societies. This applies regardless of whether EU bodies have or obtain competences in family matters or whether the activities of such bodies, both implicitly and explicitly, focus on families. Eventually, the future of the EU will be defined by Europeans who are now in their childhood and, in the medium and long run, their own children and grandchildren. Human resources, i.e. the people and their abilities and skills, provide the affluence of Old Europe. Promoting and optimising such human resources thus is the premier prerequisite to ensure that the European Union will retain its internationally competitive position. The family as a space for reproduction, socialisation, regeneration, and—at least equally important—potential buffer against the ubiquitous hazards of life is typically underrated, underestimated and given less than its due. Almost all social segments, be it in a regional, national or supranational context, fail to perceive how dependent they are on the output of their own population and thus on well-functioning families. The young, i.e. the coming generations, present and future families, the succession of generations, determine the present and future of Europeans to a much greater extent than is accounted for in legislation, economic relations and discussions of the current decision-makers in the European Union.

The European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family provides a meeting point for individuals from a range of nations and sciences, men and women from different generations, of different lifestyles and different views. They are not representative of their country of origin (nor can they be) but they stand for the heterogeneity of Europe. Their exchange of views in a common language, on a common subject, with a common objective and more or less regardless of their nationality is an example for a desirable future co-operation in Europe. A young mother discussing with an experienced grandfather, the psychologist meeting with the population scientist, and the female expert from the north exchanging opinions with the male expert from the south—all this has produced a lively discourse on the subjects within the brief of the European Observatory and is reflected in its national reports. Just as these national reports cannot span the variety of individual countries, so does this summary fail to provide a representative picture of all the national reports. It images the subjective angle of an individual expert in viewing the joint discussion. The point of this summary is to excite the curiosity of readers to turn to individual national reports and perceive the diversity as well as common aspects of family life in Europe.

The national reports and discussions of recent years have left the author with the impression that they concentrate on deploring aspects that are hoped to be changed by proper intervention. But what is insufficiently discussed in the countries is the goals which are to be achieved by intervention and, even more, the consequences which are to be expected when these goals are achieved. Thus it is widely deplored globally that birth rates are too low, yet nobody is able to state specifically which birth rates are proper now or will be in the future. If life expectancy were to remain unchanged, the generational intervals remained identical, net migration were zero and we were to achieve a stable labour market as well as other stable parameters, a birth rate of just over 2.0 would be useful and desirable in the mid to long term. But for as long as many young adults are unable to get into the labour market, life expectancy continues to grow and net migration is positive, such a figure cannot be a useful target. But what is the proper target for today and the next years? Proposals for intervention will make sense only when you have targets. Targets will make sense only when you understand and accept their consequences.

A country or region obtains and maintains its affluence by competing with other countries or regions. For Europe to keep its level of affluence, politicians should always keep in mind how their actions impact on competition between the nations to achieve a good position in the future. Considering that Europe's strength is its human resources and social infrastructure and that Europe so far enjoys a good competitive position internationally, efforts in this field translate as investments in a good future.

The social infrastructure underlying Europe as a successful model is based on a system of solidarity which strives, both at institutional and informal level, to establish and maintain fairness and equity between all involved. In such a system, intergenerational exchange, whether institutionally through transfers or informally within families, plays a crucial role. To this end, the concept of the 'family' should be broadly defined rather than reduced to the co-habitation of parent(s) and minors in a single household. An example of this problem would be defining the family as a social unit which cares for and raises one or more children—a definition used in the Netherlands. In contrast to Durkheim—i.e. family as a spousal and parental partnership—this model uses parenting and thus the parent/child relationship while the child grows up as the sole characteristic to define a family. Such a definition fails to include the reality of families that span three or more generations and ignores their positive effect on future society. The Forum *Familie in Bayern* describes a family as a long-term solidarity community that, as a rule, includes more than one generation. The purpose of this definition is to identify a subunit that will support much of the current growth and future problem-solving capacity.

The following report comprises a (subjective) selection of problems that will—ultimately—be found in all countries but are dealt with differently in current discussions. Accordingly it is useful to look at all national reports individually, so as to understand the wide range of country-specific discussion patterns and approaches as a basis for interpretation.

In asking experts to summarise and digest in a few pages almost a decade of family developments, family problems and approaches to their solution in their respective countries, they were given a very demanding and challenging task. Yet their varying approaches, weightings and nuances derived from their different origins have produced a fascinating mosaic of the situation of families in Europe, the discussion of the family and efforts by politicians and governments to deal with these problems. Obviously, the experts' individuality has made a mark on reports, but it is this mixture of individual views, that have not been pressed into a Procrustean bed of general applicability and thus mediocrity, which ensures the attractiveness of co-operation within the Observatory and its national reports, guaranteeing that all the reports and activities merge into a representative image of European variety.

The following table offers an overview, or rather an enumeration, of subtopics dealt with during the period under review and found in the national reports.

All these topics are more or less covered in all countries. A mark in bold typeface means that the relevant topic is explicitly dealt with in the national report, whereas a mark in normal typeface means that the subject is referred to implicitly in the report or has been assigned to a country from oral reports and discussions at the European Observatory. The national reports, as well as discussions in individual countries, show that each country deals with specific problems which are assumed not to elicit the full understanding of other countries. Yet when we look at the national reports overall and at the supranational discussions at the Observatory over the past years, we see that countries have much more in common than had been expected. Ultimately, all the problems listed actually occur everywhere, even though at different levels of intensity and different development stages. The interesting point of a Europe-wide discussion is that it offers a comparison between internal problems and those experienced in other EU Member States that have already overcome a given stage. In this way, successes as well as failures can be utilised to improve one's own understanding of and response to the situation.

Table 1: Overview of the subjects dealt with in the national reports

	B	DK	D	FIN	F	GR	UK	IRL	I	LUX	NL	A	P	S	E
Family relations															
Family forms	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Leaving family household (empty nest)			x			x		x	x						
Marriage rate, registered cohabitation, homosexual marriages	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Relationships, divorce, separation, child contact in separated couples	x		x		x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Lone mother households			x			x		x		x					
Childless women			x	x							x			x	
Demographic situation															
Birth rate	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Timing of children			x					x	x		x				
Large families				x	x				x				x		
Birth out of wedlock			x		x	x								x	
Abortion								x					x		x
Gender relations															
Relationship (male, female, gender)	x	x	x	x		x		x				x	x	x	
Fathers	x		x	x			x	x			x		x		x
Female labour	x	x	x	x		x		x					x		
Work-family balance (reconciliation)	x	x	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Family violence				x			x					x	x		x
Generational relations															
Well-being of children				x				x		x	x				x
Child care	x	x	x	x	x	x		x			x	x		x	
Education system			x			x	x								
Young people (unemployment)			x		x	x	x								x
Young people (family)			x										x		
Situation (care) of the elderly	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x			x	x	
Socio-economic situation of families															
Employment, labour market		x	x		x	x		x							x
Housing									x		x				x
Family (child) poverty			x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x		
Support, family network					x				x						
Citizenship, migration						x		x					x		x
Convergence on EU mean, regional view	x		x				x	x	x				x		x
Family policies	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Family services	x		x	x	x	x		x				x	x		
Role of family in society (family policy)	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x		x		x
Family mainstreaming, family as a general discussion	x						x		x						
Reducing public spending			x	x							x	x	x		
Pension systems						x				x		x		x	
Family transfer discussion			x	x		x		x				x			x
Family reporting			x					x			x				
Family competence, family education			x	x								x			x

Examples of current debate at national level

The above table is yet another example of the variety and commonality found, but also of the difficulty encountered in systematising the subjects. It is the result of numerous but vain attempts to discover an overall order that would be self-explanatory. In the end, the only option remaining was to approach the problem in an enumerative and exemplary manner, foregoing the desire for a comprehensive and congruent structure. For this, the following provides pointers to the current discussions at regional level.

In Belgium, a broad debate aimed at abolishing discrimination between family and gender forms has shaped legislation, combined with efforts to improve the situation of families beyond financial transfers and the provision of services. Thus, child care is no longer seen exclusively from the angle of reconciliation between work and family but, ever more expansively, as an investment in the future. Public discussion tends away from a family policy to boost birth rates, towards a family-friendly policy, i.e. from a deficit policy to an investment policy for a better future. Seen this way, Belgium is typical of European institutions. Although competency for most family policies is vested in the regions, the government makes use of its central competencies as a key to creating a better and safer future without negatively interfering with the delicate balance of subsidiary relationships.

Another example is Spain. Here, the birth rate appears to have reached its lowest point. With GDP growing and work prospects for women improving, these decisive factors are expected to continue their positive course. Yet young couples are still limited in their options to establish their own households, so that housing policy and interventions to improve the housing market should contribute most to improving the situation in the future.

In Italy, the family has arrived at a mid-point between tradition and modernisation. While the family continues to be the centre and apex of life, its structures are gradually changing to resemble the European mainstream. In contrast to central and northern Europe, providential services are still a family matter in Italy. The number of families is growing while their size is shrinking. Partnerships are entered at a later date, weddings become more infrequent, and separations and divorce are spreading.

One of the greatest changes in the Netherlands over the past decade is the development of a multitude of transitional forms between leaving the parental nest and establishing a marital family. Same as in most countries, divorce is on the rise in the Netherlands, but at the same time is increasingly seen as a negative lifecycle event that should preferably be avoided.

The greatest change in Finland over the past ten years is that while the number of single households is higher than ever, there have never been as many people cohabiting as today.

In Greece, the current situation is typically interpreted as a weakening of family relations, but in actual fact family forms appear to undergo a change such as has been taking place for a long time in other European countries. Yet Greece is still free of problems that have become acute elsewhere.

France holds a theoretically founded discussion on family rhetoric with the following dimensions:

- Family as an individual affair (problem or happiness) vs. family as an important subsystem of society for which the government/politicians are responsible (duty of intervention).
- Family as a vision of how it could be if the actual problems did not exist vs. traditional family as a living reality with all its problems and weaknesses. This tempts debaters to perceive the vision as positive and see reality as being negative.
- Family affected by a change in values, where the negative progression towards individualisation is countered by a desire for positive solidarity.
- Family in the centre of a debate on inequality, in terms of specific situations depending on the family phase or constellation.

Debates of this sort are necessary and useful to ensure that options and conditions, and thus also needs, will be preserved in their variety and not used for marginalisation in the political fight over the distribution of funds. But they are always interacting with current problems.

While a high labour participation rate among women is perceived to be positive, due to the growing number of double-earner households it comes with a number of problems also in France: (a) directly for the part-

ners themselves, e.g. through the need to renegotiate the share of household work and the need for more child care facilities; (b) for society at large, because it will in the future be faced with the problem of how to distribute the gainful work available, because in an ageing society it will be not just the young who enter the labour market but also the 'young old' who will look for access to work in order to preserve the social transfer systems. The growth of double-earner households and a prolongation of active working life will also impact on the care of the very old and those in need of nursing among the older generation, which services are no longer provided by family members. It is also necessary to review the intergenerational contract and re-assign institutional and family nursing. That there is a need for the latter (not just in France) was made ominously clear by the heat wave in the summer of 2003, where more than 15,000 people died in France alone, a consequence also of the changing intergenerational relationships in today's families compared to former decades.

In Germany, efforts are made to develop a future scenario in the Agenda 2010, where the family and family policy play an important role. The purpose is to find a social consensus, with the various actors (politics, business, government, associations (a strong factor in Germany), as well as individual citizens) together developing an environment where family and child promotion are given more importance and the 'structural inconsiderateness' diagnosed in former family reports is to give way to a positive child- and family-friendly environment.

Family relations and family forms

Generally speaking, families in the EU now have altogether more living space which has enabled a new level of quality in family relations: intimacy at arm's length—family members now live at a greater distance from each other, compared to former times when large families lived in the same household or under the same roof. In order to describe how families live together in their various forms and in real life, the usual practice of official statistics, which record families solely as 'households', is no longer adequate. The problem is not so much that EU Member States use different definitions of what constitutes a 'household'. Where statistics go wrong is rather that they cannot depict families living in several households either under one roof or in neighbouring houses interacting with their actual family links. Statistically viewed, multigenerational households dissolve into individual and isolated households even when (to use an example) the new house of the young generation is built in the orchard behind the house used by the parent generation and when their family life continues at the same intensity but at a higher quality of living.

Longer and, quite possibly, more heterogeneous life courses constitute another problem for the statistical depiction of families. Children leaving the nest, couples separating, lone parents remarrying or the death of a family member—these are events only partly reflected in the statistics of family and household forms. Thus, parents become statistically 'childless' when their grown-up children leave home. And when statisticians find an increase in single households, this does not necessarily indicate that people turn away from family life to embrace individual life forms: many single households consist of widows after their family life or young adults before starting a family. Such changes in life courses and in the cycle of family phases need not affect actual family bonds but may impact on the overall statistical distribution of household and family arrangements in a given country or in the EU overall and cause misinterpretations when statistics tell only of the number of households and household members and the size of available living space without regarding actual family networks. Specifically, the major changes in southern Europe need to be seen less as value changes and more in connection with non-intended changes attendant to the transition to modernity.

Greece has similarly seen an increase in the number of households whereas their size has declined. It is the result of growing affluence and a resultant improvement in living conditions which enable people to enjoy intimacy at arm's length. The greatest growth rate is in single households (from 16% to 20%). In Greece, the modernising thrust for families means that the classical marriage is retreating, the first child is born later, marriage phases are shorter, divorce and separation are on the increase, non-marital cohabitation becomes more widespread, as do births out of wedlock. Yet in spite of all this, young grown-ups remain long with their parents: over the past ten years, the age at which young men and women leave their parents' home has on average risen from 29 to 31 and from 24 to 27 respectively.

In Italy, the young are even more reluctant to leave the nest, opting for partnership, marriage and childbirth even later in life. Apart from objective reasons (longer education/training, problems in entering the labour market, finding a suitable flat), this is also due to a subjective feeling of well-being, i.e. a positive balance between parental support and supervision. Since parents similarly welcome and support their children's longer stay, all those involved appear to be satisfied with the parental home turning into a 'Hotel Mama'. Altogether, both generations consider the loss attendant to an early retreat to be greater than the advantages of the status quo. Nevertheless, such personal profit maximisation gives rise to social problems: a widespread delay in starting on young families causes demographic losses; getting used to the protection of the family may impair the ability to lead an independent life at a later date; investment into education will remain fallow for a long time; and once the family shield is lost, society cannot offer any adequate replacement from institutional services.

Portugal similarly records fewer and later weddings, an increase in non-marital cohabitation and births out of wedlock, a rise in divorce and remarriage rates and a decline in birth rates. Here too the average household size has shrunk since fewer children and fewer generations live under the same roof. The number of single households is growing because young grown-ups leave earlier and older persons (such as the grandparents) frequently exchange the multigenerational household for a home of their own in order to improve their living conditions. The largest group is made up of married couples. There is a rise of sole parents, particularly of never-married sole parents (many of whom live with their parents) and a decline of multigenerational households.

Marriage, non-marital and registered (homosexual) cohabitation

The discussion of non-marital and registered partnership models is a smokescreen for innumerable debates that focus on values. From a meta-point of view, modern secular societies have no reason not to review traditional forms of relationships and develop different, possibly better, frameworks, especially when tradition fails to include other types of partnership such as non-marital or homosexual cohabitation or life-course changes such as separation and divorce. Considering today's higher life expectancy, marriage vows ('until death do us part') no longer mean what they meant a few decades ago. Today it is customary and usual for many people to enter into sequential partnerships prior and after a child-raising phase, regardless of marital bonds. Yet this certainly does not mean that marriage has lost out in all or most of the countries.

Most youth studies and investigations of conditions required by potential parents to meet the wish for progeny show that a reliable partnership is a crucial objective and prerequisite for a fulfilled life. Thus in Germany, the probability of a child living with his/her own parents for the first 18 years of life is 80% for married parents and 20% in non-marital partnerships. Accordingly the question is not: either registered partnership or marriage—both forms are important, depending on the situation and expectations. Any public discussion, such as is unfortunately all too common, where each side champions its own form and disparages the other will only be harmful. An open discussion accepts that two adults may wish for a partnership in the spirit of solidarity but outside marriage, but that on the other hand marriage as an institution is (at least so far) still the preferred option for many if not most of the future or present parents, and that both types should be fostered in response to specific life situations.

In Belgium, the discussion of registering non-marital partnerships, homosexual marriage and acceptance of private contracts to regulate cohabitation has resulted in full recognition of "non marital cohabitation" as well as "same-sex marriage". Indeed, the LTC (Living Together Contracts) was institutionalised in 1996; whereas "same-sex marriage" was introduced January 30th 2003.

Since 1999, France has been offering the option of a *pacte civil de solidarité* (PACS) as a partnership model for hetero- and homosexual couples. By 2003, some 100,000 such pacts had been registered. As a result, the number of unmarried couples with children has grown, and marriage is no longer a prerequisite for couples who want children. One outcome of this new situation is a rising birth rate.

In Finland, the marriage rate (married persons as a share of all over-15-year-olds) declined significantly between 1990 and 2001 (from 27.9% to 23.9% among men and from 23.7% to 20.6% among women). One reason for this is the postponement of first marriages, from 28.6 to 31.4 years (for men) and from 26.6 to 29.1 years (for women), another (e.g. for the lower marriage rate among women) is the longer lifetime (widow-

hood), as well as the high share of non-marital partnerships. Since 2002 and following a long and still ongoing debate, Finland has been offering gay and lesbian couples the option of a registered partnership.

Ireland is recording a dramatic rise in the number of non-marital as well as same-sex (non-marital) partnerships.

Similar to the situation in other southern European countries, non-marital partnership is a rather rare phenomenon in Spain, although acceptance is growing among the populace. In the future, both non-marital partnerships and, consequently, the rate of births out of wedlock, are expected to grow. Legal recognition of non-marital partnership is currently not an option.

Separation and divorce

Across Europe, separation and divorce vary in incidence and in the form of social recognition, and different forms of legal acceptance and procedures have developed in the different countries of Europe. Generally, separation and divorce are accepted as a reality in all of Europe, and their rates are steadily rising. One reason for this certainly is the rise in life expectancy, a factor which by itself makes divorce and separation more probable over a longer lifetime. Are such changes relevant for social discussion or are they simply unavoidable, welcome or regrettable developments in a modern Europe?

Growing-up is associated with embarking upon partnerships which need not necessarily end up in a life-long association. Terminating such a partnership may well be painful for those involved, but will not normally be life-threatening, and is usually accepted by society. Problems will begin to abound when a partnership grows into a family, i.e. becomes a community of grown solidarity that spans expectations of reliable support between partners, between parents and their minor children, and between grandparents and grandchildren.

For most Europeans, the family as a reliable partnership is closely tied to a future that is worth living and desirable. When such a system breaks and when broken families have much more problems than intact ones in accessing resources, practical issues will crop up, away from any debate of values, that concern measures to support those affected and—even more important—preventive measures both to sustain relationships and to cover periods after their breakup. Such measures to sustain families do not mean mandatory legal measures nor efforts to preserve disrupted marriages at all cost. Prevention means taking serious the desire for a reliable partnership, and thus taking preventive action against any avoidable potential for separation caused by inadequate conflict-handling know-how. This is where an investment of efforts yields greater interests than any support after separation. Preventive measures after separation include, i.e., gender equality in access to education, training, jobs and careers, and a gender balance in the job and family work. It is only thus that gender-specific poverty risks can be effectively prevented after separation.

Divorce rates in France have risen from 9% (1965) to over 40% (since 2000). Attendant to this, the number of sole parents and patchwork families (step-families) has similarly grown.

Austria similarly records a rise in divorce rates to, at present 46%. When looking at divorce rates we need to understand that they are current divorces in terms of current weddings, i.e. divorce rates refer to a lower base rate for marriages. An average marriage (the period between wedding and divorce) lasts for 9.5 years in Austria. In Austria and in western Germany, some 80% of children below the age of 19 see their parents divorcing; 25% find their parents separated or divorced before they are 18 years old; 5% have never lived together with both parents.

As a consequence of growing divorce and separation rates, lone parent households are similarly growing. In Finland, the share of children with lone mothers rose from 9% in 1985 to 17.2% in 2002, that of children with lone fathers from 1.1% in 1985 to 2.4% in 2002. Figures are even higher in Sweden, where 23% of children below age 17 live with their lone mother and 5% with their lone father; whereas 72% live with both biological parents. Compared to this, only 1.5% of households in Greece are lone-parent ones, of which four-fifths are lone mothers.

Ireland introduced a new and more liberal divorce law in 1997, in consequence of which divorces went up by some 50%, which also increased the share of lone mothers.

Even though the number of lone parents (and in particular that of lone mothers) is on the increase in most EU Member States, we cannot claim that this is a new family form chosen as an alternative to a two-parent family. With a very few exceptions, lone parenting is either the result of an unplanned pregnancy outside a steady relationship or it comes about when a jointly planned partnership breaks up. One indicator is the fact that in many countries child poverty (to the extent defined) affects mostly the children of lone mothers. For this reason, initiatives to improve the situation of lone mothers, by transfer benefits or, even better, by opening opportunities for them to participate in working life, need to be complemented by measures to prevent avoidable separations and divorces: conflict management, improved couple management, couple and family counselling and preventive conflict assistance are always preferable to post-fact help.

Childless women

Germany exemplifies the many facets encountered in the debate on childlessness. There are hardly any reliable figures on the subject, since even the microcensus does not ask about own children, but only about own children 'in the household'. With this, each mother suddenly becomes 'childless' once the last grown-up child has left the household. Discussions accordingly are pregnant with problems. A recent forecasts tells of more than 40% of the female university graduates being permanently childless. This is frequently interpreted as women being career-driven, selfish and refusing to bear children. As usual, appearances are deceptive, as are hastily drawn conclusions.

For one, there has always been a high share of permanently childless women (and men) in Germany (the percentage of childless women at the end of the 19th century is exactly the same as that in the late 20th century). Secondly, it is open to dispute whether, at a given birth rate, it is better for all women to get one child or for many women to get two or three children and others to get none at all. Thirdly, the actual number of children is not representative of what people actually wish for. Same as other young people, students both male and female at German universities wish to raise two or three children in a family, but obviously many of them fail to fulfil their wish. Some don't because they have no partner and choosing a partner is postponed and because— with women marrying above their social status and men marrying below theirs—the growing qualification of women makes the market increasingly difficult for highly qualified women. A second reason is shown up in nearly every European and national study: Many women who are forced by circumstances to choose between a career and child now decide to postpone (but not give up) their wish for a child which, for biological reasons, leads to their remaining childless. The attempt to marry above their status or embark on a career is often connected to efforts to create conditions where future children would have better opportunities than if they were born now. Post-modernist reasonings for childlessness—anticipated selfishness, individualisation that is hostile to the community, and refusal to undertake the maternal role due to a consumer-driven conflict of interest—abound in the public debate, but fail to appear in empirical studies. Quite often the real reason for childlessness is not a rejection of children but rather an excessive ideal perception of optimal conditions for raising children.

Seen against this background, the growing number of childless women—and especially of women with a high qualification level—is certainly worrying but there is a range of influencing and intervention options open to us other than appealing to allegedly unwilling women to undertake their maternal duties.

Births and birth rate

In Austria, as in the rest of Europe, the own family is the most important reference group for the young. A constant partnership and children are part and parcel of life planning for young people. Nevertheless, marriages are steadily postponed, even though young Austrians leave the nest at a relatively early age, and the birth rate remains at a relatively low level.

Compared to central and northern European states, it is Spain, Italy and other EU Member States in the south-east of Europe which have the lowest birth rates. Apart from other trends comparable to the remaining EU Member States, the south is characterised by two special features:

- Young people leave their parental home at an extremely late date; thus delaying the first partnership and birth. More supervision of the young people's compliance with social standards means that the low legitimate birth rates are not compensated by births out of wedlock as is customary in the northern and central European states.
- Young people are equally desirous to reconcile job and family as are their peers in the rest of Europe. Yet opportunities, especially for married women, to achieve a balance between work and children are substantially fewer than hoped for. As a result, birth rates continue to decline or remain stable at a low level.

Owing to its specific socio-cultural background, Portugal is proceeding on its own course. After more than 50 years of dictatorship, the 1974 revolution caused a multiplicity of changes. Over the past quarter century, the demographic behaviour and family forms have changed considerably. Recent years have been marked by consolidation rather than dramatic change, but existing trends have continued. Portugal complies with the southern European pattern, i.e.:

- strong ideological family bonds,
- late in joining the demographic change that has gripped central and northern Europe,
- more family-focused lifestyles,
- rudimentary explicit family policy.

Portugal experienced a steep drop in its birth rate during the 1980s and 1990s. Over the past 15 years, it has remained relatively stable at 1.5, with most women expressing a wish to have two to three children. As the reasons for the gap, women state:

- difficult circumstances (housing situation, standard of living, children being dependent for a long time, cost of education),
- problems in reconciling job and family,
- health and age of the mothers.

At 1.3, Greece currently has a very low birth rate. Among the 30–39-year-olds, the trend is seen to be changing, i.e. at this age declining birth rates are reversed and rates are slowly creeping up again. Among the 25–29-year-olds, a slight increase is found, while the under-25-year-olds continue to show declining rates. Long-term expectations assume that the birth rate will grow and become stable at 1.7. In spite of the declining birth rate and shrinking of households, Greece has the largest number of large households in the EU. Half the population lives in households of four and more persons, and just 7% live in single-person households.

Ireland has seen a marked change in its demographic behaviour over recent years. The population has grown as a result of net immigration and a surplus of births over death. Following a sharp drop prior to 1994, births have slowly risen over the past years. The other indices demonstrate the same development that can be found in other EU Member States: reduction of the household size, number of childless couples, the young postpone leaving the nest, starting partnerships and giving birth to their first child, a higher number of births out of wedlock, which is currently above the EU average.

In Finland, the cohorts from low-birth years have arrived at their age of fertility. Together with a reduction of the birth rate from 1.84 to 1.71, this has cut births from 65,000 (1992) to 55,000 (2000).

Other than in the remaining EU, the marriage rate has recovered in France, as has the birth rate, which rose from 1.68 (1994) to 1.91 (2003), even though the age of mothers at their first birth increased from 28.8 (1994) to 29.5 (2003). One reason for the increase in births is a high share of illegitimate births, partly deriving from registered (non-marital) partnerships.

Same as in much of Europe, the birth rate in Austria (1.44) is substantially lower than the wish for children (two compared to, e.g., Finland with 2.4).

In the Netherlands, only 20% of women were dissatisfied with the timing of birth (12% believed it was too late, while 8% felt it was too early). Considering that the number of actual births correlates with the age for the first birth, it will be necessary to influence women to wish for giving birth at an earlier age if higher birth rates are desired.

Abortion

In Greece, gender equality is a subject of public debate and currently discussed from the angle of contraception. The high abortion rate (one out of four women has already undergone an abortion) is to be reduced by the use of modern contraception methods, thus eliminating implicit causes for abortion.

In Spain, abortion continues to be an unsettled issue. Adding abortion on social grounds to legal abortion options is currently a subject of heated discussion, and the number of abortions demanded by young and very young pregnant women is increasing.

In Portugal, the general consensus against abortion is much clearer than in the rest or average of Europe.

In Ireland, abortion continues to be illegal, but the known incidence has been rising since 1980, because women make use of services in other European countries.

Gender relations

Fuelled by the high education level attained by Finnish women, gender relations have undergone a dramatic change in Finland. The country has one of the highest labour participation rates of women in Europe, combined with women making up a high share of the full-time working population. A special feature of the Nordic welfare state is its consideration of women's needs. A wide range of child-care facilities and closely knit social network reduce their dependence on family networks. Nevertheless, the average income of Finnish women is still at about 80% of the male income. Household work is still mostly done by women and larger families still practise the classical male breadwinner model. Parental leave is taken by women, and the average working hours of women are strongly influenced by the age of their children.

Sweden perceives itself at the cutting edge of worldwide efforts to eliminate gender inequality. Ever more men contribute to household work and child care and take parental leave (17.5% of parental leave days are taken by men). In Sweden (as in Germany), overall gainful employment in a family is equally distributed between the two sexes, yet, as is the case in Germany, in terms of internal work-sharing, men tend to be more gainfully employed while women put in more work for the family.

In Austria, child care and household work is designated female work (especially after the birth of the first child). Parental leave is usually taken by women. In contrast to other parts of Europe, women in Germany and Austria find it very difficult, at a subjective level, to reconcile family and work, even though both countries have for many years made efforts in their family policies to improve this situation. Quite possibly, the negative assessment is not based on the actual facts and options to reconcile family and job, but rather on a maternity ideology which requires mothers to devote most of their day to their children. Faced with a different situation in actual practice, this generates dissatisfaction. Gender relations have undergone substantial change in recent decades, and this development will continue. Nevertheless, studies have found that two out of three women and three out of four men are satisfied with their traditional role assignment. If we look at satisfaction levels across family phases, we find a U-shaped curve: satisfaction in the partnership is down to a minimum after the birth of the first (and also second) child, only to recover later. Violence in the family is a subject that is debated and for which solutions at a political and administrative level are searched; fortunately, it is a problem only for a minority of families.

In Belgium the antidiscrimination debate with regard to gender equality was focused on two subjects: division of paid and unpaid work between the sexes and the naming of babies as a mark of relationship, especially with regard to births out of wedlock. Belgium replaced a system that provided for a break in gainful employment within the scope of balancing family work, gainful employment and voluntary work with a time management system which allows opting out of gainful employment for one year (or five years subject to special agreement). The former scheme had been almost exclusively used by women, but the new system is distinctly more attractive to men and the utilisation rate has accordingly risen. People (and particularly men) are also taking more parental leave, which can be combined with the new system.

In the southern EU Member States, the issue of reconciling family and work is perceived as closely connected to the low birth rate problem, combined with high unemployment, rather than as a problem of wasted 'human resources' produced by an (enforced) withdrawal of women into their family.

In Spain, some initial steps are being taken to strengthen a more active paternal role, e.g. by granting gender-independent parental leave. Over the past two years, the public debate has begun to focus on violence in the family. The situation of women has improved since they can now react to violent behaviour by complaining to the police. However, there has been a concordant rise in the number of women killed by their partners. Public discussion and legislators strive to respond and work towards further improvement in the situation of women.

A higher labour participation rate of women and their better education have combined in Portugal to reduce the number of male sole earners, so that double-earner households are now prevailing (two out of three couples have double incomes, with a preponderance of full-time employment). One problem perceived is that families are extremely dependent on grandparents to deliver child-care, since there are not enough inexpensive institutional child-care facilities. Portuguese women also suffer from a double burden because men's involvement in child-raising is totally inadequate. In terms of gender roles, Portugal is among the most conservative countries: only 7% of the men say that they look after the children (EU-average: 15%).

For Greece, a change towards more gender equality can be found, but it is also clear that the country still has a long way to go. Violence in the family is very high: 9% of all women experience violence in the narrower sense, and 50% in a wider sense. The educational gap has been almost bridged, as is the case in other EU Member States. Same as in these other countries, Greece still shows marked gender gaps with regard to income, unemployment and average working hours. In spite of a dearth of job opportunities, the labour participation rate of women is steadily growing.

Well-being of children

The Finnish are increasingly worried about the psychological burdens imposed on children, so that the country has extensively invested into child psychiatry, which is to be combined with preventive counselling and parental training for better-quality parenthood.

A number of studies performed in the Netherlands show that it is not structural features (family forms, poverty, migratory background, etc.) which chiefly impair the quality of the children's growing-up process, but rather procedural features, i.e. relations within a partnership and between parents and children. This also applies when the quality of growing-up is measured against hard indicators, such as deviant behaviour at a later age. A well-functioning family can serve as a buffer for structural problems (family form, poverty, disease, etc.). The greatest risk of deviancy is borne by families whose internal relations are damaging to its members (regardless of which structural characteristics define the family's situation). This importance of procedural features is frequently disguised by the correlation between problem behaviour and structural factors. But if we separate those two, we find that procedural factors are five times as effective as the structural ones.

Compared to other countries and times, the children in Sweden now enjoy the highest standard of living. Yet there is a high incidence of psychosomatic problems and obesity.

Child care

In contrast to the rest of Europe, Belgium is experiencing a gradual transition from informal to formal child care for the under-three-year-olds. A multitude of facilities and types of care is offered, and considerable attention is given to improving the quality of child care in order to ensure that the new generation will be fit for the future.

Similar to the situation in Belgium, France has a complex child care system which, in view of the high labour participation rate of both parents, offers a wide range of services to enable parents to reconcile work and family.

In the Netherlands, legislators and society are in the middle of a debate on changes in the child care system. Families continue to see child care exclusively as the women's responsibility. There is an ongoing discussion of the dangers attendant to institutional care and the positive effect of natural (maternal) care. This debate

(which does not always remain at the scientific level) mirrors wide-spread resentment against parents who leave their children to child-care facilities (the situation is similar in Germany and Austria).

In Greece, the range of child-care facilities on offer is far from adequate. The traditional model of care provided by grandparents is petering out but no substitute has yet been developed in the form of additional facilities.

Traditionally, public child care in Ireland was perceived only as a stop-gap measure in an emergency. Parents were expected to find private arrangements. Yet in recent years, with women increasingly welcome to participate in working life, with parents calling for high-quality child care and seen from the angle of international developments, demand for more public investment in child care services has been growing.

In Denmark there is a general consensus that early childhood is the base from which to ensure optimum development of skills and abilities, with due regard to balancing the parents' commitment to family and work. The population agrees that the parents are responsible for raising their children and that the state/society needs to provide the prerequisites that this claim will be optimally supported.

Generational relations

When discussing the ageing society and its effects on human resources, only a few strategies can be pinpointed which may preserve our work-based economic potential when the rate of the economically active population (early 20s to early 60s) declines vis-à-vis the share of over-60-year-olds:

- Further boosting productivity.
- Delaying the retirement age, given generally better health and greater performance up to a ripe old age.
- Reducing the number of young adults 'parked' in training systems, a practice common in Europe, and substituting their training by life-long on-the-job learning.
- Human capital is increased not by the number of working people but by the quality of their education and training. Investment into training of the young and life-long learning may help Europe retain its competitiveness even at a reduced labour force.
- Any mid- to long-term increase in the birth rate, even when only incremental, to a rate nearer to the replacement level is one (but only one!) of many strategies which may impact in the future.
- Another strategy to be pursued may be efforts to reduce the death rates among the young caused by traffic accidents and suicide.

Seen altogether, no region within Europe can afford to waste its human resources. Provided that all individuals are optimally educated and trained in line with their capacities and find their place in the employment and economic system, and provided that nobody is left out due to their gender, socio-cultural origin, migratory background or other reasons, we have a good chance to survive for the next decades even without massive migration into EU-Europe in spite of a relatively low birth rate and an ageing society.

In Austria, generational relations (within the family and in the community) are a major subject of public discussion (in the media) and of great relevance in every-day politics (transfer debate). Even though in Austria, like in many other countries, much of the nursing care accorded to the elderly is provided by the family, it is still noticeable that the process of dying is increasingly shifted from the family to institutions.

The family support network in Italy continues to be strong and closely knitted. Yet there are signs of change, i.e. due to demographic changes (fewer children, more elderly) and the higher labour participation rate of women.

In Greece, the family continues to enjoy great importance. Family networks are the constituent parts of the overall social network, especially with regard to nursing care for the elderly.

Portugal has very few institutional facilities for the old (only 26% of the over-80-year-olds live on their own, compared to an EU average of 45%). Nursing care is typically provided within the scope of the family.

Ireland has traditionally been one of those countries that emphasise private responsibility for the social situation. Accordingly, the provision of nursing care for the elderly is mostly undertaken by the families (and here again by the women). Public intervention is perceived to be a substitute for private nursing, although the effects of demography are watched with concern.

Belgium is different in that a large part of the nursing care for the elderly is supported by institutionally-provided assistance.

Denmark is governed by the maxim of individual responsibility and the objective for people to remain self-sufficient in their own household for as long as possible. Once this is no longer possible, public services are provided for support and accommodation.

In Europe overall it appears that the old-age retirement systems are no longer sustainable if they continue along present lines. The problem is unemployment and the link between retirement systems and gainful work, the bulge of post-war births now moving towards retirement, combined with a low birth rate and a substantially lower number of women of childbearing age compared to past decades. Efforts to solve the problems by creating a new baby boom through appealing (especially to young women) to raise the birth rate are, in many respects, short-sighted. The problem is chiefly that only a booming economy can pay for the transfers required for a higher birth rate. Another problem is inadequate eligible gainful employment which, when the retirement system is linked to work, will produce wide gaps. Either we need to raise the number of gainfully employed (i.e. reduce unemployment) or break up the link between pension fund financing and gainful employment, always providing that there is any cake left to distribute. Any rapid succession of baby boom and baby bust years will cause problems in the future that are similar to those facing us now. Babies and children do not contribute to the gross domestic product but act as a drain on the working part of the population. Young women and men will not be motivated to get children just because of problems facing the social system. Quite on the contrary: a progressively growing and constantly stoked fear that the social systems might break down is one reason for the large gap between the number of children wanted by young adults and those they actually get.

Sweden discusses the ageing society and the ratio of old-age pensioners to active working population in terms of migration and higher birth rates. Within the EU, Sweden already has the highest labour market participation rate of older persons.

Socio-economic situation of families

Over the past years, Ireland has experienced rapid economic and social development. Nevertheless, different strata of its population have profited to a different extent. Poverty is still widespread in Ireland: 12.3% of the population are poor. Greece combines strong economic growth with a high degree of income inequality and high unemployment, especially for young grown-ups and women. There, poverty is determined less by the change of family structures (e.g. family size) than by a combination of low educational level, unemployment and rural location, affecting the older rather the young parts of the population. Portugal experiences brisk economic growth, combined with high income inequality and high unemployment, especially for young adults and women. A large part of its population is at risk of suffering poverty (21% vs. the European average of 15%). Over the past three years, the economic boom has weakened and stagnated, as a consequence of which social benefits have been substantially reduced.

Greece and Portugal have found themselves transformed from emigrant to immigrant countries. This has had an enormous impact on their self-perception, on their administrations and on everyday life, causing problems that both countries are now required to solve.

France is faced with a paradox in its socio-economic situation: unemployment is declining, support measures are expanding, while at the same time inequality and the gap between wealth and poverty are widening, with available work increasingly shifting to low-paying 'Macjobs'. For the families, this trend has meant a rise in the number of double-earner couples. The situation is extremely problematic for lone parents whose single earnings frequently place them markedly below average incomes.

In Finland, the gap between the bottom and top income strata has widened. Due to cuts in family transfers, families, and especially lone parents, bear a greater risk of descending into poverty.

Italy records a higher rate of relative income poverty, exacerbated by a widening gap between its northern and southern regions. Poverty continues to be a function of family size: the larger the family (i.e. the more child-

ren), the higher is the risk of poverty. As a result, Italy is among the countries with the highest child poverty rates in Europe. Families at the bottom end of society suffer particularly because the compensatory effect of the social system does not have the level of efficiency that is standard in the rest of Europe.

Family policies

The family is in the grip of change. The number of states belonging to the European Union has shot up in recent years. The resultant new Europe is striving to find its proper place in the world, to accept the commonalities and heterogeneities within the EU and to continue to grow together, all within the framework of economic developments in the region as much as globally. National developments, EU activities, joint activities and competition form a conglomerate which, while making it difficult to act congruently, offers great opportunities for the future. Like much else, it is difficult to envisage the role that the family will play in a future Europe. But it is undisputed that the family will continue to be the backbone of European society and bear a central part in everyday life.

Rhetorically, 'family policies' are an important keyword. In some countries, administrative activities that impact on the families' day-to-day routine:

- are planned and implemented explicitly in line with family policy objectives,
- are reasoned, planned and implemented in other ways without naming explicit family policy objectives, either because those ministries that execute them do not have a family policy brief, or because family policy is not the responsibility of the relevant body, e.g. for reasons of subsidiarity.

Regardless of such rhetoric allocation, activities that affect family life can be found in all countries and regions of the EU, at individual state, subregional and community level. When looking at family policies, we thus need to consider the different rhetorical approach in reasoning activities pursued by countries and regions, which show up different images of family policies without necessarily leading to differences or similarities in everyday life and reality. A comparison of family-relevant activities within the EU, between the Member States and regions needs to be done without much regard to family rhetoric. Actual marginal conditions, activities performed by individual political institutions, regardless of whether they do or do not call them family policies, have a direct impact on the real life of families in each country.

A comparison of laws, policies, services and transfer systems that relate to families is almost impossible to do since such interventions frequently are not listed under or allocated to the 'family policies' category. A comparison of changes undergone by interventions in the various countries or between countries is even more difficult, since such interventions are described and recorded in the national reports by rhetorical changes, by the use of standards, but not necessarily by their effect on actual changes in the life situations, family forms and family phases. To give some examples:

Other than the central and south-eastern European countries, Denmark, in line with other Nordic countries, is pursuing a policy of entitlements, services and interventions directed at individuals rather than families. Accordingly, the rise of births since 1983 is a consequence not of any pro-natalistic policy but of measures to allow women to better reconcile family and work.

The Finnish report indicates the margin available for family support measures:

- strengthening relations between parents,
- birth rate,
- identity and legitimacy of children,
- child care,
- socialisation and education of children,
- protection and support of families,
- emotional support of families, and
- reconciliation of work and family.

Finland concentrates on comprehensive family policies that cover all areas of intervention, even though their intensity varies between sectors. As in many other countries, internal arrangements between partners are a matter of privacy, which means that state interventions are scarce but also that couples are mostly left to their own devices.

Family policy in the Netherlands shows little response to the current birth rate and hardly any efforts to boost it. Families wish to resolve their problems themselves, and state bodies strive to accommodate them since the other approach (i.e. offering institutional solutions) was rejected. For this reason, child care is provided essentially by private networks. The state is retreating from institutional child care. However, this is counterproductive when an attempt is made to influence the strengthening of human resources by quality child care. In summary it can be said that, in practical terms, there is no family policy taking place in the Netherlands at the moment.

Sweden is pursuing a policy against inequality which closely links gender and family policies. As it is underpinned by the principle of universality and individual rights, it does not provide for family status categories: each parent and each child is eligible for the same entitlements.

In Austria, family policy and family policy measures are key constituents of current political activities. Family policy refers to financial transfers as much as family counselling, and also includes the promotion of family-friendly businesses identified by family audits.

France has, for the past decade, assembled an almost innumerable array of family-relevant decisions and laws on the one hand, and at the same time experienced a development of family indices (such as the birth rate) that many experts consider exemplary, especially when compared to other Member States. However, no proof can be found whether this development was prodded by the promotion of multi-child families, graduated child care, reconciliation of job and family, by individual measures, by the entire bundle of measures or by something entirely different.

The change in the situation of families in Italy in recent years has led to pressure on the legislators which in turn has effected change: amendments in the transfer payments, launching parental leave, an improvement of access to the housing market, the introduction of tools to visualise social problems, such as collecting socio-politically relevant data. Family policy rhetoric has also undergone change: the family is increasingly accepted and explicitly considered as a major factor in the social system. An active family policy to raise birth rates by direct financial grants has recently been put in place. Italy is on its way from a traditional to a modern society, yet it appears to be driven by its budget deficit rather than any proactive future vision of a society of tomorrow.

In Spain, political intervention for the benefit of families is driven mostly by tax incentives. Regional government bodies are increasingly directing their efforts towards family policies. Very low birth rates in some regions, together with immigration problems require local action, even though such problems are not yet fully recognised at the national level.

Family values and opinions have experienced a great change in Portugal:

- from rejection to acceptance of divorce, i.e. from the standard lifelong partnership to patchwork families and life phase partnerships,
- from the dominance of church-consecrated marriage to secular partnerships,
- from ignorance to knowledge of family planning methods (birth control methods),
- from gender-limited roles to partnership-based relations, where both parties are gainfully employed and share the family work.

What has been left untouched is the great importance accorded to the family in everyday life, in the norms and expectations. In Portugal, the idea of any explicit family policy tends to be rejected, even though a large number of family-relevant amendments and laws have been adopted.

Prior to the International Year of the Family (1994), Ireland did not know any explicit family policy, but since then the family and family policy have a fixed place on the national agenda.

For Europe overall, the conclusions supplied by a contribution presented to the conference on *Families, Change and Social Policy in Europe* at the occasion of the Irish Presidency might be helpful:¹

- For the citizens of Europe, good family relations are key demands for their quality of life.
- (Potential) parents do not accept any political interference with family structures, family size, birth rates and pro-natalist measures.
- Solidarity within the family is a double-edged sword: it may help to unburden the welfare state, but it may also overburden the family, which in turn burdens the welfare state.
- There is no war between the generations in the families: intergenerational relations are much better described as solidarity within the family, even though there are frictions between the generations in everyday life.
- The family acts as a buffer to alleviate social marginalisation. Nevertheless, two groups can be found in Europe who feel marginalised in many countries: lone parents with little children and the long-term unemployed.
- Lone parents in particular feel not just marginalised but are also disadvantaged in many other respects. Here the welfare state is challenged to help without creating long-term (inherited) dependency on support systems.
- The ability to reconcile work and family (especially in families with small children) appears to be a key prerequisite to improve the situation, albeit at different levels:
 - reducing unemployment, i.e. access to work, ensuring (potential) parents a reliable income from work;
 - reconciling work and family by offering child care services, flexible working hours, consideration of family needs in the organisation of work, fair sharing of family obligations and work by both partners;
 - lifecycle-focused career paths; i.e. efforts to avoid the collision of periods of high job demands, long working hours and stressful work and periods of high-stress family work in caring for small children;
 - reliable welfare state services of a foreseeable price, including transfer payments when work and family cannot be reconciled.

Altogether it appears that a climate of acceptance, recognition and potential as much as foreseeable support in problem situations is at least as (or perhaps even more) important for (potential) parents to take the step towards family life and children. It is just as necessary to establish such a climate of trust among (new) families as it is to offer concrete help and support in the event of a problem. Europe needs a climate of family-friendliness, family mainstreaming in debate and action, that provides a foundation so that citizens (whether justified or not) no longer have cause to delay their essential wish for a stable family. Establishing such a climate is not exactly helped when the various levels of responsibilities fight for competencies within the scope of subsidiary activities. Opting for a family is a personal decision, interpreting the context within which such a decision is made is a personal decision, but the effects of such a decision will affect the future of the entire region. Quite possibly it would be better for European and national institutions to enter into the wishes and problems of their citizens and adapt their political activities accordingly, than continue to foster illusions that they might be able to adapt their citizens to their institutions.

¹ Summarised and collated by Hubert Krieger: Family life in Europe – Results of recent surveys on 'Quality of Life' in Europe. Contribution to the Irish presidency conference Families, change and social policy in Europe, Dublin Castle, 13–14 May 2004.

WALTER BIEN

Die Situation der Familien in EU-15: Eine Synthese der nationalen Länderberichte

Vorüberlegungen

Familie ist der zentrale Orientierungspunkt im Leben der Menschen. Dies gilt unabhängig davon, ob die Institutionen der Europäischen Union eine Zuständigkeit für Familie haben oder sich nehmen, und ob das Handeln dieser Gremien implizit oder explizit auf Familien ausgerichtet ist. Die Zukunft der EU wird auf die Dauer von den jetzt noch jungen EuropäerInnen und mittel- und langfristig auch durch deren Kinder und Enkel bestimmt werden. Die Menschen und ihre Fähigkeiten und Fertigkeiten, also das Humankapital ist der Reichtum des alten Europa. Die Förderung und Optimierung des Humankapitals ist damit die wichtigste Voraussetzung für die Platzierung der Europäischen Union im internationalen Wettbewerb. Familie als Reproduktions-, Sozialisations- und Regenerierungsraum und, fast noch wichtiger, als potentieller Puffer für allgegenwärtige Gefährdungen des Lebensverlaufs wird meist unterschätzt, unterbewertet und eher suboptimal gestützt. Nahezu alle gesellschaftlichen Segmente sowohl im regionalen, nationalen oder übernationalen Kontext, übersehen ihre Abhängigkeit von den Leistungen der eigenen Bevölkerung und damit von gut funktionierenden Familien. Die Jugend, d. h. die nachfolgenden Generationen, die jetzigen und zukünftigen Familien, das Miteinander der Generationen, bestimmen Alltag und Zukunft von EuropäerInnen in weitaus stärkerem Maße, als die Gesetzgebung, die Wirtschaftsbeziehungen und die Diskussionen der Verantwortlichen in der Europäischen Union dies berücksichtigen.

In der Europäischen Beobachtungsstelle zur sozialen Situation, Demographie und Familie treffen Personen aus verschiedenen Nationen und unterschiedlichen Wissenschaftszweigen, VertreterInnen der beiden Geschlechter und verschiedener Generationen, sowie Menschen mit unterschiedlichen Lebensweisen und Sichtweisen der Problematik zusammen. Sie sind weder repräsentativ für ihr jeweiliges Herkunftsland und können es auch nicht sein, sondern stehen eher für die Vielfalt Europas. Der Austausch in einer gemeinsamen Sprache, zu einem gemeinsamen Thema, mit einem gemeinsamen Ziel und relativ unabhängig von der Nationalität ist ein Beispiel für die wünschenswerte zukünftige Zusammenarbeit in Europa. Die junge Mutter in der Diskussion mit dem erfahrenen Großvater; der Psychologe im Gespräch mit dem Bevölkerungswissenschaftler und die Expertin aus dem hohen Norden im Austausch mit dem Experten aus dem Süden – dies alles hat zu einer lebendigen Auseinandersetzung mit den Themen der Europäischen Beobachtungsstelle geführt und spiegelt sich in den einzelnen Länderberichten wider. Genauso wenig wie die einzelnen Länderberichte die Vielfalt jedes einzelnen Landes umfassen können, genauso wenig kann diese Zusammenfassung repräsentativ für alle Länderberichte sein. Sie bildet die subjektive Wahrnehmung eines einzelnen Experten in der Wahrnehmung der gemeinsamen Diskussion ab. Sinn der Zusammenfassung ist es, neugierig auf die einzelnen Länderberichte und die Vielfalt und Gemeinsamkeit europäischen Familienlebens zu machen.

Die Länderberichte und die Diskussionen der letzten Jahre hinterließen beim Autor den Eindruck, dass viele Dinge im Status quo beklagt werden, von denen erhofft wird, dass sie sich in der Zukunft durch die richtigen Interventionen ändern werden. Was in den einzelnen Ländern oft zu wenig diskutiert wird, sind die Zielvorstellungen, die durch die Interventionen erreicht werden sollen, und erst recht nicht die Konsequenzen, die mit der Erfüllung der Zielvorstellungen zu erwarten sind. Z. B. ist die Klage, dass die Geburtenraten zu niedrig sind, international weit verbreitet, ohne dass irgendjemand sagen könnte, was denn hier und heute und in Zukunft die richtigen Geburtenraten sein werden. Falls die Lebenserwartung sich nicht verändern würde, der Generationenabstand gleich bliebe, die Nettomigration gleich Null wäre und wir einen stabil bleibenden Erwerbsarbeitsmarkt hätten und noch andere Parameter stabil blieben, dann (und nur dann) wäre mittel- und langfristig eine Geburtenrate knapp über zwei sinnvoll und erstrebenswert. Solange aber viele junge Erwachsene nicht auf dem Erwerbsarbeitsmarkt unterkommen, die Lebenserwartung weiter steigt und die Nettomigration positiv ist, kann diese Zahl nicht als Zielvorstellung dienen. Was aber ist die richtige Zielvorgabe

für heute und die nächsten Jahre? Interventionsvorschläge können nur dann sinnvoll sein, wenn man Zielvorgaben hat. Zielvorgaben sind nur dann sinnvoll, wenn man die Konsequenzen kennt und zu ihnen steht. Der Wohlstand eines Landes oder einer Region wird im Wettbewerb mit anderen Ländern bzw. mit anderen Regionen errungen und erhalten. Damit Europa seinen Wohlstand erhalten kann, sollte das politische Handeln immer die Auswirkungen auf den Wettbewerb der Nationen um einen guten Platz in der Zukunft berücksichtigen. Da die Stärke Europas im Humankapital und der sozialen Infrastruktur liegt und bis jetzt Europa im internationalen Wettbewerb hierdurch gut positioniert ist, sind Anstrengungen in diesem Bereich Investitionen in eine gute Zukunft.

Die soziale Infrastruktur, auf der sich das erfolgreiche Modell Europa etabliert hat, basiert auf einem Solidarsystem, das sowohl institutionell wie informell versucht, Fairness zwischen den Beteiligten aufzubauen und zu halten. In diesem System spielt der Austausch zwischen Generationen institutionell über Transfer und informell in Familien eine bedeutende Rolle. In diesem Sinne sollte Familie eher weit gefasst und nicht auf das Zusammenleben mit minderjährigen Kindern im Haushalt reduziert sein. Ein Problembeispiel ist die Definition von Familie als soziale Einheit, in der ein Kind oder mehrere Kinder betreut bzw. aufgezogen werden, wie sie in den Niederlanden vorgenommen wurde. Anders als im durkheimschen Sinne – d. h. Familie als Partnerschaft und Elternschaft – wurde hier die Elternschaft und damit die Eltern-Kind-Beziehung in der Zeit des Aufwachsens der Kinder als ausschließliches Familiendefinitionsmerkmal gewählt. Die Realität von Familien, die über drei und mehr Generationen gelebt werden, wird durch eine solche Definition nicht erfasst und ihre positive Wirkung auf die zukünftige Gesellschaft wird unterschlagen. Das Forum *Familie in Bayern* beschreibt Familie als eine auf Dauer angelegte Solidargemeinschaft, die in der Regel mehr als eine Generation umfasst. Zielsetzung dieser Definition ist es, eine Subeinheit der Gesellschaft zu definieren, auf der ein Großteil der gegenwärtigen Wohlstandsentwicklung und der zukünftig zu erwartenden Problembehandlung liegen wird.

Der nachfolgende Bericht zeigt eine (subjektive) Auswahl von Problemen, die letztendlich in allen Ländern vorhanden sind, aber in der aktuellen Diskussion unterschiedlich wahrgenommen werden. Daher ist es sinnvoll, sich alle einzelnen Länderberichte anzuschauen, um die gesamte Variation der länderspezifischen Diskussionsmuster und Lösungsansätze als Interpretationsbasis zu erschließen.

Die Aufgabe an die einzelnen ExpertInnen, fast zehn Jahre Familienentwicklung, Familienprobleme und Ansätze zur Lösung im eigenen Land zusammenzufassen und dies auf wenigen Seiten niederzulegen, war sehr anspruchsvoll und schwierig zu realisieren. Trotzdem ergeben die unterschiedlichen Angehensweisen, Gewichtungen und Färbungen aus der unterschiedlichen Herkunft der ExpertInnen ein faszinierendes Mosaik von der Situation der Familien in Europa, der Diskussion um die Familie und den Bemühungen von Politik und Administration, auf diese Probleme einzugehen. Sicherlich hat die Individualität der einzelnen ExpertInnen die Berichte gefärbt, aber gerade die Mischung dieser individuellen Sichtweisen, die nicht in das Procrustes-Bett einer generellen Repräsentativität und damit Mittelmäßigkeit gepresst wurde, macht den Reiz der Zusammenarbeit in der Beobachtungsstelle und bei den Länderberichten aus und stellt sicher, dass über alle Berichte und Aktivitäten hinweg ein repräsentatives Bild der Vielfalt in Europa gezeichnet wird.

Die nachfolgende Tabelle (S. 28) bietet einen Überblick oder besser eine Aufzählung über die einzelnen Subthemen, die im Berichtszeitraum angesprochen wurden und sich in den nachfolgenden Länderberichten wiederfinden.

Alle genannten Themen sind in allen Ländern mehr oder weniger präsent. Die fett gedruckten Ankreuzungen bedeuten, dass die Themen explizit in den jeweiligen Länderberichten angesprochen und hervorgehoben sind. Die schwächer gedruckten Ankreuzungen bedeuten, dass die Themen implizit in den Berichten erwähnt werden bzw. aus den mündlichen Berichten und Diskussionen in der Europäischen Beobachtungsstelle den einzelnen Ländern zugeschrieben wurden. Die Länderberichte und zum Teil auch einzelne Diskussionen in den verschiedenen Ländern zeigen, dass sich jedes Land in einer gewissen Weise mit spezifischen Problemen beschäftigt, von denen angenommen wird, das hierfür bei anderen Ländern nicht unbedingt Verständnis vorausgesetzt werden kann. Betrachtet man die Länderberichte aber insgesamt sowie die Diskussionen, die in den letzten Jahren überregional in der Beobachtungsstelle geführt wurden, merkt man, dass die Gemeinsamkeiten der verschiedenen Länder sehr viel größer sind als erwartet worden war. Letztlich treten alle genannten Probleme überall auf, allerdings mit unterschiedlicher Intensität und in unterschiedlichen Entwicklungsstadien.

Das Interessante für eine europäische Diskussion ist dabei, die aktuelle Problemlage im eigenen Land mit der in anderen EU-Mitgliedstaaten zu vergleichen, die über dieses Stadium bereits hinausgekommen sind. So können Erfolge wie auch Misserfolge dazu genutzt werden, die eigene Situation besser zu verstehen und angemessener darauf zu reagieren.

Beispiele für aktuelle Debatten in einzelnen Ländern

Die Tabelle ist ein weiteres Beispiel für Vielfalt und Gemeinsamkeit, aber auch für die Schwierigkeit, eine Ordnung der Themen zu erstellen. Sie ist das Ergebnis einer Vielzahl von vergeblichen Versuchen, eine übergreifende Ordnung, die aus sich heraus verständlich ist, zu finden. Letztendlich bleibt nur die Möglichkeit, sich aufzählend und beispielhaft der Problemvielfalt zu nähern ohne den Wunsch nach einer umfassenden, in sich kongruenten Gliederung erfüllen zu können. Dafür sind die folgenden Aussagen zu aktuellen Auseinandersetzungen in den einzelnen Regionen ein Hinweis.

In Belgien hat in den letzten Jahren eine breite Debatte gegen die Diskriminierung von Familienformen und sexuellen Orientierungen die Gesetzgebung bestimmt, verbunden mit einer Sicht auf die Verbesserung der Situation von Familien auch jenseits von finanziellen Transfers und der Bereitstellung von Dienstleistungen. So wird z. B. die Betreuung von Kindern nicht mehr ausschließlich unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Familie gesehen, sondern mehr und mehr als Investition in die Zukunft. Der Trend der öffentlichen Diskussion führt weg von einer Familienpolitik zur Hebung der Geburtenrate, hin zu einer familienfreundlichen Politik, also von einer Defizitpolitik zu einer investiven Politik für eine bessere Zukunft. Belgien kann insofern als Beispiel für europäische Institutionen gelten. Zwar liegt auch hier die Verantwortung für die meisten familienpolitischen Bereiche bei den Regionen, aber die Regierung nutzt ihre zentralen Zuständigkeiten insbesondere für die Familie als einen Schlüssel zu einer verbesserten und gesicherten Zukunft, ohne in das Feinwerk subsidiärer Beziehungen negativ einzugreifen.

Ein anderes Beispiel ist Spanien. Hier sieht es so aus, als ob der tiefste Punkt der Geburtenrate erreicht wäre. Ein steigendes Bruttosozialprodukt sowie verbesserte Erwerbsaussichten für Frauen sind hierfür ausschlaggebend und werden sich wohl weiterhin positiv entwickeln. Die Möglichkeit für junge Paare, einen eigenen Haushalt zu gründen, ist jedoch nach wie vor sehr beschränkt, so dass sich die Wohnungspolitik mit Interventionen zur Verbesserung des Wohnungsmarktes in Zukunft wohl am stärksten auf eine Verbesserung der Situation auswirken wird.

In Italien ist die Familie mitten auf dem Weg zwischen Tradition und Modernisierung. Sie ist weiterhin der Lebensmittelpunkt, obwohl sich die Familienstrukturen in Richtung des europäischen ‚Mainstream‘ verändern. Anders als in Mittel- und Nordeuropa, ist Vorsorge in Italien weiterhin Familiensache. Die Zahl der Familien nimmt zu, während die Familiengröße abnimmt. Der Beginn von Partnerschaftsgründungen verschiebt sich nach hinten, die Zahl der Eheschließungen wird kleiner und Trennungen und Scheidungen werden etwas häufiger.

In den Niederlanden ist eine der größten Veränderungen in den letzten zehn Jahren, dass es zwischen dem Auszug erwachsener Kinder aus dem Elternhaus und dem Übergang in die eheliche Familie eine Vielzahl von Übergangsformen gibt. Wie in den meisten Ländern nehmen auch in den Niederlanden die Scheidungen zu, aber gleichzeitig wird die Scheidung mehr und mehr als ein negatives Lebensereignis gesehen, das es, wenn eben möglich, zu vermeiden gilt.

In Finnland besteht die größte Veränderung der letzten zehn Jahre darin, dass es einerseits so viele Einpersonenhaushalte gibt wie niemals zuvor; andererseits aber auch so viele Menschen in Partnerschaften zusammenleben wie niemals zuvor.

In Griechenland wird die gegenwärtige Situation zwar häufig so interpretiert, dass die Familienbeziehungen schwächer werden, aber es handelt sich wohl eher um einen Wandel der Familienformen, wie er in anderen europäischen Ländern schon seit längerer Zeit vor sich geht. Andererseits hat Griechenland viele Probleme noch nicht, die woanders schon akut geworden sind.

Tabelle 1: Überblick über die Themen in den Länderberichten

	B	DK	D	FIN	F	GR	UK	IRL	I	LUX	NL	A	P	S	E
Familienverhältnisse															
Familienformen	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Auszug aus dem Familienhaushalt (leeres Nest)			x			x		x	x						
Heiratsquote, eingetragene eheähnliche Gemeinschaften, homosexuelle Ehen	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Beziehungen, Scheidung, Trennung, Kinderkontakt bei getrennten Ehepartnern	x		x		x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Haushalte von alleinstehenden Müttern			x			x		x		x					
Kinderlose Frauen			x	x							x			x	
Demographische Situation															
Geburtenrate	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Gebärbstand			x					x	x		x				
Großfamilien				x	x				x				x		
Uneheliche Kinder			x		x	x								x	
Abtreibung								x					x		x
Beziehungen zwischen den Geschlechtern															
Beziehungen (männlich, weiblich, Gender-Fragen)	x	x	x	x		x		x				x	x	x	
Väter	x		x	x			x	x			x		x		x
Frauenarbeit	x	x	x	x		x		x					x		
Vereinbarkeit von Arbeit und Familie	x	x	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Gewalt in der Familie				x			x					x	x		x
Beziehungen zwischen den Generationen															
Kinderwohl				x				x		x	x				x
Kinderbetreuung	x	x	x	x	x	x		x			x	x		x	
Schulsystem			x			x	x								
Jugendliche (Arbeitslosigkeit)			x		x	x	x								x
Jugendliche (Familie)			x										x		
Situation (Pflege) der Alten	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x			x	x	
Sozioökonomische Situation der Familien															
Beschäftigung, Arbeitsmarkt		x	x		x	x		x							x
Wohnsituation									x		x				x
Familien- (Kinder-)Armut			x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x		
Unterstützung, Familiennetz					x				x						
Staatsbürgerschaft, Migration						x		x					x		x
Konvergenz zum EU-Mittel, regionale Ansicht	x		x				x	x	x				x		x
Familienpolitik	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Familiendienste	x		x	x	x	x		x				x	x		
Rolle der Familie in der Gesellschaft (Familienpolitik)	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x		x		x
Familien-Mainstreaming, Familie in der allgemeinen Diskussion	x						x		x						
Reduzierung der öffentlichen Ausgaben			x	x							x	x	x		
Pensionssysteme						x				x		x		x	
Diskussion von Familientransferleistungen			x	x		x		x				x			x
Familienberichte			x					x			x				
Familienkompetenz, Ausbildung in der Familie			x	x								x			x

In Frankreich findet eine theoretisch fundierte Diskussion um Familienrhetorik in folgenden Dimensionen statt:

- Familie als individuelle Angelegenheit (Problem oder Glück) versus Familie als wichtiges Subsystem der Gesellschaft, für das die Administration bzw. die Politik zuständig ist (Interventionspflicht).
- Familie als Vision, wie sie sein könnte, wenn es die realen Probleme nicht gäbe, versus traditionelle Familie als gelebte Realität mit Problemen oder Schwächen. Eine derartige Diskussion verführt dazu, die Vision positiv zu besetzen und die Realität daneben negativ.
- Familie unter den Auswirkungen einer Werteveränderung, die einer negativen Entwicklung zur Individualisierung eine positiv gewünschte Solidarität entgegensetzt.
- Familie im Rahmen einer Ungleichheitsdebatte, bezogen auf die spezifischen Situationen je nach Familienphase oder Familienkonstellation.

Solche Debatten sind notwendig und sinnvoll, damit die Möglichkeiten und Bedingungen und damit auch die Bedürfnisse in ihrer Vielfalt erhalten bleiben und nicht im politischen Verteilungskampf zu Ausgrenzungen benutzt werden. Sie stehen aber auch immer in Wechselwirkung mit aktuellen Problemen.

So positiv die hohe Erwerbsbeteiligung von Frauen gesehen wird, sie bringt sie auch in Frankreich durch die zunehmende Zahl von Doppelverdiener-Haushalten eine Reihe von Problemen mit sich: (a) unmittelbar für die Partner z. B. eine neue Aushandlung der Verteilung von Hausarbeit und Bedarf an mehr Kinderbetreuungsmöglichkeiten; (b) gesamtgesellschaftlich stellt sich für die Zukunft das Problem der Verteilung der Erwerbsarbeit, da durch das Älterwerden der Gesellschaft neben den Jungen, die auf den Erwerbsarbeitsmarkt drängen, auch ‚junge Alte‘ einen Zugang zum Erwerbsarbeitsmarkt suchen, um die sozialen Transfersysteme erhalten zu können. Die Zunahme der Doppelverdiener-Haushalte und die Verlängerung des aktiven Erwerbslebens haben auch Auswirkungen auf die Betreuung der sehr Alten und Pflegebedürftigen in der älteren Generation, die immer weniger durch Familienangehörige erfolgt. Notwendig ist also eine neue Bestimmung des Generationenvertrags bzw. eine andere Verteilung zwischen institutioneller und familialer Pflege. Dass hier (nicht nur in Frankreich) ein Handlungsbedarf besteht, zeigte die letzte Hitzewelle im Sommer 2003, bei der allein in Frankreich über 15.000 Menschen starben, bedingt auch durch ein verändertes Generationenverhältnis in den Familien heute, verglichen mit den Jahrzehnten davor.

In Deutschland wird versucht, mit der Agenda 2010 ein Zukunftsszenario zu entwickeln, in dem Familie und Familienpolitik eine wesentliche Rolle spielen. Das Ziel dabei ist, einen gesellschaftlichen Konsens zu finden, in dem die unterschiedlichen Akteure – Politik, Wirtschaft, Administration, die in Deutschland starke Verbandsstruktur, aber auch die einzelnen BürgerInnen – gemeinsam eine Umgebung entwickeln, in der Familie und Nachwuchsförderung einen höheren Stellenwert haben und die ‚strukturelle Rücksichtslosigkeit‘, die in früheren Familienberichten diagnostiziert wurde, einer positiven kinder- und familienfreundlichen Umgebung weichen soll.

Familienbeziehungen und Familienformen

Generell gilt für die EU, dass die Familien insgesamt über mehr Wohnraum verfügen und deshalb eine neue Qualität von Familienbeziehungen möglich geworden ist: Intimität auf Distanz. Das heißt, dass die Wohnentfernungen zwischen den Familienmitgliedern größer geworden sind im Vergleich zu früher, als größere Familien im gleichen Haushalt oder unter einem gemeinsamen Dach zusammenlebten. Um das tatsächliche Zusammenleben von Familien in verschiedenen Formen der Wirklichkeit angemessen zu beschreiben, reicht die übliche Praxis der Amtlichen Statistiken nicht aus, die Familien nur als *Haushalte* erfassen. Das Problem ist weniger, dass die Definition von Haushalt in den einzelnen Mitgliedstaaten der EU unterschiedlich ist. Der Mangel der Statistik besteht vielmehr darin, dass sie Familien, die auf mehrere Haushalte unter einem Dach oder in benachbarten Häusern aufgeteilt leben, nicht in ihrem tatsächlich gelebten Familienzusammenhang erfassen kann. Statistisch lösen sich Mehrgenerationenhaushalte in isolierte Einzelhaushalte auf, auch wenn z. B. das neue Haus der jungen Generation im Apfelgarten hinter dem Haus der Elterngeneration steht und das Familienleben in gleicher Intensität und mit höherer Lebensqualität weitergeführt wird.

Ein weiteres Problem für die statistische Erfassung der Familie stellen längere und damit eventuell auch heterogenere Lebensläufe dar: Der Auszug der Kinder aus dem elterlichen Haushalt, die Trennung von Paaren,

die Neuverheiratung alleinstehender Eltern oder der Tod eines Familienmitglieds spiegeln sich nur zum Teil in den Verteilungen der Familien- und Haushaltsformen wieder. Zum Beispiel scheinen in der Statistik Paare als ‚kinderlos‘ auf, nachdem die erwachsenen Kinder aus dem elterlichen Haushalt ausgezogen sind. Oder wenn statistisch eine Zunahme von Einpersonenhaushalten festgestellt wird, muss dies nicht eine Abkehr vom Familienleben und eine wachsende Konkurrenz durch Individualisierung bedeuten, denn in vielen Einpersonenhaushalten leben zum Beispiel Witwen nach der aktiven Familienzeit oder junge Erwachsene vor ihrer Familiengründung. Solche Veränderungen in den Lebensläufen und im Laufe der verschiedenen Familienphasen müssen keine Auswirkungen auf die tatsächlich gelebten Familienzusammenhänge haben, können sich aber statistisch in der Gesamtverteilung aller Haushalts- und Familienkonstellationen eines Landes und der EU auswirken und zu Fehlinterpretationen führen, wenn nur die Zahl der Haushalte und der Haushaltsmitglieder und die Größe des benutzten Wohnraums erfasst werden und die gelebten Familiennetzwerke unberücksichtigt bleiben. Insbesondere die großen Veränderungen in Südeuropa sind weniger im Bereich Wertewandel als im Zusammenhang mit nicht intendierten Veränderungen des Übergangs in die Moderne zu verstehen.

Auch in Griechenland hat die Anzahl der Haushalte zugenommen, ihre Größe allerdings abgenommen. Dies ist auf die Zunahme des Wohlstands und die folglich besseren Wohnbedingungen zurückzuführen, welche es ermöglichen, Intimität auf Distanz zu leben. Den größten Zuwachs findet man bei Einpersonenhaushalten (von 16% auf 20%). Die Modernisierung der Gesellschaft von Griechenland bedeutet im Bezug auf die Familien einen Rückgang der klassischen Ehe, eine Verschiebung der ersten Geburt nach hinten, kürzere Phasen des Verheiratetseins, verbunden mit einer Zunahme von Scheidungen und Trennungen, einer Zunahme von nicht-ehelichen Lebensgemeinschaften und damit auch einer Zunahme von nichtehelichen Geburten. Trotzdem bleiben die jungen Erwachsenen lange bei ihren Eltern. In den letzten 10 Jahren ist der Durchschnitt des Auszugsalters bei jungen Männern von 29 auf 31 und bei jungen Frauen von 24 auf 27 gestiegen.

In Italien verbleiben die jungen Leute noch länger im elterlichen Haushalt, entscheiden sich später für Partnerschaften, Heirat und Geburten. Einer der Gründe dafür ist neben objektiven Ursachen (späteres Ende der Ausbildung, Probleme des Eintritts in den Erwerbsarbeitsmarkt, Finden einer angemessenen Wohnung) auch das subjektive Wohlbefinden, d. h. eine positive Bilanz zwischen elterlicher Unterstützung und Kontrolle. Da auch die Eltern den längeren Aufenthalt positiv sehen und unterstützen, scheinen alle Beteiligten mit der Entwicklung der elterlichen Wohnung zum ‚Hotel Mama‘ zufrieden zu sein. Insgesamt werden von beiden Generationen die Verluste bei einem früheren Auszug höher eingeschätzt als die Vorteile des Status quo. Allerdings gibt es durch diese persönliche Gewinnmaximierung gesellschaftliche Probleme. Die Verschiebung der Familiengründung nach hinten führt zu demographischen Verlusten; das Gewöhnen an den Familienschutz kann die spätere Unabhängigkeit negativ beeinflussen; die Investitionen in die Erziehung bleiben über lange Zeit brach liegen; wenn der Familienschutz einmal entfällt, kann die Gesellschaft über institutionelle Hilfen keinen adäquaten Schutz liefern.

Auch in Portugal werden Eheschließungen weniger und finden später statt, nehmen nichteheliche Lebensgemeinschaften und uneheliche Geburten zu, wachsen Scheidungs- und Wiederverheiratungsraten und liegen die Geburtenziffern niedrig. Auch in Portugal hat sich die durchschnittliche Haushaltsgröße verkleinert, weil weniger Kinder und weniger Generationen in einem Haushalt zusammenleben. Entsprechend steigt die Zahl der Einpersonenhaushalte, weil junge Erwachsene ihre Familien früher verlassen und ältere Personen (wie z. B. die Großeltern) häufiger aus dem Mehrgenerationenhaushalt ausziehen und alleine leben, um ihre Wohnverhältnisse zu verbessern. Die größte Gruppe bilden verheiratete Paare. Es gibt eine Zunahme von Alleinerziehenden, insbesondere von niemals verheirateten Alleinerziehenden (viele davon leben bei ihren Eltern) und eine Abnahme von Mehrgenerationen-Haushalten.

Heirat, nichteheliche Lebensgemeinschaften und eingetragene (homosexuelle) Lebensgemeinschaften

Hinter der Diskussion um nichteheliche bzw. eingetragene Partnerschaften verbirgt sich eine Vielzahl von Wertediskussionen. Aus einer Metasicht gibt es in modernen, säkularisierten Gesellschaften keinen Grund, traditionelle Beziehungsformen nicht zu überprüfen und gegebenenfalls bessere und andere Rahmenbedingungen zu

schaffen, insbesondere wenn die Tradition andere gelebte Partnerschaftsformen wie z. B. nichteheliche oder homosexuelle Lebensgemeinschaften oder lebenslaufbedingte Veränderungen wie Trennung und Scheidung nicht einbezieht. Mit der höheren Lebenserwartung bedeutet die eheliche Bindung („bis dass der Tod euch scheidet“) heute etwas ganz anderes, als dies noch vor ein paar Jahrzehnten der Fall war: Heute gehört es zur Realität, dass viele Menschen sequentielle Partnerschaften vor und nach einer Phase mit Kindern eingehen, unabhängig von ehelichen Bindungen. Auf der anderen Seite bedeutet dies aber nicht, dass damit das Partnerschaftsmodell der Ehe in allen oder der Mehrzahl der Länder weniger Bedeutung hätte oder gar abgelöst wäre.

Die meisten Jugendstudien und Untersuchungen der Bedingungen für die Realisierung eines vorhandenen Kinderwunschs zeigen, dass eine verlässliche Partnerschaft das wesentliche Ziel und die Voraussetzung für ein erfülltes Leben darstellt. Die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass ein Kind die ersten 18 Jahre seines Lebens bei seinen beiden leiblichen Eltern lebt, liegt z. B. in Deutschland in Ehen bei 80 % und in nichtehelichen Lebensgemeinschaften bei 20 %. Demnach kann die Frage nicht heißen, eingetragene Partnerschaft oder Ehe, sondern beide Formen haben, je nach Lebenssituation und Erwartungen, ihre Bedeutung. Eine öffentliche Diskussion, wie sie leider oft geführt wird, in der eine der beiden Formen zu Lasten der anderen propagiert wird, kann nur schädlich wirken. Eine offene Diskussion akzeptiert, dass außerhalb der Ehe gewünschte Solidargemeinschaften zwischen zwei Erwachsenen existieren, dass aber andererseits die Institution Ehe für viele, wenn nicht sogar für die meisten der zukünftigen oder bereits realisierten Elternschaften eine zumindest jetzt noch konkurrenzlose Lebensform ist, und dass beides lebenssituationsspezifisch gefördert werden sollte.

In Belgien hat die Diskussion um die Registrierung nichtehelicher Lebensgemeinschaften, homosexueller Ehen und das Akzeptieren privater Verträge zu Regelung des Zusammenlebens zu einer vollständigen Anerkennung sowohl von „nicht-ehelichen Lebensgemeinschaften“ als auch von „gleichgeschlechtlichen Lebensgemeinschaften“ geführt. Der LTC (Living Together Contracts) wurde 1996 institutionalisiert, gleichgeschlechtliche Lebensgemeinschaften wurden am 30. Jänner 2003 in diese Regelung mitaufgenommen.

In Frankreich gibt es seit 1999 die Möglichkeit des *pacte civil de solidarité* (PACS) als Partnerschaftsform für hetero- und homosexuelle Paare. Bis 2003 wurden etwa 100.000 PACS registriert. Als Folge davon haben die Paare ohne Trauschein mit Kindern zugenommen, Heirat ist in Frankreich nicht länger Voraussetzung, wenn man Kinder haben will. Eine Folge davon sind steigende Geburtenraten.

In Finnland ging die Verheiratetenrate (% Verheiratete an allen über 15-Jährigen) von 1990 bis 2001 deutlich zurück (bei Männern (m) von 27,9% auf 23,9%, bei Frauen (w) von 23,7% auf 20,6%). Ein Grund ist die Verschiebung der Erstheirat von 28,6 auf 31,4 Jahre (m) bzw. von 26,6 auf 29,1 Jahre (w), ein anderer Grund (z. B. für die niedrigere Verheiratetenrate der Frauen) ist die längere Lebensdauer (Witwenschaft), aber auch der hohe Anteil von nichtehelichen Partnerschaften. Nach einer langen und immer noch aktuellen Debatte gibt es seit 2002 in Finnland die Möglichkeit, homosexuelle und lesbische Partnerschaften eintragen zu lassen.

In Irland nimmt die Anzahl der nichtehelichen Gemeinschaften stark zu, ebenso jene der gleichgeschlechtlichen (nichtehelichen) Lebensgemeinschaften.

Ebenso wie in anderen südeuropäischen Ländern sind in Spanien nichteheliche Partnerschaften eher selten. Die Akzeptanz in der Bevölkerung wächst allerdings mehr und mehr. Für die Zukunft sind daher mehr uneheliche Partnerschaften und damit auch mehr uneheliche Geburten zu erwarten. Eine rechtliche Anerkennung von nichtehelichen Partnerschaften steht zurzeit nicht zur Debatte.

Trennungen und Scheidungen

Trennungen und Scheidungen werden in Europa unterschiedlich häufig realisiert, sind gesellschaftlich unterschiedlich anerkannt und die rechtliche Akzeptanz bzw. die Ausgestaltung des Trennungs- und Scheidungsverfahrens hat sich über die letzten Jahrzehnte in den verschiedenen Ländern unterschiedlich entwickelt. Generell ist in ganz Europa Trennung und Scheidung als Realität anerkannt und die entsprechenden Raten nehmen kontinuierlich zu. Ein Grund hierfür ist sicherlich auch die steigende Lebenserwartung, die allein über die längeren gelebten Zeiträume Scheidungen und Trennungen wahrscheinlicher macht. Sind diese Veränderungen

in der gesellschaftlichen Diskussion relevant oder nur unvermeidbare, begrüßenswerte oder zu bedauernde Entwicklungen in einem modernen Europa?

Zum Erwachsenwerden gehört das Einlassen auf Partnerschaften, die nicht unbedingt in lebenslange Verbindungen münden müssen. Die Auflösung solcher Partnerschaften ist zwar für die Betroffenen manchmal schmerzhaft, aber nicht unbedingt für das Weiterleben gefährdend, und in den meisten Fällen auch gesellschaftlich akzeptiert. Schwieriger wird es, wenn die Partnerschaften sich zur Familie weiterentwickeln, also zu gewachsenen Solidargemeinschaften werden, mit Erwartungen an verlässliche Unterstützung innerhalb der Partnerschaft, zwischen Eltern und noch nicht erwachsenen Kindern und zwischen Großeltern und Enkeln.

Familie als verlässliche Solidargemeinschaft ist für die meisten Einwohner Europas fest mit einer lebenswerten und gewünschten Zukunft verbunden. Wenn solche Systeme zerbrechen und dann noch der Zugang zu Ressourcen für zerbrochene Familien sehr viel schwieriger ist als für intakte, stellen sich von einer Wertediskussion losgelöste lebenspraktische Fragen, sowohl hinsichtlich Unterstützungsmaßnahmen für Betroffene als auch – noch wichtiger – hinsichtlich Präventionsmaßnahmen für den Erhalt von Beziehungen bzw. für die Zeiten nach deren Zerbrechen. Mit Präventionsmaßnahmen zum Erhalt von Familien sind weder gesetzliche Zwangsmaßnahmen noch ein Erhalt zerrütteter Verhältnisse um jeden Preis gemeint. Prävention bedeutet, den Wunsch nach verlässlicher Partnerschaft ernst zu nehmen und ist damit eine Vorbeugung gegen vermeidbares Trennungspotential, das durch mangelndes Wissen im Umgang mit Konflikten entsteht. Hier ist jede Investition besser angelegt als eine nachträgliche Unterstützung nach erfolgter Trennung. Prävention für die Zeit nach der Trennung meint u. a. Geschlechtergerechtigkeit beim Zugang zu Bildung, Aus- und Fortbildung, Erwerbstätigkeit und Karrieremöglichkeit, sowie Geschlechterbalance in Erwerbs- und Familienarbeit. Nur so kann sichergestellt werden, dass nach einer Trennung nicht geschlechtsspezifische Armutsrisiken auftreten.

Die Scheidungsraten sind in Frankreich von 9% (1965) bis auf über 40% (seit 2000) gestiegen. Damit hat auch die Zahl der Alleinerziehenden und Fortsetzungsfamilien (Stieffamilien) in Frankreich zugenommen.

Auch in Österreich steigen die Scheidungsraten, derzeit liegen sie bei 46%. Bei Scheidungsraten ist zu berücksichtigen, dass es sich um aktuelle Scheidungen bezogen auf aktuelle Heiraten handelt, d. h. die Scheidungsraten beziehen sich auf eine gesunkene Basis von Heiraten. Die durchschnittliche Ehedauer (die Zeit zwischen Heirat und Scheidung) beträgt in Österreich 9,5 Jahre. In Österreich und im Westen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland erleben etwa 80% der Kinder unter 19 Jahren eine Scheidung ihrer Eltern. 25 % der Kinder erleben bis zum 18. Lebensjahr eine Trennung oder Scheidung der Eltern, 5 % haben nie mit beiden Eltern zusammengelebt.

Eine Konsequenz der Zunahme von Scheidungen und Trennungen ist die Zunahme von Alleinerziehendenhaushalten. In Finnland stieg der Anteil der Kinder bei alleinerziehenden Müttern von 9% (1985) auf 17,2% (2002), bei alleinerziehenden Vätern von 1,1% (1985) auf 2,4% (2002). Noch höher sind diese Anteile in Schweden, hier leben 23% der unter 17-jährigen bei einer alleinerziehenden Mutter, 5% bei einem alleinerziehenden Vater, 72% zusammen mit ihren beiden biologischen Eltern. In Griechenland dagegen sind nur 1,5% der Haushalte Alleinerziehende, vier Fünftel davon Frauen.

In Irland gibt es seit 1997 gilt ein neues, liberaleres Ehescheidungsgesetz. In der Folge stiegen die Ehescheidungen um etwa 50% und damit erhöhte sich auch der Anteil der alleinerziehenden Mütter.

Obwohl die Zahl der Alleinerziehenden – und vor allem die der alleinerziehenden Mütter – in den meisten EU-Mitgliedstaaten steigt, kann nicht behauptet werden, dass es sich hierbei um eine neue Familienform handelt, die als Alternative zur Familie mit beiden Eltern gewählt wird. Bis auf wenige Ausnahmen ist das Alleinerziehen entweder das Ergebnis einer ungeplanten Schwangerschaft außerhalb einer festen Beziehung oder die Folge der Trennung einer ursprünglich gemeinsam geplanten Partnerschaft. Ein Indikator hierfür ist, dass in vielen Ländern Kinderarmut, so weit sie ausgewiesen wird, am stärksten die Kinder alleinerziehender Mütter betrifft. Deshalb wird es neben Initiativen zur Verbesserung der Situation von alleinerziehenden Müttern durch Transferleistungen oder – noch besser – durch Möglichkeiten ihrer Beteiligung am Erwerbsleben, ebenso wichtig, durch vorbeugende Maßnahmen vermeidbare Trennungen und Scheidungen zu verhindern: Konfliktmanagement, verbessertes Paarmanagement, Paar- und Familienberatung und präventive Hilfen im Konfliktfall sind immer besser als Hilfen hinterher.

Kinderlosigkeit

Am Beispiel Deutschlands kann die Mehrdeutigkeit der Diskussion um Kinderlosigkeit sichtbar gemacht werden. Zum einen gibt es kaum zuverlässige Zahlen, da auch im Mikrozensus nicht nach eigenen Kindern, sondern nur nach eigenen Kindern ‚im Haushalt‘ gefragt wird. Damit wird jede Mutter nach dem Auszug des letzten erwachsenen Kindes plötzlich ‚kinderlos‘. Entsprechend schwierig sind die Diskussionen. Zurzeit besagt eine Prognose, dass über 40% aller Akademikerinnen dauerhaft kinderlos sind. Dies wird häufig als Karrieredenken, Eigennutz und Gebärverweigerung interpretiert. Wie immer sind der erste Augenschein und daraus voreilig gezogene Schlussfolgerungen nicht ganz richtig.

Erstens gab es in Deutschland (und Mitteleuropa) immer schon einen hohen Anteil von dauerhaft kinderlosen Frauen (und Männern) (so entspricht z. B. der Prozentsatz kinderloser Frauen Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts exakt jenem am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts). Zweitens lässt sich streiten, ob es bei einer gegebenen Geburtenrate besser ist, dass alle Frauen ein Kind bekommen oder dass viele Frauen zwei bis drei Kinder bekommen und dafür andere Frauen gar keine. Drittens sagt die tatsächliche Kinderzahl nichts über den Kinderwunsch aus. StudentInnen an deutschen Universitäten haben ebenso wie die anderen jungen Menschen den Wunsch, einmal zwei bis drei Kinder in der Familie aufzuziehen, aber augenscheinlich verwirklichen ihn viele nicht. Einer der Gründe dafür ist, dass sie keinen Partner haben, weil die Partnerwahl im Lebenslauf weiter nach hinten geschoben wird und weil – bei Aufwärtsheirat in der sozialen Hierarchie bei Frauen oder Abwärtsheirat von Männern – mit steigender Frauenqualifikation der Markt für hochqualifizierte Frauen immer dünner wird. Ein zweiter Grund ist, wie nahezu alle europäischen und nationalen Studien zeigen: Viele Frauen, die sich situationsbedingt gezwungen sehen, hier und jetzt zwischen Karriere und Kind zu wählen, entscheiden sich für eine Aufschiebung (nicht Ablehnung) der Realisierung ihres Kinderwunsches, was aber aus biologischen Gründen oft dazu führt, dass sie kinderlos bleiben. Der Versuch, aufwärts zu heiraten oder jetzt noch Karriere zu machen, ist ebenfalls oft verbunden damit, Bedingungen zu schaffen, in denen die gewünschten Kinder bessere Möglichkeiten haben, als wenn der Kinderwunsch sofort realisiert würde. Postmodernistische Begründungen für Kinderlosigkeit – antizipierter Eigennutz, gesellschaftsfeindliche Individualisierung und Verweigerung der Mutterrolle aus konsumbegründeten Interessenkonflikten – findet man zwar häufig als Zuschreibung in der öffentlichen Diskussion, aber nicht in empirischen Untersuchungen. Sehr oft ist nicht die Ablehnung von Kindern, sondern das übersteigerte Ideal von einer optimalen Bedingung für das Aufwachsen von Kindern der wirkliche Grund für Kinderlosigkeit.

Vor diesem Hintergrund ist die wachsende Zahl der kinderlosen Frauen – und insbesondere derjenigen mit hohem Ausbildungsniveau – zwar nicht weniger besorgniserregend, aber es bieten sich ganz andere Einflussmöglichkeiten und Interventionen an als das Appellieren an die angeblich nicht vorhandene Bereitschaft zu Mutterpflichten.

Geburten und Geburtenrate

In Österreich wie im Rest Europas ist die bedeutendste Referenzgruppe für junge Menschen die eigene Familie. Eine dauerhafte Partnerschaft und Kinder gehören in Österreich fest zur Lebensplanung. Allerdings schiebt sich das Heiratsalter weiter nach hinten, obwohl die jungen Österreicherinnen relativ früh ihr Elternhaus verlassen, und die Geburtenrate bleibt auf einem relativ niedrigen Niveau.

Spanien, Italien und andere südeuropäische Mitgliedstaaten der EU haben, verglichen mit den mittel- und nordeuropäischen Staaten, die niedrigsten Geburtenraten. Neben anderen mit den restlichen EU-Mitgliedstaaten vergleichbaren Entwicklungen zeigen sich im Süden Europas zwei Besonderheiten:

- Junge Menschen ziehen extrem spät aus dem elterlichen Haushalt aus; dies verschiebt die erste Partnerschaft und die Geburt nach hinten. Außerdem führt die höhere Kontrolle zur Einhaltung von Normen dazu, dass der in nord- und mitteleuropäischen Staaten übliche Ausgleich von niedrigen ehelichen Geburtenraten durch außereheliche Geburten praktisch nicht stattfindet.
- Der Wunsch nach Vereinbarkeit von Erwerbstätigkeit und Elternschaft ist in den südlichen EU-Mitgliedstaaten bei jungen Leuten genauso groß wie im Rest Europas. Die Möglichkeiten, insbesondere für verheira-

tete Frauen, Kinder und Beruf wirklich miteinander zu vereinbaren, sind aber deutlich geringer als erhofft. Dies führt dazu, dass die Geburtenraten weiter sinken bzw. auf niedrigem Niveau stabil bleiben.

Bedingt durch seinen soziokulturellen Hintergrund geht Portugal seinen eigenen Weg. Nach mehr als 50-jähriger Diktatur hat die Revolution von 1974 zu einer Vielzahl von Veränderungen geführt. In den letzten 25 Jahren haben sich das demographische Verhalten und die Familienformen in Portugal stark verändert. Allerdings sind die letzten Jahre eher durch eine Konsolidierung gekennzeichnet als durch dramatische Änderungen, doch die vorhandenen Trends haben sich durchaus weiterentwickelt. Portugal entspricht dem südeuropäischen Muster, d. h.

- starke ideologische Bindung zur Familie,
- späterer Einstieg in die demographischen Veränderungen als in Mittel- und Nordeuropa,
- mehr familienorientierte Lebensformen,
- und eine nur rudimentäre, explizite Familienpolitik.

In Portugal ist die Geburtenrate in den 1980er und 1990er Jahren stark gefallen und in den letzten 15 Jahren bei etwa 1,5 relativ stabil geblieben, bei einem von den meisten Frauen geäußerten Wunsch von zwei bis drei Kindern. Als Gründe für die Differenz nennen Frauen

- schwierige Lebensumstände (Wohnungssituation, Lebensstandard, lange Abhängigkeit der Kinder, Bildungskosten),
- Probleme mit der Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Familie,
- Gesundheit und Alter der Mütter.

Griechenland hat derzeit eine sehr niedrige Geburtenrate von 1,3. Bei den 30–39-Jährigen vollzieht sich eine Trendwende, d. h. das Absinken der Geburtenraten in diesem Alter hört auf und die Geburtenraten steigen langsam wieder an. Bei den 25–29-Jährigen wird ein geringer Anstieg, bei den unter 25-Jährigen ein weiterer Abfall verzeichnet. Die langfristigen Erwartungen für diese Entwicklung gehen von einem Anwachsen und einer darauf folgenden Stabilität bei 1,7 aus. Trotz sinkender Geburtenrate und kleiner werdenden Haushalten hat Griechenland in der EU die meisten großen Haushalte. 50 % der Bevölkerung leben in Haushalten mit vier und mehr Personen, nur 7 % leben in Einpersonenhaushalten.

In Irland hat es in den letzten Jahren deutliche Veränderungen im demographischen Verhalten gegeben. Als Folge von Nettoimmigration und eines Geburtenüberschusses über die Sterbezahlen hat die Bevölkerung zugenommen. Nach einem scharfen Abfall vor 1994 sind die Geburtenzahlen in den letzten Jahren langsam wieder angestiegen. Die anderen Kennzahlen zeigen die gleiche Entwicklung wie in den anderen EU-Mitgliedstaaten: Verringerung der Haushaltsgröße, Zahl der kinderlosen Paare, Erhöhung des Alters beim Auszug aus dem elterlichen Haushalt, bei Partnerschaftsbeginn und bei der ersten Geburt, eine höhere Zahl von nichtehelichen Geburten, die derzeit über dem Mittelwert der EU liegt.

In Finnland sind die geburtenschwachen Jahrgänge ins Fertilitätsalter gekommen. Dies hat zusammen mit einer Reduzierung der Geburtenrate von 1,84 auf 1,71 zu einer Reduktion der Geburten von 65.000 (1992) auf 55.000 (2000) geführt.

Anders als in der restlichen EU hat sich in Frankreich die Heiratsrate erholt, ebenso die Geburtenrate: sie stieg von 1,68 (1994) auf 1,91 (2003), obwohl das Alter der Mütter bei der Erstgeburt von 28,8 (1994) auf 29,5 (2003) gestiegen ist. Ein Grund für die Zunahme der Geburten ist ein hoher Anteil nichtehelicher Geburten, die zum Teil in registrierten (nichtehelichen) Partnerschaften erfolgen.

In Österreich wie auch in weiten Teilen Europas ist die Geburtenrate (hier 1,44) deutlich niedriger als der Kinderwunsch (hier 2, in Finnland z. B. 2,4).

In den Niederlanden waren nur 20 % der Frauen nicht zufrieden mit dem Zeitpunkt der Geburt (12 % waren der Meinung, er sei zu spät, für 8 % war er zu früh). Da die Zahl der realisierten Geburten mit dem Alter bei der Erstgeburt korreliert, wird man, wenn höhere Geburtenraten erwünscht sind, Einfluss darauf nehmen müssen, dass es mehr Wünsche zu Geburten in früheren Lebensabschnitten gibt.

Abtreibung

In Griechenland ist Geschlechtergerechtigkeit ein Thema der öffentlichen Debatte und wird derzeit unter dem Aspekt der Empfängnisverhütung diskutiert. Insbesondere die hohe Abtreibungsrate (ein Viertel aller Frauen hat schon einmal abgetrieben) soll durch modernere Empfängnisverhütungsverfahren gesenkt und damit implizite Zwänge, die zu Abtreibung führen, beseitigt werden.

In Spanien ist die Abtreibungsproblematik weiterhin eine offene Frage. Die soziale Indikation als zusätzliche Möglichkeit einer erlaubten Abtreibung wird derzeit widersprüchlich diskutiert, die Zahl der Abtreibungen bei jungen und sehr jungen Schwangeren nimmt zu.

In Portugal lehnen die meisten Menschen eine Abtreibung ab, sehr viel deutlicher als im Rest bzw. im Durchschnitt Europas.

In Irland ist der Schwangerschaftsabbruch weiterhin illegal, trotzdem nehmen die bekannten Zahlen seit 1980 zu – durch ein Ausweichen auf andere europäische Länder.

Geschlechterbeziehungen

In Finnland haben sich die Geschlechterbeziehungen mit dem hohen Bildungsniveau der finnischen Frauen dramatisch geändert. Finnland hat eine der höchsten Frauenerwerbsraten in Europa, verbunden mit einem hohen Anteil an Vollzeitbeschäftigung. Frauenfreundlichkeit ist eine der Besonderheiten des nordischen Sozialstaats. Eine Vielzahl von Kinderbetreuungsangeboten und ein umfassendes Sozialnetz verringern die Abhängigkeit vom familialen Netzwerk. Trotzdem liegt auch in Finnland das durchschnittliche Einkommen von Frauen nur bei etwa 80% des männlichen Einkommens. Hausarbeit wird weiterhin überproportional von Frauen durchgeführt und in den größten Familien ist das klassische Modell (male breadwinner) üblich. Elternzeit wird von Frauen genommen und die durchschnittliche Arbeitszeit von Frauen stark durch das Alter ihrer Kinder beeinflusst.

Schweden sieht sich weltweit führend im Abbau von Geschlechterungerechtigkeit. Mehr und mehr Männer beteiligen sich auch an Hausarbeit und Kinderbetreuung und nehmen an der Elternzeit teil (17,5 % aller Tage, die als Elternzeit genommen werden, werden von Männern genommen). In Schweden (wie auch in Deutschland) ist die Summe von Familienerwerbsarbeit über beide Geschlechter gleich verteilt. Allerdings ist die interne Verteilung auch in Schweden so, dass Männer mehr erwerbstätig und Frauen mehr in der Familienarbeit engagiert sind.

In Österreich sind Kinderbetreuung und Haushaltsführung Frauensache (insbesondere nach der Geburt des ersten Kindes). Elternzeit wird hauptsächlich von Frauen genommen. Anders als sonst in Europa finden es Frauen in Deutschland und Österreich subjektiv sehr schwer, Familie und Beruf zu vereinbaren, obwohl die Familienpolitik in diesen beiden Ländern seit Jahren versucht, diese Situation zu verbessern. Wahrscheinlich liegt der negativen Einschätzung nicht die objektive Situation einer möglichen Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf zugrunde, sondern eine bestimmte Mutterideologie, die verlangt, dass sich Mütter den Großteil des Tages ihren Kindern widmen. Da die objektive Situation anders ist, provoziert sie Unzufriedenheit. Die Geschlechterbeziehungen haben sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten stark verändert und werden sich auch weiterhin verändern. Bei Befragungen sind trotzdem zwei Drittel der weiblichen und drei Viertel der männlichen Bevölkerung mit den traditionellen Rollenzuschreibungen zufrieden. Betrachtet man die Zufriedenheit über die Familienphasen, liegt die Zufriedenheit auf einer U-Funktion. Insbesondere nach der Geburt des ersten und auch des zweiten Kindes sinkt die Zufriedenheit auf ein Minimum. Später steigt die Zufriedenheit mit der Partnerschaft wieder an. Gewalt in Familien ist ein Thema, das diskutiert und politisch und administrativ angegangen wird, es ist aber zum Glück nur ein Problem in einer Minderheit von Familien.

Die Antidiskriminierungsdebatte in Belgien im Bereich Geschlechtergerechtigkeit hatte zwei Schwerpunkte: die Aufteilung von bezahlter und unbezahlter Arbeit zwischen den Geschlechtern und die Namensgebung als Verwandtschaftskennung, insbesondere im Bereich nichtehelicher Geburten. In Belgien wurde das System der Unterbrechung von Erwerbsarbeit im Bereich des Ausgleichs zwischen Familienarbeit, Erwerbsarbeit und ehrenamtlicher Tätigkeit durch ein System von Zeitmanagement ersetzt, das es erlaubt, während des Erwerbslebens ein Jahr (bzw. aufgrund besonderer Vereinbarungen bis fünf Jahre) aus dem Erwerbsleben auszusteigen.

Während Erwerbsunterbrechungen bisher fast ausschließlich von Frauen gewählt wurden, ist das neue System deutlich attraktiver für Männer und wird von ihnen vermehrt genutzt. Die Nutzung von Elternzeit, die mit diesem System verbunden werden kann, hat in den letzten Jahren ebenfalls deutlich – mit einer verstärkten Nutzung durch Männer – zugenommen.

In den südeuropäischen Mitgliedstaaten wird die Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Erwerbstätigkeit, verbunden mit hoher Arbeitslosigkeit, eng mit dem Problem der niedrigen Geburtenraten gesehen und weniger als Problem von nicht ausgenutztem ‚Humankapital‘, das bei einem (erzwungenen) Rückzug der Frauen in die Familie brachliegt.

In Spanien werden erste Schritte unternommen, die aktive Vaterrolle z. B. durch eine geschlechtsunspezifische Elternzeit zu stärken. In den letzten zwei Jahren ist in Spanien die Gewalt in Partnerschaften stärker in die öffentliche Debatte gerückt. Die Situation der Frauen hat sich verbessert, seit sie auf ihnen gegenüber ausgeübte Gewalt durch Anzeige reagieren können. Allerdings hat es auch eine Zunahme von Tötungen von Frauen durch ihre Partner gegeben. Die öffentliche Diskussion und die spanische Gesetzgebung versucht, darauf zu reagieren und die Situation der Frauen weiter zu verbessern.

In Portugal hat eine höhere Erwerbsbeteiligung von Frauen sowie deren höhere Bildung zu weniger männlichen Alleinverdienern und statt dessen zu einer Dominanz von Doppelverdienerhaushalten geführt (zwei Drittel aller Paare leben als Doppelverdiener mit einer Dominanz von Vollzeitverdienern). Als Problem wird die hohe Abhängigkeit der Familien von der Betreuung der Kinder durch die Großeltern gesehen. Es gibt zu wenig billige institutionelle Kinderbetreuung. Auch in Portugal leiden die Frauen unter einer hohen Belastung, da die Männer viel zu wenig in die Kindererziehung involviert sind. Portugal ist bezüglich der Rollenteilung eines der konservativsten Länder, nur 7% der Männer geben an, dass sie nach den Kindern schauen (der EU-Durchschnitt liegt bei 15%).

In Griechenland lässt sich eine Veränderung zu mehr Geschlechtergerechtigkeit feststellen, aber es wird auch deutlich, dass noch ein weiter Weg bis dorthin zurückzulegen ist. Die Gewalt gegen Frauen ist in Griechenland hoch. 9% aller Frauen erfahren Gewalt im engeren Sinne, ca. 50% im weiteren Sinne. Die Bildungsunterschiede zwischen den Geschlechtern sind allerdings fast aufgehoben, wie dies auch für andere EU-Mitgliedstaaten nachgewiesen ist. Ebenfalls wie in diesen anderen Ländern gilt, dass es noch deutliche Unterschiede bezüglich Einkommen, Arbeitslosenrate und durchschnittlicher Arbeitszeit gibt. Trotz der vergleichsweise schlechten Chancen auf Arbeit ist eine stetige Zunahme der Frauenerwerbsquoten zu verzeichnen.

Wohl des Kindes

In Finnland ist man zunehmend besorgt über die psychischen Belastungen von Kindern, weshalb Finnland stark in die Kinderpsychiatrie investiert hat. Sie soll verbunden werden mit präventiver Aufklärung und der Ausbildung zu einer qualitativ besseren Elternschaft.

In den Niederlanden zeigen verschiedene Studien, dass nicht strukturelle Eigenschaften (Familienformen, Einkommensarmut, Migrationshintergrund, etc.) die Qualität der Situation des Aufwachsens von Kindern dominant beeinflussen, sondern prozessuale Eigenschaften, also der Umgang miteinander in der Partnerschaft und im Eltern-Kind-Verhältnis. Das gilt auch, wenn die Qualität der Situation des Aufwachsens an so harten Indikatoren wie späterem devianten Verhalten gemessen wird. Eine gut funktionierende Familie kann als Puffer für strukturelle Probleme (Familienform, Armut, Krankheit, etc.) dienen. Das höchste Risiko, deviant zu werden, haben Familien, in denen die innerfamiliären Beziehungen verletzend wirken (unabhängig davon, welche strukturellen Eigenschaften die Situation der Familie definieren). Diese Bedeutung prozessualer Eigenschaften wird häufig überdeckt durch die Korrelation von Problemverhalten und strukturellen Faktoren. Trennt man die beiden, ergibt sich aber, dass die prozessualen Faktoren fünf Mal so stark wirken wie die strukturellen.

Verglichen mit anderen Ländern und anderen Zeiten haben Schwedens Kinder jetzt den höchsten Lebensstandard. Psychosomatische Probleme und Übergewicht lassen sich trotzdem im erheblichen Maße nachweisen.

Kinderbetreuung

Anders als im übrigen Europa gibt es in Belgien einen fortschreitenden Übergang von informeller zu formeller Betreuung bei den unter Dreijährigen. Es wird eine Vielzahl unterschiedlicher Betreuungsformen angeboten. Die Verbesserung der Qualität der Betreuung im Sinne der Zukunftsfähigkeit der nachwachsenden Generation spielt dabei eine große Rolle.

Ähnlich wie in Belgien gibt es auch in Frankreich ein ausdifferenziertes System der Kinderbetreuung, das angesichts der hohen Erwerbsbeteiligung beider Eltern unterschiedlichste Möglichkeiten anbietet, um Beruf und Familie besser miteinander zu vereinbaren.

In den Niederlanden führen Gesetzgeber und Gesellschaft Diskussionen über Veränderungen in der Kinderbetreuung. Nach wie vor wird aber von den Familien Kinderbetreuung als Frauensache angesehen. Es gab und gibt eine Diskussion um die Gefährlichkeit institutioneller Betreuung und die positiven Effekte natürlicher (mütterlicher) Betreuung. Diese (nicht immer wissenschaftlich geführte) Debatte spiegelt die verbreiteten Ressentiments gegen Eltern wider, die ihre Kinder in institutionelle Betreuung geben (ähnlich ist die Situation auch in Deutschland und Österreich).

In Griechenland reicht das Angebot institutioneller Kinderbetreuung bei weitem nicht aus. Das bisher vorherrschende Modell der Betreuung durch Großeltern wird zunehmend schwächer, ohne dass Ersatz durch zusätzliche institutionelle Betreuungsangebote geschaffen wird.

Öffentliche Kinderbetreuung in Irland wurde traditionsgemäß nur als Hilfe in besonderen Notfällen angesehen. Von Eltern wurde erwartet, dass sie private Arrangements finden. In den letzten Jahren ist infolge der gewünschten Entwicklung zu einer höheren Partizipation von Frauen am Erwerbsleben, durch den Anspruch der Eltern an eine qualitativ hohe Betreuung und aufgrund internationaler Vergleiche die Forderung nach höheren öffentlichen Investitionen im Kinderbetreuungsbereich gewachsen.

In Dänemark herrscht Einverständnis darüber, dass die frühe Kindheit die Basis für die optimale Entwicklung der eigenen Fähigkeiten ist – unter der Randbedingung einer Balance zwischen Familien- und Erwerbsengagement der Eltern. Es herrscht auch Konsens darüber, dass die Eltern verantwortlich für das Aufwachsen der Kinder sind und der Staat bzw. die Gesellschaft die Bedingungen für eine optimale Unterstützung dieses Anspruchs bereitstellen müssen.

Generationenbeziehungen

Diskutiert man das Älterwerden der Gesellschaft und die Auswirkungen auf das Humankapital, so lassen sich nur relativ wenige Strategien identifizieren, die bei einem Rückgang der heute erwerbstätigen Bevölkerung im Alter zwischen Anfang 20 bis Anfang 60 im Verhältnis zu den über 60-Jährigen die auf Erwerbstätigkeit beruhende Wirtschaftskraft weiter erhalten können:

- Die Produktivität kann weiter gesteigert werden.
- Bei allgemein verbesserter Gesundheit und Leistungsfähigkeit der Bevölkerung bis ins hohe Alter kann das Renteneintrittsalter nach hinten verschoben werden.
- Das in Europa vielfach vorgenommene ‚Parken‘ von jungen Erwachsenen im Ausbildungssystem kann reduziert und die notwendige Bildung durch ein berufsbegleitendes lebenslanges Lernen ersetzt werden.
- Nicht nur die Anzahl der erwerbstätigen Personen, sondern vielmehr die Qualität der Ausbildung ist für einen Anstieg des Humankapitals verantwortlich. Investitionen in die Ausbildung der Jungen und in lebenslanges Lernen kann dazu führen, dass auch bei einer geringeren Anzahl von Erwerbstätigen die Wettbewerbsfähigkeit Europas erhalten bleibt.
- Ein mittel- bis langfristiges Ansteigen der Geburtenrate, auch in kleinen Schritten, auf eine Zahl deutlich näher an das Bestandsniveau von 2,1 ist eine der Strategien (aber auch nur eine!), die auf die Zukunft gerichtet wirken kann.
- Eine weitere Strategie kann das Absenken der durch Verkehrsunfälle und Suizide bedingten Todesraten in jungen Lebensjahren sein.

Insgesamt gesehen kann es sich keine Region in Europa mehr erlauben, Humankapital zu vergeuden. Wenn jeder, seinen Möglichkeiten entsprechend, optimal ausgebildet wird und seinen Platz im Erwerbs- bzw. Wirtschaftssystem findet, und niemand wegen seines Geschlechts, seiner soziokulturellen Herkunft, seines Migrationshintergrunds oder aus anderen Gründen ausgegliedert wird, besteht trotz relativ niedriger Geburtenrate und dem Älterwerden der Gesellschaft eine gute Chance, die nächsten Jahrzehnte auch ohne massive Migration in den EU-Raum zu überstehen.

In Österreich sind auch die Generationenbeziehungen (in der Familie), das Generationenverhältnis (in der Gesellschaft) in der öffentlichen Diskussion (Medien) und im politischen Alltag (Diskussion der Transferbeziehungen) von hoher Relevanz. Obwohl auch in Österreich die Pflege älterer Menschen zu einem hohen Anteil von der Familie geleistet wird, fällt auf, dass das Sterben immer häufiger aus den Familien in die Institutionen verlagert wird.

Das innerfamiliäre Unterstützungsnetzwerk in Italien ist weiterhin sehr stark und weit verbreitet. Allerdings gibt es Anzeichen, dass sich dies ändert, unter anderem durch die demographischen Veränderungen (weniger Kinder, mehr Ältere) und durch die höhere Erwerbsbeteiligung von Frauen.

In Griechenland hat die Familie weiterhin eine sehr hohe Bedeutung. Die familialen Netzwerke sind der wesentliche Bestandteil des gesamtgesellschaftlichen sozialen Netzes, insbesondere auch für die Pflege der Älteren.

In Portugal gibt es eine sehr geringe Rate von institutioneller Betreuung der Älteren (nur 26% der über 80-Jährigen leben alleine – im EU-Durchschnitt 45%). Die Pflege findet meist innerhalb des Familiensystems statt.

Irland ist traditionell eines der Länder, in denen die private Verantwortung für die soziale Situation betont wird. Die Betreuung älterer Menschen wird daher auch zu einem großen Teil von den Familien – und hier von den Frauen – übernommen. Öffentliche Interventionen werden eher als Substitution der privaten Pflege gesehen, allerdings werden die Auswirkungen der demographischen Entwicklung hierbei mit Sorge betrachtet.

Anders in Belgien: Hier wird die Betreuung der älteren Bevölkerung zu einem großen Teil durch institutionelle Hilfen unterstützt.

In Dänemark ist die Maxime die individuelle Verantwortung und damit das Ziel, solange wie möglich im eigenen Haushalt für sich selber verantwortlich zu sein. Ist dies nicht mehr möglich, dann gibt es öffentliche Angebote der Unterstützung bzw. Unterbringung.

In Europa hat die Entwicklung dazu geführt, dass die Organisation der Rentensysteme im derzeitigen Verfahren nicht mehr haltbar zu sein scheint. Dies war bedingt durch die Arbeitslosenquote und das Anbinden von Pensionssystemen an die Erwerbsarbeit, durch das Hereinwachsen des Nachkriegsgeburtenbergs ins Pensionsalter, verbunden mit einer geringen Geburtenrate und einer deutlich niedrigeren Zahl von Frauen im gebärfähigen Alter im Vergleich zu den letzten Jahrzehnten. Der Versuch, die Probleme durch einen neuen Geburtenberg zu lösen, also Appelle – insbesondere an junge Frauen –, die Geburtenrate zu erhöhen, erweist sich in vielerlei Hinsicht als kurzfristig. Das Hauptproblem ist, dass nur eine florierende Wirtschaft die für eine höhere Geburtenzahl nötigen Transferleistungen überhaupt erst möglich machen würde. Das nächste Problem sind niedrige Erwerbsarbeitszahlen, die bei Anbindung des Pensionssystems an die Erwerbstätigkeit zu hohen Ausfällen führen. Hier muss entweder die Zahl der Erwerbstätigen erhöht, d. h. die Arbeitslosigkeit verringert, oder aber die Finanzierung der Pensionskassen von der Erwerbstätigkeit gelöst werden, vorausgesetzt dass in der Volkswirtschaft etwas zum Verteilen vorhanden ist. Schnelle Wechsel zwischen Geburtenbergen und Geburtentälern führen in der Zukunft zu ähnlichen Problemen, wie jene, die wir jetzt haben. Kleine Kinder tragen erst einmal nichts zum Bruttosozialprodukt bei, sondern belasten den erwerbstätigen Teil der Bevölkerung. Junge Frauen und Männer lassen sich nicht durch Probleme der Sozialsysteme motivieren, Kinder zu bekommen. Im Gegenteil, die ständig wachsende und geschürte Angst vor dem Zusammenbruch der Sozialsysteme ist ein Grund für die große Diskrepanz zwischen Kinderwunsch und seiner Realisierung bei jungen Erwachsenen.

In Schweden wird das Älterwerden der Gesellschaft und damit das Verhältnis der Rentner zur erwerbstätigen Bevölkerung in Relation zu Migrationsbedürfnissen und höherer Geburtenrate diskutiert. In der EU hat Schweden jetzt schon die höchste Partizipationsrate von älteren Menschen am Arbeitsmarkt.

Sozioökonomische Bedingungen

In den letzten Jahren hat Irland eine schnelle ökonomische und soziale Entwicklung erfahren. Allerdings haben unterschiedliche Gesellschaftsschichten sehr unterschiedlich von dieser Entwicklung profitiert. Die Armutszahlen in Irland sind weiterhin hoch, 12,3% der Bevölkerung leben in Armut. In Griechenland ist starkes ökonomisches Wachstum verbunden mit hoher Einkommensungleichheit und hoher Arbeitslosigkeit, insbesondere für junge Erwachsene und Frauen. In Griechenland ist Armut weniger durch Veränderung der Familienstrukturen (z. B. Familiengröße) bestimmt als durch die Kombination von niedrigem Bildungsgrad, Arbeitslosigkeit und ländlicher Region und betrifft eher die ältere als die jüngere Bevölkerung. In Portugal ist starkes ökonomisches Wachstum verbunden mit hoher Einkommensungleichheit und hoher Arbeitslosigkeit, insbesondere für junge Erwachsene und Frauen. Ein sehr hoher Anteil von Personen lebt mit dem Armutsrisiko, 21% vs. 15% als Durchschnitt in Europa. In den letzten drei Jahren hat sich der Aufschwung abgeschwächt und stagniert, und als Folge davon wurden Sozialleistungen deutlich gekürzt.

Griechenland und Portugal haben sich von Auswanderungs- zu Einwanderungsländern gewandelt. Das hat gewaltige Veränderungen im Selbstverständnis, in der Administration und im Alltag zur Folge, an deren Bewältigung beide Länder nun leiden.

In Frankreich ergibt sich die paradoxe sozioökonomische Situation, mit einem Rückgang der Arbeitslosigkeit, einer Zunahme von Unterstützungsmaßnahmen bei gleichzeitiger Zunahme der Ungleichheit und Reichtums-Armuts-Ausdifferenzierung durch eine Verlagerung von Erwerbstätigkeit in Billiglohnjobs. In den Familien war diese Entwicklung mit einer Zunahme von Doppelverdiener-Paaren verbunden. Sie ist insbesondere für Alleinerziehende hochgradig problematisch, denn diese liegen mit nur einem Verdienst in vielen Fällen deutlich unter dem Durchschnitt.

In Finnland hat sich die Schere zwischen den unteren und oberen Einkommensschichten geöffnet; verbunden mit einer Rücknahme der Familientransfers ist das Risiko für Familien, in Armut zu geraten gewachsen, insbesondere für Alleinerziehende.

In Italien ist eine Zunahme von relativer Einkommensarmut zu verzeichnen, verbunden mit einer weiteren Öffnung der Schere zwischen den nördlichen und südlichen Regionen. Armut ist weiterhin von der Familiengröße abhängig. Je größer die Familien (d. h. je mehr Kinder), desto höher ist das Armutsrisiko. Das führt dazu, dass Italien eines der Länder mit der höchsten Kinderarmutsrate in Europa ist. Der Druck auf Familien am unteren Segment der Gesellschaft ist insbesondere deshalb so hoch, weil in Italien die ausgleichenden Wirkungen des Sozialsystems nicht mit der Effizienz greifen, wie sie in Europa Standard sind.

Familienpolitik

Europa ist im Umbruch. Die Zahl der Staaten, die zur EU gehören, ist in den letzten Jahren stark gewachsen. Dieses neue Europa versucht seinen Platz in der Welt zu finden, die Gemeinsamkeiten und Heterogenitäten innerhalb der EU zu akzeptieren und ein weiteres Zusammenwachsen zu realisieren. Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in der Region, aber auch weltweit, gibt dabei die Rahmenbedingungen vor. Die nationalen Entwicklungen, die EU-Aktivitäten, das Miteinander und die Konkurrenzen bilden ein Konglomerat, welches das Handeln nicht einfacher macht, aber auch große Chancen für die Zukunft bietet. Welche Rolle die Familie in der Zukunft Europas genau spielen wird, ist – wie vieles – schwer absehbar. Dass die Familien aber weiterhin das Rückgrat der europäischen Gesellschaft bilden und im Alltag der Menschen eine zentrale Rolle spielen werden, ist unumstritten.

In der Familienrhetorik spielt der Begriff ‚Familienpolitik‘ eine zentrale Rolle. In manchen Ländern werden administrative Aktivitäten, die Auswirkungen auf den Familienalltag haben,

- explizit unter familienpolitischen Zielen geplant und umgesetzt,
- ohne dass explizite familienpolitische Ziele genannt sind, anders begründet, geplant und umgesetzt, da Familienpolitik entweder nicht in den Zuständigkeitsbereich der Ressorts fällt, die solche Aktivitäten durchführen, oder aber Familienpolitik, z. B. aus Subsidiaritätsgründen, nicht in den Zuständigkeitsbereich der entsprechenden Körperschaft fällt.

Von dieser rhetorischen Zuordnung unberührt finden sich in allen Ländern und allen Regionen der EU, bei einzelnen Staaten, Subregionen und Kommunen solche Aktivitäten mit starker Auswirkung auf den Familienalltag. Bei der Betrachtung von Familienpolitik muss man also den unterschiedlichen rhetorischen Umgang in der Begründung von Aktivitäten zwischen den Ländern und Regionen beachten, die sehr unterschiedliche Bilder von Familienpolitik aufzeigen, ohne dass sie notwendigerweise im Alltag oder der gelebten Realität zu Unterschieden oder Ähnlichkeiten führen müssen. Relativ unabhängig von der Familienrhetorik ist der Vergleich von familienrelevanten Aktivitäten in der EU, zwischen den Mitgliedstaaten und zwischen den Regionen zu bewerten. Die tatsächlichen Randbedingungen, die Aktivitäten, welche die einzelnen politischen Institutionen durchführen, egal ob sie sie Familienpolitik nennen oder nicht, haben eine direkte Einwirkung auf die gelebte Realität der Familien in den einzelnen Ländern.

Ein Vergleich von Gesetzen, Maßnahmen, Dienstleistungen und Transfersystemen, die familienwirksam sind, ist nahezu unmöglich, da die wirksamen Interventionen sehr oft nicht unter dem Namen ‚Familienpolitik‘ beschrieben oder dieser zugeordnet sind. Ein Vergleich von Veränderungen solcher Interventionen in den einzelnen Ländern und über die Länder hinweg ist noch schwieriger, da vielfach solche Interventionen durch rhetorische Veränderungen, durch Setzung von Normen, aber nicht unbedingt durch Auswirkungen auf tatsächliche Veränderungen der Lebenslagen, Familienformen und Familienphasen explizit beschrieben oder umfassend in den hier vorliegenden Länderberichten erfasst sind. Nachstehend einige Beispiele:

Anders als in den mittel- und südeuropäischen Ländern hat Dänemark, wie die anderen skandinavischen Ländern, eine eher an Individuen und nicht an Familien gerichtete Politik von Ansprüchen, Angeboten und Interventionen. So ist auch der Anstieg der Geburtenrate seit 1983 keine Folge einer pronatalistischen Politik, sondern von verbesserter Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Erwerbsarbeit für Frauen.

Der finnische Report zeigt den Möglichkeitsraum für Unterstützungen von Familien:

- Stärkung der Beziehungen zwischen den Eltern,
- Geburtenrate,
- Identität und Legitimität von Kindern,
- Kinderbetreuung,
- Sozialisation bzw. Bildung von Kindern,
- Schutz und Unterstützung von Familien,
- emotionale Unterstützung von Familien und
- Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Erwerbsarbeit.

Finnland macht eine intensive Familienpolitik, die alle Interventionsbereiche umfasst. Allerdings werden die einzelnen Bereiche mit unterschiedlicher Intensität angegangen. Wie in vielen anderen Ländern ist die interne Ausgestaltung von Partnerschaften Privatsache, was mit einer sehr starken Zurückhaltung staatlicher Interventionen verbunden ist, aber auf der anderen Seite auch heißt, dass die Paare weitgehend alleine gelassen werden.

Die Familienpolitik in den Niederlanden zeigt wenige Reaktionen auf die aktuelle Geburtenrate und kaum Versuche, sie zu heben. Die Familien wollen ihre Probleme selber lösen, die staatlichen Interventionen versuchen, dies zu berücksichtigen, nach dem der andere Weg (nämlich institutionelle Lösungen anzubieten) nicht akzeptiert wurde. Die Kinderbetreuung findet aus den oben genannten Gründen im Wesentlichen durch private Netzwerke statt. Daher zieht sich der Staat mehr und mehr aus der institutionellen Kinderbetreuung zurück. Dies ist aber kontraproduktiv, wenn man versucht, durch Qualität der Kinderbetreuung verstärkten Einfluss auf den Aufbau von Humankapital zu nehmen. Zusammengefasst lässt sich sagen, dass Familienpolitik in den Niederlanden derzeit mehr oder weniger nicht stattfindet.

Schweden hat eine Politik gegen Ungleichheit, in deren Rahmen Geschlechterpolitik und Familienpolitik stark verbunden sind. Da dem ein Prinzip der Universalität und der individuellen Rechte zugrunde liegt, gibt es z. B. keine Bevorzugung von Familienstandskategorien. Jeder Elternteil und jedes Kind hat die gleichen verbrieften Ansprüche.

In Österreich bilden Familienpolitik und familienpolitische Maßnahmen wichtige Bestandteile der aktuellen Handlungen. Familienpolitik bezieht sich sowohl auf finanziellen Transfer und Familienberatung wie auf die Unterstützung familienfreundlicher Unternehmen, die durch ein Familienaudit sichtbar gemacht werden.

In Frankreich hat es in den letzten zehn Jahren einerseits eine schier unüberschaubare Zahl familienrelevanter Entscheidungen und Gesetze gegeben, und andererseits –verglichen mit den anderen Mitgliedstaaten, eine Entwicklung familiennaher Indikatoren, wie z. B. der Geburtenrate, die von vielen als vorbildlich angesehen wird. Ob die Förderung von Mehrkindfamilien, die ausdifferenzierte Kinderbetreuungssituation, die Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf, einzelne Maßnahmen, das gesamte Bündel oder etwas ganz anderes ursächlich für diese Entwicklung waren, lässt sich allerdings nicht nachweisen.

Die Veränderungen in der Situation von Familien in Italien über die letzten Jahre haben Druck auf die gesetzgebenden Organe ausgelöst, die einige Veränderungen bewirkt haben: Veränderungen in den Transferzahlungen, den Einstieg in die Elternzeit, Verbesserungen beim Zugang zum Wohnungsmarkt bis hin zur Einführung von Instrumenten zur Sichtbarmachung sozialer Probleme, z. B. durch Erhebung von sozialpolitisch relevanten Informationen. Ferner hat sich die familienpolitische Rhetorik geändert: Familie wird mehr und mehr als ein wichtiger Faktor im sozialen System akzeptiert und explizit berücksichtigt. Aktive Familienpolitik zur Anhebung der Geburtenraten durch direkte finanzielle Zuwendung wurde in letzter Zeit ebenfalls etabliert. Italien ist auf dem Weg zwischen Tradition und Moderne, scheint dabei aber eher durch einen Defizitzwang getrieben zu werden statt durch eine offensive Zukunftsvision der Gesellschaft von Morgen.

In Spanien sind steuerliche Anreize die Hauptquelle politischer Interventionen zugunsten der Familie. Immer stärker intervenieren regionale Körperschaften im Bereich Familie. Sehr niedrige Geburtenraten in einigen Regionen, verbunden mit Immigrationsproblemen, erzwingen lokales Handeln, auch wenn auf nationaler Ebene die Probleme noch nicht so stark wahrgenommen werden.

Die Werte und Einstellungen zur Familie haben sich in Portugal stark verändert:

- von der Ablehnung zur Akzeptanz von Scheidungen, d. h. von der Norm der lebenslangen Partnerschaft zu Patchwork-Biographien und Lebensabschnitts-Partnerschaften,
- von der Dominanz kirchlicher Heirat zur säkularisierten Partnerschaft,
- von der Ignoranz zur Kenntnis von Familienplanung (empfangnisverhütende Maßnahmen),
- von geschlechtsspezifischen Rollenverteilungen zu partnerschaftlichen Beziehungen, in denen beide erwerbstätig sind, mit einer Teilung der Familienarbeit.

Unverändert geblieben ist die hohe Bedeutung der Familie im Alltag, in den Normen und in den Erwartungen. In Portugal trifft die Vorstellung einer expliziten Familienpolitik eher auf Ablehnung, trotzdem ist eine Vielzahl von familienrelevanten Änderungen und Gesetzen erlassen worden.

Vor dem Internationalen Jahr der Familie (1994) gab es in Irland keine explizite Familienpolitik, seitdem stehen Familie und Familienpolitik auf der nationalen Tagesordnung.

Für Europa insgesamt können die Schlussfolgerungen in einem Beitrag hilfreich sein, der anlässlich der unter der irischen EU-Präsidentschaft durchgeführten Konferenz zum Thema *Familie, Wandel und Sozialpolitik in Europa* präsentiert wurde.¹

Für die BürgerInnen Europas bedeuten gute Familienbeziehungen den Schlüssel dafür, die Lebensqualität zu gewährleisten.

- (Potentielle) Eltern akzeptieren keine politischen Einflussnahmen auf Familienstrukturen, Familiengröße, Geburtenraten und pronatalistische Zielvorgaben.
- Innerfamiliäre Solidarität hat zwei Seiten: Einerseits kann sie helfen, den Sozialstaat zu entlasten, andererseits kann sie zur Überlastung der Familien führen, was wiederum den Sozialstaat belastet.
- Der Krieg der Generationen findet in den Familien nicht statt, innerfamiliäre Solidarität beschreibt reale Generationenbeziehungen wesentlich besser, auch wenn der Alltag zwischen den Generationen nicht ganz unproblematisch verläuft.

¹ Zusammengefasst und in Ausschnitten nach Hubert Krieger: Familienleben in Europa – Ergebnisse neuerer Umfragen zur Lebensqualität in Europa. Beitrag zur Konferenz der Irischen Ratspräsidentschaft zum Thema *Familie, Wandel und Sozialpolitik in Europa*, Dublin Castle, 13.–14. Mai 2004.

- Familie wirkt als Puffer abmildernd auf die Tendenzen der sozialen Ausgrenzung. Trotzdem lassen sich in Europa zwei Gruppierungen finden, die sich in vielen Ländern als Familien ausgegrenzt fühlen: Alleinerziehende mit kleinen Kindern und Langzeitarbeitslose.
- Insbesondere Alleinerziehende fühlen sich nicht nur ausgegrenzt, sondern sind in vielerlei Hinsicht benachteiligt. Hier ist der Sozialstaat gefordert zu helfen, ohne längerfristige (vererbte) Abhängigkeiten von Unterstützungssystemen zu generieren.
- Die Vereinbarkeit von Erwerbstätigkeit und Familie – insbesondere in Familien mit kleinen Kindern – scheint eine wesentliche Voraussetzung für die Verbesserung der Situation zu bedeuten, allerdings auf verschiedenen Ebenen:
 - Verringerung der Arbeitslosigkeit, d. h. Zugang zur Erwerbstätigkeit, Verlässlichkeit von Erwerbseinkommen bei (potentiellen) Eltern.
 - Vereinbarkeit bei vorhandener Erwerbstätigkeit durch Angebote der Kinderbetreuung, Flexibilität der Arbeitszeit, Berücksichtigung von familialen Bedürfnissen bei der Organisation von Erwerbsarbeit, Fairness zwischen den Geschlechtern in der Verteilung von familialen Verpflichtungen und Erwerbsarbeit.
 - Lebenslauforientierte Karrieremöglichkeiten, d. h. Entzerrung von Zeiten hoher beruflicher Belastung mit langen Arbeitszeiten und hohem beruflichen Stress von Zeiten hoher familialer Belastung bei der Betreuung kleiner Kinder.
 - Verlässliche und kalkulierbare sozialstaatliche Angebote, inklusive Transferzahlungen, wenn Vereinbarkeit nicht möglich ist.

Insgesamt scheint es so zu sein, dass ein Klima der Akzeptanz, der Anerkennung und der potentiellen, berechenbaren Unterstützung bei Problemsituationen für (potentielle) Familien mindestens genauso wichtig – wenn nicht sogar wichtiger – für das Einlassen auf Familie und das Umsetzen der vorhandenen Familienwünsche ist. Die Herstellung dieses Vertrauens bei Familien(gründern) ist ebenso notwendig wie die konkreten Hilfen und Unterstützungen, wenn der Problemfall eingetreten ist. Europa braucht ein Klima der Familienfreundlichkeit, ein Familien-Mainstreaming in der Diskussion und im Handeln, das die Basis dafür liefert, dass sich aufgeklärte BürgerInnen nicht länger (berechtigt oder unberechtigt) veranlasst sehen, die Umsetzung des vorhandenen Grundbedürfnisses nach stabilen Familien vor sich herzuschieben. Für den Aufbau eines solchen Klimas ist Kompetenzgerangel zwischen den verschiedenen Ebenen von Zuständigkeiten im Rahmen subsidiären Handelns wenig hilfreich. Das Einlassen auf Familie ist eine persönliche Entscheidung, die Interpretation des Kontextes, in dem die Entscheidung fällt, ist eine persönliche Entscheidung, die Auswirkungen dieser Entscheidungen sind aber zukunfts wirksam für die gesamte Region. Wahrscheinlich ist es für europäische und nationale Institutionen daher besser, auf die Wünsche und Probleme ihrer BürgerInnen einzugehen und das politische Handeln darauf abzustimmen, statt Illusionen weiter zu pflegen, die BürgerInnen den Bedürfnissen der Institutionen anpassen zu können.

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(English)

RUDOLF RICHTER

Austria

Family relationships

Demographic situation

Austria is a typical social welfare state with low rates of infant mortality (0.5%), an extensive social security system, high quality of life and high life expectancy. In Austria women are expected to live to 82 years and men to about 76 years. In terms of demography, Austrian family patterns are quite characteristic for societies within the European Union (EU). The number of marriages is declining, while at the same time the number of divorces is rising. The fertility rate is rather low. In Austria about two million people are married or cohabit. More than half of them (about 55%) have children. The number of single parents is steadily increasing and at present amount to about 400,000.

While the importance of marriage has significantly decreased, this has not affected the importance of the family as an institution. Family and having children means a lot to Austrian people and more than 80% see it as one of the most important aspects of their lives. This might explain why the number of families, including cohabiting couples with children, as well as single parents, has risen in the last decades. While in 1971 there were about 2 million families, in 2001 there were about 2.3 million families. Furthermore, the number of families with children has also risen from 1.3 million to 1.4 million.

However, the fertility rate at 1.31 in 2001 is quite low, corresponding to a reproduction rate of 0.63. This decline in population has led to severe socio-political problems, which are currently the subject of intense discussions by politicians, social scientists and other experts.

In this context, it is interesting to note that although couples, and especially women, usually would like to have two or more children; in most cases they in fact only have one. There is no real explanation for this gap between wish and reality. It is probably due to a combination of factors such as the economic situation, individual values and experiences with the first child (first child shock according to Nave-Herz 2002). Nevertheless, social scientists have found that a couple's wish to have children has decreased and that it is now more common to only have one child, or none at all. If this pattern continues the fertility rate will decrease further and immigrant families living in Austria will not even offset this decline.

Although the fertility rate is higher among immigrants, who represent about 10% of the Austrian population, this will not redress the population imbalance in the next generation. This development has far-reaching consequences for pension schemes in Austria, which are based on the transfer of insurance contributions from the working population to retirees. On the other hand it can be argued that a smaller number of young people would mean savings on childcare or education costs.

Low fertility arises from multiple political, social and economical factors which have an important impact on people's wish for a child: feasibility to combine work and family, financial circumstances, need for personal freedom, housing conditions or the perception of society as child-friendly. In Austria there is a large number of care institutions available and on average 80% of children between three and six years attend a kindergarten.

Family forms

New forms of living together

As a consequence of numerous patterns of cohabitation and the increasing number of divorced families, new forms of families with specific structural features are emerging. These are the single parent family, the step family or the patchwork family.

Single parent families may either be the result of separation of unmarried couples or of divorce. In the youngest age group it often happens that a man leaves his partner because of an unintentional pregnancy and the woman's decision to give birth to their child. In the higher age bracket single parents are mostly the result of divorce. At present 15% of children under 15 live in single parent households. In the majority of cases, 93% to be precise, children live with their mother. While young, single mothers often suffer severe financial hardship and are on the verge of poverty, single parents in their forties are self-supporting and better off.

Remarriage often results in step families, but it is somewhat unclear how many there are. For households with independent children it is estimated that this figure increases to about 6%. Where one's own children are brought into a new marriage and further children are subsequently born, we talk about patchwork families. Unfortunately, there are no exact statistical data of the number of step- or patchwork families in Austria. As the number of divorces has increased so has the number of children affected by them.

Living Together Apart (LATs) as 'separated marriage'?

Whereas remarriage was the common practice when divorce rates began to increase, this tendency is now in reverse. A new kind of partnership seems to be emerging, the so-called LATs (Living Apart Together). Couples are living in different households, independently of whether they are married or not. This might be for professional reasons or for personal reasons. They might think that living in separate households will strengthen their partnership rather than weaken it. It is very difficult to figure out how many people are living in such a partnership. This is especially true when young couples living with their parents are counted as LATs. However, these young couples do not represent the typical LATs. LATs are rather a form of partnerships in a higher age group when both partners follow individual careers and other life experiences leading to this kind of living apart together.

Leaving home and marriage

The mean age at the time of marriage has risen considerably and is now nearly at 30 years. This is due to the fact that people prefer to date someone without sharing a household or live together in non-marital cohabitation rather than marrying shortly after having met. The time displacement of marriage creates a new phase in life, the so-called post-adolescence or early adulthood, which is characteristic for young people in Austria between the ages of 20 and 30. They might have a partner but do not necessarily live together. They might cohabit, but this does not implicitly mean that they will get married. Therefore, they find themselves in quite an ambivalent situation, in which they try to become independent and yet are in constant touch with their parents.

In Austria young women leave their parental home for the first time on average at the age of 20, young men about two years later at the age of 22.5 (Pfeiffer & Nowak 2001). Now fewer young adults leave home at an early age. In Austria 39% leave home before the age of 25 (this figure is 7% in Italy and 75% in Denmark).

In young people's minds values such as family and friends play an essential role and are of great importance for their well being. According to the *Youth Value Study* in Austria (Österreichisches Institut für Jugendforschung 2001) apart from the family whose importance has remained stable for the last decade, friends represent the most important social reference group for young people (see also Großegger 2001).

More than 50% of young people in Austria between the ages of 15 and 24, and in particular girls, wish for a permanent partnership and plan for children later on in their twenties or thirties. Boys and young people in their teens prefer to enjoy their youth before seriously pairing up and setting up a family. Generally speaking, young people connect partnership to faithfulness, trust and having fun. Sharing a household does not seem important to them at this point of time.

Cohabitation

While the number of marriages has declined, non-marital cohabitation has become more and more popular. However, it is very difficult to give exact figures and to analyse the quality and duration of these relationships.

People living together in cohabitation are for the most part in their twenties. However, following the definition of cohabitation as living together and sharing a household with a partner over a number of months, the actual figure of people living together has been underestimated. Various forms of cohabitation exist. Both partners can live in one household during the week but can visit their parents separately or together on weekends. They can also live together in one household but officially one or both partners can still live with their parents. In this way non-marital cohabitation precedes marital cohabitation, rather than taking its place. The *Family and Fertility Survey 1996* (Doblhammer et al. 1996) has shown that more than 50% of cohabiting couples marry after six years of cohabitation.

In the context of these developments the number of children born into non-marital relationships has risen considerably since the late 20th century. In 1960 13% were born out of wedlock, in 2001 33% were born to an unmarried mother. In contrast to the previous practice that couples married when they were expecting a child, it is now more common for them to remain unmarried or marry later on.

At this point it might be interesting to go back and make a comparison to a pre-industrial or developing industrial society. During the 19th century Austria was an agricultural society and more than 70% of the population were involved in agriculture. At this time men could only marry when their parents' property and house was handed down to them. This was usually at the age of 30 when the old farmer was about to die. Therefore, the age at the time of marriage was the same as nowadays.

Furthermore, marriage was closely connected to income and property. This is why, for example, girls and farm labourers of lower classes could not marry. However, they had children and consequently the rate of extramarital births was also rather high—even though the reasons are different from those of today.

In many ways, cohabiting couples resemble married people in sharing similar values, such as fidelity for example. However, the risk of separation is higher than among married couples. Austrian law still differentiates between married couples and couples living together in non-marital cohabitation. Consequently, different legal obligations and rights apply. However, the law concerning cases of divorce or separation of families has largely been equalised concerning maintenance obligations, the amount of financial support for children and the custody of children.

Divorce and separation

In Austria the rate of divorces has risen considerably during recent decades. At present the divorce rate stands at 46% and is expected to remain stable at this level. However, this does not mean that 46% of marriages will end in divorce. The divorce rate takes into account the number of divorces and the number of marriages per year and relates them to each other. Therefore, the divorce rate automatically rises as the marriage rate falls. This is exactly what has happened over the last three decades.

Divorced families have steadily become a natural constituent part of Austrian society. While only 1.1 per 1,000 inhabitants divorced in 1961, at the turn of the 21st century 2.5 per 1,000 inhabitants divorced. This represents a 100% increase. In numbers, this means 8,000 divorces in 1961 and 20,600 in 2001.

The age of people at the time of divorce has risen from the early thirties to the late thirties. This development can largely be explained by the higher age of people at the time of marriage and by the increasing duration of marriages. At present, marriages in Austria last on average 9.5 years. Consequently, the number of divorces of long-lasting marriages rises. However, if we investigate further we find that most divorces take place within the first years of marriage and that the number of divorces reaches its peak in the fourth year.

Many people who divorce marry again. About 60% of divorced people under the age of 30 remarry. However, after the age of 30 there are significant gender differences, so that 55% of divorced men but only 46% of divorced women marry again within ten years of divorce. Generally, partnerships after remarriage are lifelong and only very few people divorce a second and third time.

About 20% of children up to the age of 19 are affected by the divorce of their parents. According to Haller (1998) who focused in his study on the risk of separation and divorce of on children, the quality of the relationship between parents and children after divorce is of essential importance for the well being of the children and their later partnerships.

Gender relationships

Gender roles and gender differences in society constitute an extensive research topic. Some crucial points are summarized below.

In Austria demography continuously indicates gender differences in life expectancy. Since the beginning of the 21st century the life expectancy for women is 82 years, and for men 76 years. As a result of this difference the proportion of widowed women is higher than that of widowed men. While about 51% of women aged over 75 live alone, only 17% of men at the same age outlive their wife. Consequently, there are more old women than men requiring continuous health care. In many cases their daughters, only 20 to 30 years younger, take on this care.

Although women tend to search for men with an equal or higher level of education, they increasingly marry men with lower educational standards. This is due to the increasing number of women in the tertiary educational system, which sometimes even exceeds that of men (Schwarz & Spielauer 2002).

The distribution of household chores is considered as one of the most useful indicators concerning disparities between men and women. Household chores are even today mainly done by women, even though changes have taken place. While in 1983 about 75% of men reported that they would not do any chores, in 1995 this dropped to 60%. This development can partly be explained by the increasing number of men living in single households during recent decades, and also by the increasing number of men participating in doing the chores, young men doing significantly more than older men.

It would seem that the portion of work done is usually overestimated. For example: depending on age, 50% to 75% of men report that their spouse does the cooking, while 70% to 90% of women say they cook themselves. Therefore, indications of percentages, if based on questionnaires rather than on daily protocols, are somewhat imprecise and only indicate trends concerning the distribution of housework.

It is remarkable that the distribution of household chores changes significantly after the birth of the first child. Men do fewer household chores than before, neglecting activities such as cooking, shopping, cleaning, washing and ironing. Marital satisfaction of both men and women decreases when children are born (Werneck & Rollet 2001: 132). Although these data are from 1992, they are still relevant today. Considering job and housework together, women work on an average one hour more than men, independently of how many hours they work in paid labour.

Childcare requires a great deal of time and usually women care for their children. Most men are only partly involved and dress, feed or play with their children on a rather irregular basis. Because of this irregularity, men spend less absolute time on childcare than women do. Young men care more for their children than older men. Parental leave is mainly claimed by mothers. Although at least 19% of men can imagine taking leave at least for a short time, only about 2% actually do so. As a new qualitative study (Gräfinger 2001) has indicated, several social factors exert a significant impact on men's attitude to parental leave. Most men argue that the main reason for not taking parental leave is their substantial income and the risk of losing it. Furthermore most men feel that their employer would not look positively on parental leave. However, men who did take parental leave have reported that, surprisingly, they had far fewer difficulties than they had expected. It is interesting to note that men's parents and parents-in-law do not want their son or son-in-law to stay at home and care for his children. However, sisters-in-law are more amenable to this arrangement. Once men take parental leave, they are surprised how many household chores have to be done.

Such topics are about to enter public debate, since most studies, which investigate the combination of family and work, focus on women's perspectives and only recent studies have taken into consideration men and their points of view.

Although Austrian law allows parents a maximum of three years of paternal leave, on condition that men take at least half a year, only very few men take advantage of this opportunity. As a result, very few families take leave for three years.

Apart from the issue of the division of household chores, family research also deals with the question of how partners negotiate the division of work. Mikula & Freudenthaler (2002) investigated the distribution of household chores from a psychological point of view. Their secondary analysis of data of the *Family and Fertility*

Survey 1996 shows that about one third of women perceive the division of household chores as unjust. This feeling is closely related to the time effectively spent on chores by women themselves. Furthermore, women emphasise that their partner comes off well in comparison to other men, and the better he performs the more women are comfortable with the actual division.

Marital status and income also contribute to the evaluation of equity. In comparison to unmarried women, married women feel the division of chores to be more unjust, and the lower their income the more they are dissatisfied. Therefore, the perception of equity or inequity strongly depends on women's social relationships and their social network, rather than on real differences and inequalities. However, in most partnerships the distribution of household chores does not lead to any fundamental conflicts.

One of the most essential functions of modern family is the care of its members, especially of children and of the elderly. In 1999, it was estimated that this work amount to 58 billion EURs if counted as a minimum wage, including hours of overtime. About 80% of this work is done by women.

In contrast to other EUR pean countries, it is remarkable that women in Austria, as well as in Germany, find it particularly difficult to combine work and family, although modern caring facilities are available and family policies are amongst the most advanced in EUR pe. (EUR pean Commission 1996).

This might be due to the prevailing idea that children have to be cared for by their mother—and only by their mother. Because of this social norm most women feel obliged to care for their children and stay at home—at least as long as their children are under three.

Marital relations

Traditional roles are losing their importance and partners continually have to arrange and negotiate their relationship in everyday life. Emotional closeness and mutual understanding are found to be of great importance for successful partnerships. Although violence in families exists, it is not widespread. In most cases, even separations and divorces are consensual and carried out carefully and rationally.

Marital satisfaction changes in the course of marriage. Usually it resembles the run of a U-curve. At the beginning marital satisfaction, mutual love and affection is very high as long as no children are born. At the time of childbirth, each partner's contentment with their marriage significantly declines. This is partly due to the fact that men desist from doing household chores. When the second child is born, men even work longer hours and spend less time at home with their family. When children reach puberty, satisfaction falls to the lowest point. Gradually satisfaction rises again and marital relationships reach a high level of intimacy and common understanding (Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family 1999).

Couples without children face a similar pattern. However, childlessness can also cause severe conflicts. Affection, good communication, love and tenderness as well as sexuality are very important for partnerships. Young couples in particular try to maintain their individuality and freedom in order to pursue professional goals and other activities in order to advance their personal development.

Family stress and violence

Partnerships perpetually have to meet new challenges in everyday life. In this context, numerous studies indicate that children constitute an important stress factor; in particular for women who try to combine work and family.

In Austria, children go to school in the morning and in the early afternoon. Consequently, childcare after school requires deliberate time management in families where both parents are working full time. Some schools offer after-school day care, however, this is difficult for low-income families to afford.

Children's school achievements represent another possible stress factor, as well as disagreements between parents with regard to bringing up their children. Unfortunately, there are as yet no relevant studies. Stress can be one cause of domestic violence, although it cannot be an excuse. In the majority of cases violent hands are laid on children and women, although men can also be victims.

The *Vienna Youth Health Report* (Magistrat der Stadt Wien 2002), a representative study of young people aged between 15 to 24 living in Vienna, indicates that 11% of young girls and boys often or occasionally experience physical violence. However, significant gender differences exist. Whereas boys are more often suffer physical abuse, girls tend to be subjected to verbal and psychological violence. Furthermore, boys report that two thirds of violent episodes originate from their father and about 40% from their mother. Conversely, girls experience 58% of violence from their mother. However, more than 50% are critical about their parents' actions and one third of the interviewed boys and 44% of the interviewed girls say that their parents allow themselves to be contradicted.

Newspapers and media increasingly report on sexual harassment. Out of 622 reported cases of physical violence against children within one year, 259 were sexual. In most cases children under the age of 10 or 11 are affected. These data were furnished by doctors in 1994. There is no clear profile of the delinquent. Therefore, violent behaviour and sexual harassment might relate to the attitude toward sexuality rather than to social milieus.

Concerning violence against women, it is estimated that 5–10% of women experience violence in their partnership. Major crimes against women are often committed out of jealousy. Low income, financial difficulties and alcohol abuse play a significant role in such crimes. The increasing number of reported cases during recent years may be explained by the greater willingness of women to report them rather than a real increase in violent crime. There is a law under consideration, which will define sexual harassment within marriage as a crime. This will have significant consequences on criminal proceedings.

Generational relationships

In Austria about 50% of families consist of three generations and 27% of families even of four generations. The elderly are involved in generational relationships and therefore seldom isolated. In many families grandparents actively take part in family life and some 40% of the elderly live with their children or children-in-law and another 23% live nearby.

The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is reported to be very good, and would seem to be even better than between grandparents and their own children.

At this point it is worth mentioning that individuals tend to rate their personal relationship to other generations better than they perceive or assume intergenerational relationships between young and old people in general to be. Thirty-eight percent of Austrians fear that intergenerational relationships will decline. Pessimism prevails particularly among the age group 46–60 years old, i.e., the upcoming older generation: 48% fear that the situation will deteriorate, as compared to 32% of young people.

In Austria education is marked by tolerance and cooperation between children and their parents. Parents feel that it is important to make their children responsible (85%), independent and tolerant persons with good manners (78%). In contrast, they do not insist on obedience—only one quarter agrees that their children should be obedient.

Though it is shown through quantitative empirical data that micro social relations between generations are generally close, they might be qualitatively structured by ambivalence, a hypothesis introduced by Pillemer & Lüscher (2003). Alongside a relationship of solidarity and mutual help, they distinguish the dimensions of emancipation, atomization and captivation. By emancipation they mean a relationship oriented also to innovation. Personal development and independency is furthered without losing contact. Atomization of a family is characterized by conflicting separation and the family is fragmented into individuals. Finally, captivation might often occur in the situation of care for the elderly. One generation dominates and makes the other feel guilty for not caring enough.

Over the last decade public opinion has considerably changed with regard to old people. In 1989, only 35% called upon old people to renounce their rights and interests and to make way for young people. Almost ten years later, 53% expressed this opinion. However, even older people support this idea, at least at a verbal level. At present, only half of the population thinks that the current compensation of interests between the generations is fair.

At the macro level the proportion of the total payroll redistributed to the parents' and children's generations is shown to be a useful indicator for the quality of intergenerational relationships. It is worth mentioning that the transfer of social and economic resources from aging people to the younger generation is higher than the other way round, even when the necessary care of older people is taken into consideration (see Rosenmayr 2000: 236).

The elderly can expect emotional, social or material help from their family. Only about 2% cannot expect help through their family when needed. In most cases old people are cared for by their daughters. Therefore help might often be considered as being female. Employment is the main reason (far more frequently than any other) why people either do not want or are not able to care for their parents. Incidentally, this is cited even more often by women than by men.

If children care for their old parents they do so out of gratitude or obligation rather than for the abstract reason of family solidarity. It seems that the more parents helped their children, the more they can count on their children's help later on. However, looking at all age groups in society, young people experience more situations that require help than the elderly do. They need someone to talk to, to do housework and maintenance, and to look after each other in case of illness and so on.

The *Generations Study* of 1998 concluded that the conflict between generations is more apparent in the public media and social policy discourses than in the family sphere itself (Majce 2000).

The socio-economic situation of families

One of the central issues in family policy as well as in social policy is the socio-economic situation. Within the family situation there is a relatively high poverty risk. The comparison between people with and without children is obvious. If you take a single person without children you will find that about a quarter of that group is at the risk of poverty, in the EU-15 average as well as in Austria. If you look at single parents, about a third is in that group (35% in the EU, 32% in Austria). The poverty risk is especially high in families with three or more children: about a third are at the risk of poverty. No difference could be found in 1998 between families with one or two children where both parents live within the household with their dependents. In those groups the risk of poverty is 11%. Although poverty is not a common phenomenon in welfare states, we have to face the fact that in Austria families with more than three children, as well as single parents, have a poverty risk well above the average.

This affects the social situation of children. It is due less to the fact that they have little money to spend than to the habit of saving and of feeling excluded from the activities of their peers. Parents and single mothers try to hide poverty as much as possible by spending money, especially on the children, which leads again to more poverty in the household. Aggressive behaviour of children might be the result. This can be alleviated by an integrated and friendly family atmosphere. Poverty in welfare states is biographically structured. This means that being born into a social situation of poverty and remaining in a poor family throughout one's lifetime is not typical, even though it exists. Rather, poverty is a risk, which can occur at any phase of one's life. A period of unemployment is one such phase or as mentioned earlier, the phase when three or more dependent children are living in the household. Also divorce can lead to a poverty risk situation, not only for the single mother, but also for men. This biographical figuration of poverty makes it hard to fight with simple measures.

Family policies

Family policy is one of the central political issues concerning family. Within the European Union it is assigned to the individual countries and is not the responsibility of the European Commission. We will discuss some crucial developments of Austrian family policy since the late 1990s after the Year of the Family in 1994.

The Family Fund (FLAF)

The Family Fund, which was introduced in 1954, constitutes an effective tool to support families by financing specific family policy measures at the federal level. Every taxpayer pays a certain amount to the FLAF, and the money is distributed to those families in need.

Family allowance, for example, is to cover the maintenance costs of children. Over the past 20 years the Family Fund has increasingly developed into an instrument to finance an even greater range of family policy measures, but has failed to tap new financial resources. Its main resource is a payroll tax of 4.5%¹ (6% before 1980).

In 1999, 60% of the Family Fund's expenditures were designed for family allowance (compared to some 88% in 1970). Another 20% was primarily intended to be used for other measures, such as parental leave and the mother-child pass scheme of payments in return for medical checkups (compared to 2.8% in 1975). Finally 9% was intended for children's free travel to school and free schoolbooks. Since 2001 the Family Fund also funds family-related research studies.

Depending on the individual's income, a specific percentage of payroll tax is transferred to the FLAF. The Fund's distributive effect includes a strong vertical component: up to the sixth income decile, households with children are net recipients. The lowest quartile contributes 9.8% of the Fund's revenues and receives 29% of its expenditures; the top quartile contributes 44.7% and receives 19.2%.

There is an ongoing discussion whether the FLAF should be retained or not. One opinion is that in times of low fertility the FLAF produces a surplus, which is not efficiently redistributed. Though families benefit from the money, families are still in danger of poverty and financial contributions did not, in the past, lead to higher fertility rates. Thus there is always a tendency to abolish this instrument and to make family policy through general laws, which would influence individual primary income directly, however; experts in family policies would prefer to retain the FLAF.

In 2001 the Austrian government enacted a law which transformed the previous child benefit that was only intended to support parents who had worked before parenthood into a general benefit payable to all parents, regardless of whether they were employed or not. Consequently, for example, students also receive child benefit.

At present child benefit is EUR 430 for up to 30 months. Where the father also takes leave for half a year, child benefit is allocated for a further six months. For additional income a ceiling of about EUR 1,136 per month was introduced. Although childcare benefit is very controversial and carries the risk that women are unlikely to work again, at present there is no political party that calls for its abolition. However, evaluations have shown so far that childcare benefit only has minor effects on women's participation in the work force, but it does lower the level of poverty.

In 2003 a new pension scheme was established which implicates substantive changes to both the private insurance system and the state-run insurance system. In Austria the central problem is that many employees retire quite early. Consequently only one third of Austrians between the ages of 55 and 65 who would have been able to work really do work. The new scheme envisages a continual rise in the retirement age and will no longer permit early retirement. In addition, those years that women spend caring for their children are counted as man-years.

The '2000 Family Package' adopted at the end of the decade more than compensated for the reductions in family allowances made in 1995 and 1996² and doubled the child credit to ATS 700 (about EUR 51) per child per month, for the first child.

¹ For 2001, these revenues are expected to be 3.2 billion euros, out of total Fund revenues of 4.4 billion euros.

² The family allowance is determined on a sliding scale, according to the age and total number of children per family. In 2001, the following amounts were paid per month: for the first child up to 10 years of age, EUR 105.38; between 10 and 19 years of age, EUR 123.55; between 19 and 26 years of age, EUR 130.81. The amount increases by EUR 12.72 for the second child and by EUR 25.45 for each additional child. As of 2002, the family allowance went up by EUR 7.27 for children as of their fourth birthday. Added to the family allowance is the uniform tax credit referred to above.

As a result of the above reduction programme, parental leave was actually cut which caused substantial problems concerning care for very young children. The Family Ministry therefore commissioned the Austrian Institute for Family Studies (ÖIF) to prepare a study on childcare in Austria. One finding of this study led to the discussion of a childcare voucher; and in June 2001, the Austrian Parliament enacted the childcare benefit scheme, effective as of 1 January 2002. This benefit turned the parental-leave benefit, payable only to working parents into a general benefit, payable to all parents in a similar situation, regardless of whether or not they are employed. Because of its fundamental importance, the measure is discussed in more detail below.

Childcare vouchers and childcare benefit

As already mentioned, the idea of a childcare voucher was first voiced as a consequence of a study on state support for part-time care for preschoolers. A feasibility study took up the idea, developing it into a concept with several budgetary options to cover its costs. The idea was embedded in a general welfare concept, with due consideration given to intergenerational and gender relationships and to the development of a wide range of measures. Seen objectively, the voucher is a general, unspecified measure to extend standardised support (under a 'concept of minimum standards') for part-time childcare to parents within the scope of parental responsibility. The voucher indicated a change in paradigms: rather than the type of work the parent does, it is the child and his/her need for care that constitutes both the voucher's point of departure and its objective. It gave fundamental responsibility for childcare to the parents; by making purchasing power available to them, they themselves can then decide on whether to provide part-time care themselves and/or to purchase it from external sources. Once the child is four years old, parents are given a strong incentive to utilise external care services (such as kindergartens) by using the vouchers.

In addition to the money and the vouchers, the time spent by the parents themselves on providing childcare is recognised as a qualifying period for old-age pension claims. A separate empirical study was made, that involved asking almost a thousand persons what their views were on the various voucher models and what they expected their impact to be. Generally, 71% of those polled saw the voucher scheme as an improvement (positive utilisation difference); the positive response rate was particularly high among women (74%), those under 40 (80%), persons with children under the age of six (85%), and single parents (84%).

The childcare benefit adopted by Parliament in June 2001, while based on the findings of the feasibility study, still differs from it in two aspects: it introduced a ceiling for additional income of about EUR 1,133 per month and limited the maximum claim per parent to 30 months. Both restrictions were substantially the result of budgetary restraints and had not been foreseen in the feasibility study model.

Evaluation of the childcare voucher is in progress. Up to the present time, the policy has been very controversial. The possibility of working, in addition to receiving the voucher, is considered as a contribution to combining family and work. It seems that the limited amount of additional earnings contradicts the structure of the policy and this might be changed in the future. Beside this more ideological debate, questions are raised which mainly concern the financial affordability for the state. At the present time, there is no political party in parliament, which wants to abolish the voucher.

Joint child custody after divorce

In addition to equal-rights concerns, measures against violence—especially in the family—and the introduction of mediation—especially in the case of separation—the issue of joint custody after divorce was to become a major legal subject for discussion. This was finally adopted in 2001. During the 1970s, when family law underwent reform, child custody was specifically reserved to one parent. By the 1990s, however, a movement had developed that advocated the child's right to both parents. Researchers added their suggestion of introducing a 'non-obligatory provision' that allows courts the option of joint custody based on specified criteria. The new law enables divorce courts to grant custody to both parents, a measure that appears sensible at least for some aspects of the relationship between parents and that may also have positive effects for the children. Similar provisions have been introduced by other European states over the past few years.

The generation policy

One of the central issues in Austrian policy focuses on the change to a new pension system. So far very little has been achieved. One central issue is the increase in the age of early retirement. Austria has one of the highest early retirement rates in EUR pe. The issue has been dealt with in recent years and initial results showed a reduction in early retirement. But this is not enough to solve the expected pension problems. The strategy is to narrow the gap between early retirement and planned retirement age. An additional point of discussion is equalizing the retirement ages for men and women. Currently, the official planned retirement age for women is 60 and for men 65.

Regionally, and especially in urban areas, a great effort is being made concerning housing for the elderly. This does not mean only better age-adequate equipment in flats but also integration into the urban setting. The ideology behind this policy is to integrate the generations, not to separate them. There are, as yet, no results to show how successful these projects are.

In Austria, some 22.8% of the total payroll, plus a substantial contribution from the federal budget, is paid as old-age pensions to the retired. Out of the total payroll 3% is spent on family allowance to a similar number of children. There are several policy measures for the support of the elderly. The Austrian government recently introduced the possibility to take leave to look after severely sick children or dying persons, while social security provisions, as in the case of dismissal protection, continue.

Counselling and parental education

These days families and family members face rapid changes, which frequently exhaust their capacities. Therefore, a supportive and preventive backup system is of great importance. Family counselling and parental-education systems currently in place undertake this task of supporting families. Counselling is provided in accordance with the 1974 Act to Promote Family Counselling. In 2000 there were about 305 family counselling centres with a staff of about 2,000 counsellors throughout Austria.

Over time most centres have become specialised, focusing on specific target groups and specific issues. They range from educational counselling to marriage counselling and their work concentrates on problematic issues concerning relationships, separation/divorce and education. In many cases, interdisciplinary teams have been very successful. As a consequence many counsellors dream of so-called 'multifunctional centres' which offer a variety of different psychological and social services. At the federal level parental education has been somewhat neglected so far, although there has been some improvements since the Year of the Family in 1994. Finally, the federal government substantially increased funding for parental education from 0.22 to 2.2 million euros in 2000.

Family Audit

In Austria the government encourages the so-called Family Audit. Initially the Family Audit was intended to analyse firms with regard to their family friendliness and later on it was extended to communities and villages. The prime objective with regard to firms is the improvement of the combination of work and family. Firms, which participated and reached a high standard of family friendliness, were honoured by the government with the title of 'family-friendly firm'. Communities are also subject to extensive analysis of their family and child friendliness. As a result of this analysis, programmes for improvement have been implemented. The participation of the local population and of children in particular is essential to ensure success. In 2003 the first family-friendly community was honoured by the Austrian government.

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WILFRIED DUMON

Belgium

In the period covered by this monitoring report (July 1996–June 2004) three major trends can be identified upon which this report will focus.

- Active promotion of equality and combat against any form of discrimination in terms of gender, sexual orientation, or family form (life style).
- Expansion of family policy orientation beyond the transfer of money and the expansion of services. For example, the promotion and enhancement of non-material goods such as quality of life, or governmental concern about parenting and the balance between work and family life.
- Refocusing on 'family' at the federal level.

Gender equality and life style

Belgium is often compared with a particular musical instrument, the saxophone, created by a Belgian musician, Adolphe Sax, in 1846, 13 years after the creation of the country in 1830. The saxophone is characterized by its complexity; it is difficult to play but if handled well, the sound it produces is pleasing. Belgium (population about 10,000,000) is a federal state composed of three language communities: Dutch, French and German. In the Belgian vocabulary they are referred to as the communities, each headed by a (cultural) government, organising education and cultural matters as well as issues concerning welfare, including family welfare and health. To make it more complex, this cultural division is paralleled by a regional repartition of the country into three regions: Flanders (Northern part), Wallonia (Southern part) and Brussels (central part), representing about 60%, 40% and 10% respectively of the population. The regional governments attend to economic matters including employment, housing, etc. The regions, except for Brussels, almost overlap with the language communities to the extent that cleavages tend to reinforce each other. Moreover, all the governments (federal, regional, cultural or linguistic) tend to be coalition governments composed of at least two parties (in Belgian jargon: political families). In order to handle this complex situation and perform adequately, Belgian policy making is characterized by reaching compromises or making a 'fair deal'.

In the period covered here, a textbook example of this highly developed technique is to be found in the domain of 'equality' achievement between the different family forms: marriage versus cohabitation. At the turn of the century, 1998–1999, a compromise was reached between the two major groups in Belgian society: a more progressive one advocating recognition of same-sex couples versus a more conservative tendency stressing the importance of marriage. Both tendencies manifested themselves in the attempts of political parties to rectify the situation, which was labelled as discrimination. In late 1998, the problem was solved by a deal whereby legal recognition of same-sex couples was to be achieved on the condition that the fiscal 'discrimination' of married couples versus persons living in cohabitation would be eliminated.

Family forms: equity in taxation

In Belgium the trend towards non-discrimination between family forms is focused on tax equality for married and unmarried couples. Social changes in couple formation, and in particular the increasing number of unmarried people cohabitating had an unintended impact on the taxsystem. Two unmarried persons living together had two advantages over married couples, tax-free minimum and tax deduction for children.

Tax-free minimum

In order to ensure that individuals (or a family group) obtain the basic necessities (food, clothing, housing), in the Belgian system, as in many other systems, a basic minimum of the total income is tax free.

Until recently, the so-called 'tax free' amounts were differentiated according to marital status. The amounts for singles were substantially higher than those for married couples (n/2 owing to the fact that married couples usually share housing (including utilities), food, etc.

In this respect, in the late 1990s, unmarried persons living together were sometimes referred to as two 'fake' singles. Whatever the labelling persons living together had fiscal advantages over married couples. Estimates at that time (1998) could result in a difference of some Euro 500 a year. This difference was branded in the pre-election period as 'discrimination'. The theme became a key element in the political campaign that led to the election of June 13, 1999. After the election the new government, in its October 1999 declaration, announced a 'fiscal reform'.

A bill introducing a new tax system, qualified as 'neutral' as to family form (i.e., non-discrimination between married and unmarried couples) was passed by Parliament in August 2001 (B.S./M.B. September 27th, 2001).

The cost was estimated at 1.5 billion Euros. It gradually removed discrimination and will take full effect in 2005. It does not only relate to the so-called basic minimum. One of its main features concerns dual income families. As of 2004 the full income of each partner will be taxed separately, whereas formerly it was to a large extent added to that of the partner with the higher income. Therefore, from 2005 on (income 2004), for tax purposes, the marital status of couples will be almost irrelevant.

Tax allowance for children

The new law of August 10th 2001, erasing the differences for couples whatever their family form, does not remove all the difference in tax reduction for dependent children. In some respect the differentiated treatment is theoretically and judicially increased. In sociological terms the outcome is not overly dramatic. Two situations are at stake, tax free income earned by children and a special system for children of divorcees.

All children can earn, or have income from other sources (such as child support) or gifts from grandparents/kin, up to a certain sum. If this sum is exceeded they lose for tax purposes their status as 'dependent persons'. For dependent persons tax deductions apply.

- Children of married persons may earn up to EUR 1,500 before they lose the status of dependent persons. All amounts are indexed according to the consumption prices index. For children of singles these amounts may run up to ±EUR 2,600 (formerly EUR 2,250). The discrepancy was due to the fact that many of those children receive 'child support', so in order not to lose the status of 'dependent child', this measure was taken.
- Children of divorcees. The same law of August 10th includes a new provision regarding 'child support'. Child support is no longer tax deductible up to an amount of EUR 1,800. Combined with the measure indicated above, the amount reaches EUR 1,800 + EUR 2,600 = EUR 4,400. It does not matter whether these children live with one parent or in a cohabitation situation. As a result, in some instances, married couples where all circumstances are similar are, at least theoretically at a disadvantaged position.

Currently the item of 'discrimination' is no longer a matter of discussion in the socio-political debate.

Inheritance tax

With regard to inheritance, at the beginning of the period under consideration, 1969, married couples were far better off than cohabiting couples: a reversed 'discrimination'.

Inheritance tax are not set by the Federal Government but subject to regional legislation. Consequently they tend to differ between Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia.

The example given is that of Flanders (the most populous region) since in that region discrimination was removed in two phases. In the two other regions similar measures are yet to be taken.

- Phase 1: Cohabiting couples living together for three years pay a reduced inheritance tax. The highest rate went down from 65% to 50% (the one discrepancy remaining is that his figure is 30% for spouses). This measure was taken by a previous government in October 1997.
- Phase 2: A new government removed any discrimination between cohabiting and married couples. Moreover, the definition as 'cohabiting couples' was extended in two ways: all cohabiting couples registered at the town hall were included and for the non-registered the time provision was reduced from three years to one.

Moreover, the maximum rate went down (both for married and cohabiting couples) from 30% to 27%.

Sexual orientation: same-sex couples

This important matter in terms of public attention as well as in terms of symbolic importance concerns the socio-public debate and the dramatic change in policy regarding same gender couples. Even a new word was coined: 'holebis'. Although its concern is a minority group, ±10% of the population, its symbolic value is immense, since these measures involved were assessed as involving key institutions in society such as marriage and institutionalised gender relationships. In the period under consideration four phases can be identified:

- 1996–1998: confusion and conflict,
- 1998–1999: compromise and deal-making,
- 2000–2001: consensus and outcomes,
- 2002–2004: fine tuning and new issues.

These phases are not clearly separated but do overlap to some extent. There are four steps in the process of recognition and institutionalisation of same-sex marriage general unease about

- discrimination;
- recognition of private cohabitation contracts;
- registered partnership;
- same-sex marriage.
- Anti-discrimination

Anti-discrimination

In May 1996, the two major political parties, which constitute the government, put forward an anti-discrimination bill in parliament, to the effect that discrimination of 'homosexuals' and 'lesbians' became a felony. The socio-political debate that followed focused on two issues. Some claimed the bill was unnecessary and redundant, since according to the constitution 'all citizens are equal under the law', whereas the protagonists referred to the law dealing with anti-racism, which turned any expression of racism into a felony. A second objection was of a more technical nature, how to specify which actions are punishable and which actions can still be tolerated under the proposed Act. Thus, necessity as well as feasibility were at stake.

The socio-political debate was rather intensive but short-lived. In September 1996, one of the major parties withdrew its unconditional support. As a consequence the proposal to introduce an anti-discrimination law was killed.

(Private) living together contracts

The period 1996–1997 was marked by confusion and conflict over the so-called 'new forms of living together'. Three forms were at stake, registered partner relationships, 'homosexual marriages' and recognition of private living together contracts.

These three forms were neither clearly defined nor clearly separated.

Meanwhile some action was taken. Antwerp was the first town in Belgium to accept the registration of private cohabitation contracts. 1995 marked the first public acknowledgement of the private contract. Registration included the name and address of the notary. In early 1996 (March) the coalition government (Social Democrats and Christian Democrats) prepared a decree to the effect that all local communities should offer this service. Owing to the intense controversy concerning same-sex marriage, which became a heated issue in that year, the decree was stillborn.

Institutionalisation of living together contracts (LTC)

Discussion concerning recognition and institutionalisation of the so-called 'living together contracts' started in 1996. The debate was lively but confused. The confusion was not limited to the issue of institutionalisation of living together situations, but also concerned the sexual orientation of the persons who could qualify to enter these new institutions, which were yet to be created. The main issue was whether or not heterosexuals could enter such new legalized form, or whether it should be reserved for homosexuals exclusively. So in 1996 two issues were at stake. Firstly, whether the LTC were in accordance with the Constitution or not. The debate was not conducted exclusively in legalistic terms but also 'ethical' and ideological considerations were at stake, the arguments ranging from "can one experiment with marriage" to "can any Christian tolerate discrimination": rigidity versus compassion. The second issue, LTC open to heterosexuals or reserved for homosexuals, created even more confusion.

Indeed, both issues cut across each other since, in September 1996, one major party proposed a deal with the other major party (which together constituted the government of that period) where they agreed to introduce the LTC exclusively for 'homosexuals' and marriage exclusively for heterosexuals. The rhetoric ran: "these institutions have to be kept differentiated but of equal value". In 1997 the issue was a matter of debate between the major political parties and was at the centre of socio-political debate. In 1999 the debate continued and the former government made a deal whereby LTC was accepted in principle but should only become effective after the removal of fiscal discrimination for married couples. The two issues should be linked together. At the end of 1999 the new government disconnected the two issues and on November 23rd, 1999 parliament adopted the Bill institutionalising the LTC. The law makes provisions for two persons sharing a home: a homo- or heterosexual couple, siblings, two friends, etc. who can legally be considered as 'living together'. The new bill provides a legal basis for their relationship. The law came into effect on January 1st, 2000. The first ceremony took place in the Brussels town hall on January 5th, 2000. Two same-sex couples (males) were the first to sign the LTC. Therefore, legalized partnership has been in force in Belgium since 2000.

Later, in October 2003, certain fiscal measures were passed in order to remove unequal treatment between legal cohabitantes and married couples. As of 2005, the two groups will enjoy the same income tax assessments. More particularly, cohabitantes living in a breadwinner family situation will profit. As to the two earner/two income cohabiting families, only moderate income families will have some advantage, whereas two-career partners, both with high incomes, will hardly see any difference. So, the measure taken is symbolic in nature for all concerned. Yet, it still brings a real bonus to middle-income as well as to lower-income cohabiting couples.

Same-sex marriage

Already in 1996 some people advocated 'homo-marriages' if only to prevent the emergence of a new type of legalized cohabitation in the same style as 'contract of living together' or LTC. At the end of 1996 the de facto union of same-sex couples received some legal recognition not only in civil law but also in social law, e.g. social protection. For example, by Royal Decree, effective from September 1st 1996, in the de facto union same-sex couples, one partner was recognized as being the 'head of the family' to the extent that in terms of social protection one of the partners received a higher amount for example, in terms of unemployment benefits, etc. As a matter of fact, the sums of this compensation money tend to be significantly higher than for 'dependents' or 'co-residents'.

As far as civil recognition was concerned a breakthrough was made at the end of 1997 when a coalition of members of parliament across all major parties agreed on a kind of same-sex marriage under the style of 'registered partnership' to be set up exclusively for homosexuals. But in 1998 this project was put at 'calendas graecas' meaning that no further action was taken. Early in 2000 the proposal was reanimated and renovated. The 'registered partnership' would remain exclusively geared towards 'same-sex couples' as a reflecting mirror of marriage reserved for heterosexuals. Additional provisions were to the effect that both partners were responsible for providing for each other (as included in the marriage contract), that both gained kinship relations (in-laws and so forth), just as in marriage. One exception was adoption. As a couple they could not adopt children. With regard to this exemption, reference was made to 'international contracts' and 'international law'. The question of adoption remained on the political agenda. At the end of 2000 the Minister of Justice announced that cohabiting couples (either same-sex or heterosexual) would be allowed to adopt 'Belgian' children from early 2001. In mid-2001, parliamentary action was taken to that effect but in mid-July 2001 the situation changed: the same Minister of Justice announced the forthcoming provision of a new Bill: homosexual marriage.

In mid-July 2001 the Cabinet agreed that same gender couples could get married as of early 2002, the expected date was around Easter 2002, and at the latest mid-2002. The law would become effective four months after its publication in the Official Bulletin (Belgisch Staatsblad/Moniteur Belge). The provisions of the new Bill stated that same-sex couples will enjoy/are submitted to exactly the same rights and obligations as heterosexual couples. This is in terms of procedure for marriage, both in terms of its provisions as well as in terms of its effects, but with some limitations and restrictions. The limitations concerned cross-national marriages. Cross-national, same-sex marriage is exclusively open to citizens of a country providing similar arrangements. At that time this was only the case for the Netherlands. The single restriction states that the same-sex couple cannot adopt children as a couple. The announcement was met with great enthusiasm by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) advocating the rights of homosexuals. To them, same gender marriage represented a symbol of equal treatment. These euphoric feelings were met by total silence from any group which had previously concern over the issue. It was as if this new phenomenon of 'same sex marriage' is fully accepted by society. In 2001 the adoption question remained on the political agenda. Some members of parliament indicated their opposition to the exception and announced that they would take action to eliminate any differentiation.

At the end of 2001, the supreme Council, the body responsible for testing each law on constitutional grounds, pronounced its verdict. In late November it declared a bill legalizing 'same-sex marriage' to be unconstitutional. Two key arguments were put forward to substantiate its verdict:

- same gender couples cannot enter into marriage, since this union, by nature, is not child bearing oriented, and
- the government itself, in making an implicit difference between heterosexual couples and same-sex couples by excluding the latter from the right to adopt a child, had manifestedly proved the need for a differentiated treatment of the two forms.

The government immediately announced its intention not to take this advice into consideration. Groups advocating same gender marriage blamed the high Council for its 'social blindness' and 'for living in an ivory tower'. The negative advice of the High Court did not fuel any opposition by any social group to the new provisions.

Yet it took until 2003 before the new bill 'opening up marriage' to same-sex couples was introduced. The bill was passed in Parliament on 30 January, 2003, published in the Official Bulletin (BS/MB) on 28 February, and came into effect on 1 June, 2003. On Friday, 6 June, the first same-sex marriage was registered in a village near Antwerp (Kapellen) where two women exchanged nuptial vows. The institutionalisation of same-sex marriage does not constitute any new form of marriage, it only allows for same-sex couples to enter into the existing institution of marriage. Thus, the so-called 'holibis' have exactly the same rights and obligations as a heterosexual couple. However, there are two exemptions:

- Parentage: in the case of the death of the biological mother, the partner does not automatically get custody of the child(ren) of the partner.
- Adoption: same-sex couples are not (yet) permitted to adopt children.

Currently both issues feature as an argument in socio-political debate. The former (parentage) is qualified as a technicality which can be solved in the near future, in contrast the latter (adoption), which is a more delicate issue and is becoming an item on the agenda of the holibi-movement, which qualifies this exemption as a form of 'new discrimination'.

Yet, in the course of 2004 some fine tuning was made to the provisions. In early 2004, marriage between same-sex couples was opened up to foreigners, e.g. Belgians can now marry a non-Belgian partner, provided they are both Belgian residents.

In spring 2004, another development, minor in scope yet not without symbolic overtones attached to it, occurred. In one case on April 28th 2004, a judge in a juvenile court accorded visiting rights to the co-mother although this was against the firm will of the biological mother of the child. This ruling represented a shift in the traditional way of handling this issue. Moreover, it fuelled the claim for new legislation allowing the co-parent to adopt and/or legally recognize children of one of the same-sex spouse.

Gender

For decades gender equity has been at the centre of socio-political debate. In the period under discussion, two family-related issues were at the centre of this debate: division of labour in terms of paid and unpaid work and identification of kinship in terms of 'name giving' of the children (the surname).

Division of paid and unpaid labour

In 1979 the Minister for equal opportunities launched an extensive publicity campaign, including huge posters and flyers showing males performing so-called typical female tasks such as childcare and females performing male tasks such as plumbing. This campaign was supported by a large NGO, the largest family organisation in Belgium, which under the slogan of 'A family is a two-person job' conducted investigations, but more importantly, designed an instrument, a tool kit, enabling families to measure by themselves the degree of unfair division of labour inside the family. These campaigns might have achieved better results on the cultural level: awareness raising rather than effecting dramatic behavioural changes. However, attention on the actual division of labour within the family was raised to the degree that results of scholarly investigation into the matter became relevant for public discussion and government concern. Whereas in previous periods, women were the target group in terms of attention, in the period covered, men were identified as the problem group. At the beginning of the new century a new word was coined, 'the new man' with a question mark. 'Did or didn't he exist?' was the question. In contrast with previous terminology: 'the new father' and 'new fatherhood', popular terms at the end of the last century (the 1980s and 1990s), in 2000–2001 the reference is not to children but to the partner. The new man takes on his household duties. In 2001 a regional-governmental prize was awarded to the 'new man of the year 2001', praising his performance in running the household and by doing so enabling his wife to advance her career.

However, the main emphasis placed on 'paid' work, in terms of degree of activities as well as salaries. As far as family-related issues are concerned, the main concern is focused on issues regarding the balance between work and family.

Allocation of the surname

Some ten years ago, the law regulating surnames was changed in order to remove any discrimination between children born in and out of wedlock. Yet, in 1997, a cohabiting couple made an appeal to the highest court (Arbitragehof/Cour d'Arbitrage) on grounds of discrimination, claiming the right to attribute to their children a double surname: both the father's and the mother's. The case is still pending. In Belgium children automatically take the surname of the father. The Council of Europe has invited Belgium to adapt its system and make it non-discriminatory. As a result, a senator proposed in parliament a bill reversing the situation and bestowing automatically the mother's name on the child. No action, however, was taken. In June 2001, female members of

parliament, a cross-party group, representing all the democratic parties in parliament, put forward a bill to the effect that a surname should not be bestowed on the child automatically but that the parents should have the choice. The proposal is to the effect that parents can give either one name or a double name. The surname should be identical for all children born to the same parents. However, the parents have a wide choice: they can opt for either the father's, the mother's, or both names in whichever order they wish. In the latter (double name) case the next generation has even a wider option: either both names of the mother or the father, or a mixture leading to sixteen options. This proposal received considerable media attention. As a result, the Minister of Justice confirmed that the government would put forward a bill regulating the matter in 2002.

According to an opinion poll, conducted June 2002, 50% of the Belgian population expressed its support for this change. However, new legislation to that effect did not materialize. Thus, in contrast to the former issue (same-sex marriage) this item has not gained priority on the political agenda and no action is to be expected in the near future. Meanwhile, in early November 2002, the highest council (Arbitragehof/Cour d'Arbitrage) ruled on the matter. Although they recognize the existing provision to represent a patriarchal image of society that tends to be out of step with current trends, they do not consider this provision as 'unconstitutional'.

In mid-2003, this issue was dealt with in the negotiations leading up to the new coalition government of June 2003. It was agreed that the new (federal) government would introduce a bill regulating the matter. The intention of the current (federal) government, which took office in July 2003, is to change the patriarchal system which consists of bestowing on the child the surname of father, into a system, labelled the Spanish system. For example, the simple name would be replaced by a double name, father's and mother's and in that order. The question remaining open is whether the newborn should get the double name automatically or whether the parents could decide and have an open choice between the father's (sur)name and/or the double name. As a result, an issue which started as a gender-related issue has now turned into an issue of power-balance between the private and the public sphere. One year later, in mid-2004, these issues had disappeared from the political agenda.

Family life: new and emerging issues

In the period covered (1996–2004) several issues were raised concerning family life as well as family structure. This report will only deal with family life since this aspect has featured as an important issue on the socio-political agenda. With regard to family life in the period covered, three issues were at the centre of public attention and the socio-political debate, parenting, balancing work and family, and care.

Parenting

In the period covered, parenting has emerged as a political issue and featured explicitly in socio-political debate. The media reported on the issue by suggesting that parenting had become more complex on the one hand and on the other hand that parents had developed a more anxious attitude and are becoming more insecure. And, indeed, some studies have suggested that parents have had high and unrealistic expectations of their children, while other studies have indicated that one out of four parents defined the task of parenting as a heavy burden. Non-material family policy in Belgium is the competence of the three language community governments (Flemish/French/German), to the effect that the policies tend to be quite diverse.

Balancing family-work-citizenship

Time credit

On 1 January, 2002, a new system aimed at balancing family-work-citizenship was introduced, called 'time credit', replacing the former system of career-interruption. The system of time credit is regulated by a Collective Labour Agreement and therefore covers all persons working in the private market sector. It allows each employee to take leave of absence for one year in the course of his/her career. According to the sector of

activity the one year limit can be extended up to five years. By the end of November 2002, 30 out of 170 industrial sectors had extended the period of one year to the full five years.

The beneficiary receives a flat sum each month with a ceiling of Euro 495.79 (if he/she has seniority of less than 5 years, this amount is reduced to EUR 371.84). In addition to this provision, in one region, Flanders, three different incentives were introduced in order to stimulate the success of the programme. As far as family is concerned, the 'bonus care credit' should be mentioned. This bonus is granted to anyone taking time credit in order to care of a sick child (up to the age of 18) or of a parent in need of care (aged 70 and over). The credit is also granted to those who care for a severely ill family member or a terminal patient. The additional bonus amounts to EUR 50 a month for those in full-time employment, EUR 100 for part-time employees. In mid-2002, the system of time credit, applied in the private market sector, was extended to the governmental business sectors (such as postal services, etc.), employing approximately 100,000 persons.

The system of credit time, substituting the system of 'career interruption', can be described as successful on two counts: already by April 2002 some 15,600 persons had entered the programme. As a result it was successful in terms of participation, but it has also addressed the gender issue. The system of career interruption was predominantly taken up by women, whereas the system of time credit became somewhat more male oriented. The percentage of males has risen from 21% to 37%. However, the reasons for taking up time credit are remarkably diverse. Women tend to take up time credit at an age when they can spend more time with their children, while two-thirds of the men entering the programme are in their 50s and are likely to be doing so in order to alleviate the workload. This discrepancy is confirmed by the results of a survey by the ULB (Université Libre de Bruxelles); conducted in the French-speaking region of Belgium. Their findings suggest that in case of illness of very young children who are in care (crèche, day care etc.), about 26% of mothers take leave-of-work versus 14% of the fathers.

In 2003, the system proved to be even more successful than in 2002. In the first semester of 2003, the number of persons who took time off under the time credit scheme had doubled compared with the reference period 2002, 152,000 persons were expected to take advantage of this system in 2003.

Although the programme is still heavily female oriented, the percentage of men entering the system increased by almost 40%, in the first semester about 16,000 men (15,892) took advantage of the system out of a total of about 50,000 (49,796), i.e., 68% women and 32% men.

Parental leave

Parental leave, linked to the time credit system and consisting of a three months' career interruption, showed a dramatic increase from about 12,000 in the first semester of 2002 to over 18,000 in the corresponding period in 2003, a 50% increase.

Simultaneously, 2003 marked a dramatic increase in parental leave taken up by fathers. The figure more than doubled in the period June 2002–June 2003; its number rose from 1,026 to 2,480. This sharp increase of men (fathers) did not occur to the detriment of the number of women (mothers) taking leave. Indeed, that number also went up considerably. In one year there was an increase of about 70%.

The new government which took office in July 2003, announced in its governmental declaration an extension of parental leave from three months to six months. In March 2004, the government decided to extend the leave by one month to four months.

Amounts will be raised by Euro 100. (e.g. from Euro 550 up to Euro 650 for a full-time employee). This decision is still (summer 2004) subject to approval by the social partners, but the government has announced its firm intention to apply these measures.

- Already in 1997 the issue of parental leave was not exclusively directed at mothers but fathers too were included. Even special arrangements exclusively for fathers were introduced. To give one example, the regional government of Brussels introduced an additional ten days fatherhood leave for its staff, effective 1 January, 2002. Across the regions two general tendencies can be identified: the amounts received for parental leave tend to be substantial and some incentives are built in so that the measures would attract men as well as women.

Care

In the period under discussion the care issue has been at the centre of socio-political debate. Children are involved but more and more attention is being paid to the aged. The rationale of care for children traditionally has been put in terms of 'balancing work and family', but is increasingly put in terms of 'investment for the future'. Child centeredness is even reflected in political vocabulary. In one of the declarations by the regional governments, the goal is defined as 'balancing the interest of parents and children'. Moreover, facilities for childcare were, up to 1996–1997, almost exclusively put in terms of availability 'quantity', whereas the issue is increasingly put in terms of 'quality'. As far as care for the aged is concerned the longstanding debate and controversy over dependent/independent assurance for non-medical care came to fruition in 2001, the new provisions coming into effect on 1 January, 2002.

Childcare

Although childcare is a matter of the three (language) Communities (Dutch/French/ German-speaking), the policies and preoccupations are more convergent than divergent. In the period covered three main issues were at stake: day care for babies up to three years of age and out-of-school care for infants between two and six years of age.

Provider concerns

The issues concerning the providers are availability and quality of crèches, this is also a concern of the consumers, i.e., the parents.

Day care for babies

In Belgium as in any other European society informal care (grandparents) is gradually taken over by formal care. In the period covered the latter form (formal care) was an issue, in contrast to informal care. Informal care was hardly at the centre of public attention, although some attention was paid to the declining care provided by grandparents. As far as formal care is concerned: the first phase of the period covered was marked by great concern over availability of services (quantity). In the last part of the period covered, quality became more important. This does not mean that quantity is no longer a problem; on the contrary, it is the quantity problem that poses claims for the quality standard to be high. Indeed immediately prior to the period covered new quality control standards were developed and had been applied since 1997. At the end of the period covered, 2004, there is still serious concern both in terms of quantity as well as quality. In terms of quality a special characteristic, the gender issue, has emerged in the course of the period under observation.

In Belgium, until 1983, statutory provisions stipulated that the staff in childcare had to be female. In early 2003 the Flemish government launched a campaign in order to attract more men into the sector of professional childcare. Based on data going back to 1995, it was documented that in childcare facilities less than 2% of the staff was male. Officially the action was based on three considerations:

- Economical: in the sector there is some (over)demand and a certain undersupply;
- Gender issue: an attempt versus horizontal integrating,
- Pedagogical: the advantage of male role models for infants.

An assessment of the situation in the middle of 2004 showed that the situation has not changed dramatically, yet in training centres for childcare the number of male participants has increased considerably.

As a more general observation, in the two language regions (French, Dutch) a striking convergence in preoccupation and policy formulation regarding day-care centres can be identified. In both communities the focus is on quality care both in terms of the material quality of the facilities and also in terms of qualified employees. Since in Belgium, almost all children between the ages of 2.5 and 3 and over tend to go to school on an all-day basis, the attention is being focused on out-of-school care. In late May, the government of the

French Community introduced a bill which came into effect in September 2003. Its aim is to transform care from 'care-parking' into a care system that could be qualified as more stimulating for the children. The main feature of this reform is its stimulation and activation of cooperation between the various participants.

Regarding childcare facilities, two types of providers are available. The first type are crèches (8 children or more in private centres, 23 children or more in publicly controlled initiatives). The second type of facility is that of the day-care mothers (minimum of 4 children up to a maximum of 8 children).

Crèches

Subsidized and governmental crèches are administrated by licensed NGOs. They outnumber by far private crèches in the free market. In the period covered, the latter (private crèches) have made several attempts to increase their share of the market arguing that they are cost efficient. In 2001 these efforts yielded some results. In order to expand their facilities they will receive \pm EUR 370 per child per year (index 2001 = 100).

The official crèches score high in terms of numbers of places available (babies), satisfaction of the customers (parents) and performance (they tend to score highly on quality-control tests). In addition the parents also clearly appreciate the professionalism of the care takers. The main shortcoming reported was related to the issue of flexibility. Already in 1996 an inspection team reported a growing discrepancy between the work situation of parents (in terms of time schedules) and the opening hours of the crèches. In addition there is over demand and undersupply of the official crèches. This short coming has not yet been fully dealt with. Some claimed that over demand and undersupply would be eased by the demographic trend: lower birth rates. Yet, this tendency was counteracted by a steady decrease of the informal sector (grandparents) and by a decrease in the number of day-care mothers, but in 2003 the latter situation has shown a reversed tendency.

In *business-linked* crèches, the childcare sector is characterized by a permanent squeeze: overdemand and undersupply. In order to cope with this imbalance, an effort was made to expand the number of participants on the supply side. Corporate family policy was never given high priority on the political agenda, yet the regions, and more particularly the regional governments, became active in this area. In June 2002, the Flemish Minister for Welfare started a campaign aimed at involving businesses in childcare. Somewhat later, in December 2003, a similar campaign was launched in Wallonia. In both regions, different alternatives were suggested, ranging from subsidizing parents to actually installing crèches at the workplace. The latter was severely criticized by the major family organisations, fearing too close a link between family and work ('boss and family'). However, even before this campaign started, this type of day care was already in existence. In Flanders, the service was offered to approximately 35 employers, i.e., a tiny minority. They almost all tended to be in the non-profit sector. In contrast, the campaign focused heavily on the market sector. In Wallonia, the campaign was endorsed by the Organisation of Employers. Already in early 2003, regional governments and the federal government made a deal to the effect that companies (market) as well as local authorities (e.g. communes/cities) could take initiatives in childcare, the cost of which was to be tax deductible up to a certain amount (tax benefit ceiling for companies). The measure came retroactively into effect as of 1 January, 2003. The measure was not aimed so much at the establishment of childcare facilities within the company premises, although this was not excluded, but rather targeted financial support by corporations, either to existing facilities or to the establishment of new ones (inter-corporative or mixed ones). The measure was advocated on two grounds, expanding childcare opportunities for the employees as well as expanding the labour market. For Flanders, it was calculated that the measure should yield: 1,100 new places for childcare, involving at least 100 new full-time jobs. In Wallonia, the target was set at 1,130 new places. For Wallonia it is too early to assess the impact of this campaign. In Flanders, in terms of numbers, the target seems to have been reached. Indeed, by the end of 2003, some 2,400 babies had been registered, however in terms of companies involved, the overwhelming majority is still confined to the non-profit sector.

Day-care mothers

Day-care mothers are women (occasionally men) who look after children in their own home during the day. This model represents the most popular, or at least the most frequent form of day care in Belgium. Together with the crèches, two systems are simultaneously operational: private day-care mothers, operating as self-employed persons, i.e., the 'non-organized' sector; and the 'organized' sector administrated by rather larger NGOs, belonging to the social welfare sector. They are monitored and controlled by specialized agencies which in turn are part of the (regional) governmental authorities. The second type by far outnumbers the former in terms of quantity as well as in terms of quality. Parents highly value the flexibility offered. Yet, in the period covered by this report, their numbers have decreased steadily, although late 2003, a reverse trend was observed. Great dissatisfaction was expressed by day-care mothers in terms of income as such and in terms of social protection, both were qualified as inadequate.

Self-employed day-care mothers. In late 2003 the University of Limburg reported that the income of self-employed day-care parents was low compared with the heavy workload they had to bear. The study highlights long working hours, some days they have to work up to nine hours. In the lowest income bracket, involving 25% of the women, monthly income ranged from zero up to Euro 300, while in the highest bracket (some 10%), income was as high as Euro 1,500 with average income being Euro 541. Thus, in sum very few women make a decent living out of their profession and some even have a negative income (i.e., they lose money).

What the day-care mothers value in their homes, is their freedom, so they do not want the government to be involved too much or to exert greater control. During the period monitored their number has steadily declined. Moreover they are by far outnumbered by the organized day-care mothers.

Day-care mothers (under supervision of NGOs). In comparison with the previous group, day-care mothers working under the supervision of NGOs (welfare sector), manifestly and even militantly demanded more adequate social protection and even more so in the period covered. Prompted by decreasing numbers, in early 2000 the federal government promised increased social protection, yet the regional authorities (regional government) had to pay a larger share of the bill. The social protection promised would ensure unemployment benefit, pensions, health insurance and insurance for work-related accidents. However, day-care mothers were becoming more and more unionised to the extent that the trade unions would not accept these proposals and claimed full social coverage, e.g. day-care mothers had to be recognized as employees. The conflict culminated in a street demonstration in the capital, Brussels, in spring 2002 organized by the main trade unions. Meanwhile, individual care mothers filed their cases in the labour courts. As is often the case in Belgium, a compromise was reached, care mothers would be covered by a transitional system of social protection, coming into effect on 1 April, 2003. New provisions in social security systems were introduced to the effect that day-care mothers were receiving some social security, but not full coverage as requested by the organisation representing them. The system was mainly centred on income security. The new system was qualified as transitional, a first step towards full coverage and the recognition of care mothers as employees. However, in autumn 2003, a labour court ruled that care mothers could not be considered as employees and therefore did not qualify to be covered by the social protection system of employees. A roller coaster of judicial rulings followed, some courts ruling that care mothers were to be considered as employees, others rejecting it. The last rejection was in September 2003 while the last ruling in abolishing the claim is rather recent, June 2004. At the time the Ghent court of appeal made a clear ruling that care mothers should be considered as employees and thus are entitled to full social protection like any other employee. Yet the NGOs either employing or monitoring the work of the day-care mothers expressed clearly their position: 'they were not able, on financial grounds to agree to this kind of protection. Currently, the situation has reached a stalemate. .

New developments: vouchers for childcare

In order to combat illegal employment, as well as to create new jobs, one regional government introduced a new system of 'vouchers for household work'. Temping agencies as well as non-profit organisations were entitled to recruit staff. Although this initiative started at a regional level in Flanders, it should be mentioned because of it is breaking new ground. The vouchers entitle the customers to employ a worker in their household

to perform household duties ranging from housekeeping to cooking to gardening. 'House workers' paid with these vouchers, benefit from full social protection, employers (households) pay a fair amount but the expenses are tax deductible, and finally, the regional government subsidises to a large extent the total costs. As a result, the demand for vouchers considerably outnumbered the supply (governmental budget being fixed). Although successful, the initiative was highly controversial on a political level. It provoked considerable conflict between the federal and regional governments on matters of competence which ended in a compromise. Thus, the system continued and expanded. Early in 2004 the vouchers could be used not only for household work but now also for childcare. This provoked a new political controversy, this time within the regional government, the ministers for labour and employment, versus the minister for social welfare (including family). Here too a compromise was reached. However, whether conflict, compromise or cooperation, the important point is that the interaction of work and family leads to an overlap between family and employment policy. These new measures can be qualified as innovative on three accounts: (a) In Belgium, it implies that the market is intruding into the childcare domain. In spite of protests by the non-profit making sector, expressed in public demonstrations backed by trade unions, the free market was able to acquire a share of the new opportunities and job creation, to the benefit of families. (b) The introduction of this at home care by agency staff (i.e., persons temping) was severely criticised by experts, e.g. an inter-university group of child education professors who strongly highlighted the value of crèches over upbringing in the home. In doing so they were not referring just to the advantages of the system for the parent (work/family balance) but mainly to the child as the target of policy. This was more than one single action, the value of the crèche, the importance of the social as well as the educational function of crèches, was highly valued, even over the family as a system. Family organisations as well as the media expressed concern about this new concept. (c) The introduction of the vouchers can actually be characterized as another element enhancing family power. Families (parents) have acquired more power in hiring services, setting demands, and in expanding alternatives.

Out-of-school care (infants aged 2½ to 6 years of age)

In Belgium the overwhelming majority of children around the age of 2½-3 years do enter into the school system. In 2004, it was estimated that at the age of five, almost all children attend school (only some 0.3% are not registered). In the age bracket 2½ to 6 years of age children attend kindergarten on full-time basis, five days a week. As a result organized and formal care for children after school hours needs to be organized.

In all three regions initiatives for out-of-school care are organized by the local communities (town authorities) subsidized by the regional authorities. The French community government included the issue explicitly in its former governmental declaration (September 1999). It reads: out-of-school care should not be limited to the school year but vacation time should be covered as well.

In the period 1996-1997, considerable debate took place on whether or not the school should be linked to out-of-school care. This resulted in a typical and functioning Belgian compromise: the out-of-school initiatives (IBOs). Most of this initiative came into effect in 1998. Since then the system has expanded and now covers the whole territory. Yet, in contrast to younger children (0-3 years), informal care, in particular by grandparents plays a far greater role. Moreover, in general, the role of the informal sector (grandparents) tends to decline to the benefit of the role of the formal system. Recent evidence suggests that 35% of out-of-school care is covered by the informal sector (but declining), 35% of out-of-school care by school-linked services (but increasing) and IBOs account for about 10% (but increasing).

Customer concerns

Two main issues are at stake: availability (quantity) and quality, secondly: costs.

Availability

As already stated above, the childcare sector, although expanding rapidly, can still be characterized by over-demand and undersupply. Recently (mid-2004) it was estimated that in the largest region, Flanders, some 5,000

places for infants (up to five years of age) and about 10,000 for out-of-school care (6–12 years of age) would be needed by 2010. In terms of quality, the study noted that there was some room for improvement more particularly in the non-subsidized, private crèches, sector.

Recently, the emphasis has not been so much on availability of facilities but on flexibility, more particularly in terms of business hours. For more than one year now (2003-2004) there has been an experiment regarding out-of-school care; a few out-of-school care facilities now offer their services from 5.30 a.m. until 11.00 p.m. If these practices will continue depends on the evaluation and assessment by groups of experts (predominantly education specialists) who are monitoring these experiments.

During 2003–2004, concern was not exclusively based on supply but also on demand. More particularly, it was felt that children of dual-career/dual income parents were overrepresented in childcare, while babies living in deprived neighbourhoods, more particularly in larger cities were underrepresented. In order to encourage the participation of disadvantaged groups, in late 2003, in larger cities such as Ghent, initiatives were taken to stimulate neighbourhood- oriented childcare. These initiatives were characterized by their small size, their way of operation (close collaboration between professional care takers and parents) and their informal nature (great emphasis on accessibility). These new initiatives are not a Belgian innovation they were modelled on similar projects of large cities in France and Germany.

Costs/Fees

Up to mid-2004 costs for childcare were tax deductible for children up to the age of 3 years. From mid-2004 the age limit was raised to 12 years. Since the organization of childcare is under the competence of the regional governments, fees tend to differ according to the region. For example, in the largest region, the fees are income related and range from Euro 1.50 a child a day, up to about Euro 15 a child a day, reflecting the principle 'fee according to financial capacity'.

Care for the elderly: money matters

Research evidence, released mid-2003 suggests that half of the people in the over 55 age group do not consider themselves to be old. These people tend to become more healthy and wealthy. However, this category is characterized by great differences in terms of health as well as in terms of wealth, both variables being cut across different age subcategories. As regards care, for this age group, the responsibility lies to a great extent with the regions, although the federal government plays a vital role in financing the programme. For example, in 2003 the federal government transferred an additional 23 million Euros to the language communities, (Flanders, 15 million Euros, Wallonia, 7 million Euros, Brussels, 0.5 million Euros and the German speaking region approximately EUR 32,000) in order to enable them to carry out their care programmes. During the same period some initiatives are being developed in Wallonia which can be said to be rather innovative in bridging the market differential between home care and institutional care. One example is the development of day-care centres for ailing older family members and of spouses who can be taken to these centres, while remaining integrated in family life by coming home at night.

However, most matters in that domain cannot be covered under the label of 'family'. Nevertheless, two particular issues can be identified as family-related, at-home care and residential or institutionalised care.

Home care

Since care is under the competence of the regional authorities, so also does home care. The last term of office of the language community Flanders, was marked by great unrest, demonstrations and strikes by professional home carers (both for the family and the elderly). They claimed that the Flemish regional government did not live up to its promise of increasing their salaries, neither meeting their demands for better secondary labour conditions (vacations etc.). As a result, new provisions were made, although subject to budgetary constraints. This development serves as another example of the increased confusion between family policy and employment policy.

Institutionalised care

In November 2003, the federal government issued an order entitling each resident in a home or residential home to a minimum amount of pocket-money of EUR 900 a year. The amount is to be paid by the local (communal) social welfare organisation (run by the local communal authority) in monthly instalments.

The same local social welfare agencies (run by the local authorities) take care of payment for the elderly who are insolvent and who either cannot, or only partially pay the residential cost for their stay in residential or nursing homes. Up to now these agencies, run by local authorities, could reclaim that money from the child(ren) of the elderly. Starting in 2001, some communes decided to stop that practice on grounds of inefficiency. The last half of the period covered needed a great deal of investment (in terms of money and effort) but the outcome was meagre. Ever since, this issue has been central in the socio-political debate and 2003 did not bring it to an end. In 2003, new elements were brought up to add fuel to the argument. Old and new arguments were heard. An old argument was abolition does not cost a great deal. A new argument concerned an opinion poll organised by a regional government, which showed that an overwhelming majority of the elderly population themselves agreed with abolition. Whatever the importance of opinion polls, the results had symbolic value, since the argument 'children should feel responsible for their parents, and parents are entitled to count on it', did not hold true.

In mid-2004, the Federal Minister for Social Integration decided that on the condition that local (communal) authorities approved, the social welfare agencies had an option, either to maintain the system of reclaiming the money or abandoning it, currently (mid-2004) some 100,000 are living in a retirement home, of which some 25% are financially supported by the local welfare agencies.

Current trends and developments

The current government that took office in July 2004, announced in a governmental declaration the intention of organizing a 'General Assembly on the Family'. This General Assembly, representing political authorities, experts and NGOs was organized in April 2004. The results of this high powered Assembly may serve as a show case of the current trends and developments of family issues in Belgium.

From an explicit family policy to implicit family friendly policies

In this cabinet there is a new under minister (Secretary of State) with the brief 'Family and Disabled Persons'. This might be seen as paradoxical since family policy is under the competence of the regional governments (regions and language communities). Yet, crucial family related policies such as tax-benefits, child allowances and so on remain a federal matter. However, the organisation and working groups preparing the high-level conference on Family illustrated and confirmed the tensions that exist between central federal and decentralized regional governments regarding competence over the regulation of family matters. These tensions have manifested themselves clearly during the period under observation (1996–2004). Moreover, this competition for power does not tend to be limited to conflicts between federal and regional political authorities, being intra-governmental as well. The tensions were particularly obvious between the political decision makers in the realm of employment and labour versus those who were responsible for care and welfare. The emergence and growing visibility of these tensions may serve as an indicator of the growing overlap between family matters and work-related issues. It also reinforces the old adage that the target group of family policy does not exclusively consist of the deserving poor but is geared to the able, productive work force as well.

Traditional family policy: tax and child benefits (cash benefits)

There is a second paradox. At the final and public session of the Family Assembly, a great deal of attention was paid to financial transfers to the family. This in sharp contrast with the trend and developments in family policy in the course of the period under observation, which was characterized by family policies beyond the sphere of taxation and child (family) allowances. To some extent this can be attributed to the differences of opinion

expressed in the working sessions of the Assembly. However, as to contents, the debate and controversy tends to focus on taxation systems under the label of splitting the so-called 'family-quotient' by referring to a system of 'splitting' the taxable income. For example, some part of the income of one spouse can be taxed as if it was the income of the other spouse. This is in contrast to the 'individualization of the tax-system. Whatever the value and merit of either system or its lack of value', it brought the old (or original) type of family policy back into the limelight of public debate. Therefore, cash was put back at the centre of socio-political debate, more important even than the focus on services. Even more paradoxically, this is occurring simultaneously in Belgium at a time of an overwhelming need for greater participation in the labour force, more particularly in terms of gender and age, more female participation, longer participation of older workers, both male and female. Thus the convergence between gender policy and family policy is currently being tested, at least verbally.

Marriage and divorce

The period covered (1996–2004) was marked by a decrease in the rate of marriage and an increase in the divorce rate. The decrease in the marriage rate did not provoke much concern, since marriage-like cohabitation is accepted and to some extent over institutionalised. However, divorce rates, which in the European context can be regarded as relatively high, have caused some concern. This is yet another paradox: in Belgium the divorce law is outdated since it represents one of the few examples in Western Europe where the non-fault divorce has not yet been introduced. Therefore, the divorce issue ranked highly on the agenda of the Assembly on the Family, in the spring of 2004. Two issues are at stake: divorce procedure (divorce law) including child custody and alimony (ways of collecting amounts awarded by the courts).

Non-fault divorce

In its governmental declaration, the current government (which took office in July 2003), announced its intention to introduce a bill introducing faultless divorce in Belgium. Early in 2004, the Federal Chamber of Representatives put this item on the agenda. Current debate on this issue is not so much about whether or not to introduce faultless divorce since the principle itself is not so much a matter of debate, rather the question raised is whether or not this 'faultlessness' should become exclusively the new principle or if 'fault' divorce should remain on the books, e.g. in case of divorce caused by domestic violence. Whatever the outcome of the debate, the faultless divorce, ranking high on the political agenda, will probably be introduced in the course of the next two to three years.

As far as custody of children is concerned, currently custody is usually given to the mother. For some decades now, fathers have been organising themselves, and claim—sometimes through militant action—their rights to remain fathers. In parliament as well as in civil society agreement has been reached on the principle of joint custody and in practice this is increasingly the case. However, this principle does not yet have any legal support. Debate continues to attract great publicity. The Family Assembly is concerned not so much with the principle as with the modalities and implementation of this principle. Currently two alternatives are being proposed. Some advocate the 'bi-location' of children, with children spending an equal amount of time alternatively with each parent. Others are strongly opposed to this principle and advocate joint custody or joint responsibility but stress the importance and value of stable and familiar accommodation for children. It should be noted that both positions are supported and strongly defended by the experts such as psychologists and educationalists.

Alimony/child support

On Women's day 2000, women's organisations met in the Belgian parliament under the label of 'Women's Parliament'. They made a formal request to the government to establish an 'Alimony Fund' which would guarantee payment of alimony when ex-partners failed to do so. The need for such an institution had already been voiced in the middle of the 1970s and had surfaced regularly ever since. The Minister of Finance stated it would be feasible to make such a Fund operational by January 2003. In 2002 the number of ex-partners failing to pay

alimony was estimated at 19%. In September 2002, the government unexpectedly announced its intention to abandon the project. The current system will remain and will be modified; it will become more flexible and accessible to many more women. Yet, the claimants will still have to contact the local social welfare agencies in their local communities. This rejection of an explicit commitment by the government provoked severe criticism from women's organisations. They protested on grounds of technical difficulties (financing) as well as on grounds of performance (according to their mission this meant giving priority to persons according to need). As a result, the project to establish an Alimony Fund was revitalised. In early 2003, a bill to that effect was passed in parliament and the fund was to become operational in September 2003. However, in September 2003 the new government (which took office in July 2003) decided to postpone its introduction by one year. As a result, some 10,000 claimants still have to contact local social agencies. The Alimony Fund will partly be financed by the money obtained from an increase in the tax on tobacco products. Even this goal could not be fully realized. As a result of protests from women's organisations who had established a 'Platform for Alimony', a 'light version' of the Alimony Agency became operational. In contrast with the original purpose, this agency was not empowered to advance money to the claimants but was reduced to an office which would collect money from ex-partners unwilling or unable to comply with the payments due. After being in operation for one month only, the agency had at least 145 registration offices and had already started working on some 200 cases; 89% of these claims were made by women.

Of course the Family Assembly did not intend to put all emerging issues concerning the family onto its agenda. In the period covered, 1996–2004, at least three issues, that have emerged in this period, should be mentioned:

- concern about a stable birthrate continuing to stay below replacement level,
- issues concerning bio-technological engineering and
- the issue of migration (intra-European and international migration) influencing the role of the family in a multicultural society.

JENS BONKE

Denmark

Introduction

Changes in gender relations, generational relations and the socio-economic situation of families are important issues in order to understand recent developments in modern welfare states. However, these are very broad categories allowing plenty of scope for interpretation with respect to monitoring purposes. In this study, a more concise use of gender and generational relationships and the family structure are applied, with focus on the conditions of individuals as members of families in Denmark, i.e., the working life–family life dilemma, family norms and developments and the welfare of children. Moreover, health conditions and immigration issues are also addressed.

The description of the development of the above-mentioned welfare indicators follows questions raised in the Danish debate as well as topics of national research in this field. Moreover, policies addressed have all attracted marked public attention. Nonetheless, other perspectives and policies might have been chosen, so this paper cannot be definitive with regard to changes in gender and generational relationships and family structures in Denmark. The information used in this paper is from diverse reports, research articles, and from public debate. However, there are no references (available on request) because the overall aim has been to give an overview of the issue rather than a full documentation of the state of the art.

General family issues

The family issue can be approached in several ways, although some questions are found in the public debate more frequently than others. In the Danish debate the questions are work-life balance, family norms and developments and the welfare of children.

Working life–family life

The welfare of the family is closely related to working life patterns. The increasing workload of both men and women is considered to have a negative impact on the well being of modern families. However, recent research indicates that this is not necessarily the case, because the well being of the family is found to rely more on the quality rather than the quantity of work. If women and men spend the day in an inspiring and challenging working environment, it is found to have a positive influence on how they experience their time within the family. A challenging working environment, therefore, in many ways mitigates the working life–family life dilemma and the bad conscience that women and men often experience. On the other hand this implies that those parents who do not experience job security do not feel as comfortable in general. For the unemployed, the problem might be even worse, as they find themselves in a humiliating position and prone to potentially self-destructive behaviour. There is an increased risk of violence, abuse, and divorce, and therefore the family will experience not only financial but also social and mental negative consequences from unemployment. As in other countries, unemployment is not evenly distributed throughout the Danish population, but most often occurs in families with the lowest educational level.

Parental and educational leave arrangements were introduced both to ease the general problem of unemployment and to meet some of the family's needs. When employees leave the labour market in order to study or to take care of their children for a given period of time, temporary jobs are open for the unemployed. Parental leave was introduced with the aim of reducing waiting lists to public childcare institutions. Despite good intentions, however, leave arrangements did not achieve these goals. In fact, parents did not always make use of this leave and fathers in particular rarely use it. This can partly be explained by the fact that the father is still the breadwinner in most families, and for double career families neither of the spouses wishes to risk good career

opportunities by losing their attachment to the labour market, not even for a short period of time. There are variations, however, as public-sector employees take leave more often than private-sector employees, because of more flexible working conditions and higher economic compensations.

Today, Danish men and women attain nearly the same educational level, and the proportion of households where the woman is more highly educated than the man, has increased from 15% to 29% in the period 1985–1995. Therefore, it does not seem right that the housework should still be unevenly divided between the spouses. The father is still more committed to his job than the mother, and the mother still manages the major part of the housework. One reason is that most husbands earn a higher income than their wives and regard themselves as the breadwinner. Another explanation is to be found in cultural and historical gender differentials concerning expectations and the value attached to paid work versus unpaid work. Finally, many women still have to get away from the idea that housework is an obligation, and get a position in the labour market. This does not mean that changes have not occurred. The division of labour, where women are mainly responsible for unpaid work, was much more pronounced within the traditional family, whereas modern households are based on more equal rights for men and women. Today, men contribute more to the housework than previously and a comparative European gender study shows that Denmark is leading in terms of equal opportunities and allocation of time when compared to most other European countries.

However, there is still a childcare gap in Denmark insofar as Danish women reduce time spent in the labour market after giving birth while men increase theirs. Moreover, women never work to the same degree as prior to giving birth. This means that there is still a gender division with regard to time between parents with small children. Whether this can be explained by different time preferences between women and men, or because of structural phenomena, is still an open-ended question.

One implication of the gender division of labour is, on the one hand that women earn less than men, and on the other hand dedicate themselves to a career less often than men. The gender wage gap is now calculated to be 12% for public-sector employees and 17% for private-sector employees, with 9% and 5% respectively due to different training and education and to positions in the labour market, while some of the residual 3% to 12% are accounted for by earnings discrimination against women. Discrimination appears primarily in the private sector, and the general level of discrimination is very low in Denmark. The same study has shown that the gender wage gap is found to be highest in the upper end of the income-distribution scale. One explanation is, that even for career people, a gender division of household work prevails. Another explanation is that the public day-care institutions do not offer sufficient flexibility in terms of opening hours and therefore do not make it possible to have long and late working hours at the workplace.

Family norms and development

An important question is whether the growing number of women working full time has a negative impact on family life. Due to pressure of time, less time might be available for family issues such as socializing and taking care of children. However, there is no evidence that this is the case in Denmark. Most families appear to be satisfied and only a small number (10% to 15%) of families report that they have major problems. However, satisfaction is difficult to measure as it depends on expectations and varies according to cultural and social life styles. Marriage occurs later than previously, the spouses are more likely to be of the same age, and often have the same educational background. Furthermore, because young people want to create a secure social and economic environment for the family before they have children, the age of women giving birth to their first child has been increasing.

Nowadays almost half of all Danish children are born into families where the parents are not married but cohabiting instead, with only 4% born to single mothers. Moreover, there has been a substantial increase in the number of parents who choose not to be married. Therefore, the well-known term the nuclear family now refers to parenthood rather than to marriage/married couples.

One feature of today's society is the process of individualization, which implies that the family is nowadays constituted by non-marital cohabitation—a freer and more non-committed way of living than marriage. This does not prevent a high number of divorces, however, and every third child experiences a family break-up

during his/her childhood. One reason for this may be that women, who are now better educated, have become economically independent of their husbands who were traditionally the breadwinners. This might be one reason for the loosening of family ties making divorce a more obvious solution to marital problems.

When parents break up there is a tendency towards a change in the child's relationship to his/her parents. Most commonly, it is the father-child relationship that weakens with divorce, because the father more often than the mother loses daily contact with the child. This implies that the mother gains a stronger position in the child's upbringing, which together with the high number of women in day-care institutions has led to the term 'feminisation' of childhood. For children of poor parents this is even more pronounced, because they have weaker bonds to their father than children of more well-off parents. If the parents are not married these problems are found to be greater, and therefore, there has been an attempt to equalise the rights of married and unmarried couples in order to secure the child's right to see both parents on a regular basis.

Child welfare

The increasing participation of women in the labour market has obviously had an immense impact on how children grow up nowadays. Apart from a large increase in living standards, everyday life has changed radically. Most children spend a considerable number of hours in day-care institutions or schools or, to be more specific, 94% of the 3-year-olds are in some kind of childcare institution on any ordinary day. That leaves only 6% to be taken care of at home by their mother. Moreover, the relationship between the child and his/her parents has changed, as children are treated more as individuals with their own rights, and they have become prestigious "projects" for their parents.

Furthermore, the upbringing of children in Denmark has become much less authoritarian. Mothers report that they find it very important for their children to be brought up to be independent and to feel responsibility for their environment. In addition, there has been a perceptible fall in the use of physical punishment in the last 30 years, which is an important indicator of improvement in child welfare.

Most Danish children experience a safe childhood, with only a minority growing up with problems in their homes. The proportion of Danish children experiencing poverty for two or more years during their childhood and adolescence is calculated to be around 20% of a cohort of children born in 1984, whereas the proportion of children experiencing ten or more years of poverty is only 1%. Another study shows that the number of poor children—living in families with equivalent corrected disposable income below the 50% median—is around 3% to 4% for a given year and another 4% to 5% are living in families at risk—families below the median income with financial problems, but not classified as poor. However, there seem to be high transition rates—calculated by using deprivation poverty criteria—as around 50% of children in poor families in one year are not considered poor families the following year.

Social economic inheritance has also been studied, and findings show that it is still considerable in Denmark. Measured as so-called mobility coefficients, we find that social economic inheritance in Denmark is somewhat higher than in Sweden and Finland, but lower than in the USA.

Furthermore, there is strong evidence of negative social inheritance concerning factors such as unemployment, low education levels, crime, alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness, attempted suicide and violence in the family. These problems already begin in early childhood, when children from deprived families more often than other children enter the social system and experience a higher risk of being removed from home. It is difficult to ascertain whether removing children from their home is a positive or negative measure and the latest legislation stresses the importance of keeping families intact. For that reason different support arrangements have been introduced, and the removal of children from their home is considered as the last resort, and if there is no alternative the period they live away from home should be as short as possible.

However, studies show that children who grow up under tough conditions generally do better than their parents. The explanation is a wealthier society with better opportunities for all citizens. On the other hand, this does not imply that the relative positions of children and parents in society have changed, only that there has been an improvement in the absolute level of welfare.

In the Danish welfare society, the effects of social inheritance should be reduced through an extensive social safety network and a progressive tax system. Moreover, because the majority of Danish preschool children spend most of their day in public day-care institutions, this should somehow compensate for a problematic family background. However, studies have shown that this is not the case. The tendency is that children from families with inadequate resources are also the ones to be found in the poorly functioning day-care centres and their social skills with other children tend to be limited. This is despite the fact that Danish day-care centres are on a high level when compared internationally. Schools are also incapable of smoothing out existing inequalities.

The introduction of free choice when choosing public day-care institutions and schools across community lines is recognized as a threat to the fight against negative social inheritance. The argument for this initiative, however, has been that more competition implies higher quality in childcare and education for all children.

Health

In Denmark, private and semi-private institutions mainly constitute the primary health-care system, whereas the secondary health system is mostly a public affair. For this reason the role of the family is hard to determine. This does not mean, however, that taking care of sick family members does not take place within Danish families. The family does indeed play an important role for the health and welfare of Danish citizens.

Health-related caring in Denmark

Despite the large health sector in Denmark, the family plays an important role in health-related caring. Every third adult helps family members and/or friends in maintaining and/or improving their health. There are only minor variations between age groups, but gender matters since women offer health services to relatives more often than men. This places women in the traditional role of being more family-minded than men.

The proportion of people who have given help to family members and friends living outside the household is fairly high, i.e. for the under 60 age group one in four has helped their parents within the past four weeks. For obvious reasons, this proportion drops to one in twenty when focusing on the over sixties age group. Helping children who live on their own is also common with one out of every three parents between the ages of 46 and 74 doing so on a regular basis. On the other hand, only one out of every eight grandparent has taken care of their grandchildren, probably because most of the under sixties grandparents are active in the labour market, and the over sixties are either active in the labour market, have active leisure time or live too far away from their grandchildren to take care of them.

The conclusion is that even though the role of the Danish welfare state is considerable in issues such as health, many Danes are active in helping and caring for other people living outside their own household.

The standard of health in Denmark

Reporting on the health situation is not an easy task because different approaches can be applied. One is to take objective measures into consideration; another one is to rely on subjective measures. Furthermore, the health situation varies between different groups within the population, so overall figures might tell only some part of the story. We will apply subjective and objective measures and look at average figures as well as figures related to different population groups.

First of all, we find that the proportion of women and men reporting good health are virtually the same up to the age of 60. After that relatively more women than men report good health. In absolute figures among 60-year-olds, around 60% report good health, while 35% of men and 40% of women in their 70s do the same. For the 80-year-olds, the corresponding figures are 15% and 20%, respectively. The same pattern is found when looking at the proportion of women and men within different age groups who have been without long sickness periods during their lifetime. Again, among the oldest age groups men do worse than women.

The proportion of people who report good health varies according to educational background. That is, the higher their education, the more healthy people feel, the exceptions being people with 10 years of schooling, who fall between groups.

Another important welfare indicator is life expectancy, which has increased from 70 to 74 years for men and from 74 to 79 years for women within the last four decades. The developments, however, have not been the same for both sexes. While men experienced no progress for most of the 1960s, the life expectancy for women increased sharply in the 1960s and the 1970s. From that time the life expectancy curve for women was very flat, which was also the case for men in the 1980s as well as in the 1970s. Another surprising observation is that men's life expectancy increased considerably in the 1990s, when half of the total increase in life expectancy came about, whereas for women the same trend only relates to the last half of the 1990s.

Although life expectancy in Denmark has been increasing for women as well as for men within recent years, Danes still fare relatively badly internationally. If we compare the Danes to other Scandinavians—Swedes, Icelanders, Norwegians and Finns as well as with Germans and Britons, Danish men do not live as long as men from those countries, and Danish women not as long as other women, the differentials being greater for women than for men.

Immigration

In the years to come Denmark will be faced with the major task of integrating foreigners more thoroughly into Danish society. This applies to foreigners already living in Denmark, as well as to those arriving in the future, i.e., either as refugees or via family reunification.

Experience so far has shown that many immigrants from the so-called developing countries, i.e., countries outside the Nordic countries, the EUROPEAN UNION (EU) and North America, have not succeeded in finding employment. The main reason is because they have little schooling and weak cultural and social competences, which makes it hard to get an ordinary job in the Danish labour market.

An increased focus on language studies and education, and on discriminatory behaviour among employees and employers are important integration initiatives already implemented in recent years. Immigration necessitates this, but in addition the need is growing and appropriated by the expanding group of foreigners with little or no education. It is, therefore, a fact that the Danish welfare system is at risk because most benefits are based on a universal principle allowing everybody in need to get tax-funded subsidies, independently of earlier associations with the labour market.

An intense public debate in the last couple of years on immigration and integration has been followed up by a number of regulations and cutbacks aimed at reducing the number of immigrants coming to Denmark. Below is a review of the situation based on recent research in the field.

Integration and language skills

According to studies on immigration, the primary factors to determine the success of integration are education, employment and self support. Furthermore, improved language skills in Danish are important because they are conditional on acquiring a job and on completing an education. Only four out of 10 immigrants speak fluent or good Danish. The proportion speaking poor Danish is 38% among women and 29% among men. The second generation is significantly better at Danish, as 80% speak the language well or fluently.

Moreover, immigrants and descendants from developing countries who have a Danish educational qualification have a better employment status than immigrants and descendants from developing countries who completed their education in their country of origin. Immigrants from developing countries, who have completed a Danish education, have typically been in Denmark for a minimum of eight to ten years prior to acquiring a vocational qualification.

The labour market and the immigrants

Permanent within the labour market is of great importance for the integration of foreigners in Denmark, because it increases the chance of self support and improves the standard of living. It is also at the workplace that foreigners and Danes meet and have the opportunity of gaining a more distinctive impression of each other's background and cultural orientation.

Unfortunately, only every second foreigner from developing countries belongs to the labour market, compared to four out of five Danes. However, even among those within the labour force, there are markedly more unemployed foreigners from developing countries than there are Danes (19% versus 4%) and more foreigners in government-supported employment, e.g. job training, job-pools, and rehabilitation (6% versus 1%). The proportion of the immigrants aged between 25 and 66 from developing countries, who have lived in Denmark for more than three years, and who still receive some kind of social benefit, is therefore high, around 76%, equal to 80,000 people. The equivalent figure for Danes is 42%.

Integration policy encouraging immigrants to become economically independent of the welfare state is therefore still far from being a success.

Other aspects of integration

An important precondition for the integration of immigrants is social relations between immigrants and Danes. These contacts may arise out of either working together with Danes, within clubs or through mixed marriages. It turns out that 55% of foreigners from developing countries regularly socialize with Danes, 40% are on speaking and greeting terms with Danes, whereas 8% have no contact with Danes whatsoever. The study also shows that younger foreigners socialize more with Danes than older ones, men more than women, and employed foreigners more than unemployed.

Furthermore, 27% of foreigners with children say that their children's friends are mainly Danes, 63% of the children have Danish as well as foreign friends, whereas 10% state that their children primarily have non-Danish friends. An obvious place for socializing is in day-care institutions. There is, however, a significant difference in the proportion of children in day-care institutions, 68% of Danish children were in day care in 2000, but only 39% of children from developing countries. Furthermore, the proportion of children with a foreign background is very high in some day-care centres as well as in some schools, which minimizes the opportunity of socializing with Danish children.

Finally, studies show that Danes relate to the principles on equal rights between sexes to a slightly higher degree than the foreigners interviewed. For Danes 88% of those interviewed among the entire population disagree with men having more right to paid work in case of unemployment, and 92% found it obvious that housework chores are shared equally among spouses. For foreigners, the concurrent figures were 66% and 88%, respectively. However, in terms of equal rights in general, the majority of all Danes interviewed as well as foreigners, express positive attitudes.

Family policy

There is now a specific Ministry of Family Affairs in Denmark. However, also other ministries—such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Employment—deal with issues concerning family policy. Moreover, many political decisions fall within the jurisdiction of the municipalities and are based on individual collective agreements between the social partners (trade unions and employers' associations). The implication is that there is no general agreement on what family policy is about in Denmark.

In the following study, family policy relates to initiatives, which somehow influence the everyday life of individuals living together with partners and/or children. The period studied principally covers the last five-six years.

Day-care facilities, youth clubs, etc.

During recent years, one political aim has been to increase the number of day-care institutions and youth clubs to meet modern, double-career families' demand for daytime caring of children. In the period from 1996 to 2001, for example, the coverage rate for zero–two–year old children increased from 66.4% to 76.6%, and for three–five–year olds and six–nine–year olds the rates increased from 85.0% and 66.6% to 92.4% and 79.3%, respectively.

Following the February 2001 amendment to the law governing social services, several municipalities have more flexibility in assigning places in day-care facilities. This allows them to pay more attention to the situation of siblings, who now have a better chance of entering the same day-care facility.

Another initiative concerns strengthening the role of day-care facilities as an integrating factor. It tries both to include more bilingual children in day-care facilities and to focus more on integration of these children, especially when it comes to language skills. Around 7 million Euros were allocated to improving youth club work with non-integrated and vulnerable young people.

In 2001, the Ministry of Social Affairs placed more emphasis on the quality of day-care facilities. This process is a collaborative project between the Ministry of Social Affairs, Local Government Denmark (LGDK), and the National Union of Child and Youth Educators. Focus is on the following, education, network organization and economy, cooperation and responsibility, management and human resources, and public family day care.

In Denmark, the procedure has been that a child is offered a day-care place in the municipality where the family resides, and therefore it has not been possible for the child to enrol, for instance, at a day-care facility near the parents' workplaces. In 2003, the Parliament passed an amendment to the act on social service, which makes it possible to choose day care across municipalities. The major advantage is that parents can now state which kind of day care they think suitable for their child, and the municipality is obliged to take this into consideration when placing the child. Furthermore, the family is also entitled to receive a grant if the costs in the other municipality exceed those in their home municipality. The municipalities can for a short period of time choose to close the waiting list for outsiders under certain conditions, for example if it is impossible to meet the care-taking guarantee for the home citizens alone.

The current increase and raised standards in quality in day-care facilities have increased the price considerably over the past few years. This has brought about an increased political will to give financial support to families with children, and the Social Democrats have proposed putting a ceiling on expenses on childcare, if they come into power. This proposal would, when in effect, limit the disbursement to DKK 1,000 (about 130) per child per month, whereas the average disbursement at present is around DKK 2,000 a month.

Child benefits

The number of families receiving child allowance is now 667,000, one in every four families in Denmark. The ordinary child allowance is a fixed amount received by all parents of children up to the age of 18. The allowance varies with the age of the child, and the average amount per family is DKK 4,400. As a percentage of all kinds of child allowances, including lone parents' allowance, orphaned children's allowances, etc., the ordinary pay check amounts to 87% of the payments. However, there is now a proposal to introduce means-testing of the child allowance in order to place more emphasis on poor parents, and certainly to reduce overall expenses, which amount to 1-2% of GNP. Means-testing has already been introduced for students with children, who receive a special child allowance to a maximum of DKK 5,000 per year.

Children at risk

The Ministry of Social Affairs has granted financial support to the Family Group Conferences project, a model for working with children and families with special needs. It includes the entire extended family (siblings, parents, grandparents, good friends, etc.) within a framework of developing a future action plan for the individual child. The purpose of the project is to test, develop and finely-tune Family Group Conferences as a model in eight Danish municipalities.

In ten municipalities, a project concerning children in families with alcohol abuse has been implemented. Cooperation is established between the county and the municipalities to ensure that the municipalities involved will not ignore, or fail to take notice of, these children. The project is among others supported financially by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Moreover, in Copenhagen discussion groups for children of divorced parents have been established. The experience so far has been fruitful, and the idea is apparently spreading to other counties that are starting similar groups.

After a number of cases of sexual abuse, Danish family policy has paid more attention to the need to implement further measures to combat this problem. Several initiatives have already been implemented, such as research groups and the so-called knowledge centres that are rooted in social and health fields. Precautionary measures have also been proposed with regard to children's use of the Internet. This is to be done through the municipalities and their influence on schools, libraries, and other public institutions where children gain access to the Internet. More knowledge on preventing and helping in a situation of abuse is being incorporated into relevant education for educationists and schoolteachers. Similar guidelines for reporting and passing on information of an assault and for better precautions when hiring personnel are other preventive measures proposed in order to help prevent child sexual abuse. Efforts to reduce the extent of child abuse are also aimed at the international community. This does not only include fighting organized trafficking of human beings and child pornography, but also sex-tourism.

Finally, an educational project directed at all municipal caseworkers involved in placing children and young people has been initiated. This project reflects an increased political will to make the casework smoother when placing the child. Evaluation carried out by the participants is generally positive. Over 90% feel that the courses within the project have been relevant to their work.

Social inheritance

Some few years ago a number of Danish research institutes carried out a research review on negative social inheritance, which is still considerable in Denmark. This work led to a research programme, which stressed the importance of improved knowledge on factors influencing individual resources and behaviour; and the demand for analyses on how these factors affect an individual's well-being, social integration, health, family formation, education and maintenance of the family.

On the basis of this research the government made a proposal with regard to negative social inheritance entitled "A Good Start for All Children". Three central strategies were proposed. They included more parental responsibility to increase involvement in the lives of their children. For example, parents are invited to define a code of conduct for what they expect from day-care facilities and vice versa. A clearer line of responsibilities between parents and school is to be drawn in order to reduce absenteeism. A further strategy addresses the development of qualifications obtained during time spent in childcare institutions. This strategy is assumed to ease the transition period for the child when starting school. In addition, all day-care facilities should have clearly defined goals in terms of the qualifications children should obtain prior to starting school. To prepare the staff for higher demands, the education of teachers and educationalists is being improved in order to cope with the changed standards. The point of departure was that there are considerable problems relating to information about an individual child and what to pass on between the various institutions with which the child has been in contact. These procedures will clarify and minimize a loss of information. The knowledge of child placement is very limited, and through research the government hopes to be able to initiate an effective reform in this field.

Caring for relatives with disabilities

The purpose of the initiative is to improve conditions when taking care of relatives with a disability or with a serious illness, for a limited period of time. Another dimension of the initiative is the maintenance of the bond to the labour market throughout this period. In October 2002, this was put into effect. For a period of up to 6 months a close relative in good health is granted leave from his or her workplace and becomes employed by

the municipality. In this way the right to receive unemployment benefits and earn holiday pay is maintained, as is the contact with the labour market.

Leave arrangements

Maternity leave prior to giving birth is now four weeks for the mother, and leave after giving birth is 14 weeks for the mother and two weeks for the father, without any substitution possible between the parents. Parental leave, which was 10 weeks for the mother and two weeks for the father, and the childcare leave another 13 weeks, has now been extended to 46 weeks for the father and the mother, respectively. However, the parental leave allowance is only available for 32 weeks in total for both spouses, whereas there are no limitations concerning the maternity and paternity allowances, which cover the full period. The parental leave is to be taken within the child's first eight years, with eight weeks as a minimum and 13 weeks as a maximum. While public-sector employees keep their salary, most private-sector employees receive public allowance, which is up to 90% of their pay, i.e., equal to the level of unemployment allowance.

In view of prolonged maternity leave, the financing of it is being debated intensively. Most agreement areas have a maternity fund that covers some of the expenses of maternity leave, but problems arise when some industries hire more women than men. To overcome this bias across industries, many unions have stressed the need for a maternity fund for all agreement areas. The maternity fund would imply that the economic pressure in very female-dominated working areas would be reduced. Many feminist organizations are also heavily involved in this matter because of the gain in terms of equal opportunities for men and women. A maternity fund would imply that employers facing the choice of hiring either a man or a woman would be less reluctant in hiring a woman because he would get compensation if the woman became pregnant.

In recent years, the municipalities have had some trouble meeting the demands of day-care facilities. To comply with this demand an initiative has been undertaken. The offer of a grant so that one parent can stay at home to take care of his or her child took effect from 2002. The grant can be given to families with children from the age of 24 weeks to the age where they normally start kindergarten and for a time period of at least 8 weeks but no more than a year. The parent receiving the grant should give priority to the family and spend time with his or her children, so they should not receive other earnings during this period. If the family takes advantage of this opportunity it is assumed that there will be a drop in the demand for places available to children in day-care institutions.

Working life–family life

The government has appointed a committee to take a closer look at the terms that a family faces in relation to work and work conditions. Here work-life balance plays a central role. Many families face barriers such as inflexible working hours, long waiting lists for day-care facilities and lack of transportation or other essentials to make everyday life work. In order to make this transition, freedom of choice and flexibility are keywords. The government has already, as mentioned above, passed a one-year flexible maternity leave and improved the possibilities of receiving financial support when taking care of the child at home.

Another suggestion is the termination of the Shops Act. The argument is, why should it not be possible to do the shopping on a Sunday instead of on an already busy weekday? Can the hours not be more flexible? The counterargument is the concern about people who will have to work on Sundays. Both sides, however, agree on the need for liberalizing the Shops Act.

Health policies

The Danish Health Plan 2002–2010 proposes different goals in order to improve the standard of health in Denmark within the next decade. As Denmark has the lowest life expectancy in Europe, the major goal in the Health Plan is to make progress in improving life expectancy. This implies the identification of a number of risk factors such as smoking, alcohol, unhealthy diet, too little physical activity, obesity, accidents, a poor working en-

vironment and environmental factors. All these factors have a negative influence on health and life expectancy the implication being that minimizing these factors might improve the life expectancy of Danish people.

Another major goal in the Health Plan is to increase the number of years of quality life. However, there are several problems in defining what quality of life is about and for the same reason it is not easy to measure this concept. Furthermore, there might be different opinions about the meaning of the quality of life. Thus, different approaches are used; one is to apply a subjective measurement relying on people's own perception of his or her health. Other measures used are the probability of contracting a chronic disease, or the risk of losing one's physical ability for a prolonged period of time. If these measures were made operational and appropriate preventive initiatives taken, this would secure more years of quality of life in old age.

The last goal mentioned in the Health Plan is to decrease social inequality by focusing more explicitly on the living conditions of people particularly at risk. These people include pregnant women, children, young people, poor adults, the elderly and those with a chronic illness. The diversity of this group, however, implies that different initiatives must be taken and a variety of players need to become involved in order to target more specifically the people in need of help.

A number of initiatives have been undertaken to combat problems within specific risk groups of the population. Most of the initiatives are specific campaigns, and one of the most prominent examples is the so-called "Six a Day"-campaign. People are among other things encouraged to eat at least six pieces of fruit or vegetables every day. Another initiative, organized by the National Board of Health, is the "Week Number 40", which is a week-long campaign aimed at reducing the consumption of alcohol. At the regional level some counties have begun cooperating on projects called "Children, Food and Exercise". Although the projects vary greatly they are all about implementing food and exercise strategies by involving parents and other family members in improving children's health.

Other initiatives have also been taken recently at national level. These include financial support to parents with handicapped children. The aim is to compensate financially for the loss of earnings caused by their extra caring burden. In this way, it will become more attractive for such parents to keep their handicapped children within a family setting.

In the public debate another issue has been addressed, namely that of expanding the present "Child's First Day of Illness" system. This arrangement enables the parent to stay at home on their child's first day of sickness. The intention was to expand the system to more than just one day of leave for the parent, but the extension, however, was found to be too expensive for the employers and was taken off the political agenda.

Another arrangement is about taking care of dying close family members. This system was introduced in 1994 and compensates family members for lost earnings during the care-taking period. The new figures show that more and more families are taking advantage of this opportunity to spend the last moments together with their close relatives.

Integration policies

Within recent years integration policy has been subject to intensive debate in Denmark. Even though the number of immigrants is relatively small compared to other countries, there has been a significant increase during recent years, especially in terms of immigrants from relatively poor countries. To limit this increase the present government has taken various initiatives, which have been passed through the Danish Parliament.

The initiatives include among other things:

- Permanent residence permission is only given on an individual basis.
- Family reunification is dealt with on an individual basis.
- Marriages with a national of another country requires among other things that both parties are over the age of 24 and that the Danish partner is able to support the other person, which means that no public benefits will be paid. In addition a stronger sense of belonging to Danish society than to the home country is taken into consideration, when permission for reunification is given.
- An introduction programme for individuals obtaining asylum implies that reduced social benefit is given, i.e., significantly below the usual cash benefit.

- Finally, an individual action plan including labour market training and compulsory participation in language courses in Danish and some cultural programmes is essential.

There are further initiatives being launched in Denmark and directed towards immigration, health and family issues, but the above mentioned are the most significant ones when dealing specifically with gender relationships, generation relationships and the socio-economic situation of families in Denmark.

SIRPA TASKINEN

Finland

Family relationships

Family forms

The family scene has changed quite profoundly in Finland during recent decades. The tendencies are similar to other countries in the European Union (EU), but in some respects, development has been more rapid in Finland than in most other countries.

There are two distinct trends concerning the formation of families. Never before have there been so many single persons living alone, but at the same time, more people than ever have some kind of pair relationship during the course of their life.

The marriage rate (the percentage of married people aged 15 or over) went down from 27.9 in 1990 to 23.9 in 2001 for men and from 23.7 to 20.6 for women over the same period. Only in the last two years has it slightly increased. In 2002, it was 25.6 for men and 22.2 for women. The mean age for the first marriage has risen from 28.6 years (in 1991) to 31.4 (in 2002) for men and, at the same time, from 26.6 years to 29.1 years for women.

After the reform of the Marriage Act in 1988, the number of divorces increased from about 10,000 to 13,000–14,000 per year, and has remained at about the same level ever since. However, as the number of marriages has decreased, the proportion of divorced people in the population has actually grown.

The younger the marriage age, the greater is the risk of divorce. For young couples, one out of two marriages is anticipated to end in divorce. An increasing number of people have decided to cohabit even after they have had children. The risk of separation for cohabiting couples is even higher than for married couples.

In spite of the growing divorce rates, the mean length of marriages has not changed to any great extent over the past century, since the mean age of people has increased. Marriages end more often through divorce and not so often through the death of the spouse as happened before. However, this might also be changing. In the early 1990s, most divorces occurred in marriages, which had lasted from four to six years, but from 1997, the largest incidence of divorces has been concentrated on those marriages that only lasted from two to four years. However, there are no big changes in the average duration of marriage ended by divorce, since it has remained between 11.6–12.5 years during the last decade (Statistics Finland 2003).

As a consequence of divorces and separations, the number of single parent families has been rising. In 1985, the proportion of children living in families with married parents stood at 85%, but by the year 2002 the figure had dropped to 64%.

Table 1: Children Aged Under 17 by Family Type (1985–2002)

Year	Children (total)	Married Parents (%)	Cohabiting Parents (%)	Single Mother (%)	Single Father (%)	Total (%)
1985	1,136,000	84.5	5.4	9.0	1.1	100
1990	1,136,000	80.7	7.9	10.0	1.3	100
1995	1,151,000	74.6	10.9	12.9	1.6	100
2002	1,105,988	63.7	16.6	17.2	2.4	100

Sources: Kartovaara & Sauli 2001, Statistics Finland 2003

Around one in five children is living with a single parent. This figure includes those who have lived all their life with just one parent, as well as children of couples who have divorced or separated from a consensual union

and those who have been widowed. In 2002, there were 32 registered same-gender male or female couples with children (Statistics Finland 2003).

Most of the families are nuclear, and in only 3% of families are three generations living together.

Demographic situation

The population of Finland was 5,206,295 in 2002. There were 595,725 families with children under the age of 17 years. Cross section statistics imply that the prevailing number of children in the family is two (40.4%), and in 37.1% of the families, there is only one child. There are four or more children in 5.9% of the families. The average number of children under 18 living at home in a family was 1.83. However, some of these children have older siblings already of adult age who do not appear in the statistics, and some of these are first-born children who will, in time, have siblings.

The number of children has decreased markedly since 1992. Until then, about 65,000 new babies a year were born, but in the 2000s, births have decreased to 55,000. At the beginning of the new millennium, fewer children were born than ever before in the past 70 years. Half of the decrease can be explained by the fact that the small age groups of the 1970s now are at a fertile age. A small increase occurred, however, in 2003 and in the first half of 2004. The reproduction rate has declined over the last 10 years from 1.84 to 1.71, which is one of the highest in EU but nevertheless a growing cause of concern (Statistics Finland 2003).

According to a family barometer set up by the Population League (Väestöliitto 2002), people would be willing to have an average of 2.4 children in their family, if they had finished with their studies and had a steady job. Those questioned gave credit to the day-care systems and the housing facilities arranged by society.

About 15% of married women remain childless. A steadily increasing number of couples have to use some artificial fertilisation method. In 1992, 479 babies (0.7% of all newborns) and in 2002, 1,438 children (2.4%) were born with the aid of artificial insemination (Stakes 2003).

The rate of abortions has remained relatively low, under 11,000 per year. Among teenagers aged 15–19, the number of induced abortions remained steady at around 20 per 1,000 in the 1970s and the 1980s, but dropped to 10.7 per 1,000 in 1994. The rate increased to 16.2 per 1,000 teenage girls in 2002, and only declined in 2003. Even these numbers are still low in comparison to other countries (Gissler 2004).

Since most pregnancies under age 20 are unplanned, the occurrence of adolescent pregnancies reflects adolescent sexual activity and contraceptive practices. Girls from a lower socio-economic background have a higher risk of pregnancy. This risk increases among teenagers not living in an intact nuclear family, especially if they live away from their parents. Girls who live in a stepfamily have a higher pregnancy risk than girls who live in a one-parent family. Swedish-speaking girls in Finland have a lower risk than Finnish-speaking girls, even when the socio-economic background was similar (Vikat 2004).

Among the immigrated ethnic groups, the use of contraception is less usual than among the native Finnish population. A study has revealed that the large majority of the Somali women living in Finland did not use contraception and the men did not use condoms either. Social status, religion, the traditional gender system and the utility of children are the four pillars of Somali culture considered as obstacles to the use of contraception (Filio 2004).

Gender relationships

The relationship between the genders has rapidly changed, due to the high educational level of Finnish women. Finland has one of the highest rates of women's employment, and most people in the labour market work full time.

Finland has been rated one of the most egalitarian countries in the world. Gender equality and the availability of alternatives for childcare have been emphasised as indicators of the woman-friendliness of the Nordic welfare-state model. Universal services and benefits form a safety net for all citizens and decrease the individual's dependence on family or marital status.

In 1906, Finland was the first State in Europe to grant women the right to vote and be eligible for Parliamentary office. In 1919, municipal reform gave women full rights in local politics. The Marriage Law reform of 1929 enhanced women's position as autonomous subjects and citizens and made them economically independent of conjugal relationships. The Act of Equality between Women and Men came into force in 1987; it was aimed particularly at promoting the status of women in working life.

In spite of the legislation, however, there still exist some basic problems, both in working life and at home. Regardless of women's high participation in the labour market, their mean annual earnings still remain only about 80% of those of men. This is partly due to the fact that women and men work in their own separate labour markets, in that there still exist jobs considered to be more suitable for women (such as nursing) or for men (e.g. technical trades). Men are also more often promoted to management-level positions, even in such areas where the majority of the workers are women (e.g. libraries).

The share of work in families is another concern. Mothers spend considerably more time on domestic tasks than fathers do, and this is also true for women who work full time. Latest statistics show that in the past 20 years, little change has occurred in the share of domestic chores (Statistics Finland 2003). Young mothers and fathers often have atypical working hours (shift work, evening or night work, weekend work), and young fathers in particular put in a great deal of overtime.

On average, parents with children tend more often to be gainfully employed than other people of working age. The employment rate for mothers is 70% and less than 60% for childless women. Also, single parents show a high employment rate (almost 50%), though not as high as parents in two-parent households.

Every second child has two working parents. The male breadwinner model is most common in large families, and in half of these families the mother is not in the labour force. Mothers tend to regulate their working time according to their children's age. Where the youngest child is under three years of age, only 45% of the mothers work. This has been made possible by maternity and parental leave as well as childcare leave. More mothers go back to work when the child reaches three years of age, and again when the child reaches school age (seven). Compared to other men, fathers who have small children work more overtime. Young mothers and fathers often have atypical working hours (shift work, evening or night work, weekend work).

Mothers spend considerably more time on domestic tasks than do fathers, and this is also true for women who work full-time. Women bear greater responsibility for children and have been the main users of various forms of statutory childcare leave. Because benefits do not totally compensate for earnings, it is more profitable for the parent with the lower income to stay at home. Most often, this is the mother. The use of gender-specific paternal leave has increased from 8% (in 1980) to 70% (in 2001), but only 1% of fathers have used their option for a parental leave (Lammi-Taskula 2003).

At the beginning of 2003, an extension of the fathers' leave at the time of the birth of a baby was introduced. The father is entitled to a bonus of 12 days if he uses the last two weeks of the parental leave instead of the mother. However, this innovation was not favoured by families mainly for economic reasons. During the first year, only 2,100 fathers took advantage of this possibility. Almost two thirds of all fathers have used their right to stay at home to care for a sick child, but temporary childcare leave is mainly used by women.

Generational relationships

Life expectancy has risen considerably in two decades. For males, it was 69.2 years of age in 1980, and at the turn of the millennium, 74.2 years of age. For females, the respective ages were 77.6 years and 81.0 years (European Union 2004).

Population aging has raised the issue of financing pensions. Several working groups have made suggestions on this issue, and there are proposals for a flexible pensioning age that would make staying at work more attractive by increasing the pension rate according to age. In addition, there has been much discussion of the need to improve working conditions in order to encourage people to work longer.

Almost half of the children under two years of age have four grandparents still alive; most often the mother's mother (91%) and the father's mother (89%). The mother's father is more often alive (76%) than the father's father (72%). Thus the first to die is usually the father of the father, which might be explained by the

somewhat older age of the male parents. In the same age group of children, father's mothers were on average 2.5 years older than mother's mothers and almost the same age as mother's fathers were. The oldest of all were father's fathers. For teenagers, only half of the grandfathers identified were alive any more; the proportion for grandmothers was three-quarters (Kartovaara & Sauli 2001).

Of the Finnish grandparents still alive, four out of five live together. The parents of the father have stayed together more often than the parents of the mother. Here age might explain the difference since in the older age groups divorce rates are the smallest.

Table 2: Children by Age and Number of Grandparents (in 1997, percent of all children)

Age of the child	Number of Grandparents				
	None	One	Two	Three	Four
0–2	2.5	4.5	15.1	30.3	47.5
3–6	3.2	6.7	19.0	32.7	38.4
7–12	7.0	12.7	24.7	31.1	24.5
13–17	15.6	20.3	27.6	23.9	12.5

Source: Kartovaara & Sauli (2001)

Compared with other countries, Finnish children are in good health and both prenatal health and infant mortality are among the lowest in the world.

However, there is a growing concern about the psychological well being of children. Until the mid-1990s, surveys showed that the physical and psychological health of children was improving year by year. Since then—following an economic recession—the children themselves as well as their preschool and school teachers have reported that children are showing more distress and different behavioural problems and health symptoms than before. The incidences of asthma and allergies have risen consistently, and even among young children depression occurs. A small but increasing group of children are faced with cumulative problems. Alcohol abuse by youngsters is the main problem in Finland, followed by drug abuse, which for many years remained at a relatively low level. Only in 2003 have the numbers of health and behavioural symptoms shown a decrease (Kouluterveyskysely 2003).

There is now an ongoing public debate on the psychological state of children. Many factors are cited as causes for their problems: parental ineptitude or indifference, increasing demands at work, the difficult socio-economic situation of families as well as the egocentric and competitive atmosphere in society at large.

It has been pointed out that, during the recession, family benefits were cut (see below), and poverty is increasing among families with children. Although the national economy has rapidly recovered, earlier cuts have not been fully compensated for. Even services for children have deteriorated, e.g. net spending per child in day-care facilities has dropped. In schools and in day-care centres, class size has grown, with a negative effect on the overall group dynamic. Children's primary health care and preventive services have declined in many municipalities, and the queues for guidance and therapy are long.

The Government issued a Report on Child Policy to Parliament in spring 2002. In a preliminary report to the Government Bardy et al. 2001 conclude:

"The fact that distress among children has increased and exacerbated is not surprising; it is a logical consequence of the combined effects of several factors. We should take a comprehensive view of the conditions under which children are growing up and of the underlying factors.

Children face inequalities in financial opportunities available to their families, but also in the extent they have access to people they can rely upon, people who concern themselves with children. Serious attention should be paid to lone and lonely children. It seems that the 'adult resources' available to children have diminished. This has happened in some families as well as in day care and in school, where adults are fatigued by children's increasing needs, understaffed units and demands for efficiency."

Socio-economic situation of families

There has been a tendency to blame social expenditure and labour costs for the past depression although economists do not support this view. However, this discussion has created an atmosphere where reductions have seemed inevitable. Thus, almost all benefits were reduced in 1995. The greatest pressure has been on the benefits of the unemployed, since the costs had risen above all expectations. Family benefits have also been targeted, although several political parties had earlier made promises not to tackle these. For the first time even child benefits were lowered in 1995. Since the child allowances are progressive, the reduction was 6% for the first child, and rose to 16% for the fifth child onwards. It was not until 2004 that there was again an increase in child allowances, but only for the allowance of the first child, which rose from EUR 90 to EUR 100 per month. The amount of the child allowance increases with the number of children, so that for the fifth child onwards the maximum amount is EUR 172 per month per a child.

During the past decade, income inequality has grown in Finland, and a new phenomenon of wealthy yuppies has appeared with the increase in information technology. Compared to other households, incomes in families with children have declined in general, and the proportion of poor and low-income families has increased. At the same time, housing costs have gone up. The number of children below the poverty line is growing. Over half of those who lived below the poverty line in the late 1990s belonged to families with children. Low-income families are increasingly dependent on welfare.

Table 3: Percentage of Families with Children by Income Quintile (1990–1999)

Year	Lowest Quintile %	Second Lowest Quintile	Middle Quintile	Second Highest Quintile	Highest Quintile	Total
1990	16.0	25.0	24.7	20.8	13.4	100
1995	20.4	22.2	23.9	20.3	13.2	100
1999	22.7	21.5	22.9	20.6	12.4	100

Source: Sauli 2001

The purchasing parity of income transfers for families with children has decreased by almost 84 million Euros from 1992 (the most generous year) to 2000, i.e., by about one quarter (taking into account inflation). At the beginning of the 1990s, tax reductions for children were eliminated. With the above mentioned cuts in child allowances, the ensuing purchasing parity of child benefits dropped by 11% between 1995 and 2001. With the declining number of children, the total amount of the child benefits has decreased from 1,397 million Euros in 1999 to 1,358 million Euros in 2003.

Maternity, paternity and parental allowances are calculated proportionally according to the beneficiary's taxable income; or, if she/he is not working, there is a minimum allowance. The percentage decreases as income increases. Percentage rates were lowered in both 1992 and 1993, and they have not changed since. Before 1992, the highest percentage for wage compensation was 80% and the lowest was 30%. After 1993, the percentages have been 70% and 25% respectively. Due to the high unemployment rate in the 1990s the amount of mothers receiving only the minimum allowance rose from 6% to 28% (in 1999). Even the minimum allowance was lowered.

In 2003, maternity, paternity and parental allowances were finally raised. In addition, with recovering employment, total payments have again increased in the new millennium. From 2003 on, there is a new bonus to the father (see below), and thus the payments to the fathers increased by 16.3% from the previous year (Kela 2004).

Table 4: The maternity, paternity and parental allowance from 1999 to 2003 (million Euros)

Year	Paid to the Mother	Paid to the Father	Total
1999	262.1	4.6	466.9
2000	266.2	4.5	478.5
2001	276.5	5.3	500.1
2002	283.9	5.8	519.5
2003	308.5	7.8	569.7

Source: Kela 2004

After the maternity/paternity/parental period, the family can choose between municipal day care, or home care allowance for children under three, or private care allowance for families with a child under school age looked after by a private day-care provider. During 1995–1996, allowances were cut twice, the total reduction amounting to almost 25%. Thus, the level of these allowances has remained at that of 1990, without any compensation for inflation. The basic allowance for one child is EUR 252.28 per month. Different families choose different allowances. The children's home care allowance is mostly used by families where the educational level and socio-economic position of the mother is low, and family income is small and the private care allowance is used by wealthy and better-educated families.

Single parent families face a much greater risk of falling below the poverty line than do other groups. Unemployment and the cuts in some benefits have most probably been the main reasons for their economic difficulties. Single carer families form half of those families who receive a living allowance. Because women are more often single parents than men (17.2% as opposed to 2.4% of all families, respectively), this is also a gender issue. This also concerns the housing allowance. Two thirds of all families receiving housing allowance are single carer families. Changes in qualifications for the allowance eliminated the eligibility of a great number of families but since the result was a disaster, the policy had to be modified. Given that housing costs are one of the main expenditures for families, housing policy has a major impact on their life.

In the new millennium, mostly due to the improved employment situation, the economic situation of families with children seems to be improving. In 2002, about one in ten families with children received income related social security benefit while the proportion was one in eight in 1998. The amount of single parent families applying for income security, however, is still increasing.

Family policies

Measures in family policy

There are three main measures in family policy by which the families may be supported and empowered.

- Laws and generally accepted unofficial norms;
- Benefits and subsidies;
- Services.

The laws and norms make explicit the accepted norms and their limits; e.g. in which situations must the privacy of the family be tackled in order to protect the child. The objective for benefits and subsidies is to ensure the maintenance and the well being of the family members. In Finland, as in the other Nordic countries, society aims to support children and their families with a variety of services. Many of the services are organised by the local municipalities, and they are free for the customers or their costs are subsidised so that everyone can afford to use them. This is considered to be one of the basic features in the so-called Nordic welfare society.

In Finland, all legislation is decided by Parliament, and there are no local or area authorities which can decide on their own laws, although the municipalities in Finland have considerable independence in organising local services as they see fit.

Both the State and the local municipalities have the right to levy taxes. Welfare is financed in almost equal shares by the State and the municipalities. Fees are charged for some of the social services, but these cover only about 10% of the costs of all social services. Charges can be waived for low-income families or for social reasons. Basic security benefits are funded through social security payments collected from employers and insured persons and in part by the State and, to some degree, also by the municipalities. Basic national unemployment security is financed entirely by the State.

Social insurance contributions are paid by employees, the self-employed and other persons with taxable income, as well as employers. The pension insurance of persons employed by the private sector is financed through insurance contributions based on salary and paid by employers. The pension insurance of farmers as well as other self-employed persons is financed in part through insurance payments made by the self-employed persons and in part with State funds.

The municipalities have the responsibility of arranging social, health and educational services, as laid down in the respective laws. For this purpose, the State gives subsidies to the local authorities.

Voluntary welfare has a long tradition in Finland, and private organizations have started many programmes that have later been established as public social services, especially for children and families. Organizations still play a major role in supplementing official welfare for minors, old people and persons with disabilities. Most of the services of the private societies are organized by salaried employees. Organizations get a reasonable part of their funding from public resources.

The parishes of the Lutheran Church of Finland run children's day clubs, supply home help and auxiliary services for the old as well as cooperate in home nursing and in welfare for the disabled, addicts and other troubled persons.

Supporting the functions of families

The functions of the family can be listed in different ways. Listed below are the functions that are considered vital:

- strengthening the bond between spouses;
- giving birth to children;
- giving identity and legitimacy to children;
- basic care of children ;
- socialisation of children;
- protection of family members;
- emotional care for family members;
- work and family conciliation.

In the following table, the functions of families and the means of family policies are cross-referenced. Thus, one can quickly check the ways in which families are supported in their different tasks, and what remains to be developed.

Table 5: Examples of Different Ways to Support Families in Finland

Family Functions	Measures of Family Policy		
	Laws and Norms	Subsidies	Services
Spousal Bonds	Marriage Act; unofficial role models	(All former tax refunds for marriage and first home loans have been eliminated)	Marriage and divorce counselling
Child birth	Adoption Act; Abortion Act	Maternity allowance; Maternal, paternal and paternity benefit	Maternity clinics, well-baby clinics, family planning clinics
Identity and Legitimation	Paternity Act; Name Act; Child Custody and Right to Access Act; Adoption Act	Child maintenance allowance if the custodian is not able to pay (repayable)	Legal advice, child welfare supervisor; adoption counselling
Basic Care of Children	Child Welfare Act; Child Custody and Right to Access Act	Universal child benefits; home and private care allowances; free lunch in schools for all pupils	Well-baby clinics; municipal day-care services
Socialisation	School Laws; Traditions	Free preschool (optional); Free basic education; study loans for higher education	Municipal day-care services and preschool; municipal primary and secondary schools
Protection	Child Welfare Act; Criminal Code	Benefits on individual basis to support children's maintenance and activities; housing allowance	Open care facilities and institutions for child welfare; shelters for the victims of family violence
Emotional Support	Social Welfare Act	Free child and family guidance	Municipal family guidance centres; mental health clinics
Work and Family Conciliation	Work legislation; unofficial norms of living and household labour distribution	Childcare leave and shorter working hours; subsidised leaves for poor families	Home help services; social leaves programmes

Strengthening the bond between spouses

In Finland, there is a firm belief that choice of spouse is such an intimate and private affair that counselling for young people regarding their relationship concerns does not exist.

Since the reform of the Marriage Act in 1988 free optional counselling in marriage matters does exist. It is organised mainly by the municipal family guidance centres and Lutheran Church family counselling bureaus. However, this service has mostly been limited to counselling in divorce situations. Around 9,100 persons per year have used these services, i.e., about one third of divorcing couples. There has been much discussion about the constant increase of divorce and separation among cohabiting couples. Several NGOs, together with the Lutheran Church, have arranged programmes to strengthen the bonds between spouses.

A lengthy debate preceded the law on the registration of homosexual and lesbian couples. The argumentation line was that there is more reason to be worried about marriages than about homosexual and lesbian people who want to make their relationship permanent and visible. In autumn 2001—after a six-year debate—Parliament finally passed a bill allowing for this type of registration. It came into force in 2002. It was stressed that mere registration does not mean a family-like status for such couples. Adoption in particular was discussed during the debate, but no regulations for this were included in the legislation. The couples were only granted rights of mutual inheritance and other property rights. A new working party was established in 2003 to consider the possibility of adoption.

Giving birth to children

A-natal maternal clinics (from 1944 on) have successfully contributed to the low incidence of baby and maternal deaths, low birth weight and premature births. Finland has for years been among the top three countries in the world in these respects. Almost all pregnant women (94%) attend clinics before the end of the fourth month of pregnancy.

With declining birth rates and a growing number of abortions among teenagers, family planning was one of the arguments in the discussion of a proposed new subject (Health Information) to be taught in schools. It was included in the high-school curriculum in 2001.

A maternity allowance (a package or EUR 140 in cash) is granted to each newborn baby. Over three of four families choose the package, which consists of a large variety of baby equipment. The package box is big enough for the baby to sleep in for the first months. From 2003, in the case of twins, the maternity allowance is doubled; triplets get it tripled and so on. There is a maternity leave (of 105 weekdays), paternity leave (of 18 weekdays + a bonus), and parental leave (of 158 weekdays which the parents can agree to split between themselves). In 2003, a special bonus of 12 weekdays was granted for the father if he uses the last two weeks of the parental leave instead of the mother.

Giving identity and legitimacy to children

Under the Paternity Act paternity shall be established and confirmed to all children, even if the parents are not married. It is a duty of the municipal child welfare supervisor to pursue this, though the mother has the right to refuse permission to the establishment of paternity. All children received the right to inherit from their biological parents; however, adopted children only inherit from their adoptive parents. The Child Maintenance Security Act was revised in 1977, guaranteeing maintenance paid out of municipal funds if the parent ordered to pay maintenance is not able to do so, if the paternity is not established, or if a single person adopts a child.

The child has the right to receive maintenance from his or her parents. If this for some reason does not happen, the child can receive maintenance support, which has then in due course to be repaid by the liable parent. The number of children receiving maintenance support has constantly increased. In the 1980s, about 6% of children received support, in the 1990s the amount rose to over 9%, and in 2002 already almost one in ten children (9.6%) received maintenance support with a total of 144 million Euros. From 1999 there has been a limit for the repayment of debts by the liable parents (61,000 parents in 2002). If the debt has not been repaid within five years, it will not be reimbursed. This was aimed to facilitate the work of social welfare supervisors who earlier had to try to collect payment for support that had been paid even decades earlier. Single mothers feared that this would lead to fewer payments by the fathers, but this does not seem to be the case.

The growing number of children receiving maintenance support as well as the increase of agreements (concerning children in divorce, separation or other situations where the parents do not live together) reveals that the families of more and more children are broken, and that even their maintenance is jeopardised.

Table 6: Agreements Confirmed by the Social Welfare Boards (by number of children)

Year	Agreement on Custody and Right of access	Agreement on Maintenance for Children
1985	6,473	7,278
1990	17,047	11,673
1995	30,911	26,808
2000	36,727	34,316
2002	38,313	35,646

Sources: *Stakes 2001, 2002 and 2003*

Since the Adoption Act of 1985, international adoptions have increased in Finland by about 200 children annually. The parents of an adopted child under the age of seven are entitled to a parental allowance if the adopted mother or father takes leave from work. The parents of an adopted child under the age of 12 months are also entitled to maternity benefit (either the maternity package or a lump sum). Since 2002, they also can receive support for the costs of international adoption. The amount depends on the child's country of origin: for adoption from Estonia the support is EUR 1,900, for China and Colombia EUR 4,500 and from any other country, EUR 3,000.

Basic childcare

For basic care and primary health care (including vaccination) families can attend well-baby clinics until the start of school age. Practically all families do attend these clinics and in 2000, there were 1,343,243 visits to such clinics. Later, school health nurses and doctors take care of the health care of pupils in primary and secondary schools. New guidelines for programmes in well-baby clinics and in school health were laid down by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in 2004.

With regard to the statutory day-care system, the question is sometimes raised whether the children become institutionalised. However, about half of all children are cared for in their own home. Due to parental leaves, practically all babies are in home care, and only 2% are in outside day care. From the third year on, the rate of home care drops to 36%. At home, the parents are the care takers; only 1% of children have a paid nanny at home. Municipal day-care facilities look after 46% of all children under preschool age, while the share of private day care remains at 4–5% of children (Takala 2000).

Because of the irregular working hours of the parents, 7% of children under school age use shift care offered as part of municipal day care. However, one third (32%) of the municipalities have not been able to provide this to all families who need it. (*Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 2001*). In some home day-care sites, the child-teacher ratio has grown larger than the Day Care Act originally permitted. Consequently, the League of Day-Care Teachers is concerned about the situation of children and working conditions in some of the centres. Day-care fees to be paid by the parents have constantly been a target of political debate. The present fee varies according to the income and size of the family. Low-income families may be totally exempt from paying any fee. Some political parties would prefer a flat-rate fee, while others prefer the current system.

Over the past decade, municipal day care has become more and more concentrated in day-care institutions, whereas earlier almost half of the children were cared for in other families by child minders. In 2002, no more than 33% of children were in such day-care homes.

Table 7: Children Under School Age in Day Care

Year	Children in Day-care Institutions	Children in Family Care Outside the Home	Total	Percent of Children Under 6 years
1989	106,876	91,830	198,706	45
1993	112,580	61,757	174,337	39
1997	140,991	78,389	219,380	49
1999	142,538	72,429	214,967	50
2000	131,857	68,630	200,487	48
2001	132,058	65,113	197,171	48
2002	130,272	62,817	193,089	48

Sources: Stakes 2001, 2002 and 2003

Full-time day care has also decreased from a high of 83% so that, in the 2000s, one in four children uses day-care facilities only part time.

From August 2004, the municipalities will receive State support amounting to an average of EUR 235 per child if they arrange optional morning and afternoon day-care activities for young pupils. According to preliminary information, most municipalities will start to organise these services, and 50,000 pupils will attend. Of these, 58% are first-graders, and 38% second-graders (Opetusministeriö 2004).

Socialisation of children

In 2001, all children received the right to free optional preschool education at the age of six. Preschool classes are arranged either in a municipal day-care centre or a public school, according to the decision of the municipality in which the child is living. In the first year, already 91% attended preschool, and in 2003, almost all children (99%) were included. A majority of preschool education is arranged within the municipal day-care institutes.

Basic education is free of charge, and almost all schools are public. School legislation was reformed in 2003. Stronger than the old laws, there is an emphasis on the promotion of a healthy and safe school environment and on the psychological development of the pupils.

Protection of family members

The number of children in need of protection doubled during the 1990s. The percentage of children placed outside their own home, which earlier was 0.7% of all children, has grown to 1.0%. The reasons for this development have been discussed above. In child welfare as in child day care, the volume of institutions has risen more rapidly than the volume of family-type care. Already 57% of children in child welfare are placed in institutions. This also indicates that the problems of the children are severe enough to require professional care.

Table 8: Child welfare

Year	Children in Open Care	Children Placed Outside the Home	Children Taken into Custody
1992	23,456	9,414	6,382
1997	35,809	11,764	6,803
2002	54,458	14,187	7,829

Sources: Stakes 2001, 2002 and 2003

Children in need of child welfare are also vulnerable to mental health problems, and about half of them have psychic disorders. Their primary health status is weak and their mortality risk is manifold compared to other children (Kalland et al. 2001).

Eliminating violence against women has been one of the principal objects of promoting equality in Finland. Funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, a five-year (1997–2002) project for eliminating violence against women was carried out by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES). Among other things, the project has encouraged municipalities to create services for battered women and children, build shelters, and institute programmes for abusive men to enable them to take responsibility for their behaviour. The number of clients in shelters has remained at the level of 3,500 persons a year, but the need is probably greater than these figures suggest. Not all municipalities are willing to cover these expenses.

For the recognition and treatment of physical and sexual abuse of children, the STAKES laid down new guidelines in 2003 for personnel in social and health services (Taskinen 2003). These guidelines were prepared in collaboration with the police and the prosecutor to ensure the best ways to proceed.

Emotional care for family members

As stated above, there is a growing concern for the psychic state of the children. The number of children in mental health institutions has markedly increased in the past five years. For 10–14 year-old children, the increase was as high as 46% (Niemi et al. 2003). Parliament granted an extra 70 million FIM (11.8 million Euros) for the development of child psychiatry in 2000. With the help of this money, new personnel were employed and a number of preventive and curative projects were carried out (Taskinen 2001a).

The number of clients in family and child guidance centres has also increased, especially in the latter part on the 1990s after the economic recession. As Leinonen (2004) puts it:

"The results support [...] theories in showing that parenting is not simply a technique which can be mastered or not, but it is deeply dependent on parental and family resources and circumstances, such as national recession, economic and work realities, mental health and social support. The results further show that child mental health is vulnerable to changes in society when they affect parental mental health and family relationships, especially the quality of parenting."

Table 9: Family and Child Guidance

Year	Clients		Visits		
	Total	Children	Check-up	Therapy	Total
1985	49,197	5,363	71,914	77,949	22,303
1991	22,003	28,610	33,518	86,000	135,775
1997	248,033	253,264	79,000	103,080	171,238
2002	148,848	238,855	286,218	419,271	402,112

Sources: Stakes 2001, 2002 and 2003

In the 2000s, over 33,000 children and their 42,000 parents have visited family and child guidance centres annually. This is 52% more than 10 years before with 40% more visits. The percentage of children under 18 years visiting these centres has grown from 4.6% to 7.0%. At the same time, the number of personnel was cut, and only increased in the last few years (Kauppinen et al. 2003).

The majority of families visit the centres on their own initiative, and the children are not checked without the consent of the parents. The services are free of charge. Most often the reason for the visits is some problem of the child (60%), but also partner and family relationships are common. Among the clients, the proportion of single and remarried clients is statistically significantly larger than in the whole population.

Helping people who face a divorce sometimes requires expert advice. In many divorces, there are problems regarding custody and access rights that are severe enough for the authorities to intervene, and these cases are quite difficult and time-consuming. In 2001 Development Centre for Welfare and STAKES published a guidebook for social welfare and health personnel dealing with divorces (Taskinen 2001b).

Work and family conciliation

One of the key areas of Finnish equality and family policies has long been the reconciliation of work and family life. Society supports this by means of various family-leave arrangements, income transfers and day-care services. There is widespread agreement that the opportunity for both women and men to take part in working life should be ensured and, at the same time, a more equal division of labour between women and men in both childcare and housework should be facilitated. This has been the main target of two EU-funded projects run by the STAKES. However, there is no general model yet agreed upon for reaching these goals.

With reference to the above-mentioned increase in problems that children must now face, there is a strong public sentiment that mothers should stay at home while their children are small. Needless to say, this has given rise to heated debates, since opponents consider this kind of argumentation to be old-fashioned and against the principle of equality. Several enterprises have worked on their own models for combining work and family life.

Once the parental allowance period has ended, the parents of a child under the age of three are entitled to childcare leave without endangering their employment. The parents cannot both take childcare leave at the same time, but from 2004 on, they both can be on partial childcare leave. For instance, the parents can share the care of the child so that one parent cares for the child in the morning and the other in the afternoon, or they can care for the child on alternate days or weeks.

In the 1980s, the municipal home help service was greatly appreciated by families with children. However, this service has been more and more directed towards aging people still living at home. Ten years ago, 60,000 families with children received services from the home-help services while the number had dropped to 20,000 by the end of the millennium (Bardy et al. 2001).

In recent years, a new and promising measure has been tested, as families gained the right to deduct from their taxes the cost of helping hands and paid services at home. Further analysis has still to be carried out in order to ascertain the results.

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CLAUDE MARTIN

France

Economic background

Although France enjoyed economic recovery between 1997 and 2001 it is now facing a downswing in the economy (2001–2004) and the forecasts for 2005 do not contradict this negative trend. As matter of fact, the employment rate of 15–64 year olds increased from 59.2% in 1997 to 62.3% in 2001 (59.7% in 1998, 60.1% in 1999, 61% in 2000). But during 2002 and 2003, more than 300,000 people became unemployed. In other words, more than half of the positive impact on employment of the economic recovery disappeared in these two years. For 2004, the unemployment rate reached the symbolic threshold of 10%, i.e., 2,7 million people.

Furthermore, the paradoxical effect of the economic recovery must be emphasised: a decrease in unemployment, a decrease in the number of beneficiaries of minimum income support (*Revenu minimum d'insertion*) and, at the same time, an increase in inequality and in the number of the working poor. Inequalities of wages remained relatively stable from the mid-1970s (Atkinson et al. 2001). Contrary to a commonly held idea, these inequalities in terms of wage per hour were lower in the 1990s than at the beginning of the 1970s. But, on the other hand, inequalities in terms of access to a job increased greatly during the 1980s and 1990s. The percentage of working people receiving very low wages (i.e., less than the guaranteed minimum wage) increased from 13% at the beginning of the 1980s to 18.4%, in the mid-1990s. This is mainly due to the development of enforced part-time work, atypical jobs and also atypical times of work. In 2003, about 12% of salaried people had atypical status (fixed term contract, temporary work, subsidized contract, paid experience, etc.), i.e., 3 millions people.

The number of bi-active couples and couples where both members are unemployed is increasing, which means a polarization of the structure of employment of couples. At the same time, the number of working people living alone, and working lone parents, is increasing, they represent today more than a third of active households, compared to a quarter at the beginning of the 1980s. These isolated people are particularly vulnerable in terms of employment (atypical and precarious jobs, but also unemployment). This polarization also increases inequalities.

To tackle this tendency during the first period (1998–2001), more re-distributive employment and fiscal public policies were adopted: the creation of a subsidy for employment ('prime pour l'emploi') in 1998 and tax relief are recent examples of government decisions at the time. The efficiency of this re-distributive effect combined with an improvement of the global economic situation was visible in many indicators: between 1997 and 2002, more than 1.6 million jobs were created and the unemployment rate decreased more than 3.5 points. In 2000 and 2001, and for the first time since its adoption, the number of beneficiaries of the minimum income (RMI) decreased (80,000 fewer in 2000–2001).

Unfortunately, this effect was short lived. With 2,285,000 unemployed (International Labour Office), the year 2001 has the best indicator for the last decade. In 2003, 2,685,000 people were unemployed (+400,000). In January 2005, 2,716,000 unemployed people were registered. It is the same for the minimum income beneficiaries. In 2003, their number increased again: +152,000 in 2002. Currently, more than a million people are receiving RMI.

Thus, the results are contrasting: during the first phase, an improvement of the global economic situation, better conditions for the poor; but at the same time, polarization of the labour market and an increase in precarious situations, which affect the families directly (Commaille and Martin 1999). For the past two years, we have been facing a new and marked downturn in the economic situation in France.

Main demographic trends 1998–2004

Fertility and marriage rate recovery

As for all other European Union (EU) countries, France was affected during the period 1970–1995 by a sharp decrease in fertility rates: from almost three at the beginning of the 1960s to 1.65 in 1994. Nevertheless, the end of the 1990s may have been a turning point. The number of births increased from 1998 up to 2001 (Table 1). Some newspapers even speak about a new 'small baby boom' in France at the end of the millennium.

Subsequently, the number of births slightly decreased in 2002 and 2003 (– 10,400 in 2002 and –1,000 in 2003). Nevertheless, the fertility rate remains at a high level (1.9). Between 2000 and 2001, the rise in the birth rate was mainly due to young women (under 25 years of age). Between 2002 and 2003, it was mainly due to women between 30 and 34 years of age. Therefore, the mean age of the mother is rising again (29.6 in 2004) (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of births and fertility rate

	Number of births (in thousands)	Fertility rate	Mean age of the mothers
1994	741.5	1.68	28.8
1997	758.1	1.74	29.1
1998	768.6	1.78	29.3
1999	776.5	1.81	29.3
2000	808.2	1.9	29.3
2001	804.1	1.9	29.3
2002	793.6	1.89	29.4
2003	792.6	1.91	29.5
2004	797,0	1,9	29,6

Source: INSEE, 2005.

The final fertility rate of 40-year old women is still high: 2.09 children for the generation of women born in 1953, and 2.03 for the generation of women born in 1963. At 35 years old, the women born in 1968 already had 1.74 children, which means that they will probably have a final fertility rate of around two children. So, in sum, France has quite a high fertility rate compared to other European countries. This level of fertility, which had not been reached since the beginning of the 1980s, put France at the top of the EU, together with Ireland. Two main arguments may explain this recovery: first, economic recovery itself which plays a major role in terms of household morale¹; second, the importance of childcare policies, which facilitate conciliation between work and family life, even if these policies are not developed enough to cover all needs.

The issue of caring arrangements for contemporary families

The high employment rate of mothers and the high level of fertility in France are closely related to public services devoted to young children. Children have access to pre-elementary school almost free of charge, even for two- year old children. In 1998, 100% of three- to five-year old children were in a pre-elementary school, and even 35% of the two-year olds. In the west of France, around 60% of the two-year olds were in a pre-elementary school in 2003. The French situation is particularly good compared to other European countries, even if all needs are not covered.

¹ This first argument is nevertheless relatively weak: French households reached a record of pessimism in March 2003, which is still the case at the beginning of 2005, but the fertility rate remain still relatively high.

Pre-elementary schools, day-care centres (*crèches collectives*) and childminder's homes (*crèches familiales*) offered almost 500,000 places in 1999 for the 2.2 million children under three years of age, which is almost 20% of the potential needs. One may add the '*crèches parentales*' (8,500 places) and the '*Halte-garderies*' (70,000 places) to these services (DREES 2000).

Nevertheless, it is important to underline the local variations of these services within the country. The difference may be very significant for a family living in a big city, compared to a family living in the countryside. Accessibility and availability of the different types of services are quite different.

Table 2: Situation of children under 3 and under 6 years of age in France and types of structures

Age of child	Care institution	Number of places (1 January 1999)
Under 3 years	Pre-elementary school (children under 3 in 1998–1999)	255,000 (56%)
	Crèches collectives	138,400 (30.5%)
	Crèches familiales	61,000 (13.5%)
	Total number of places in all institutions for children under 3 years of age	454,500 (100%)
Under 6 years	Haltes-garderies	68,100

Source: DREES 2000

The fertility rate of immigrant women is one point higher (2.80) than that of French women (1.72). Nevertheless, this mean is hiding a convergence, whose effect is still greater when the length of stay is longer. This trend progressively reduces the gap between these two populations in terms of level of fertility. For example, between 1989–1990 and 1998–1999, the fertility rate of women from Africa decreased from 4.72 to 4.07. The same trend can be seen for women from Tunisia – 3.93 to 3.29; Turkey – 3.73 to 3.35; Morocco – 3.51 to 3.32. Portuguese, Spanish and Italian women have more stable fertility rates, 1.86 in 1989 and 2.04 in 1999 for Portuguese women; 1.48 in 1989 and 1.41 in 1999 for Spanish women and 1.43 in 1989 and 1.47 in 1999 for Italian women. The women from these countries who live in France have a higher level of fertility than their fellow citizens still living in their home countries, which may be linked to the offer of services in France compared to the situation in the country of origin.

As far as marriage is concerned, the trend is comparable. The number of marriages decreased drastically from the end of the 1960s to the mid-1990s: from 380,000 in 1969 to 253,000 in 1994, which means a decrease in the marriage rate from almost eight marriages in a thousand people to 4.4. A slight increase was observed in 1996 (280,000 marriages), mainly due to fiscal reform. This recovery was subsequently confirmed, with 293,700 in 1999, 305,400 in 2000, 295,900 in 2001, which means a marriage rate of five in 2000 and the rate was still 4.9 in 2001. In 2002, there were 286,300 marriages (4.7) (9,600 fewer marriages compared to 2001) and there was a further decrease in 2003, with 280,300 marriages (4.6) (6,000 fewer marriages compared to 2002), which means 25,100 marriages less in three years compared to the situation in 2000. In 2004, the decrease was confirmed with 266,000 marriages and a marriage rate of 4.3. Currently, the mean age of marriage is becoming older: 30.4 for men and 28.3 for women.

The introduction of a Civil agreement: 'pacte civil de solidarité' (PACS) in 1999 offers an alternative to marriage for cohabitant homosexual or heterosexual couples. By the end of 2000, around 30,000 PACS had been registered, and more than 15,000 in 2001. In 2002, 25,000 had signed up and by the end of 2003, a total of 100,000 PACS had been registered. At the end of the first trimester of 2004, 130,000 PACS had been registered. However, this public recognition does not seem to threaten marriage.

Couples and divorces

The decrease in the number of marriages in the 1970s and 1980s did not mean a reduction of couples, because during these years, the decrease in the number of marriages was compensated for by an increase in cohabitation. Almost 70% of people over 15 years of age are living as a couple. So cohabitation is growing constantly and is compensating for the decrease in the number of marriages: there were 2.4 millions cohabiting couples in 1998, compared to 1.5 million in 1990, which means almost one couple in six in 1998, compared to one in ten in 1990 (Beaumel et al. 1999) (see Table 3).

Table 3: Number of couples married and cohabiting depending of the number of children

	1990		1998	
	(thousands)	%	(Thousand)	%
Cohabitants	1,516	10.7	2,429	16.4
Without child	973	6.8	1,353	9.1
One child	332	2.4	587	4.0
Two or more children	210	1.5	490	3.3
Married	12,714	89.3	12,386	83.6
Without child	6,850	48.2	7,211	48.7
One child	2,439	17.4	2,126	14.4
Two or more children	3,425	24.0	3,049	20.5
All together	14,229	100.0	14,815	100.0

Source: INSEE, *Employment inquiry in 1990 and 1998*

The cohabitants are young people: almost 30% of people aged between 25 and 30 are living in cohabitation. Cohabitants are more numerous than married people particularly for women under 26 years of age and for men under 28 years of age. Nevertheless, cohabitation is no longer a specific behaviour of the younger generations. As Toulemon (1996) argued, „*cohabitation became established.*“

The birth of a child is no longer a sufficient reason to get married. So we are witnessing a significant increase in the number of children born out of wedlock: around 6% between 1945 and 1965; 6.8% in 1970; 11.4% in 1980; 30% in 1990; 39% in 1996; 40% at the end of the 1990s and 47,5% in 2004. More than 50% of first children are born nowadays out of wedlock. This increase means that France was in third position after Sweden and Denmark in terms of live births outside marriage in 1998 (followed by the UK, Finland and Germany). Very often, cohabitation has occurred between adults who already had children from a previous relationship. Out of the total number of unions that occurred between 1989 and 1993, with or without marriage, 16% of men or women already had one child (Beaumel et al. 1999).

This trend partly explains the increase in the birth rate, because in contrast to the southern European countries, births out of wedlock represent a significant part of the number of births in a year. In 2000, 40% of births were out of wedlock and even 45% in 2001, which means 360,000 children. In 2003, 45.2% of the births were out of wedlock (57% of the first born children were born outside marriage).

These developments show that cohabitation is integrated in French society as an accepted situation for millions of children (Martin & Théry 2001). Their situation is very different nowadays, as almost 75% are recognised by their father at birth, compared to 6% of illegitimate children at the end of the 1960s, which was associated with strong stigmatisation and disapproval.² This normalization process has led to their total legal recognition, as is suggested in the last report to the minister of Justice by Dekeuwer-Desfossez (1999). In that sense, cohabitation is not a major issue in French public debate, not even in the field of family policy reforms, except as an aspect of couples concerned about the PACs project (Commaille & Martin 2000). But it is mainly a means to

² At the beginning of the 1970s, only one in five children was legitimised by their father at birth.

avoid speaking exclusively about homosexual couples, or a means to also involve the interests of the modern homosexual and heterosexual couples.

The number of divorces, which increased regularly from the mid-1960s, from 9% of marriages in 1965 to 22% in 1980, 30% in 1985, 32% in 1990 and 40% in 2000, is becoming stable around 110,000 divorces per year in 2000 and 2001. In 2002, the number of divorces increased once more to 127,000. If we take into account the breakdowns among cohabiting couples, which seem more unstable than married couples, the instability of family life seems even more important. These breakdowns of fertile couples lead to new phases in family life: lone parent households and reconstituted families. The number of lone parent households with children under the age of 25 (definition of INSEE) increased from 720,000 in 1968 to 1,100,000 in 1990 (Chambaz & Martin 2001). In 2000, there were 1,423,000, which represent 16% of households with a child under 25 years old and in 2002, 1,6 million (18% of the households with a child under 25).

The percentage of minor children living in a lone parent family also increased significantly, from 8.4% in 1986, to 11.5% in 1994 and 14% in 1999. At present, 15% of the under 18 year olds are living in a lone parent family and around 9% in a reconstituted family. A lone parent means more and more lone mothers, who represent almost 86% of the lone parents (Table 4).

Table 4: Number of lone parent families in France in 1990 and 2000

	1990		2000	
	Thousands	%	Thousands	%
All families with dependent children	8,901	100.0	8,888	100.0
Lone parent families	1,088	12.2	1,423	16.0
Lone mother	925	10.4	1,222	13.8
Lone father	162	1.8	201	2.3

Note: Dependent children are single and under 25 years of age.

Source: INSEE, 1990–2000

But the major change here concerns the distribution of single parents by marital status. The share of widows among lone parents dropped from 54% in 1968 to 12.7% in 2000, compared to the percentage of divorced parents which rose from 17% in 1968 to 47% in 2000, or single parents, which represented 8% in 1968 and 30% in 2000 (Table 5).

Table 5: Number of lone parent families in 1990 and 2000 by marital status and age.

Marital status	1990		2000	
	Thousands	%	Thousands	%
Single	217	20.0	449	31.5
Divorced	555	51.2	673	47.3
Separated	78	7.2	121	8.5
Widowed	234	21.6	181	12.7

Source: INSEE 1990–2000

For the last decade, the most important increase has concerned single parents, whose number has more than doubled, from 217,000 to 449,000.³ The increase of cohabitation and the fragility of non-married couples explain these changes. As a matter of fact, the growing number of single parents refers mainly to the progres-

³ The progression is also important for lone parents who have separated, this figure dropped from 78,000 to 121,000. Couples seem to separate more often before divorce has been pronounced.

sion of cohabitation in new generations and the fragility of these cohabiting couples. The category of single parents has also changed significantly in terms of age. In 1990, almost one single parent in three was under 30 years old and only 8% were more than 45 years old. In 2000, only one in five was under 30 and almost 18% were more than 45 years old. So, contrary to the situation in most Anglo-Saxon countries, lone parents in France are rarely young single mothers with babies. Most of them are divorced or separated mothers with pre-adolescents or teenagers. After separation and divorce, many parents may meet a new partner and commit themselves to a new family. The likelihood of this happening depends very much on the sex of the parent (men are more concerned than women), on the age (the younger you are, the more probable it is), and on the level of schooling (the higher it is, the more probable it is) (Martin 1997, Cassan et al. 2001).

Academic controversies regarding family transformations

Public opinion and public debate are more and more affected by the arguments and ideas of experts, whose advice is frequently sought by politicians through the issuing of official reports. How do these experts interpret this profound change?

French debate has mainly been organized through the opposition between the *family* and the *individual* (Commaïlle & Martin 1998; Martin & Théry 2001). The reason for this is probably historical and goes back to the beginning with the French Revolution. The creation of civil marriage in 1792 was the symbol of a secularised society and equality of citizens before the law. Civil marriage was at the same time the symbol of the link between republican political ideals and the private sphere. From 1789 to 1793 (a short but historically very important period), all problems regarding the family were analysed in terms of individual liberty and equality. The family was seen as a private sphere and revolutionary laws were introduced (the divorce law introduced in 1792 was more liberal than the French divorce law today).

Immediately after the 'terror', another interpretation of 'family' emerged. The family was considered as a precondition for assuring social order and as the natural bedrock of society. The Napoleonic code of 1804 promoted one unique model of family as 'the' family for more than a century and a half. Marital and paternal power organized the family as a very hierarchical unit. Only the married family was considered to be a family. Liberal revolutionary divorce was limited, and finally suspended in 1816 for almost one century (when divorce was reintroduced in 1884 it was fault-divorce only, until the reform of 1975). This history explains the long lasting opposition between conservative parties, strongly influenced by Catholicism, and progressive or socialist parties, attacking this family model on the basis of individual liberty, secularism, and equality. This opposition is so strong in French culture and public debate, that the word 'family' seemed, until very recently, to belong to the right wing. Until the 1980s, it was most unusual for the left wing to refer to the family as something of value (Commaïlle & Martin, 1998).

Until the beginning of the 1980s, it was not unusual to present the transformation of the family as a crisis and a threat. This position consisted of a simplistic opposition between the Golden Age of the family ('20 Glorieuses' from 1945–1965) and the 30 pitiful years of the family ('30 piteuses' from 1965–1995). Indeed, if we want to understand the current transformation by a comparison with the traditional family of a hypothetical golden age corresponding to the 1945–1965 period, the diagnosis seems simple: it compares the stable nuclear family (founded on marriage, very fecund, with strong ties and obligations, etc.) to a fragile family, with weak links and solidarities. That nostalgic position underestimates that the strength of the traditional family was founded on a strict and unequal division of the gender roles and on the dependence of the female within the marriage contract.

This dichotomy led to the consideration of the 'family' as 'traditional family'. So it is not surprising that the recent change in family behaviour and values was interpreted among academics as 'the passage from family to individual' and as a movement towards 'privatization' of norms. Demography and family sociology has expanded a great deal since the 1970s, but most of the research was devoted to specific aspects, dealing very little with family change in general. The reason is that a kind of generalized explanation was largely accepted: we faced 'new behaviours', 'new values', and 'pluralization' of the family forms. Depending on each political choice, this was seen as a symptom of decline, decadence, individualism, egotism (among jurists and some demographers), or, on

the contrary, a cultural emancipation, more freedom and social tolerance (among sociologists). But the main expression was 'from family to families'.

The 1990s changed the issues and the hypothesis of a 'passage from family to individual' was challenged. This aspect became more important after 1995, when social problems and specifically teenage delinquency were attributed to a lack of family education, generating a strong political debate. So, beyond the ideological position which interprets the transformation of the family as destruction, a threat, a peril, and which considers that the best solution is to go backwards, 'back to basics', we can identify different, more theoretical positions, which demonstrate the difficulty in understanding the present and the future. The meaning of these transformations of the family may be synthesized in three main positions, often interconnected (see Déchaux 1995, Commaille & Martin 1998, Théry 1999): First, some researchers consider that the main transformation of family life corresponds to a process of emancipation from tradition, a 'detraditionalization' of family life (Beck 1992), a progressive recognition of the individual within the family, and mainly a process of emancipation of women in relation to their role in terms of gender. The interpretation considers that this 'positive individualization' mainly has virtues and gives the family a new structure, more horizontal and more equal, more contractual (*famille élective*), more centred on the production of identities than around transmission of goods (de Singly 1993 & 1996). By analogy, it could also correspond to a new public order, not the vertical conception of social order founded on a structure of delegation of power from the top (God) to the bottom (the father), but a democratic order founded on mutual recognition (Giddens 1992).

However, this initial position is immediately counterbalanced by those who insist on the limits of the individualization process or the threat of 'de-institutionalization' (Roussel 1989). How can we preserve the 'common good', the collective foundations of a society, without symbolic signs and collective norms? How may we even form a society if the only links we recognize are defined on the basis of interaction between individuals? Such a position insists on the role of law, as a symbolic link which gives meaning and consistency to the social relationships inside the family: horizontal (couple) or vertical (filiation). It leads also to a demand for more institutions (for example, PACS or the access to marriage for same-sex couples). These limits to the 'de-institutionalisation' of the family are very close to those identified by Alexis de Tocqueville (1835) in the 19th century or Durkheim (1892) at the beginning of the 20th century, in terms of risk of individualism.

This hypothesis argues that growing equality between men and women is the most important factor of change, and has been largely underestimated in France for years. The general thesis is that the 'matrimonial model' of the family, presuming a gender share of public and private, in fact, implodes in the 1970s. It is an anthropological revolution, still incomplete, that we are just beginning to be conscious of. Fertility, marriage, and divorce must be reconsidered according to this perspective. The other major issue concerns changes in inter-generational relationships within a context of increasing life expectancy. The entire life cycle is reconstructed. From this perspective, family change is a structural mutation, generating new forms of social inequalities and requiring the elaboration of new institutions, and a complete change in family policy defining a 'new gender contract' and a new 'generational pact'.

A third position in these debates considers that a second risk and brake on this positive progress of individualization is constituted by inequalities: inequalities between social groups and classes and between genders (Chopart & Martin, 2004). The process of emancipation is not equally accessible and the main evidence of this inequality is, for example, the unequal consequences of separation and divorce, depending on the social and economic conditions of the families (Martin 1997 & 1999, Commaille 1999). On the other hand, traditional norms still represent a reference point for many social groups. Individuals in these configurations do not recognize themselves in the new gender or intergenerational roles. In these cases, separations, divorces, births outside marriage, etc, are still considered as pathologies and sources of social problems. From this perspective, the process of individualization may accompany a regulation of social inequalities and problems linked to these transformations of family.

These different positions represent a very simplified scheme in which it is possible to collect the arguments about family change and family reforms. We can easily understand that arguments, ideas, and social references swing in the political debate between these different interpretations of changes, according to circumstances and mobilization.

Main family policy reforms

A major political change marked the period under discussion and the framing of family issues: the shift between the Jospin socialist government (1996–2002) and from April 2002, the Raffarin government (reconstructed in 2004). This political turning point had a great impact on family issues. While the former government was mainly centred on the question of modernization of civil family law (reform of divorce and parental authority, PACS), and aimed at promoting more equality between men and women, the right wing government immediately introduced a very prominent issue: insecurity, with all the consequence in terms of family responsibility.

Political background: Public debate about family and insecurity

In order to be understood, family issues must be related to the profound shock of 21 April 2002: the re-election of Jacques Chirac with about 80% of the vote to make a 'Republican front' against the extreme-right candidate. The link between private life and public policies or the role of the State and the family are closely connected to this ideological confrontation.

The strong comeback of right-wing parties in political life may nevertheless be much more complicated to understand than it might appear at a first glance. On the one hand, it is quite clear that public opinion is much more sensitive than 10 years ago to the issue of authority and respect for Institutions. The percentage of those who consider, for example, that 'it's a good thing to respect more authority' in a recent public opinion inquiry rose from 51% in 1981 to 65% in 1999. But on the other hand, the traditional gap between left- and right-wing positions on private and public issues is more difficult to ascertain than it was a few years ago: when the left was quite liberal on private issues and interventionist in the economic field, and the right was quite liberal on economic issues and conservative on private ones. Nowadays, the principal left-wing party, the socialist party has been more tolerant towards the market while at the same time the right-wing party became more open to changes in private life. The frontiers seem more and more hazy.

Another element plays a central role in this ideological confrontation, i.e., the emergence of the issue of insecurity. By gaining the spotlight in the media, the subject of insecurity, the increase in juvenile delinquency and parental irresponsibility (Martin 2003), became one of the primary issues for all candidates in the last presidential and legislative elections. The effect that family transformation and particularly divorce has on children led to this feeling of insecurity. The proposed suppression of family allowances in the case of families that were incapable of functioning in society under 'normal' or satisfactory conditions was launched towards the end of the 1990s. This was introduced by the mayors of several middle-sized French towns, principally those of a rightist political tendency, but also by one or two leftist Mayors anxious to contain 'the explosion of delinquency' and what they saw as a flagrant degradation of the social conditions of minors. From their point of view, several different events seemed to justify this solution: attacks on teachers and school bus drivers, urban degradation and antisocial behaviour. The application of sanctions appeared, to these leading political figures, to be the only possible course of action, notwithstanding the fact that criminal law already envisaged disciplinary measures for negligent parents, and in particular, the withholding of family allowances in the event of school truancy.

Although initially the left was mainly reticent as regards this discussion on security and repression, certain leftist exponents contributed to the modification of political attitudes in the matter: Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who was Minister of the Interior in the socialist government, played a crucial role by qualifying these antisocial minors as '*sauvageons*' (little savages) and by giving a republican and traditionalist address of a kind designed to support initiatives likely to reinforce authority, whether that of parents or of the administration.⁴ The debate in

⁴ A few academics had recourse to the same argument, such as Charles Hadji, professor of education at the University of Grenoble who writes: "When will the parents cease being afraid to discipline their children? Because 'only discipline transforms animality into humanity' (Kant). Without discipline, which is the simple negative dimension of education, the child is condemned to 'brutality', which makes instruction impossible; 'the positive dimension of education'. Let us not be afraid to call a spade a spade and 'sauvageon' (it is the only correct word) the one who was not likely to meet the structuring interdict which will make it pass from the wild state to the human state" Letter published in *Le Monde* on February, 16, 2002.

favour of the wide-scale return of the concept of incompetence, parental irresponsibility or lack of authority again became a major issue.

Since then, the subject has remained latent and recurrent. Although no action was taken on the suspension of family allowances in the case of antisocial behaviour by children, the idea was occasionally invoked as a form of threat particularly from the political right but also at the level of a certain number of local communities. For its part, the socialist government preferred, on the occasion of the 1998 'family conference',⁵ to propose measures designed to help parents in their educational mission: 'counselling, support and parental assistance networks'. The aim was to create a budget, managed at local level, for the support of associations and local initiatives seeking to create discussion groups or support facilities for parents under the supervision of the *Délégation interministérielle à la Famille* (DIF)⁶. Three million Euros were set aside between 1999 and 2001, half of which came from the family branch of the social security system. These operations were carried out by local associations, including departmental groups of family associations. Four influential types of action were implemented: those which relate to parent-school relations; exchange of knowledge and experience between parents; meetings between parents and professionals; the organization of parent-child activities.

However, it appeared more and more difficult for the socialist party and the 'rainbow left' government (socialists, communists and the greens) to ignore this issue that was becoming increasingly hot to handle, at the risk of allowing itself to become involved in a moral debate on the subject of the family. The approach of the highly important political elections of March 2001 (municipal) and of May 2002 (presidential and legislative) took care of the rest.

Among government initiatives, mention should be made of a measure introduced by Ségolène Royal, the Minister for the Family, Childhood and Handicapped Persons, concerning the reform of parental authority. But, notwithstanding her cautious attitude towards the issue of insecurity, this ministry did not wholly escape unscathed concerning its responsibility in respect of the spread of delinquency.

In February 2001, the minister announced measures intended to urge parents to exercise full responsibility for their children and, in particular, for fathers following separation: *"Parents must regain a form of authority in response to the antisocial and risk-provoking conduct on the part of young people. There must be an end to the 'do as you please' attitude, the desire to be friends with one's offspring induced in many cases by a guilty conscience on the part of divorcing parents. In the absence of barriers and constraints, young people become immature adults. All fathers and mothers, irrespective of their lifestyle, must be given additional help in putting authority of this kind into practice."*⁷

The aim of the government was *"to redefine parental authority by insisting on the responsibility of parents in the education of their children; the reaffirmation of the joint character of the exercise of parental authority through definition of the rules applicable to all parents; promotion of the alternating residence procedure following divorce and the provision of a legal basis to facilitate the development of family mediation"* (action proposed by Ségolène Royal, Minister for the Family, Childhood and Handicapped Persons, on Thursday, 26 April, 2001)⁸. Notwithstanding the scope of the proposed aims, it is remarkable that Ségolène Royal has herself chosen to present these measures as an effort to restore parental authority in a context of excessive laxity and a dangerous 'do as you please' attitude.

⁵ Since 1994, a family conference is organised each year (except in 2002 because of the elections) which brings together ministers in charge, trade unions, family associations and high-level civil servants. It provides the opportunity for the government to announce a new family plan.

⁶ Inter-ministerial Delegation on Family.

⁷ Ségolène Royal's press conference on the occasion of the presentation of the reform project on parental authority published in *Le Monde* on 28 February, 2001.

⁸ Among the concrete measures announced, one can mention the reading, during the ceremony of marriage, not only of the obligations of the husbands but also of the main articles of the Civil code concerning parental authority; the creation of a solemn meeting of recognition of cohabitant parents in front of a registrar; the inscription of the rules concerning parental authority in the family record book; and following divorce, the possibility of alternating custody of the children; the creation of a booklet of paternity; the delivery of a copy of the administrative documents to the non custodial parent; the linking of the child to the social security of each parent; the maintenance of train reductions for the separated families.

These different elements in the reform of legislative provisions for the family were introduced in a general climate of denunciation of parents' failure to take responsibility for their children when confronted with a presumed 'explosion of insecurity'. At the same time, however, a number of experts challenged this approach on the grounds that the institutions (justice, law, education), at which an accusing finger is pointed whenever mention is made of the spread of delinquency, appeared to blame the private sphere.

During the summer of 2001, one witnessed a marked resurgence of this subject on the media's agenda following the decision of the right-wing Mayor of Orléans to forbid young persons under the age of 13 to be on their own on the streets of three 'sensitive' districts between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m., a measure that was termed a '*couvre-feu pour les mineurs*' (a curfew for minors). This provision was moreover adopted by other mayors in the metropolitan centres of Cannes, Nice and Étampes, but more importantly it was ratified by the *Conseil d'État* in July when analogous municipal decisions, adopted in 1997 had been annulled by the administrative tribunals. This decision to ratify these repressive municipal decrees led to lively debate and some measure of denunciation, notably from the League of Human Rights, because of its concern for the restriction of public and individual rights. But this decision on the part of the *Conseil d'État* resulted principally in the consolidation of support for greater severity in the struggle against juvenile delinquency and parental abandonment.

In August 2001, the publication of the disappointing statistics on delinquency by the Ministry of the Interior showing an increase of nearly 10% had, according to a headline in *Le Monde*, definitively placed '*delinquency at the core of public debate*'. These statistics on delinquency, which reflect offences reported by the police and gendarmerie, were no better on the eve of the presidential and legislative campaigns of 2002. There was a further increase in offences of 5.7%, thereby accounting for more than 4 million ascertained infringements involving 177,000 minors, with an increase in the number of juvenile delinquents under the age of 13.

The fact that these statistics effectively show an increase in delinquency remains highly problematic. For the *Centre de recherche sociologique sur le droit et les institutions pénales* (CESDIP) — (Sociological Research Centre on Criminal Law and Institutions) and experts in criminology such as Laurent Mucchielli, Philippe Robert or Bruno Aubusson de Cavarlay, it implies an upgrading of surveillance services on the part of the gendarmerie and the police or a more systematic recording of their activities: "*It is probable that over the past few years, police and gendarmerie services have been encouraged to record complaints of delinquency victims more systematically, owing to the fact that they received recommendations in this sense... One enters into a vicious circle when one considers an indicator of means—what the police is doing—for the reading of the insecurity barometer*" (B. Aubusson de Cavarlay interviewed by *Le Monde* on 29 January, 2002, see also Aubusson de Cavarlay 2002).

By gaining the spotlight of the media,⁹ the subject of insecurity, the increase in juvenile delinquency and parental abandonment, raised a serious problem for the leading left-wing candidate in the presidential election. Lionel Jospin, who had to define a position on the subject of delinquency and the family before the media, was frequently compelled to answer questions on the difference between his propositions and those of Jacques Chirac. In effect, his platform, and also Mr Chirac's platform, included the projected reopening of detainment centres for juvenile delinquents (which however had been abolished by Mr Peyrefitte, the right-wing minister in the 1970s owing to ineffectiveness and extreme violence)—and the immediate pressing of charges ('comparution immédiate') against juveniles, a measure until then applied exclusively in the case of adults, and thereby questioning traditional legislation concerning justice for minors (*Ordonnance de 1945*)¹⁰.

Numerous experts once again protested against these measures and denounced security campaigns and catchphrases such as 'zero tolerance'. A petition brought together a number of renowned specialists in this field, such as the sociologists Eric Debardieux, Rémi Lenoir, François Dubet, Laurent Mucchielli and magistrates such as Alain Bruel or psychiatrists such as Stanislas Tomkiewicz.¹¹ (next side) But this led to nothing. The election results showed that the issue of insecurity had borne its fruits: the elimination of Lionel Jospin in the first presidential round, the appearance on the scene of the extreme right candidate Le Pen in second place and finally, the election of Jacques Chirac by an overwhelming majority in a 'republican reflex'.

⁹ According to an investigation which measures the quantitative importance of various issues on television, radio or in the press, during the first quarter of 2002, three times more French people were confronted with questions of insecurity in the media than with the problem of unemployment.

¹⁰ This legislation was a way to distinguish clearly the criminal treatment of minors compared to adults.

The first Raffarin government then set itself the task of implementing the electoral promises of the majority party. The new Minister for the Interior and the Justice Minister decided to promote recruitment in the police and gendarmerie and to increase their budgets significantly, to publish monthly statistics on delinquency, to stiffen control in 'no-go' areas, to reform the '1945 Ordonnance', to reopen detainment centres for minors and authorise imprisonment of juveniles from the age of 13, notwithstanding the fact that French prisons are overcrowded owing to a dramatic increase in numbers (+15.5% inmates and +25% in custody) in the course of a year¹². As of 3 August, 2002, a special provision (the Estrosi amendment) even permits the withholding of family allowances in the case where a minor is placed in one of the new detainment centres for the re-education of 13–16-year old juveniles. This measure emphasizes the fact that delinquency is not a societal problem and transfers the blame to the family.

It is difficult to understand how any such financial penalty levied on an already impoverished household whose resources are often heavily dependant on allowances can serve to restore parental authority. The purpose of any such measure is clearly different. It is a question of satisfying public opinion through the adoption of ideologically exemplary measures for the symbolic restoration of public order. It constitutes a return to 'La police des familles' (Donzelot 1977) or to 'blaming the victim' (Ryan 1971).

Main reforms

After the adoption of the PACS in 1999, following a very lively debate in the media (Commaillie & Martin 1999 & 2000), Jospin's Government, and more specifically the Minister of Family, Childhood and Handicapped Persons proposed and implemented in 2001 and 2002 important reforms in the field of family law, on the following issues:

- Compensatory allowance ('prestation compensatoire') in the case of divorce (Law n°2000–596 30 June 2000), with the aim of putting a time limit (eight years) on the money that should be paid by an ex-spouse to compensate for the decrease in the resources of the other partner due to divorce and giving priority to payment as capital.
- The rights of the surviving spouse (possibility to stay in his/her house for one year, for example) and equality between all the children in terms of inheritance for children born illegitimately (Law n°2000–1135 3 December 2001).
- Anonymous childbirth ('Accouchement sous X') and access to parental information (Law n°2002–93, 22 January 2002).
- Parental authority, (Law adopted the 21 February 2002).
- The name of the child and the choice of the father's versus mother's name or both (Law adopted the 21 February 2002).
- Divorce, as a proposition of reform presented to the national Assembly, on 10 October 2001 and to the Senate on 22 February 2002.

This last reform dealing with divorce had two main objectives: to simplify the mutual agreement proceedings, with only one hearing and not two as before and to reduce the length of the proceedings which on average is nine months but also to abolish the 'fault proceedings'. This last proposition has been rejected by the senators. Nevertheless, this reform has not been adopted and was again put forward in Parliament in July 2003 and adopted in 2004, with a similar proposition by the present government.

The most important reform of the last socialist government was certainly parental authority reform. The objective was clearly to equalize the position of the father and the mother in terms of parental responsibility, in

¹¹ „The campaign without precedent on insecurity, political escalation and the excessive coverage in the media which accompany it worry us seriously.... These measures come close to manipulation and suggest young people facing difficulties are responsible for insecurity. This comes close to irresponsibility and distracts from true solutions which should be implemented.” (Le Monde).

¹² In August 2002, French prisons accommodated nearly 56,000 people, while having only 47,500 places. More than half of the prisoners suffer from psychiatric disorders.

marriage, as well as outside marriage or after divorce. This reform entered into civil law, entails the possibility of shared custody and has instituted paternal leave (implemented in January 2002) and even a paternal record book.

Paternal leave (11 days paid leave covered by the social insurance system, or 18 days for multiple births, than can be taken during the four months after the birth of a child) has been a success. In 2002, 250,000 fathers took parental leave, irrespective of whether he was a wage-earner, self-employed or unemployed. Another measure, adopted in 2001, concerns parental leave and a specific allowance for those parents who have to cope with a serious illness of a child, to care for him or her at home (1,800 families benefited from this measure in 2001). Last but not least, a special fund has been used to finance 20,000 new places in childcare institutions (municipal and parental crèches).

In 2003 two reforms were introduced: the return of the reform of the divorce proceedings in civil law and the reform of the childcare allowance in social law. The project of reform of divorce proceedings is a continuation of previous ones. First, the mutual agreement formula (60% of the cases), aims at reducing the number of hearings from two to only one, in order to simplify and ease the proceedings for those parents who have reached an agreement. A divorce in the situation where there is an irreversible breakdown in marital relations (1.4% of the cases), will be pronounced after two years compared to six years in the previous system. The divorce by fault (38% of the cases) is maintained in the case of 'serious violation of the duties and obligations of marriage'. The role of mediation is also emphasized in order to help couples to reach an agreement.

For five years, between 1994 and 1998, the family branch of the social security system was in deficit. However, as of 1999 there was a surplus of 0.254 billions Euros in 1999, 1.44 billion Euros in 2000, 1.7 billion Euros in 2001, 1.1 billion Euros in 2002 and 1.7 billion Euros in 2003. Only a small part of this surplus (2%) was used to help French families in their daily life in 2003: around 32 million Euros only. The rest of this surplus was transferred to the pension fund.

In April 2003, the last Family Conference was the occasion for the Raffarin government to present the project for family policy, completely focused on the reform of the French childcare policy (for the under three year olds), in the realm of the famous 'simplification and free choice' ideology. Even if these measures were effective only in 2004, it seems interesting to us to note that they express a very strong commitment on family issues in a very difficult economic background (increase in unemployment, bad economic indicators, reduction of the budget, etc.), as if, as a few commentators suggest, the government were trying to compensate for the bad news and prospects on the pension reform, health and unemployment.

So, the Government only presented the reform which proposes to replace all previous allowances (only for children born after the 1 January 2004):

- APJE (*Allocation pour jeune enfant* – allowance for young children), a means tested allowance from the fifth month of pregnancy up to the child's third year, approximately 159 per month;
- AFEAMA (*Aide à la famille pour l'emploi d'une assistante maternelle agréée*-family allowance for the employment of a registered childminder), which helped parents who employed a professional childminder to look after their child(ren) in her own home to pay the welfare costs;
- AGED (*Allocation de garde d'enfant à domicile*- allowance for home childcare), which helped parents to compensate for up to 75% of the cost of a childminder who cares for their child(ren) in their own home;
- APE (*Allocation parentale d'éducation* - paid parental leave), a flat rate non means-tested parental leave (495 for the full allowance) for parents with two or more children who want to stay home and stop their professional activity completely or partially,

There is an unique, almost universal, allowance called PAJE: *prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant* and there are four main elements, for this reform:

- A birth bonus: 800 before the birth of a child;
- A flat rate means-tested allowance with a ceiling of 4,120, distributed until the child is three years of age;
- A subsidy for those who want their child to be cared for by a registered childminder or in a 'crèche', and to stay in the labour market; this depends on the revenue of the household and on the type of carer (registered childminders, non professional carers, crèche).

- A subsidy for those parents who decide to stop their professional activity to care for their child, a paid parental leave, which is 340 per month. This allowance may be paid to a family with two children until the youngest child is three years of age, with a condition of activity (the parent has to be on the labour market for at least two years out of the last four years). It could be paid also for the first child, but only during the first six months after maternity leave and only if the mother has worked during the past two years.

The government proposes also a fiscal incentive to encourage enterprises to develop private childcare solutions. In addition, the government has announced that 200 million Euros will be made available to create 20,000 new places in childcare institutions, and a tax credit to help develop childcare services in enterprises. Lastly the government announced an improvement in the prestige and salary of childminders.

The Government's estimate for the financing of the plan was about 1 billion Euros, which will be quite problematic in the future. The surplus of the family branch of the social security system in 2003 about equals that amount, but for 2004, it is only 800 to 900 million Euros. What about the future? Uncertainty does not only affect the finance side, but also the costs: nobody knows exactly how many women with a first child will prolong their maternity leave by six months parental leave.

But the other important aspect of the reform is that it completely ignores other major issues, that are receiving much attention in other European countries: the development of public childcare solutions throughout the entire country; the payment of parental leave on the basis of the previous salary (80% as in Sweden or Iceland), and more importantly, the question of equal opportunity for women and men, which could lead to a distinction between maternal, paternal and parental leave (three months for each as in Iceland, for example).

Some doubts, criticisms and controversies still exist about the financing of these measures, but also about the impact of paid parental leave for women. As a matter of fact, almost half of the beneficiaries of the APE system did not return to the labour market after the end of the allowance, contrary to the aim of the law, which is supposed to give them the right to an equivalent job at the end of parental leave.

Challenges for the future of family life and family policies

Double-income families and the new 'gender contract'

Because of the very high participation rate of women in the labour market, (eight women in ten between 25 and 50 years old are active and 70% are employed full time), 60% of couples living with children are both active. This percentage depends, of course, on the number of dependent children living in the household: 64% of the parents with two children are both working, but only 44% of the couples with three children. This trend means that the traditional 'gender contract', or the 'male breadwinner model' is called into question. Nevertheless, the gender division of domestic and caring tasks is still very unequal, and inertia of behaviour means that the road to equality in that field is still very long (if it continues at the same speed of change that we observed with the last two inquiries in 1986 and 1999, we will need about a century to share these tasks equally between men and women). On average, a man living in a couple devotes two hours and a half each day to domestic tasks compared to five hours for women. Another challenge concerns the work timetables and the development of atypical times of work. This phenomenon is increasing and has posed new problems for households, the more so in a country where the childcare services are only accessible during normal working hours, i.e., from 8 am to 6 pm (Le Bihan & Martin 2003). Therefore, it is also a big challenge for the policy maker: How can this situation be regulated? Introduce new 24 hour and 7 days a week services as in Scandinavian countries; regulate the labour market in such a way that these types of atypical and, mostly unpredictable timetables do not flourish; encourage the enterprises concerned to develop a specific answer to this problem, etc.

From youth to young adults

France is also being challenged by a new organization of the life cycle. Between 1945 and 1975, it was generally considered that life was divided into three main phases: childhood, time of education, ending with adolescence; adulthood, time of work with a slow but regular progression; and old age, time for retirement, a period now called the third age. This organization of the life cycle is changing. The prolongation of schooling up to 18 years of age and the access to high school for a majority of young people means a lengthening of the first phase. On average, young women are mainly living with their parents up to 21 years old and young men up to 24 years old. Around 10% of young adults are living in their parents' home, even if they spend more than half of their time outside their home. Others are living in an independent flat during the week, but come back to their parents' home at the weekends. This 'lengthening of youth' is challenging public policy (Cicchelli & Martin, 2004). The debate revolves around the creation of a new social status for young adults and even a new allowance to permit them to be more economically independent of their parents. The alternative is to discuss the limit to which family allowances may be distributed to the parents in charge of dependent young adults (up to 25 or older?).

The caring needs of children and the frail elderly: a new contract between generations

The aging of French society, i.e., the increase in the number of older people (over 60 or 65 years old) compared to the youngest (under 20 years old), is obvious. People aged more than 60 increased drastically between the two last censuses in 1990 and 1999, from 11.3 to 12.5 million (an increase of 1.2 million). This increase is going to speed up with the 'baby-boom' generation, i.e., the approach of the numerous generations of the baby boom to retirement age. The population which is increasing even faster corresponds to the more aged people. The number of people over 75 years old was about 4.5 million in 1999 (an increase of 500,000 between 1990 and 1999).

A quite significant proportion of this 'fourth age' generation is concerned with caring needs (receiving help for bathing, dressing, lunches, walking, etc.), or what we call in France, dependency. Taking into account that inter-generational cohabitation is much rarer nowadays, 40% of the people aged more than 80, are living alone. In other words, more than half of the people living alone in their household are over 60 years old. The national statistic institute (INSEE) estimates that there are about 1.2 million frail elderly people of which 800,000 could apply for a new allowance, 'allocation personnalisée d'autonomie' (APA, personal allowance for autonomy) to help them to pay for services. But in fact, the family is still the main provider of daily help and, within the family, mainly women: wives, daughters, daughters-in-law. So there is a double trend: lengthening of youth and old age means that the 'middle generation' or the 'buffer generation' (45–60 year olds) is under pressure from work, young dependent children and frail elderly parents (Le Bihan & Martin 2003).

In summer 2003, France experienced a major tragedy when a heat wave hit the country. This tragedy made the government adopt new measures. In April 2003, the government decided to reduce the conditions of access to the APA, criticizing the previous government and its finance plan. In September, however, after the heat wave, the government had to announce a new plan to guarantee the financing of APA and also to increase responses: a major plan for the frail elderly.

Between 4 and 10 August 2003, 6,500 people died in France because of the heat wave. But between the 10 and 13 August the temperature was extremely high, minimum 25.5° during the night and up to 10,000 people died because of it. On 25 September, the Institute of medical research INSERM and more recently INSEE confirmed that more than 15,000 people died that summer because of this heat wave: 42% of these deaths occurred in hospitals, 35% at home, 19% in retirement homes and 3% in private hospitals. In September, some newspaper and politicians were criticizing the lack of responsibility of the families, who had left their aged parents alone, without any support, to take their normal summer holidays. This argument was ongoing at the beginning of September, even if some experts were arguing that, on the contrary, the family was the main source of help and care. The various official reports and inquiries published afterwards show clearly that the lack of responsibility and response was due to the government and administration and that the gap between social

and health services was very detrimental. Right-wing politicians had to face the political impact of this event, which shows clearly the importance of the combination of formal and informal sources of solidarity, an inter-connection of the health and social services, the huge importance of local response to such a phenomenon, the responsibility of the administration to deal with such an event, and so on. The share between public and private regarding care needs, may become the major issue on the political agenda.

A last challenge may be to define a real policy towards children, in a perspective of social investment in the future of society (Esping-Andersen 2002; Martin 2004), which means an improvement in the social and economic conditions of the child, by facilitating conciliation between work and family life for active parents, promoting dual earner families and improving the level of education of children. Adopting such a preventive perspective may be much more efficient than to adopt repairing measures towards adults confronted by social exclusion. It is also a way to consider social policy in a longitudinal perspective, taking into account that tomorrow's social problems are made today.

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WALTER BIEN

Germany

Introduction

“Family means Future—Joint Family Policy Thrust in the European Union”

“The Member States of the European Union have been confronted with strong social, economic, demographic and societal challenges. If we do not manage to cope with these challenges and do not make use of the opportunities that are rooted in these trends, it will have serious impacts on man's social existence.

Particularly the population trend constitutes a process the consequences of which are currently discussed on a large scale but cannot yet be assessed comprehensively by far. On the one hand, the increasing life expectancy of the population includes a large potential for the government, society and the families, which has not yet been used to a sufficient extent. On the other hand, fewer children mean less wealth, less dynamism, less innovation and a lower standard of living.

In politics we therefore have to deal intensively with the forms of living together that people wish to realize in different shapes as a prerequisite for the education of their children. This particularly applies to families. Families constitute a source of stability for societies by giving the individual person support and orientation in times of major change. For the great majority of people, family is the most important part of their lives.

The European Union does not have any competence for family policy. The member states are right to consider family policy as a national task. Nevertheless they have granted considerable scope for action to the European Union in the past. The support of the family has not been stipulated as an objective and task in the EC Treaty. However, it has been laid down in permanent form that the Community pursues the goal to achieve a high level of social protection in all member states and to promote gender equality. The particular regulations in these areas are of the same importance to family policy as the objectives agreed upon in Lisbon which serve as a central guideline in policy.

In the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union the protection of families has been stipulated as an integral part of the Constitution for Europe: ‘The family shall enjoy legal, social and economic protection.’ (Article 33 paragraph 1) The 25 member states of the European Union have different economic and socio-political traditions. In view of the major challenges for society it is important to share our views about the issues that are currently dealt with in family policy.”¹

Good, reliable data are an indispensable basis for political action and objective debate, both in the national and international context. Responsible advocates and actors in the public sphere depend on the support of sound figures, accurately reflecting reality. This is particularly relevant in those socio-political areas at the heart of current debate and which call for far-reaching decisions.

Developments such as changing family structures, the growing number of families of different ethnic origins and current demographic processes all have a fundamental impact on social security systems. Developments in this area are not limited to the national context; they are global phenomena.

We are living in an era of internationalisation and globalisation and the mobility this entails leads to different forms of living together. Yet there is a constant factor in the midst of all upheaval and innovation and that is the family. The family today has many more facets than in previous times; in addition to the married couple family with children, there are a large number of non-married families, lone parents and families made up of several households. But the changes in external form do not alter the fact that the family is still the core element of society. The family is and remains the basic model for community spirit in action, meaning that only a nation which is family friendly is a nation with a future. For this reason, acceptance of the family is an essential political credo—in Germany and throughout the world.

¹ Text from an invitation to a European family policy conference hosted by Renate Schmidt, Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, in Berlin on 2 December 2004.

The need to foster the family links us all. But to achieve this, we also need good arguments. And these rely on quality data. That is why this report is based solely on data from official statistics or from data sets financed from public funds. The independent and representative nature of these data is guaranteed by law and is the result of sound and reliable research.”²

Both these citations of Renate Schmidt indicate how discussions have changed with regard to issues on family and family policy in Germany.

Policies, challenges and opportunities

The main discussions in recent years have been related to the question: what will German society be like in 2010? In an attempt to answer this question, the Federal government introduced a programme called ‘Agenda 2010’. The purpose of the Agenda 2010 reform programme is to reform the welfare state while preserving its principles. The key objectives are more growth, stable pensions, lower health care costs, better education, lower taxes and thus more disposable income, as well as more money for investment in research.

The German parliament passed key legislation relating to Agenda 2010 in December 2003. Some parts of these laws have been in effect since the beginning of this year and are showing initial results. This includes health reform, labour market reforms, and the creation of new all-day schools.

Agenda 2010 reforms will continue. This year and next the government will initiate reforms in the areas of education as well as in research and development. The coming years are to be years of innovation, requiring renewal and the willingness of society as a whole to explore new paths (Deutsche Bundesregierung 2004).

The main purpose of the discussion is the reconstruction of the social system in accordance with current financial and economic constraints. Therefore the need to reduce costs determines the discussion. Independently of this discussion, both society and the political system have recognized that the society of the future will be a society of human beings, so the power and strength of this future society will be related to the power and strength of the people living in such a society. Future society will not be exclusively tied to the economic system or capital but also to human capital. Thus the increasing importance of human and social capital and also of family matters is one of the main themes discussed nowadays in Germany. Solutions preferably discussed under the given economic constraints are solutions without additional cost. In recent years they were very often addressed to the work-life (labour-family) balance.

Family Alliance

The ‘alliance for the family’ will initiate a long-term lasting economy and family policy. The alliance is based on the consensus that:

- In the long and mid term Germany needs higher birth rates as a protection against negative economic and social side effects of population decline (BMFSFJ 2003b);
- Human capital is one source of economic success in Germany, so the economic sector needs highly qualified workers and a higher employment rate of women (BMFSFJ 2003a);
- In order to increase the level of human capital, children need support and education particularly in the early years (BMFSFJ 2003c, 2004a, 2004b).

The partners of the alliance agreed to make an effort to create a family friendly labour force, employment and occupational culture within the areas of:

- business culture
- labour force organisation
- working hours
- human resources development
- family related services.

² Renate Schmidt Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in a foreword to a CD with data on families in Germany (Families in Germany—Facts and Figures).

A realization of these topics is being attempted between local unions, local businesses, local politicians and local family organisations. Another activity is a contest based on an audit on family friendly companies with the title 'Success Factor Family'. The audit is based on an instrument which allows examinations on family friendly activities.

Childcare

Childcare is discussed not only with the intention of achieving a family-labour balance, but also with respect to the needs of children in strengthening early childhood needs and the responsibility of the parents for education. Providing opportunities within the first six years of life will strongly influence the future, therefore childcare is not only a question of quantity but also of quality, and of affordable good quality. Childcare is the area in which key qualifications could be learned. The development of children should be optimised in relation to their age, their possibilities and their individual time needs (BMFSFJ 2003c).

Family competence

Parents have the main responsibility for the education of their children. To fulfil this responsibility parents sometimes need help. One area for giving support is media competence, especially sensitivity to the problem of 'children and violence in electronic media'. A new law for the protection of youth and operational from 1 April 2003 decrees that computer games have to be labelled as being suitable for children of a certain age. This will make it easier for parents to find appropriate games for their children's age. Another initiative is 'Look on'. Together with media journals, television stations and the media-related industry help will be given for everyday situations, e.g. by a Parent-Child-Media-Workshop or a media passport (BMFSFJ 2003d).

Reconstructing the social system under economic constraints and the promotion of human and social capital are interventions into complex interwoven systems. The main difficulties have arisen because most solutions are discussed separately for the pension system, health system, labour force, education system, fertility and the issue of migration. But they are complex and interwoven, especially when family is involved, so these discussions are accompanied by a considerable feeling of uncertainty, dissatisfaction and fear.

Family report

Every second legislature period, the federal government has to prepare a family report to be presented to parliament. One part of the report will be drawn up by an independent group of experts, while the other part is a political interpretation of the results of the first part by the federal government. The Fifth Family Report was a general report describing the future of human capital in Germany (BMFSFJ 1995, 2003e).

The Sixth Family Report was related to migration (BMFSFJ 2000). The Seventh Family Report will deal with the Future of Family and the Future through the Family. Central topics are balance of family and labour in the life cycle, change and stability of family, change in labour, education and economy, financial and time economy of families, generation relationships between children, parents and grandparents and changes in gender roles.

The report should show that the basic changes in the life cycles of the family members, the changed time structures in economy and labour, the differentiation of family environments, different cultures and the new definition of generational relationships require a new balance between the family members, the structure of families, neighbourhoods, labour force and society. This balance cannot be restricted to isolated core families with a clearly defined role, if the outcome of families is based on family-orientated and emotionally stable relationships. The family as an economic factor should be seen also as the family as a personal social solidarity network of its members.

Family relationships

General discussion topics

In recent years, discussion on family policy in the Federal Republic of Germany has been greatly influenced by fears rooted in the current low fertility rate of around 1.4, coupled with the dramatic estimates of the Ninth population forecast for the next 25–50 years. The media sensationalised the figures as being a drastic population decline entailing considerable disadvantages for Germany as an industrial nation. The discussion on population forecasts gave rise to a number of different proposals to remedy the anticipated situation in relation to the labour market. On the whole, the changes discussed and partially implemented, can be classified as positive. Interestingly enough, however, the triggering factor—the birth rate—did not provide any incentive for change, because it has remained stable at a low level over the past 20 years—at least in the western part of Germany.

A different pattern emerged in the eastern part of Germany. The birth rate sharply decreased after reunification and it is now slowly increasing, with the aim of achieving the same rate as in the western part of Germany.

A new population forecast from the Federal Statistical Agency in April 2003 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2003) provides a different view of the problem. The low birth rate is still seen as a problem. Furthermore, the number of possible mothers is decreasing, because of the decrease in the birth rate over the past 30 years. As a result the absolute number of births will go down. On the other hand, life expectancy is increasing and migration is expected to be positive. So the population forecast for the next 20 years shows absolute overall numbers of the population which are not very different from today, but with a higher average age. This Tenth population forecast of the Federal Statistical Office with its moderate estimates for the future has not yet been recognized by the public media and the politicians.

It would appear that public opinion and political discussion are only tenuously connected with the results of these scientific forecasts and it is sometimes hard to say if this is good or bad for the family situation.

One highly discussed topic is migration, which is sometimes expected to compensate for the lack of births. However, the Federal Agency does not believe that there will be a significant effect on population distribution. Because of fear of the lack of highly qualified people for the labour market, the Federal Republic of Germany was keen to improve the conditions for immigration, especially for highly-qualified labour immigrants. Initial changes to facilitate immigration of skilled labour had already been implemented but was stopped by the Supreme Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht) because of the incorrect way the proposed laws were implemented. Hence, discussion on the problems of migration started again, without any idea of how the process will end. In addition, in the initial concern about the decline of the German population, young people—particularly young women—were accused of endangering the survival of the German population because of their lack of motivation to have children. However, these allegations quickly subsided and gave way to more realistic ideas on how to solve the problems.

Besides migration, the discussion soon focused on the enormous potential of qualified women. If future provisions enable them to reconcile work and family life better, they could close the anticipated gap between the supply of and demand for skilled labour. Meanwhile, the governments at the federal and 'Länder' (state) levels, as well as communities and industries, have all taken a number of initiatives to enable childcare services to operate more flexibly during working hours. This is a prerequisite to increase the number of employed young mothers. Although these measures were mainly introduced to ensure competitive advantage, their implementation also substantially contributes to securing the livelihood of women as well as their vocational choice. In this way, these measures also enhance equal opportunities for both genders. Helping to reconcile work and family could even have the side effect of raising the birth rate.

Equalising the burden on families also plays an important role in the discussion on low birth rates and the reconciliation of work and family life. As in other European Union (EU) countries, the developments in Germany over the past few decades have shifted poverty and the lack of financial and material resources from the older to the younger generation. Most especially, the share of children below 10 years of age who are dependent on public subsidies has increased by four to five times in the Federal Republic of Germany, while the

share of the elderly population receiving such subsidies has slightly decreased. Public debate also became aware of the fact that this development has had a negative effect on the birth rate, which needs to be counteracted by improving the situation of young families. This then gave rise to the first serious analysis of what measure would be more appropriate: to increase personal allowances (e.g. child benefits) to young families, or to improve the social infrastructure to help young mothers improve their situation on their own by taking on paid work.

To sum up, it can be said that in Germany, the public debate is centred on a well-known fact, i.e., the low birth rate. The expected shortage of labour and the resulting deterioration of Germany as an industrial nation in the medium term has created a favourable climate for a more sensible and judicious family policy. Low birth rates and the lack of labour in the near future make the situation of the family of paramount importance in the political agenda. Most players in the field recognize that population related policy, which implies a policy which is strongly related to the decision to have a child and ends with the child's birth, is not enough. Only family policy which concentrates on the whole life cycle and relates to all different kinds of problems of family life can change the situation.

On the one hand, the anticipated problems form a good basis on which to discuss and develop a better family policy. On the other hand, the shortage of money and budgetary problems decrease the possibility of introducing a real change in the situation of families. Because of economic changes in Germany and the positive influences of economic fear with regard to family policy, more and more of the discussion within the government and between government and industry related to family policy is centred on the economy.

In 2002 a new calculation of the costs of raising children based on an economic household survey (EVS) was made public. The cost of raising children for single mothers was below the cost of raising children for families with both parents. The cost of raising children for single mothers varied from Euro 400 to Euro 500 for per child per month, irrespective of whether the single mother had one or two children or lived in eastern or western Germany. The cost in families with two parents varied from about Euro 500 in three children families to about Euro 570 in one child families. Calculated over 18 years the average cost of raising a child in Germany is around Euro 120,000 (Münnich & Krebs 2002).

Also in discussion with different groups of society the economic value of families has shown to be more and more important, so reconciliation of work and family is easier to achieve if benefits can be reaped by all sectors involved. A model calculation, carried out here for a company with 1,500 employees 44.6% of which are women, shows that family related activities could reduce the legal-based family related costs of a company by 55% to 78%. Such family friendly activities include flexibility of work time, information, computer related work at home, company organised childcare and so on. So an investment in family friendly activities is not only related to higher motivation of the staff, but is also a cost reducing factor (BMFSFJ 2003a).

The basic idea behind such calculations and such arguments is the only family policy which has not yet been realized, a cost reducing and/or economic related family policy. Improvements in family policy could provide the basis for increasing birth rates. An increase in birth rates without improvements in family policy seems unthinkable.

Fewer children and the decreasing rate of women's employment escalate the economic problems of aging societies. Young people in Germany want children. Society, at least in Germany, needs children. The problem is to bring both together. Therefore, a good family policy should be based on equal opportunities for both sexes and should be orientated towards the wishes and needs of the population. The expectancies of the majority of people include the reconciliation of family and employment. Therefore, a better childcare infrastructure and a decrease in the opportunity costs of children should be developed with the aim of higher employment for women as well as higher birth rates. This will be a win-win situation for families, companies, government and society (Rürup & Gruescu 2003). However, the prospects for improving the situation of women and young families, and in particular for better reconciling work and family, have not been very favourable for many decades when compared to the importance of the issue. It remains to be seen whether this climate will continue long enough for the constructive approaches discussed to be implemented.

Family relationships

In Germany, the last century was the century of women. The traditional role and opportunities for women has changed dramatically. There has been a trend towards more fairness between both sexes in public discussion, in politics and in private life. Young women, just as young men, see realistic fairness more and more not as unrealistic equality between the partners, but as the basis of a long lasting relationship. Both try to start a relationship based on the idea of fairness, and as long as no children are born most of the couples are successful in having a fairer relationship than their parents had. With pregnancy and after the birth of the first child, the situation changes. While the decision for the first child is a decision of both partners, the decision for a second child tends to be the decision of the woman. When the second child is born the woman very often realizes that something is changing, her involvement in regular family work is much higher than the involvement of the father. The major reason for this change is the situation in the labour market and the importance of the labour force for living conditions in combination with an inadequate childcare system. The risk after a possible divorce of not finding a suitable entry into the labour market is much higher for a woman than for a man. So fairness often ends with the first and certainly with the second child. The difference between the wish for fairness within a couple and the problem of realising it when having children is still an unsolvable problem for many couples. If both of the partners see that the essential problem lies in the structure of society they have a chance for a long lasting relationship. If one or both partners perceive the behaviour of the other partner as being the main cause of problems, the risk of divorce is very high (Fthenakis et al. 2002).

Why is it so hard to achieve a fair partnership after the birth of the first or second child? There are many subjective, acceptable reasons for a gender specific division of labour and family related work. In Germany, most women marry men who have a higher status in the labour market than themselves, and generally there is still gender income inequality. So the decision to effect adequate distribution of family related work and labour becomes an economic decision. The father takes a full-time job and the mother reduces her hours of work to take over family work. Young couples very seldom have a real chance to resist the traditional role division, even if there is the wish for fair distribution. Problems in the childcare system, especially the low flexibility of this system, makes it very hard for young mothers to combine family and a satisfactory career. Men have career opportunities while women lose them after each year involved in family work. So the real income differences at the beginning of parental leave have a worsening influence on future income differences between both partners after one parent leaves work; the differences increase year after year until women start a full-time job again. There is also the significant risk that women are the losers if the relationship ends. Young women, who have a clear idea of their situation and can foresee the consequences, see themselves losing their independence more and more.

Some couples accept this situation and they try to do their best under difficult circumstances. For an increasing number of couples this problem leads to real conflicts. Men and women often personalise this structural problem and each sees the other as the main cause of the problem. Because they have no chance to change the structural inequality by themselves, their relationship will probably end with dramatic consequences for the family, especially for the economic situation of single mothers, the contact of fathers with their children and the economic and mental state of the children.

Discussion of the role of fathers has become more and more important in Germany. While it is understood that women have the same rights in the labour market as men, it is also understood that fathers have rights and duties concerning the education of the child. The legal rights of fathers after divorce have changed, and the commitment of fathers is increasing, but it is still far below the commitment of mothers.

Therefore, programmes should be initiated to remedy the situation, for example, programmes against structural inequality and programmes to improve fairness between husband and wife in a young family and help them solve conflicts. Since the social security system is used by single mothers because of the lack of other opportunities, it is also economically relevant to start programmes to help couples to solve their problems, stay together and not end their relationships without important reasons. Gender mainstreaming is also important for everyday family life and help for young couples should be available, otherwise problems will arise and the difference between the wish for gender fairness and reality will result in broken families. Higher education, equal

opportunities in the labour market, equal pay for equal work are other relevant issues which help to establish stable relationships.

Fairness between generations is also an important issue in Germany. One aspect of increasing life expectancy is the larger number of living generations within a family. One aspect of an aging society is the need for a fair and maybe new distribution of resources between the generations. Both aspects are being discussed within families and within society.

Within a family the relationship between generations is not free from problems, but for most of the family members there are more positive than negative aspects, especially regarding the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents. Within most families one can find a high degree of solidarity, active family relationships, and most importantly the feeling that there are people who will help provide within the same generation, from the younger generation and from the older generation, if such help is needed. The older generation give more money to the younger generation than the other way around. Instrumental help is more often given by the younger generation to the older generation. Communication is the base of real family life and goes from older to younger and from younger to older generations. The stability of the family is established by the feeling of fairness through these different relationships between all generations, balanced over the whole life cycle. Again, the feeling of fairness is more important than a balanced household budget. Where there is a feeling of fairness the family can be said to be stable.

In society and especially within the public domain there are intense discussions regarding the abstract fairness between generations in relation to the labour market, the social security system and resources. As a result there is a great deal of discussion about how the effects of an aging society will interfere with generational relationships. Most often the older generation is apprehensive; they are more afraid of the future than the younger generation. Some of these problems will be addressed in the description of the socio-economic situation of families. Solving the problems of fairness between the sexes and between the generations will be a major problem for German society and particularly families. Not solving these problems will generate more difficulties and could pose a real danger for the future development of German society.

Socio-economic situation of families

In Germany, about one in three adult persons lives in a nuclear family (the parents are married and have at least one child). The age at marriage and the percentage of unmarried persons are increasing most dramatically in the eastern part of Germany. More than 70% of all Germans believe that there is no happiness without family. Most childless couples want children (73% in the west, 79% in the east). If a couple has one child usually a second and sometimes a third child is born. Growing up without siblings is rare in Germany, only about 17–20% of all children have no siblings. There is an ongoing discussion to make the decision to have the first child easier. This decision is related to expectations regarding stability in work and in a partnership. If the objective and subjective feelings of stability in both areas remain constant, the number of childless women and men will rise.

There is a significant variation in socio-economic situations in the different German states (Bundesländer) which is closely connected to the degree of unemployment: in 2000 the unemployment rates were 8.7% in the west (7.4% in Bavaria and up to 15.8% in Bremen) and 18.8% in the east (16.5% in Thuringia and up to 21.4% in Anhalt-Saxony). Also the situation differs between the big cities (Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Cologne, Munich) and the countryside. Family life in Germany, as in most other EU countries, is related to the economic and cultural background of the region of residence.

The percentage of non-German citizens in the population is 8.9%. The comparison of the living conditions of citizens and non-citizens and differentiation within the population of non-citizens shows a high variation, depending on the reason for migration and labour status. Also, the percentage of non-citizens varies dramatically between states from 19.4% in Hamburg to 1.3% in Thuringia.

Any investigation into inequalities shows the importance of being employed. A good indicator of wealth and poverty is the ratio of household members employed divided by all household members. This indicator is highly sensitive to family constellations and family cycles. Young children in Germany have a high risk of poverty. The percentage of poor young persons under 10 years of age is about five times higher than the percentage of

poor elderly people. When a relationship ends, for a married or non-married couple this reduces the possibility of having a large number of employed persons in a household. Therefore young women with children under six and non-married women are particularly at risk of becoming poor. On the other hand, empty nest families of (married) partners who are both employed and have adult children who are not living in their household do very well economically. The economic situation of families in Germany is strongly related to the specific phase of a family cycle, the region of residence, and being a German citizen. All of these factors contribute greatly towards success in the labour market.

However, there is a discussion about the problems of the pension system given demographic changes. As in other European countries, in Germany there is a call to raise the retirement age. This discussion (as in all European countries) is not related to the impact of such a decision on the labour market. The consequences of dealing with the pension system will generate serious problems for families. In Germany in the last ten years, the absolute number of employed persons has been stable. If in the next four years this continues and the retirement age goes up, by three years for example, in the election year 2006 there will be about six million people out of work instead of four million. A high percentage of these six million unemployed people will be young people. Fairness between generations also includes fairness regarding opportunities in the labour market. For the future of any society it seems more important to have labour prospects for young people in the early phases of the family cycle than for the elderly. Raising the retirement age in a stable labour market would only make sense if, for example, working parents had more opportunities for parental leave as compensation for later retirement. Otherwise young people are the losers in every sense.

Family policies

Increased Expenditures for Family Policies

Over a two year period, child benefit (*Kindergeld*) was adjusted twice: after an increase of Euro 15 for the first and second child in January 1999, it amounted to Euro 128. In January 2000, there was a further increase of Euro 10, bringing it to Euro 138. The next upward adjustment to Euro 154 was envisaged for the beginning of 2002. The basic tax-free amount was increased in two annual steps: in total, it rose from Euro 6,322 to Euro 6,900 in 2000. Moreover, the basic tax rate was lowered from 25.9% to 22.9%. From 2005 onwards, there are plans to gradually increase the basic tax-free amount and to lower the basic tax rate (BMFSFJ 2004c).

In the last year, these costs rose by 3.84 billion Euros, bringing them to around 165.65 billion Euros in 2001. Even if we consider that families finance a considerable part of these amounts themselves (they also pay taxes and other fees flowing into the transfers), the result obtained in this study shows that society finances around one third of the cost of raising children. The largest item consists of kindergartens, schools and youth services offered by regional and/or local authorities (63.25 billion Euros), the second largest item consists of family-policy measures granted under tax legislation, particularly child benefits (31.09 billion Euros) and income-splitting between spouses (23 billion Euros). Monetary transfers by federal, state and local authorities for childcare services, child rearing allowances, family supplements paid by the public service as well as public assistance, accommodation allowance and publicly-assisted housing (29.19 billion Euros) are third on the list. Measures by the statutory health insurance including free insurance for family members and/or dependants, and non-cash benefits for pregnant women and mothers (13.9 billion Euros) are in fourth place.

Recent Changes in Family Policies

- The regulations regarding the *child rearing allowance* (*Erziehungsgeld*) were changed to enable fathers and mothers to distribute their leave from gainful employment better. To make clear that raising children is also work, the term 'parental leave' (*Erziehungsurlaub*)—which tends to connote 'vacation' in German—was substituted by 'parental time' (*Elternzeit*). Since the beginning of 2001, mothers and fathers have also been entitled to take parental leave *at the same time*. During the three years of parental leave, both parents have

the right to work part time, provided the firm has more than 15 employees. The weekly working time allowed was extended from 19 to 30 hours. With the employer's consent, parents may postpone the third year of their parental leave until their child's eighth birthday. Given that the income ceiling for receiving full child rearing allowance had remained unchanged since 1986, the recent 9.5% increase was long overdue: it is currently Euro 16,464 per year for parents with one child older than seven months. For single parents, the income ceiling was raised to Euro 13,498 per year, which corresponds to an 11.4% increase. After a 14% raise in 2001, the supplement for each additional child increased to Euro 2,454 and will be increased by another Euro 343 in each of the following two years. Parents may receive the monthly child rearing allowance amounting to a maximum of Euro 307 for the child's first 24 months of life. If they opt for the shortened period of 12 months, the allowance may be as high as Euro 460. Another new feature is that a parent may receive both a child rearing allowance and unemployment benefits if the latter are granted as income compensation for a weekly working time of up to 30 hours. (BMFSFJ 2004b)

- A reform introduced on 1 January 2001 tailored the *accommodation allowance* to the needs of families. Many low-income households that did not receive an accommodation allowance before the reform have now become eligible. Large families benefit most: on average, their housing allowance is around Euro 61 higher than before. Those who receive an accommodation allowance in the old Federal States receive an average of around Euro 42 more.
- Subsidising *home ownership* now focuses more on families with children. Within the past two years the income ceiling for the allowance granted to people living in their own homes was raised to Euro 163,613 for spouses. In the year the family moves into its new home, this limit increases by Euro 30,678 for each child.
- *Protection against domestic violence*: Besides more public support to improve the material situation of families, legal protection against domestic violence was also improved, thereby strengthening the position of women and children (e.g. by ordering violent men to stay away from the family home). The right to non-violent education was enacted into the Civil Code.

Future plans

An aging society, economic problems and influences on social security systems have influenced government programmes for the next decade. Agenda 2010 is one such programme initiated by the Social Democratic government with regard to the situation of families. Within this programme fighting against child poverty is one aim, e.g. by giving more subsidies to low-income families and to raising the threshold of tax-free income for single parents. In order to reconcile family and work better, the childcare system should be broadened and with regard to the economic sector there is the idea of an alliance of families for a better balance of family and labour. These alliances should be realized as local coalitions for families within a community or small region. The main aim of these activities is increasing fairness between sexes and lowering the risks for women of having children.

Summary

The importance of the family has never been questioned in Germany. However, appreciation of the work involved in raising a family and the importance of families as an investment into the future only became focal issues in the course of the discussion on the potential labour shortage. Family associations and those representing families feel some uneasiness over the fact that the family only received the recognition it deserves by virtue of its role in the production process—thus a back-door entry at best, without any recognition in its own right. However, current acknowledgement of the family's importance is indeed noteworthy. It constitutes a favourable prerequisite for creating a solid and lasting basis for children, women and families—and for not blocking the way into a future that must offer children and adolescents stable conditions for growing up.

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Greece

Introduction

Over the last few years, the Greek economy has shown positive macroeconomic results, in particular GDP growth and an increase in labour productivity. Efforts to join the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) have been recompensed by the introduction of the Euro at the beginning of 2002. This extremely important development for Greece has led to further political and scientific discussion about the content and the character of the economic and social policy, in order to create conditions for improving the level of competitiveness in the context of the common currency. At the same time, Greece continues to be characterised by high—though declining—levels of unemployment affecting specific population groups and by a poor trade balance and low competitiveness. Moreover, Greece faces a relatively high inflation rate and public deficit, in particular for the year 2003, when compared to the European Union (EU)-15 average, as well as relatively severe income inequalities.

Growth in GDP was around 3.8% on average for the period 1997–2003, which is one of the highest levels in the EU (Bank of Greece 2004). Over the same period, productivity rose by 2.6% per year and employment increased by 1.2%. Unemployment rates, which reached a peak level in the late 1990s and then started to decline at a moderate pace, are still some of the highest in the EU-15 as a whole. Moreover, for certain groups, namely women and young people, unemployment rates continue to be significantly higher than the national average (around 50% higher for women while youth unemployment is nearly three times higher than the national average).

As far as families are concerned, family and household structure have been modified, partly because of the increasing participation of women in the labour market and in education, changes in gender roles and relationships and also because of the high level of youth unemployment. Furthermore, as Greece clearly became a migration destination, the question of foreign families, but also more generally, the financial situation of all families, has been debated in the context of present and future social cohesion. The family's standard of living has been clearly affected, among other factors, by the relatively high, and somewhat increasing, inflation rate, which occurred in particular after the introduction of the common currency. This financial constraint is reflected in the increase of the rate of borrowing among families, although these rates remain lower in Greece than they do EU-wide.

Last but not least, the way decisions are taken at the level of policy making in the social field has been affected by the predominance of an economic policy based on the Stability and Growth Pact. In this context, measures, which could be considered as family policy initiatives have been further integrated into policies regarding employment, social protection, social inclusion and equal opportunities.

Issues affecting Greek family and household structures

Changes in family forms and household structures

Both family and household structure have changed over the last few years. According to the final results of the latest General Census (2001), the number of households increased between 1991 and 2001 by nearly 15%, at least double the total population growth over the same decade (6.6%). This trend has resulted in a net decrease in the average size of household (from three persons per household on average in 1991 to 2.8 in 2001).

The increase in the total number of private households is mainly due to developments regarding the one-person household, the households with two members and to a lesser extent to households with three members. All the previous household types increased in numbers between 1991 and 2001, but their contribution to the rise in the total number of households differs quite markedly. In fact, changes in the one-person household

is likely to account for 44% of the increase in the number of households as a whole, while the two and three-person households have contributed to that by 38% and 25% respectively. In addition, the contribution of households with four members to the increase in the number of households was very low (2%) while households with five members and over could decrease the total figures (by -7%), since its number has fallen by -16%. For the largest households (five persons and over), in particular, the strong negative correlation between their size and their increase in numbers continues to persist, although at a lower pace as compared to previous decades. In fact, their share in the total number of households decreased between 1991 and 2001 from 14% to less than 11%. Trends in one-person and four-person households have also to be mentioned, since they tend to diverge significantly. This diversity is reflected by the fact that the share of one-person households in the total number of households has increased from 16% to around 20%, while for households with four members, the corresponding figure has fallen from 23% to nearly 20%. As for the remaining household types, their ranking has not changed a great deal, since their share moved from 27% to 28% (two-persons household) or remained stable at 21% (three-persons household).

Changes seem to be somewhat more pronounced when household size is compared with the population living in private households. In particular, the population living in the largest household has decreased by around -15% while the population living in four-person households has remained somewhat unchanged (an increase of 1%). In contrast to that trend, the population living in the other household types, namely the one, two or three-person households, grew significantly by 40%, 21% and 18% respectively. Greece, however, presents quite a different household pattern when compared to the EU-wide pattern, since nearly 50% of the population lives in households with four persons and over, 43% in households with two or three members and only 7% in one-person households.

The fall in the percentage of family households out of the total number of households, resulting from a lower increase in family households than in non-family households, is one of the more relevant developments of the last decade. Family households, however, currently amount to a rather high share of the total number of households (roughly 75%). An additional important feature is that trends in family households show significant divergences, depending on whether or not children or both parents are among the household members. Thus, while the number of family households without children rose by 30% between 1991 and 2001, family households with children fell by around -6%. At the same time, trends in one-parent families resulted in an increase in its share in the number of family households as a whole by 1.5. It is worth noting that this kind of family continues to be matriarchal, since in four out of five cases the mother is the head of the family.

As regards the relationship between age, household type and population living in specific types of households, it has to be mentioned that, in Greece, the proportion of persons living with their parents remains rather high (around one in three). For the most part (nearly 80%), they are of course young people aged below 24 but also to some extent people in the age group 25-34. In general, young people continue to live for quite a long time in the family household. In fact, over the last 10 years, the youngest age at which 50% of the young people are not living in the parental home has increased for both males and females (from 29 to 31 and from 24 to 27 respectively). As far as the older population is concerned, it is worth mentioning that, among people living with a partner and without children, more than 50% are people aged 65 and over. This percentage is almost at the same level when one-person households are considered. In other words, the elderly are clearly over represented in the two-household forms mentioned above, since they amount to roughly 17% of the total population and to around 50% of the population living in those household forms.

There can be no doubt that all the above changes are closely related, among other factors, to developments regarding family formation and family breakdown as well as birth rates, especially birth order. They also have to do with the longstanding trend in population aging, which favours the increase in the number of one or two person households, the increasing participation of youth in education and the persistence of their extremely high unemployment rates as well.

Marriage, fertility, family breakdown and 'modernisation' of family structure

In recent years, a certain number of indicators appear to suggest a further 'modernisation' of family structure in Greece, which is reflected, among other things, in the delay in family formation, childbearing postponement, shorter marriage duration and the growing number of family breakdowns. In particular, the crude marriage rate has remained at relatively low levels (around six per 1,000 population), whereas the average age at first marriage has continued to grow. The rising delay in marital partnership is also reflected by the increase in the annual average or median age on marriage for different cohorts. Recent research shows that for women born in the late 1960s, the median age at first marriage was 23.1 while for those born in the late 1950s it was 22.5 (Symeonidou 2002). A similar increasing trend seems to occur within successive generations as regards to the proportion of women who have never been married. While 5% of women born at the beginning of the 1960s, have never had a husband, this figure is likely to reach even 20% for women born in 1970 and afterwards.

Generally, evidence points to a closer and closer relationship between the delay in marriage and the postponement of the first childbearing. This is likely to suggest that, even in Greece, marriage rates should no longer be considered as fertility determinants. The fact that both marriage and childbearing are simultaneously postponed could be seen as a signal of people's will to seek the most 'convenient timing' to have children rather than to get married. In other words, in contrast with what had happened in the recent past, it appears that the delay in childbearing is more likely to 'draw on' marriage patterns than the opposite.

At the same time, marital breakdowns have become a more frequent phenomenon. Thus, the crude divorce rate, over the period 1999 to 2003, was clearly higher (by nearly 50%) when compared to figures at the beginning of the 1990s. The mean number of years of marriage duration at divorce is also decreasing over time. It was 14.3 years for the 1970 marriage cohort and fell to roughly 12 years for that of 1985. In addition, marital breakdown developments are also reflected in the growing proportion of marriage dissolved by divorce for the various marriage cohorts. In fact, this proportion was around 8% for the 1970 marriage cohort, while it tends towards rather high levels for the marriage cohorts of the early 1980s (between 12–13%). In other words, this is an increase of around 50% for the marriage cohorts, which had taken place 10 years later. Nevertheless, those levels remain quite low when compared with EU-wide ones (between 28–29% for the marriage cohorts of the early 1980s).

In addition to the above developments, the proportion of couples living in a consensual union and where partners are aged between 16 and 29 years has doubled from the mid-1990s onwards (from 4% to 8%). Nevertheless, the current level is nearly four times lower than the EU-15 average (33%). Moreover, while one out of 100 persons within the total population live in a consensual union in Greece, the corresponding figure for the EU-15 is nine out of 100. Lastly, the number of out-of-wedlock births has experienced a rather sharp increase (from more than 2% in the mid-1990s to 4% in the early 2000s). In comparison with the EU-15 as a whole (27%), this is, however, an extremely low level. In other words, all divorce, marriage and new family forms indicators show that the average speed of the process towards a further 'modernisation' in family formation is clearly higher in Greece than in the EU-15 as a whole. However, Greece still remains in a cluster of countries where family structure presents a certain number of 'traditional' features.

Fertility patterns show that very low fertility has become a rather structural characteristic of the demographic regime in Greece. The combination of a later timing with less intensity has led to very low level in the total fertility rate (around 1.3 in recent years). In fact, the lower number of children when compared to the past and the increasing fertility rates at higher ages are the main features of the recent trends in reproduction patterns (Bagavos 2004, Bagavos and Martin 2004). The age pattern of fertility development in Greece indicates that in the 1990s as well as in the early 2000s, low fertility is mainly a result of the combination of three elements. Firstly, fertility rates for the age group 30 to 39 years stopped decreasing and then started to go up. Secondly, fertility for women aged between 25 and 29 experienced a rather limited increase and thirdly, fertility in younger ages (below 25) continued to fall. There can be no doubt that the above developments reflect, to a great extent, the different age pattern of successive generations as regards childbearing. In a context where the total number of children born to various female cohorts is, on average, around two, either the births occur at the younger ages and then fertility rates decline at the higher ages or childbearing is postponed for women below

25 and then births occur mainly at higher ages. When, in addition to that, changes in the age pattern of fertility are combined with those in the average number of births from one cohort to the next, trends in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) become quite pronounced over time. In reality, there are two elements likely to explain why TFR continues to remain at a very low level. The first, which seems to prevail in Greece for the cohorts born in the late 1950s and afterwards, is related to 'tempo' of fertility (i.e., a postponement of fertility at younger ages followed by a resumption at the higher ages). The second is a result of the 'quantum' of fertility as cohort fertility declines over time (from two children per woman born in the early 1950s to roughly 1.7 for women born in the late 1950s and afterwards).

In general, given the relatively low (below replacement level), and even declining, level of completed cohort fertility for the post-war cohorts, for whom in addition, the incidence of divorce was rather insignificant, low fertility is not necessarily a recent development for Greece. The new element is that recent trends in childbearing tend to confirm that low fertility not only results from the delay in the timing (tempo effect) but from a net decrease in fertility as well, since the resumption of fertility at higher ages does not compensate for the postponement at ages below 25. Besides, taking into account the fact that the tempo effect in Greece is currently estimated at 25–30% (Bongaarts 2002), the TFR could amount to nearly 1.7 rather than the current 1.3, which in any case is clearly below the level that had been observed before 1980.

Gender and generational relationships

Gender relationships and roles are constantly changing in Greece in favour of more gender equality. Women's participation in economic, political and social life is increasing, although in some cases, some backlashes can be observed. In the economic sphere, the increasing participation of women in the labour market has clearly contributed to further 'modernisation' of the traditional family and created several situations requiring policy responses, particularly in the area of childcare. On the other hand, despite the increase in female participation in the labour market, gender differences still exist regarding unemployment rates, atypical employment, pay differentials and occupational segregation, as well as occupational and career choices. At the same time, the education gap between men and women has almost disappeared as the number of years people devote to their education has increased much more for women than for men. However, this gender education gap, even though it is decreasing, still persists for the relatively older generations, as a result of the lower female participation in education over the past decades.

In recent years, particular attention has been paid to the question of childcare in relation to the reconciliation of family and working life for women. In fact, as grandmothers became less available to provide unpaid childcare (more of them are in paid work or most of the time they live quite far away), childcare remains a core problem for working mothers. The number of public kindergartens is still not enough and the scheduled operation of primary schools does not correspond to parents' working hours. The recent results of the Fertility and Family Survey (FFS) for Greece indicate that only 3% of children under three years of age are catered for by nursery school, while for children aged 3–6 this percentage is 70%. In fact, grandparents remain the main source of childcare provision, in particular for working parents (46.4% of the childcare for children under three years old with two working parents is the responsibility of grandparents (Symeonidou 2002)). Generally, the burden-sharing of men and women becomes a major aspect of gender roles, not only in terms of policy (i.e., an increase in the use of parental leave for men) but also in terms of more 'cultural' changes (i.e., the acceptance of the idea that childcare is not exclusively a mother's affair).

As far as society in general is concerned, contraception, women's health and domestic violence are the main issues of gender equality. Abortion practices have become an extremely important issue for Greek women and Greek society. Although the data on abortions should be treated cautiously, it is quite evident that the frequency of abortion is very high in Greece. One out of four women in Greece has experienced an abortion while 150,000 couples (in fact women) cannot have a child because of a previous abortion (Bagavos 2002a). As older cohorts tend to use more traditional contraceptive methods, abortion rates are higher among them than the younger cohorts. This clearly arises from the lower cumulative percentage of women having a first induced abortion in the younger birth cohorts. For instance, at the same age (29 years), this percentage

was around 18% for women born between 1965 and 1969 while for older generations (1960–1964, 1955–1959 and 1950–1954) it was 24.5%, 24% and 25.5% respectively (Symeonidou 2002). Despite the lower frequency in younger generations, abortion continues, to a great extent, to be considered as a method of 'contraception' than of termination of an undesired pregnancy.

Recent research into the intra-family domestic violence against women shows that for 9% of women, the behaviour of their partner/husband is considered to be violent (KETHI 2003). Around half of the women admit that they experience abusive behaviour (verbal and psychological violence such as slights, insults, restrictions, isolation from their friends and family environment and threats), 3.6% of them recognize that their partner/husband acts with physical violence against them and 3.5% that they are forced into sexual contact. However, only 30% and 37% of them respectively consider this behaviour as violent behaviour or sexual maltreatment. In general, it seems that there is a persisting gap between violent acts and women's perception of violence. This has to do with attitudes and perceptions regarding family and gender roles, as well as with inadequate knowledge of women's rights. It is also related to the fact that the legal framework with regard to women's protection against intra-family violence fails and therefore the issue is most of the time considered by the authorities as a 'private' affair.

The generational aspects of recent socio-economic developments in Greece indicate that, in spite of the delay in family formation and the idea that recent changes lead towards a 'broken family', the family remains a pivotal element of social and economic life. The strong generational relations are reflected, among others, in the importance of family and family networks for the education, the financial support and the employment perspectives of young people. In particular, the cost of children's education borne by families is very high and closely related to the existence of a 'parallel' education system in Greece. In fact, this is expressed at least in two different ways:

- private institutions (for primary and secondary education), and
- private education functioning as a complement to secondary public education enabling students to improve their knowledge in particular subjects.

According to recent estimates, the percentage of children and adults enrolled in private education (both primary and secondary) has risen to almost 7% of the total school population and the cost of the whole 'parallel' education has risen to nearly 30% of the overall public budget for education (Bagavos 2001). As far as the relationship between unemployment patterns, financial status and family ties is concerned it seems that there are at least two different directions. On the one hand, the existence of family and informal networks is one of the factors explaining why in Greece, poverty increases less than unemployment rates (Bagavos 2001). On the other hand, in a context of high unemployment, a high proportion of unemployed youth (in 2002, it was estimated at 73%) appeals to the family network in order to obtain a job (Bagavos 2002a).

Family and kin networks are also important elements for the care of the elderly whilst as discussed above the elderly play an important role as a childcare provider. In fact, Greece is characterised by a high proportion of the elderly living in a son or daughter's home (more than double compared to the EU-15). Moreover, the family remains the principal care provider for the elderly. According to a recent study (KEDKE 2002), in two out of three cases it is the family, which provides care for the elderly.

All the above elements, which reflect strong generational ties, seem however to be in contraction, to some extent, with recent socio-economic trends. Firstly, an increasing educational gap between children and parents has become apparent over time, as a result of the increase in the children's education level. In the early 2000s, this educational gap was nearly 30% higher in Greece than in the EU-15 for both upper-secondary and tertiary education (Bagavos 2002a). Secondly, the proportion of the elderly living in a household where the head of household is a younger person seems to have decreased over time (Bagavos 2001), indicating that family solidarity as expressed exclusively through the simple cohabitation of different generations is likely to be weaker than in the past. Thirdly, income distribution in Greece is clearly against the elderly, which means that their financial resources must be rather limited and therefore there is not much scope for financial assistance towards their children and their grandchildren.

In reality, on the one hand different indicators regarding the generational aspects of recent socio-economic trends could imply that generational ties become weaker over time. But, on the other hand, there can be no doubt that these ties remain very strong, even if they are expressed in a different way from in the past.

Family concerns and the socio-economic situation of families

Migrant population and migrant families

Although the mid-1970s can be considered as the turning point of Greek migration history, since Greece became for the first time a net immigration county, particular attention has to be paid to the most recent trends. In fact, the unprecedented increase in immigration flows over the last 10 to 15 years has undoubtedly made it clear that the immigration movement has to be treated from now on as one of the most relevant socio-economic developments for Greece. The main peculiarity of the latest trends in immigration flows and stocks is related to the fact that immigrants are mostly foreigners and ethnic Greeks and to a lesser extent returning Greek emigrants.

According to the results of the latest General Census (2001), international geographical mobility was the main demographic component of the total population growth in Greece during the 1990s. In fact, between 1991 and 2001, the number of foreigners multiplied by five (from 167,000 to 797,000). Given that the natural increase has only been 21,600 persons (3% of the whole increase), the 90% increase in the total population during the 1990s has been due to the net migration movements of non-nationals (the other 7% is due to the net migration of nationals). Taking into account the fact that these figures could be underestimated, as coming up with the total number of illegal immigrants from studies based on official statistics is an extremely difficult task, it is quite evident that at the beginning of the 2000s the proportion of the foreign population exceeded 7% of the total population (Bagavos, in press). In addition, as 92% of total net migration over the 1990s is foreign immigrants and internal EU mobility was rather stable during the 1990s, it is obvious that the large majority of immigrants are third-country nationals.

The impact of immigration on total population growth is even more significant when the natural increase of the foreign population is taken into account. Although this impact can not be measured precisely, since data regarding birth numbers by nationality of parents are not available, natural increase of foreigners appears rather high, since they present a younger age structure than nationals, and therefore birth rates are higher than mortality rates. Moreover, administration data, provided by public hospitals in the Athens area as well as by the Athens municipality, show that a large proportion (varying from 30% to 60%) of births are due to the foreign population (Bagavos 2002b). Nevertheless, because of the high concentration of the foreign population in the Athens area as well as of the high concentration of the foreign population who visit particular public hospitals, we must be very careful about generalising these results. But, in any case, whatever the percentage of births due to the foreign population, it is evident that over recent years the immigrant birth rate has had a clear, positive contribution to the natural increase of the population of Greece.

The composition of immigrants by nationality clearly indicates the preponderance of Albanians in the foreign population. While in 1991, they were around 20,000, 10 years later this figure amounted to 440,000. A sharp increase has also been recorded for immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, among others, Georgia, Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine. In 2001 however, the share of Albanians was around 56% of the total foreign population, whereas that of Bulgarians, the second most important nationality, was slightly above 5%. In general, the vast majority of immigrants are from the ex-communist countries since, when immigrants from the new EU member states are excluded, their share amounts to 73% of the total number of immigrants. In contrast to that, the corresponding figure for immigrants from Asia and Africa is low, their share being around 7% and 2% respectively.

Foreign citizens present some quite typical characteristics, the likes of which can be observed in any new immigration country. They have a younger age composition than nationals and they live mainly in urban areas, especially in the Athens region. Although some significant differences in the sex ratio within nationalities are observed, there is a clear overrepresentation of males in the total foreign population. In addition, males have a

higher participation in the labour market than females and both males and females present a concentration regarding the employment sectors and occupational status as compared to the nationals. In fact, given that in public administration the posts are generally open only to nationals, the immigrant population is mainly employed in construction, in personal services, in petty trade and in hotels and restaurants and also to a smaller extent in the food and beverage sector. It is also widely acknowledged that immigrants are employed to a large extent in the agricultural sector, but as these activities represent a high degree of temporality and since most of the time immigrants working in this sector are illegal, the corresponding figures are not always represented in the statistics. The occupational structure of immigrants shows an overrepresentation of unskilled or semiskilled manual workers in the sectors already mentioned. Construction workers, petty traders and helpers, personal service providers and textile workers are the most common occupations of immigrants. In the labour market, they are complementary to rather than substitutes for Greek nationals, except perhaps in construction. There can be no doubt that they occupy temporary and badly paid work positions.

Moreover, there are some particular family-related characteristics in the foreign population, which have to be mentioned. The first, which concerns the reason for settlement in Greece, indicates that 13% of immigrants entered the country for family reunification purposes, which is the second reason after employment-linked migration (54%). The second feature concerns marital status, where there are no significant differences between foreigners and nationals. In particular, nearly 48% of foreigners are married (50% for nationals), 44% are not married (39% for nationals) and 8% are either widows or divorced (11% for nationals). It is also worth noting that the size of an average household for married people is around 2.7 in the foreign population, which is very close to the corresponding figure for nationals.

Apart from trends in the immigrant population as a whole, particular attention has been paid over recent years to children of immigrant and 'repatriate' parents (Greeks returning, usually from the ex-USSR, during the 1990s). In fact, a growing number of immigrants and 'repatriate' pupils have been added to the school population in recent years. Figures have more than doubled from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s (from around 48,000 to more than 100,000). At the same time, the native school population in primary, secondary and upper secondary education has tended to decrease as a result of the decline in birth rates from 1980 onwards. Thus, the proportion of children of non-nationals in the total school population has increased to around 11% in primary, 6% in secondary and 2% in upper secondary education. Moreover, figures are much higher in certain schools (i.e. in the Athens area) where this proportion even reaches 75%.

Income and poverty

In recent years, questions of income inequalities and poverty have become particularly important subjects in the media and in political debate in Greece. The availability of statistical data from different sources, regarding the economic situation of households, has allowed a deeper analysis of trends in poverty over time. From a family point of view, the prominence attributed to poverty was associated with the established idea that family poverty is closely related to family structure. Moreover, as social cohesion constitutes one of the main objectives of the welfare state, the fight against poverty has become one of the main goals of socio-economic policy. At a national level, the latest available (1999) Household Expenditure Survey has permitted an analysis of the phenomena of income inequalities and poverty over the period 1994–1998, a period characterised by substantial efforts to join the European Monetary Union (EMU). Two particular methodological considerations, however, have to be mentioned (Mitrakos & Tsakoglou 2004). On the one hand, because of the sample characteristics, a certain number of population groups running high risks of poverty (for instance the homeless, people living in institutions or asylums and more generally people who do not live in private households) are excluded, while on the other hand, some other groups (for instance immigrants) are clearly under-represented. For these reasons, results regarding inequality and poverty could probably be underestimated. However, on the other hand, the fact that public non-financial benefits applying to families are not included in the analysis could lead to a greater degree of welfare among the population than that suggested by the above results.

Statistical analysis of the above data has shown that changes in relative poverty, based on total income or total expenditure per adult equivalent, were very moderate, leading to a level of nearly 18% in the late 1990s

(Ministry of Labour and Social Security 2001 | Mitrakos & Tsakloglou 2004). However, poverty, in absolute terms, has experienced a further decline between 1994 and 1999. On the whole, taking into consideration the fact that the population's material well being is positively related to average consumption expenditure and negatively to the inequality level, the population's welfare has improved over time (Mitrakos & Tsakloglou 2004).

Poverty levels are related to the different family and household forms but not necessarily in the expected way. Even if the presence of a child increases the probability of living in poverty, the poverty level is decreasing over time for couples with one child and is rising for families with three children and over. On the other hand, in the late 1990s, poverty for families with one child or two children was lower than for families without children. This result is probably related to the existence of informal networks, but also to the fact that the decision for family formation and childbirth, at least of the first order, do not precede the efforts of the families to stabilise their financial situation. Lastly, single parent families appear to be burdened in terms of income but not in terms of consumption, probably because of the existence of an informal support network.

Another particularly important point has to do with the factors that tend to affect inequalities and poverty. Analysis shows that only educational inequalities are closely related to economic inequalities. As regards poverty, it is related to the elderly as well as to people living in farming households or in households having a head who is working in the primary sector, or who has a low-educational level or who is unemployed or retired. Taking into account the interactions between the above factors, it seems that three of them are the most important for poverty patterns: the low educational level, the unemployment of the head of household and residence in an agricultural area.

In addition, it is quite clear that poverty in Greece affects in particular the elderly and pensioners, although their relative and absolute financial situation has clearly improved over the period 1994–1999, to a certain extent because of the implementation of the EKAS (Pensioners' Social Solidarity Supplement) in 1996. Moreover, differences in income level can be observed among the population of higher ages. Here again, the main factors affecting unequal income distribution for the elderly population are related to their previous employment experience and employment sector, which determines the pension level of retired people. In addition, income and poverty differentials are particularly strong between the elderly living in urban or rural areas, but also within rural areas. In this age group, farmers as well as very old persons seem to be more vulnerable to poverty situations.

Family and family-related policies

In recent years family policy measures have been more and more connected to new initiatives regarding employment, social protection, social inclusion and equal opportunities (Moussourou and Stratigaki 2004). This connection between new initiatives and policies regarding families is clearly reflected in the different National Action Plans, which have been presented in the last few years. Moreover, reforms undertaken in recent years or announced for the very near future in the fields of health, social protection, welfare services, education and the tax system are likely to have an impact on the socio-economic situation of families, and for this reason they should be considered to some extent as elements and measures of family policy. Some of the most relevant policy measures regarding families, in a context of more general reforms, are presented here.

Family allowances and tax policy regarding families

Over recent years, a number of changes have occurred regarding family income tax. Up to 2003, a tax reduction was granted in line with the number of children: Euro 88.04 for one child, Euro 205.43 for two children (which means Euro 102.71 per child), Euro 616.29 for three children (which means Euro 205.43 per child), Euro 939.10 for four children (which means Euro 234.78 per child). For families with more than four children, every additional child increases the tax break by Euro 29.35 for each child (this means a family with six children has a tax reduction of Euro 1,760.82 or Euro 293.47 per child). A quite different tax system was applied for incomes earned in 2003. In fact, the number of children is no longer related to tax amounts but to tax exemption scales, since family structure could lead to an increase in the level of the tax exemption scale. Notably, for

taxpayers with one child, the tax exemption scale increases by Euro 1,000 when compared to the first tax exemption scale, while with two children the tax exemption scale increases by Euro 2,000, and with three children the tax exemption scale increases by Euro 1,000. For taxpayers with more than three children, the tax exemption scale increases by Euro 1,000 for each child.

An important development has taken place over recent years regarding family allowances and in particular for those allowances which accrued as a salary augmentation of the father or of the mother (civil family allowance). In fact, in 2001, the Supreme Court decreed that this kind of family allowance has to be paid both to the mother and the father. This decision concerns parents working in the public and the broad public sector as well as various other professional categories, among them judges, magistrates and persons belonging to the diplomatic corps. It also concerns people working in the public sector whose partners work in the private sector and have already received the allowance in the past. This development has led to a discussion about the retrospective validity of the decision. In fact, it has been decided that the retrospective payment only concerns the period after 1999 and it can come into force after those concerned take their case against the State to court. In 2002, a preliminary court decision ruled in favour of the plaintiffs. This was, in fact, the starting point, which led public authorities to agree that these allowances have to be paid to both parents. However, recognition of this right still remains an open question for people working in the private sector.

This differential between private and public sector is also clearly reflected in the application of measures regarding maternity leave as well as parental leave. In Greece, the 'typical' maternity leave is a paid leave of 17 weeks (eight before and nine after the birth) in the private sector and for five months in the public sector. Moreover, in the private sector, a reduction of working time is offered, over the 30 months following the birth, to either the mother or the father. This can take the form of starting work one hour later, or leaving from work one hour earlier, or working fewer hours per day (two hours per day for the first year and one hour per day over the following six months).

This kind of measure is applied in the public sector but with some differences. In fact, the reduction in working hours only applies to the mother and it concerns a reduction by two hours per day when children are under the age of two, and one hour per day when children are aged between two and four. However, mothers could opt for another possibility, namely, a paid 'maternity leave' for nine months. Again, this possibility is not offered to the fathers.

Parental leave is an unpaid leave, offered, in the private sector, for a period of 3.5 months when the child is aged less than 3.5. In the public sector, parental leave could be extended at two years. Nevertheless, it seems that in both the private and the public sector, parental leave is not attractive for parents. Although statistics regarding the use of parental leave are few, the fact that parents are not paid during the leave-period and in addition they have to pay their own social security appear to be the most dissuasive factors. In any case, in both the private and the public sector, parental leave is much more a woman's than a man's affair. On the whole, apart from the pronounced differences between the private and the public sector, the gender issue is also very relevant as regards to the use of maternity-parental leave.

Childcare, 'all-day' schools and kindergartens

In recent years, the question of childcare services was closely related to policies regarding the reconciliation of work and family life. At present, there are almost 180 day-care centres operated by local government. On the other hand, nearly 2,100 are operated under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Welfare in different municipalities. In recent years, the Ministry of Education has created 1,000 'day-long' kindergartens, attended by 17,000 infants. In 1997, day-long infant and elementary schools with an extended timetable (children of working parents remain until 4p.m., and are occupied with creative activities) were created. Their number is constantly increasing. 2,000 such schools existed in the 2000–2001 school year, with the participation of 60,000 pupils. This number was extended to around 3,000 in the school year 2002–2003, covering nearly 210,000 pupils, and it is expected to increase further in the years to come. This measure is very popular among parents who are also very positive about this type of school (INE 2003).

Although the objective of the 'all-day' schools is rather different between infant and elementary schools, since in the former they tend to facilitate the work of mothers and in the latter to attenuate social inequalities, it seems that in both cases they are used as 'care centres'. In fact, a recent study (INE 2003) indicates that the majority of pupils are in the first three classes of the elementary school (nearly 68%), which accords with the parents' view (by 94%) that the day-long school permits the mother to have a job. This positive view of parents as regards those schools contrasts, to some extent, with that of educators. The latter are rather reluctant, because of the insufficient infrastructure as compared to the activities that the day-long schools are supposed to offer to the pupils, and of the long timetable which in relation with physical inactivity, could on the one hand transform those schools into 'kindergartens' and on the other hand lead children to manifest violent behaviour. It is worth noting that parents are of the same view as regards some of the above concerns and in addition they consider that the timetable is rather tiring for their children.

Migration policy and children of immigrants at school

Given the growing importance of immigration issues, in particular illegal immigration, it is not surprising that the main policy aspects were closely related to the legalisation of illegal immigrants through the regularisation processes. Up to now there were two regularisation processes in Greece. The first, started in 1998, has been based on the 1997 Presidential Decrees 357 and 358 and to the first law (1975/1991) aimed at regulating the migration question. In 2001, Greece instituted a second regularisation programme for illegal immigrants, based on a new law on migration (2910/2001). In this law particular attention was paid to the process of family reunification of foreign citizens. According to the new ruling (article 28), family members can enter the country after the head of the family has spent two years in legal residence. Moreover there are some changes regarding the definition of the meaning of family member. Foreign citizens have the possibility not only of inviting their own child but also the child of their partner for whom they have legal care. Lastly, family members who have reached the country through the family reunification process could legally participate in the labour market.

There can be no doubt that law 2910/2001 aimed at setting up a new legal framework regarding residence and work of illegal immigrants is going in the right direction. Nevertheless, several problems have been met during its application, mainly because administration services were unprepared to accomplish this new and rather difficult task. Most of the time immigrants are provided with a resident and work permit of a limited duration—one year—and so the renewal of these cards remains one of the main elements of the process. Moreover, the residence of family members depends on the work permit of the head of family. In fact, all the above elements seem to indicate that immigration is still treated as a temporary and not as a structural phenomenon. Immigrants are seen more as 'visitor workers' than as 'resident workers'.

However, the importance attributed by Greek authorities to immigration issues is reflected in their efforts and initiatives undertaken during the Greek Presidency (first half of 2003), which led to the adoption of the Directive on Family Unification. The Directive, which was adopted after three years of negotiations and three amended Commission proposals, provides the first legal instrument for entry to the EU. Its added value is in defining the concept of family and the right to be reunited in member states.

The rapid change in the composition of the school population has led to policy measures aimed at integrating immigrant children in education, and has augmented at the same time worries about the education prospects of native children (it is worth mentioning that these worries are by no means expressed by native children and not necessarily by all parents). Different measures have been taken, aimed at creating a bilingual and bicultural environment for immigrant children. A number of new educational institutions such as reception classes, after-class tutorial sessions and intercultural schools have been created in order to facilitate the educational, linguistic and social integration of the children. Moreover, a number of initiatives have been implemented, such as the compilation of bilingual educational material (in Albanian and Russian) and material for teaching Greek as a second language. At present, admission classes operate in primary and secondary education.

However, the existence of a common system for integration in school of both repatriate and foreign children, is likely to have quite a negative impact on the effectiveness of the above policies (Moussourou 2002). It is rather obvious that the question of integration of immigrant children in school presents a certain number of

contradictions, where the most apparent is related to the fact that the temporality of the immigrant population does not aid efforts for the integration of immigrant pupils, which requires their presence in school for quite a long period of time. Moreover, as both pupils' and their parents' inadequate knowledge of the Greek language is one of the main obstacles to their integration, foreign and repatriate children do not face the same difficulties. On the whole, the extremely positive results attained in school by some of them disguise the difficulties, which the majority of them have to face (in fact, only 10% of foreign children continue into secondary education). There can be no doubt that, taking into account the specific nature of the integration problems that each immigrant pupil faces, increasing efforts to combine the heterogeneity of pupils with the homogeneity of the educational system could further contribute to their integration.

Initiatives regarding new practices for human reproduction

During 2002 a newly proposed law was presented to the National Assembly, which aims to regulate practices regarding in vitro fertilisation and the possibility of having a child through a surrogate mother. Despite preliminary reactions from various quarters, the proposed law was adopted towards the end of 2002 after a certain number of modifications (Bagavos 2002b). Under this proposed law, particular attention is paid to the role of biological parents and in particular to the role of surrogate mothers. In order to avoid 'tourism reproduction', it was decided that the biological parents, as well as the parents with whom the child will grow up, have to reside in Greece. As for the surrogate mother no compensation is expected. Moreover, she will not be considered as the legal mother. With regard to in vitro fertilisation, the mother has to be at the 'natural' age of reproduction and not at the period of menopause. Artificial insemination is also permitted for non-married women. In this case, the biological father's agreement is required, something which has to be attested by a notary. This agreement is equivalent to the recognition of paternity.

Health care and assistance for the elderly

In the context of growing demographic aging, several policy initiatives have been undertaken in order to meet the growing needs of the elderly as well as of their families, which very often are the care providers. Over recent years, care for the elderly has become a broader policy issue than the simple income measures aimed at reducing income inequalities, which clearly work against the aged. New policy initiatives were implemented which aim at influencing and improving the way of life of the elderly, by augmenting the support and solidarity provided by the family or the local community and by supporting independent and dignified living conditions (Ministry of Labour and Social Security 2001).

Among others initiatives, the 'Home Help' programme deserves particular mention. This programme, which was implemented by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 1997 in collaboration with municipalities, was based on the idea that people do not have to be removed from their familiar (in a broader sense) and social environment. The objective is to provide primary home medical care as well as consultation and psychological support, in order to improve the quality of life of people, and to guarantee services leading to decent standard of living and independence. It addresses people living alone with insufficient means who are unable to help themselves, which means mainly the elderly. Particular attention is given to efforts to reduce the need for institutional hospital care. The programme is being extended to persons with disabilities. The provision of help and care is guaranteed by a staff composed of a social worker, a nurse and a home helper, and in some cases a volunteer worker of a collaborating NGO, who pay visits regularly to old persons. The programme offers a sense of security to the elderly and to disabled people, since it guarantees the supply of units with cars and the provision of paging services, which enables interconnection with emergency and other services (Ministry of Labour and Social Security 2001). According to estimations (KEDKE 2002), this programme covers only one out of three elderly people who need care and for whom the family is not the care provider. There can be no doubt that this initiative has to be extended to all the elderly, whether they are living alone or with their children.

Changes in social security

Issues regarding reforms of the Social Security System have been widely discussed in Greece in recent years. In reality, 2002 has to be considered as the starting point for these reforms, which were finally classified into two main categories. The first one contains several changes in relation to different parameter' of the system, among them retirement age, replacement rate and early retirement. The second category refers to five statutory and structural changes:

- A precise timing for the gradual unification of pension funds for paid workers.
- A new framework for the functioning of auxiliary insurance funds.
- A set of changes regarding the financing of the main pension fund (IKA) in order to provide pension sustainability up to 2032.
- The introduction of professional pension funds.
- The establishment of a National Actuarial Office.

Particular attention has to be paid, among other changes, to the fact that the new law gives the possibility to parents to recognise a 'fictive' period of social insurance. Women becoming mothers after 1.1.2003 might recognise that fictive time in order to complete the number of years required to receive an old-age pension. According to the number of children, the fictive time corresponds to one year for the first child, 1.5 years for the second child and two years for the third child. Although the objective is to counterbalance the difficulties that a woman might have to cope with over her life cycle (higher unemployment, lower participation in the labour market, specific role as a care provider...), this possibility is granted to men as well.

Conclusion

Family welfare is closely related to the welfare of its members. In recent years, a certain gap between expectations and reality seems to have occurred in Greece for particular population groups and for different family forms, increasing the risks of declining welfare of family members. In particular, the discrepancy between the high expectations of women and young people, to a great extent due to the increasing education level, and their unfavourable position in the labour market call for more adequate measures in socio-economic policy making.

Reducing the imbalance between the increasing education level and the rather vague employment prospects for younger generations will constitute a core issue for both families and its members over the coming years. As for gender issues, they will continue mainly to be related to gender differential in the labour market as well as to uneven gender distribution of household labour and leisure. For those issues, the aim as well as the effectiveness of policy responses are not so clear at the moment. For instance, as measures regarding the conciliation between family and working life are almost exclusively addressed to 'normal families', they risk reproducing gender stereotypes where women will continue to be the principal care provider for both children and the elderly.

In spite of the recent trends towards a further 'modernisation' of the Greek family, the family as well as strong family ties continue to be core elements of Greek society. However, families have to cope with increasing difficulties, as the crisis of the Welfare State results in inadequate public services and in further responsibilities for families in order to cover the needs of its members, which are not met by public services. Moreover, although targeting measures seem to be an adequate way to improve family welfare, current policies tend to neglect specific family forms, among others, one-parent families, families with unemployed or handicapped or elderly members, as well as migrant families, which have been of a growing importance over recent years.

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VALERIE RICHARDSON

Ireland

Introduction

In the past six years Ireland has undergone rapid economic and social change that has impacted on the structure and nature of family life. While this report concentrates primarily on developments in the past six years, it is important to place more recent changes within the context of the development of family policy in Ireland.

At the beginning of the 1990s there was no explicit family policy, although a range of social policies did exist which impacted on families. Family policy was not identified as a separate entity within social and public policy. It existed in an implicit rather than explicit sense. At that time it was necessary to look to other policy areas such as social welfare, housing and childcare to evaluate family policy. There were no unifying elements in these policies regarding the promotion or protection of family life, so that policies developed in a pragmatic and piecemeal fashion around specific issues as they arose. In the absence of any structured family policy, government strategies were linked by a number of beliefs and philosophies about the nature of the ideal family and how life should be organised. Policy measures at that time relating to the family were either distributive measures providing financial support or regulatory measures in the form of legislation which were centred around how family members should behave socially and morally. Both the Church and the State engaged in considerable rhetoric about the family and its protection but neither institution had an overall policy strategy related to it.

The Programme for Government (1993) was the first indication that family policy was gaining a place on the political agenda. It proposed a major programme of family law reform as a response to increasing recognition of the numbers and variety of family forms in Irish society and the need for a more pluralistic approach to family policy. It promised to introduce a Constitutional referendum to remove the ban on divorce and re-marriage, to implement the 1991 Childcare Act, to provide for the payment of the legally determined entitlements of married women to social welfare equality payments, to provide in housing for all, to introduce a basic income system for children and to introduce policies to deal with long-term unemployment.

The International Year of the Family in 1994 provided a major impetus for the development of family policy in Ireland. During that year a wide range of events were coordinated by a National Steering Committee made up of representatives of organisations with an interest in family affairs. At a national level the Oireachtas set up the Joint Committee on the Family. Consequently, 'the family' became central to many debates during the year. As a result of the increased interest in the family as an institution and awareness of the many changes taking place in relation to the family, the Government established the Commission on the Family in 1995, whose terms of reference were:

"To examine the effects of legislation and policies on families and make recommendations to the government on proposals which would strengthen the capacity of families to carry out their functions in a changing economic and social environment."

In 1995 the Government established the Constitution Review Group, which reported in 1996. Part of that review included examination of the definition of the family within the Constitution. It recommended that a revised Article 41 should retain recognition by the State of the family as the primary and fundamental unit of society and a pledge to protect the family based on marriage, but should also guarantee respect for all family life, whether based on marriage or not. The Review Group argued that the change would maintain the special place of marriage as the ideal family form while also giving recognition to the increasing numbers of other family forms, without taking the final step in changing the definition of the family within the Constitution. The Government did not introduce any constitutional change and the definition of the family as based on marriage remains. However, debate on the definition of the family continues to be raised, particularly among groups representing families defined as 'non-constitutional' who take the position that they are disadvantaged because they do not conform to the Constitutional definition.

While not going so far as Constitutional change, the Government moved towards addressing the issues of exclusion of families not based on marriage from the protection of much of the family legislation. Consequently, there were significant changes in the legislation and public policy introduced. For example, in 1996 divorce legislation was passed (Family Law (Divorce) Act 1996) and in 1997 a One-Parent Family Payment was introduced to consolidate all the social welfare payments that existed for lone parent families. This change opened the scheme to male and female applicants and removed the term 'unmarried mother' from social welfare terminology. The growing awareness of the needs of all families laid the basis for a more explicit family policy in Ireland for the following six years.

Demographic changes 1998–2004

During the past six years there have been major demographic changes. These are documented in the Census of the Populations 2002. The Census gives a picture of increasing diversification of family forms and evidence of Ireland moving towards a multicultural society. Over the inter-census period, Irish society has become more urban and ethnically diverse than ever before, the population is getting older, producing fewer children and speaking less Irish. The Census quantified the huge social change of the past decade, including the growth in immigration, the effects of the introduction of divorce legislation and the increase in the number of lone parent families and those with no children.

There was a population increase of 8% over the previous six year period, resulting from a combination of net inward migration and a natural increase of births over deaths. The arrival of large numbers of asylum-seekers and other migrants is reflected in these figures, although it is probable that the count of some non-national populations is an underestimate. Ten percent of the population was born outside Ireland, compared to 7% in the last census, and the non-national population is recorded as 5.8%. The combined forces of returning emigrants, foreign workers and asylum seekers have created a situation where one in every six people in Ireland had lived abroad for at least one year prior to the Census. The Census also shows that the population in their twenties and thirties are also the most ethnically diverse generation in the country with one person in 10 in the 25–34 age range described as non-Irish nationals.

The figures show that 644,400 long-term migrants are now living in Ireland and of these 366,800 are returned Irish emigrants while 252,000 have come to live in Ireland since 1996. Many of the returned migrants would be Irish citizens who have reached retirement age, having emigrated during earlier periods of high unemployment, together with younger people attracted back to Ireland because of the unprecedented economic growth during the Celtic Tiger period when there was a demand for highly-skilled workers. During the latter part of the inter-census period migration into Ireland has been driven by foreign nationals rather than by returning emigrants.

The statistical data for 2003 (CSO 2004) showed a slight rise in the number of births at a rate of 15.5/1,000, an increase of 0.3 on the previous year. Births outside marriage now make up 31.4% of all births registered, 10% higher than the average for the rest of the European Union (EU). A recent phenomenon of Irish demography has been the high average age of women at childbearing. In the 1990s the increasing employment participation rate of young Irish women had the effect of raising to 28 the average age at which Irish women have their first child. After 1980 there was a rapid drop in the birth rate by over one third but this has been reversed in the last eight years with the number of births increasing by over 25% since 1994. The majority of this increase is, therefore, attributable to the increase in birth to Irish women in their thirties who had postponed childbearing during the previous decade. In addition, for the total period the fertility rate rose to 2.01 in 2002 but fell again in 2003 to 1.98. This compares to an all time low of 1.85 in 1994. The Census also shows that the dependency ratio is now less than the EU average.

Abortion remains illegal in Ireland forcing Irish women wishing to have a termination of pregnancy to travel to England or to other European destinations. In 2002, a total of 6,490 women providing Irish addresses had abortions in England, a drop of 135 over the previous year. The annual figure had risen steadily each year since 1980. The highest number were aged between 20 and 24 years (34.5%) with 24.9% being between 25 and 29 years of age. Fifty-four girls under the age of 16 were recorded as having abortions in 2002. The decrease in the

numbers may well be accounted for by unrecorded numbers of women travelling to European countries within the Euro zone which would be a cheaper alternative than going to England.

Demography of the family

One of the striking features of the past six years has been the changing structure and formation of families in Ireland together with increasing diversification of family forms.

The number of families in Ireland has increased since 1996 with households comprising childless couples, whether married or not, representing the fastest growing category. The average size of private households has fallen from 3.14 to 2.94, which confirms the continuing decline in family size. Multi-family, three-generational households have continued to decline in number with the number of households consisting solely of couples with children increasing by 11.1%. The number of families with four or more children has halved over the period. Moreover 75% of families in 2002 contained two children or fewer and the average number of children per family fell from 1.8 to 1.6 in the inter-census period. The statistics also show a rise in the number of married and cohabiting women aged between 25 and 34 with no children, equivalent to 38% of the total number in this age bracket. Birth rate trends are likely to fall further since women are increasingly delaying childbearing and are having just one child or none at all.

Young adults are increasingly staying in the family home until their mid-30s. Since 1996 the number of people aged over 20 remaining in the family home rose by 13.7% with 47,500 men aged over 30 remaining with their parents. This development is largely explained by rising house prices, particularly in urban areas, the high cost of private rental accommodation, the later age of marriage and the increasing age of completed education or professional qualifications.

Family formation through adoption has changed rapidly over the past six years. The numbers of traditional non-family adoptions in Ireland has declined significantly with just 68 Adoption Orders being granted in 2003. This reduction is almost entirely accounted for by the fact that women giving birth outside marriage are deciding to parent their children either alone or within a cohabiting relationship. The majority of adoption orders made in 2003 (n=171) were family adoptions, in the main a mother and her husband who was not the father of the child adopting the mother's child. While these numbers have been declining the number of foreign adoptions has increased. The Adoption Board granted 648 declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt abroad or to extend the declaration in 2003 compared to 399 in the previous year. Between 1991 and 2003 a total of 2,124 children adopted from abroad were registered by the Adoption Board. (Report of An Bord Uchtala (The Adoption Board) 2003 (2005)) The Government is currently introducing legislation in order to comply with the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption. In addition, new legislation will be introduced in relation to search and reunion between adopted persons and their birth parents.

Marital breakdown and lone parenthood

Since the previous census divorce legislation has been introduced in Ireland (Family Law (Divorce) Act 1996), which came into effect in 1997. The number of separated persons, including divorced, increased by over a half between 1996 and 2002 giving an average annual increase of 7.3%. Within a separate category, the number of persons recorded as divorced more than trebled, reaching a figure of 35,100, which is a reflection of the divorce legislation. The relative extent of marital breakdown in 2002 was 7.5% compared to 5.4% six years earlier. Much of this increase may be attributable to an increase in accurate reporting at the census. However, it is clear that there has been a rapid increase in the number of couples seeking divorce. In 2003 almost 3,000 divorce applications were granted in the High Court and Circuit Court, which represented a 15% increase on 2002 (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2004).

Data from the 2002 Census showed that the number of cohabiting couples is increasing rapidly. Over the previous twenty years the number of cohabiting couples has increased more than two hundredfold. In 2002, 75,000 couples were recorded as cohabiting accounting for 8.4% of all family units compared with 3.9% in 1996

of which those with children represented 5.5% of all couples with children. A more in-depth analysis of the data relating to cohabiting couples reveals that over three quarters of these couples without children were unions where both partners were single and over 50% of the females and 40% of the males in cohabiting relationships were in their 20s. These figures would seem to indicate that marriage is of less importance in family formation. However, marriage rates have increased by 22% since 1994 reaching an annual rate of 5.1 per 1,000 population. However, divorce and marriage breakdown have increased sharply adding to the increase in cohabitation.

The number of same-sex cohabiting couples increased from 150 to 1,300 during the inter-census period. This probably reflects the increasing social acceptance of same-sex relationships and the willingness to put this information into the public domain.

While the largest family type in Ireland still comprises two-parent married families the number of lone parent family units in Ireland has risen to just under 179,000 which represents 9.5% of total family units of which 87.5% were headed by women (Central Statistics Office 2004). Different family types have been found to have a strong social class dimension in Ireland in that one-parent families, both single and separated are more likely to be concentrated in lower socio-economic positions involving unskilled occupations (McKeown et al. 2003). They are also the families at greatest risk of reaching the poverty level (Nolan et al 2002). Almost 32% of lone parents are separated or divorced and never married parents accounted for 23.9%. The widowed lone parent group was almost 40% of the total. However, there has always been a difficulty in enumerating lone parents, with an underestimate of the group of unmarried parents with a child who live within another household, and an overestimate of the widowed group who live with children where the ages of the children are not given and who therefore, may not be dependent children.

Development of family policy 1998–2004

The report of the Commission on the Family (1998) was the first coordinated statement of family policy in Ireland. Its publication marks the beginning of a period of development towards a more explicit family policy.

The Government was quick to respond to many of the recommendations of the Commission on the Family, amongst them the setting up of a Family Affairs Unit, within a reconstituted Department of Social Welfare as the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, headed by a Minister who for the first time was officially designated as the Minister responsible for the family. Emphasis in the report stressed the need to support and strengthen families by providing both financial support and services. The overall focus of policies affecting families began to change from one of control and regulation of behaviour to one of support and recognition of the multiplicity of family forms. The emphasis has gradually moved away from focusing on the traditional married family to address the needs of all families irrespective of the basis on which they are formed. Developments have included an expansion of the Family Mediation Service, together with increased funding for marriage counselling services and the extension of a clear policy framework for the development of family support services.

In 2003 the Family Support Agency, a statutory body, was set up. Its main functions are:

- To directly provide a family mediation service which is a free, professional and confidential service;
- To support, promote and develop the provision of marriage and relationship counselling and family support services;
- To promote and disseminate information on issues relating to marriage and relationships, education, family mediation, parenting and family responsibilities and related matters;
- To support, promote and develop the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme and provide financial help to voluntary bodies in respect of matters related to the Agency's functions.

Over 80 Family Resource Centres, which receive financial support from the Family Support Agency, have been set up with the aim of combating disadvantage and improving the functioning of families. They provide counselling and information and aim to enhance the self-esteem and potential of people by working closely with them within their communities.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs also set up a research programme designed to fund research, which will stimulate and inform the development of future family policy.

Socio-economic context

In the last six years Ireland has experienced unprecedented economic growth. For example, during the period 1996–2001 the general government balance went from a deficit of 0.3% of the GDP to a surplus of 4.6% in 2000. In 2001 this fell to 1.1%. During the same period unemployment fell from 11.5% in 1996 to 3.7% by September 2000, with average earnings for men rising by 26% and for women by 30.8% (Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI): Economic Series 2001: 24,55). The year 2002 saw a substantial slowdown in economic growth, largely related to the general slowdown internationally. However, the Medium Term Review 2003–2010 (ESRI 2003) reported that the Irish economy remains fundamentally healthy despite the uncertain short-term outlook with a projected return to full employment. The Quarterly Economic Commentary Summer 2004 (ESRI 2004) shows that economic conditions have improved significantly in the first half of 2004 with output growth expected to average 4.6% in 2004 rising to 5.2% in 2005. Irish incomes in real GNP terms are anticipated to grow by 4.3% in 2004 and 4.5% in 2005. Price inflation fell by nearly 3 percentage points during 2003 to an average of 3.5% and is expected to average 2% for the next two years. The EU-SILC survey (Central Statistics Office 2005) found that the gross annual household income averaged over all households was estimated to be just over EUR 46,000 in 2003, the equivalent to an average of EUR 883 per week. Total disposable household income, which is net of income tax and social contributions was almost EUR 38,000 per annum. The average weekly gross income of households in the lowest income group was EUR 121.58 with 94% receiving social benefits. This was in sharp contrast to the top income group where almost 97% of the total weekly income of EUR 2,398.70 was from direct income. After adjusting the income figures for household size the total disposable household income averaged across all persons was EUR 17,800 per annum. (Central Statistics Office 2005)

During the first half of 2004 the labour market has begun to improve with the unemployment rate expected to average 4.5% in 2004 and drop to an average of 4.3% of the labour force during 2005.

Amongst the countries of the OECD Ireland is ranked 12th out of 173 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI) and in terms of GDP per capita Ireland comes third with a purchasing power parity in US Dollars of 32,600.

Socio-economic situation of families

Despite economic growth over the past six years Ireland remains a divided society where not all sections have benefited equally from the years of the Celtic Tiger. Using the Human Poverty Index the OECD has calculated that Ireland comes second worst out of 17 selected high income countries with 12.3% of its population living below the poverty line. Overall, Ireland is rated as second only to the US as being the most unequal society in the Developed World. The EU-SILC survey (Central Statistics Office 2005) found that over 9% of the population is classed as consistently poor with 23% at risk of poverty. The survey, covering the last six months of 2003 showed that people living alone are most at risk with almost 45% below the 60% threshold. Adults and children living in lone parent households were also a high risk group at just over 42% below the 60% threshold. Children living in lone parent households showed the highest consistent poverty rate at 32% followed by those living in other households with children at 16.6%. Households with one adult had a consistent poverty rate of 12%. The data provided by this survey will be used to monitor and evaluate progress towards achieving the targets set out in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The Combat Poverty Agency has highlighted the continuing needs of families at greatest risk of poverty: families with four or more children, lone parent families, single adult families, especially women and vulnerable families such as ethnic minority families and those of the travelling community. Vulnerable families also include the homeless, particularly women and children. People in workless households make up 70% of the consistently poor population, comprising people working in the home, unemployed people, retired and disabled people. In addition, low paid employees account for a quarter of the consistently poor (Daly 2001).

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) (Stationery Office 1997) is the main national policy document to address poverty. The revised strategy Building an Inclusive Society is based on targets to eliminate poverty

generally by 2007 and particularly aimed at eliminating child poverty (Stationery Office 2003). The main platform to address this is to raise the basic social welfare rate and to raise child benefit. However, the levels of increase in child benefit and other social welfare benefits announced in the 2004 Budget were below the targets set by the NAPS. The National agreement *Sustaining Progress* which was negotiated after the revised NAPS contains eight specific targets: ending child poverty, measures to deal with migration and intercultural issues, housing and accommodation, long-term unemployment, vulnerable workers who have been made redundant, tackling educational disadvantage, care of children and the elderly, alcohol/drug abuse, and the inclusion of all the population in the information society. (National Agreement *Sustaining Progress* 2003). Unlike NAPS, no time schedules or tasks are set for accomplishing these targets. In addition, the agreement commits no new resources to addressing poverty, social inclusion or inequality and makes few specific commitments in relation to these issues. However, it does contain a commitment to raising the lowest rates of social welfare payments to 150 in 2002 terms by 2007 as set out in the revised NAPS (Daly 2003).

One significant development was the setting up of the National Office for Social Inclusion and the Social Inclusion Forum. The National Office for Social Inclusion represents an administrative re-organisation for and specialisation on social inclusion, whereas the Social Inclusion Forum is a move towards regularising consultation with those who are active in the field of poverty and social inclusion, including people directly affected by poverty and social exclusion.

Families and the social welfare and tax systems

The rise in the number of new family structures led to the Report of the Working Group on the Treatment of Married, Cohabiting and One-Parent Families under the Tax and Social Welfare codes (Stationery Office 1999). For many years the underlying assumption of social welfare and taxation in Ireland was that of a breadwinner father with a dependent spouse and children in a lifelong marriage. Many of the issues examined in the report remain contentious. The social welfare system treats cohabiting couples in the same way as married couples, whereas the income tax system treats cohabiting couples as single people and anomalies concerning Earnings Disregards continue within the social welfare system.

As a consequence of the Report individualisation of the tax system began in 2000 giving dual-earner families a lower tax liability than single breadwinner families in order to encourage more married women to enter the workforce. There was intense public debate on this issue particularly involving the parent groups representing women working in the home. Women in the home constitute a sizeable number of Irish parents. This is evidenced from the Quarterly National Household Survey (CSO 2004), which shows 557,8000 people whose principal economic status is 'home duties' of which 99.2% were women. As a result there was a parallel introduction of a tax-free allowance for carers of children, the disabled or the elderly. The allowance was welcomed as a partial recognition of both the value of unpaid labour carried out in the home by stay-at-home parents and of social protection from the labour market for mothers. However, the result has been that dual-earner families with high incomes have been the major beneficiaries of the system and concerns have been expressed that the anomalies and various rules may act as a disincentive for lone parents to marry.

Employment is regarded as a major factor in the elimination of poverty among lone parent families. However, the low level of employment among lone parents remains an issue. The Minister for Social and Family Affairs has indicated that she intends to review the income support arrangements for lone parents, the main purpose of the review being to establish the extent to which the One-Parent Family Payment may be acting as a disincentive to recipients taking up employment.

National statistics show that lone parents are at a high risk of poverty and a significant number live in consistent poverty (Nolan et al. 2002). A recent study, which reviewed the One-Parent Family Payment, concluded that the original aims and objectives of the One-Parent Family Payment are not being achieved.¹ (OPEN 2004) The report recommended:

- That there should be an independent review of the One-Parent Family Payment in view of the continuing risk of poverty for lone parents;

- There should be a significant increase in the Earnings Disregard to reflect childcare costs, the Earnings Disregard should be treated as untaxed income in the same way as the Back to Work Allowance and no future cutbacks to the Community Employment scheme should be made and its flexibility and support should be applied to all mainstream training programmes (OPEN 2004: 54).

The rapid growth of good quality employment has contributed to a widening gap between top and bottom income barriers. Economic growth has put huge pressure on housing and other forms of economic and social infrastructure. The cost of housing has contributed to the economic difficulties of low-income families with the narrowing of housing choice for low income households. This has gone hand in hand with a decline in the relative size of the social housing sector and a sharp rise in the level of private rents, both of which have emerged in the last decade.

Work/life balance

Since 1996 the participation of women in the paid labour force has continued to rise and in the first quarter of 2004 was 49.5%, a slight drop from just over 50% in 2003. Over this period, the most significant change in female participation in the labour force has been the increase in the number of married women. In the first quarter of 2004, the participation rate for married females was 48.8%. For married women with children and women living with a partner and children, the rate was 52.4% (CSO 2004). The participation rate for lone mothers with children of any age was 42.3% and lone mothers with children under the age of 15 years accounted for 52.8%, in the first quarter of 2004.

The increase in female participation rates over the period has been the result of policies aimed at encouraging women to remain in or return to the labour force. However, emphasis on policies has been largely motivated by an economic agenda rather than an agenda to achieve gender equality.

Family policy over the past six years has been greatly concerned with families as workers. Part of the strategy to combat poverty has been based on increasing the levels of employment and in particular encouraging the participation of women in the workforce. Consequently family policy measures aimed at the reconciliation of work and family life have been central to addressing poverty. Policies relating to maternity leave, parental leave, organisation of work time and the protection of part-time workers have been introduced largely in response to EU Directives. Maternity leave has been gradually increased and now allows for 18 weeks paid leave and eight weeks unpaid leave. Parental leave allows for 14 weeks unpaid over five years for each child until the child reaches five years of age. The government has published its intention to strengthen the Parental Leave Scheme in line with the recommendations of the Working Group on Parental Leave. Amendments will provide for leave to be taken in separate blocks of a minimum of six continuous weeks and the raising of the maximum age of the eligible child from five to eight years. There are no plans to introduce paid parental leave. There is no statutory paternity leave in Ireland. The fact that parental leave is unpaid has led to a low uptake, particularly among fathers.

The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness set up the National Framework Committee for Family Friendly Policies, which included representatives of Irish Business and Employers Confederation, the public sector employers and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. It is charged with the task of monitoring and developing policies such as flexi-time, part-time working, job-sharing, term-time work and teleworking. Despite the increasing number of work/life balance opportunities within the workplace it is clear that the uptake of such schemes is largely by women. One research study has shown that while public policies have influenced the gender division of paid work through increased female participation they have made little significant impact on the gender division of unpaid work (Richardson 2003). The findings from the International Social Survey Panel survey data show that, despite the overall emphasis on gender equality and making men into fathers within social policy discourses,

¹ Objectives: the relief of hardship where a lone parent has not secured adequate, or any maintenance from the spouse or the other parent of their children; to support and encourage lone parents to consider employment as an alternative to long-term welfare dependency, while at the same time supporting them to remain in the home if that is their wish.

female respondents reported an increase rather than a decrease in their share of unpaid work, thus confirming the 'second shift' phenomenon for women combining work outside and inside the home (Rush et al. 2005).

Generational relationships

Existing demands and future demographic change present significant challenges to the traditional patterns by which Irish society supported those in need of care and there is a clear need for a strategic approach in order to provide an infrastructure of care services which should achieve a balance between the respective roles of families, the State, the private sector and voluntary organisations.

Ireland is generally characterised by its liberal welfare regime (Hantrais 2004:129) insofar as the state does not impose a legal responsibility for caring and family relationships are not regulated. Families can expect to be supported by the state but in a situation where the duties are not clearly defined. Greater reliance is placed on the private and voluntary sectors. The behaviour of families towards their older members and children involves a moral sense of responsibility rather than legal obligations. Families in Ireland have always cared for their members and there is no indication from available research that there is a reduction of this desire. The family continues to play a key role in the care of its members. However, with the increase in employment, particularly that of women, the ability of the family to meet the demands of providing care of both children and the elderly or disabled has diminished. In addition, the gender division is obviously seen in that the greatest majority of care for dependent family members falls to women.

Care of the elderly

Policies are still underwritten with the assumption that it is one of the roles of women in society to assume caring responsibilities for others. The policy of community care outlined in *Shaping a Healthier Future* (Department of Health 1994) with its emphasis on care for dependent groups being provided in the home by family members, has obvious implications for women and their health status. Older people, their families and the Government prefer care at home rather than in institutional settings and there is strong support for extending family care with little enthusiasm for nursing homes. However, in a study carried out by the European Foundation for Living and Working in 2004 it was found that 25% of female carers and 15% of male carers felt that care limited their employment opportunities in terms of career development and promotion, disadvantaged them in terms of finances and pensions and limited access to training and skills development and increased the risk of stress, sickness and absenteeism.

Despite these difficulties, according to the 2002 Census it is estimated that there are at least 148,800 family carers in Ireland who provide constant unpaid care to elderly, infirm, chronically ill and disabled family members. 27.3% provided 43 hours or more of such care every week, 15.7% provided between 15 and 42 hours per week of care and 57% provided between one and four hours care each week.

Since 1990 when the means-tested Carer's Allowance was introduced there have been a number of developments in policies regarding care of the elderly. Cash benefits have been continuously expanded and revised and eligibility has been widened to include ill children and adults, and some of the conditions such as co-residency and non-employment have been relaxed. However, the means-tested element of the allowance has been strongly criticised with calls from pressure groups for its modification.

An important development was the introduction of the social insurance-based Carer's Benefit in 2000 designed to facilitate short-term exit from the work force for the purpose of caring. In 2001 a carer's leave scheme was introduced to dovetail with the Carer's Benefit. The scheme entitles employees to take advantage of temporary leave from employment to provide full-time care and attention for a maximum period of 65 weeks. There are about 22,000 people receiving either Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit.

There is a range of tax credits and allowances available to carers.² However, there is no overall policy behind these credits and allowances. Tax credits and allowances are only relevant to people who have a taxable

² Home Carers Tax Credit; Incapacitated Child Credit; Prescribed Relatives Credit; Allowance for employing a carer

income, thus excluding a significant number of carers who are family members who are classified as being 'on home duties'. These allowances and credits need to be examined and consideration given to direct payment for family carers.

The report of the 2003 Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs highlighted that the majority (78%) of carers were caring for the frail elderly and 46% of them were themselves aged over 60 years. The greatest need identified by carers was for respite care in the home and day-care services. Despite the unprecedented levels of economic growth and resources there are still significant waiting lists for residential care, day care and respite as well as for a range of medical services/procedures.

The public sector used to be the main provider of institutional care services for the elderly. However, by 1996 provision by private and voluntary sectors had exceeded 50%. (Department of Health and Children 2004:195). The growth of such provision derived from a system of subventions introduced by the Health (Nursing Homes) Act 1990. However, the new system of subsidies introduced by the Act has been controversial insofar as entitlement is subject to a means test by which the income of the elderly person, their spouse and the income of sons and daughters living in Ireland are assessed. Close family are, therefore, expected to contribute towards the cost of care. However, the legality of this measure is in question since there is no legal or constitutional obligation on family members to support their elderly parents (Fahey 1997: 97–98).

The system for care is a dichotomised system. At the present time, state intervention is used to substitute for the carer or used when care supports break down, rather than offering practical support in order to ensure continuation of care in a complementary sense. There is a real need for increased provision of respite care. As Comhairle has pointed out, "*Given that increased support for carers would make financial sense the question arises as to whether the lack of greater support for informal care and intermediary forms of care is due to deep-rooted reluctance to increase the role of the State in financing and providing services.*" (Comhairle 2002). Although it still remains low in comparison with the expenditure on institutional care, health board expenditure on community care has expanded tenfold during the latter half of the 1990s. However, more support services are needed if State policy is to be one of continuing reliance on informal care provision. It is essential to promote the mental and physical health of carers if they are to continue to provide the bulk of caring services without undue damage to their health and well being (O'Neill & Evans 2000). Policies in Ireland are primarily designed to support an assumed capacity and willingness on the part of informal carers and the needs and wishes of those who need more intensive support to cope with the task of informal care are not adequately catered for under current provisions.

Childcare

The childcare sector has developed in an ad hoc manner with responsibility being fragmented. State provision of day care for children has traditionally been available only for children at risk and those in targeted areas of deprivation. Government policy related to provision of childcare for the children of working parents has been to leave parents to make their own private arrangements. However, the lack of affordable, good quality childcare has been a major issue for working parents of young children. Only in the mid to late 1990s did childcare become an issue on the policy agenda and then in response to the need to encourage women's increased participation in the labour market. The debates concerning the provision of childcare have been centred on labour market issues rather than those of early childhood education and its association with equity.

Under the Childcare Act 1991 regulations covering the registration, inspection and standards of certain childcare facilities were introduced. This measure, while having the positive effect of monitoring quality also reduced the overall stock of childcare facilities and increased the cost of childcare.

The beginning of a pro-active approach on the part of the State to childcare emerged from Social Partnership negotiations when trade unionists and other social partners, including women's organisations, highlighted the necessity for developing concrete measures to bring about greater provision of childcare facilities. An Expert Working Group on Childcare was set up in 1997 under Partnership 2000 and reported in 1999. (National Childcare Strategy 1999). The Strategy has provided the basis on which the State has embarked in developing a national childcare infrastructure by establishing city and county childcare committees throughout

the country for the coordination of childcare delivery. Since that time Government policy has targeted the supply side of childcare provision with increased state funding through capital grants for community and private childcare facilities under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme. Except for lone parents where the costs of childcare can be factored into the means test, there are no subsidies or tax benefits for childcare costs for working parents. The Government has been very sensitive to the "question of equity between parents who stay at home to care for children and those who have to meet additional childcare expenses when they go out to work" (Minister of Finance, Budget speech, 1999).

The Quarterly National Household Survey on Childcare (CSO 2003) showed that 42.5% of all families with preschool children regularly rely on non-parental childcare arrangements for minding their children during normal working hours and the greatest uptake was among couples where both partners were working. Usage of non-parental childcare facilities is less common for minding primary school-going children with 25.3% of all families availing themselves of it on a regular basis. The reverse is the case for lone parents with primary school-going children where over 28% have regular arrangements compared to the average of 25.3%.

While it is clear that over half of the families with preschool children are cared for by their non-working parents, for those children who are cared for by others their families provide a substantial amount of that care, most commonly the grandparents. Almost 23,000 (31%) families with childcare arrangements relied on unpaid relatives for minding preschool children on a regular basis and over 19,000 (82%) of these indicated that it was their main source of childcare. Reliance on unpaid relatives was somewhat greater for minding school-going children with over 31,000 (46%) of families reporting their use on a regular basis and 25,100 (80%) of these indicating that it was their main source of childcare outside school hours. In proportionate terms, lone parents were more reliant on unpaid relatives (Central Statistics Office 2003 Tables 2 and 5)

In terms of paid childcare around 8,000 families paid a relative to mind their preschool children and a similar number paid relatives in the case of school-going children. Almost 20,000 families employ a paid carer and a further 15,800 used a crèche or Montessori school. However, less than 4,000 families used a crèche for their school-going children with the majority (19,700) using a paid carer. Average childcare expenditure exceeded EUR 97.47 per week in the last quarter of 2002.

In terms of satisfaction with the arrangements just under 20% of families with preschool children would welcome alternative arrangements with almost half preferring a crèche and preferably work-based. Just over one in ten of parents would prefer to mind the children themselves instead of their existing arrangements. Over 45% said that they were not availing themselves of their preferred alternative due to cost or financial reasons. In relative terms there was less dissatisfaction in relation to arrangements for school-going children.

Ireland participated in an OECD review of family friendly policies the report of which was published in November 2003. The report analysed the existing mix of policies, including tax and benefit policies, childcare policy and employment and workplace practices and how they contribute to parental labour market outcomes and other societal outcomes. The report made specific policy recommendations for Ireland which include introduction of an entitlement to part-time work for parents with very young children, measures to facilitate lone parents to take up full-time employment, encouragement for employers and unions to make the workplace more family friendly and good quality childcare services. It also recommended additional public investment in childcare, particularly for low-income families.

The social partnership agreement *Sustaining Progress 2003-2005* contains a commitment to setting up a Partnership Sub-Committee with representatives of Government, Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Irish Business and Employers Confederation under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme which will consider recommendations on how to improve the availability of quality childcare for working parents and how the supply of both preschool and after-school care can be accelerated (National Agreement *Sustaining Progress 2003*). In particular the committee will examine and make recommendations on the feasibility of establishing workplace childcare arrangements such as provision of specific supports to facilitate employers and unions to work together to design and implement a range of childcare support at the level of the enterprise together with targeting resources towards promoting the active participation of employers in developing and providing childcare initiatives in consultation with the unions.

Child protection, children's rights and children as citizens

The latest available national statistics from the Department of Health and Children show that health boards received 8,269 reports of child abuse during 2000 of which 37.3% (3,085) were confirmed. Of the total number, the majority were cases of neglect (1,453), 548 of physical abuse, 517 sexual abuse and 567 emotional abuse. This is an increase of almost 30% over the previous five years. However, it is difficult to assess whether the increase in cases notified is due to a higher incidence of abuse or whether increased public awareness has led to increased reporting (Department of Health and Children, Health Statistics 2000 (2003))

Awareness of the extent of child abuse has heightened over the past six years, particularly in relation to the abuse of children in state institutions over the past forty years. In order to respond to this situation the Government issued a public apology to the victims and also set up a Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse as part of a range of measures to address the effects of abuse in childhood on the victims. The primary functions of the Commission are to listen to victims of childhood abuse who want to recount their experiences and to fully investigate all allegations of abuse made to it. In addition the Residential Institutions Redress Board was established under the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002 to make awards to persons who, as children, were abused while resident in industrial reformatories and other institutions subject to state regulation or inspection.

The two decades from 1970 laid the foundations for policy developments in the 1990s and the enactment of the Childcare Act 1991. A developing awareness of the extent of child physical and sexual abuse, the increasing body of research on child abuse, the official reports of child neglect and abuse, the increasing role of voluntary bodies in the support of families, strong pressure group activity, the development of health board structures and the professionalism of social work services all came together to affect policy during this period (Ferguson 1996: 23–5). The period was characterized by attempts to move towards policies of prevention and support for families in providing for the care and welfare of their children. The overriding responsibility for child welfare became firmly rooted in the health board structures with central government guidelines allowing for regional variations of interpretation (Kenny 1995: 56). However, Ferguson (1996: 26) has argued that initially government policy was more concerned with influencing what practitioners actually do in relation to suspected cases, and putting less emphasis on the prevention and family support aspects. It is this legacy, which has led to the present child protection policies.

The passing of the Childcare Act 1991 brought together many of the strands of childcare policy and marked the beginning of the present era. The Act is based on the principle that it is generally in the best interests of a child to be brought up in his or her own family (Section 3.2c) and that it is the function of the health board to promote the welfare of children in its area who are not receiving adequate care and protection (Section 3.1). The Childcare Act 1991, despite being signed into law that year, was not fully implemented until December 1996. Thus, the mid to late 1990s was characterized by the implementation of new legislation and dominated by increasing public awareness of physical and sexual abuse as a major factor in Irish society. A growing awareness of children's rights has been significant in the development of a philosophy surrounding children and their needs, together with an increasing understanding of the need to institute measures to educate children and the public about child abuse, with concentration on prevention.

In June 1998 the government launched Springboard an initiative of 15 family support projects and in 1999 the Government also committed itself to establishing 100 Family and Community Centres throughout the country in line with the recommendations of the Commission on the Family (1998:17), which had highlighted the need for health boards to prioritise family support work at the preventive level and to make resources available to do so. The centres were planned as a social partnership between the statutory and voluntary agencies driven by the communities involved. In particular the Commission on the Family (1998) recommended the extension of the Family Support Scheme run by the Eastern Health Board and the Community Mothers Programmes (Johnson et al. 1993). In addition, the government proposed developing parenting programmes and 'other supports for vulnerable families' (Department of Health Press Release June 1998 www.dohc.ie/press/releases/). An evaluation of the *Springboard* family support projects found that parents and children showed considerable improvement in well being and it was estimated that the projects had halved the

number of children at moderate to high risk of being abused or going into care. (McKeown et al. 2001). By the end of the century family support services were at an expansionary phase. The National Development Plan 2000–2006 contained a commitment to the allocation of funds to childcare, community and family support and youth services. The importance of family support was also underlined in the National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, *Children First* (1999:59-63) These initiatives indicated a very important policy change in relation to the prevention of family breakdown and the support of families.

This period of development also saw the beginning of a children's rights perspective within childcare policy and practice. In January 1998, the UN Committee published its concerns about Ireland's performance in relation to its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite the fact that every report on childcare policy and practice since 1970 has emphasized the need for rationalization of the administrative systems affecting children, statutory responsibility for their welfare remains divided. The competent authorities are the Departments of Health and Children, Education and Science, and Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Responsibility for the welfare of children in need of care and protection and children with disabilities lies with the Department of Health and Children, within which a Minister of State for Children has been appointed as the designated minister with overall responsibility for coordinating the three Departments. It does, however, leave a serious anomaly, with child policy being separated from family policy development within the Department of Social and Family Affairs. There is a real need for rationalisation of these administrative structures and to place children's welfare within the context of the family.

In 2000 the Government published its National Children's Strategy, *Our Children—Their Lives* (2000). Three national goals were identified:

- Children will have a voice;
- Children's lives will be better understood;
- Children will receive quality supports and services.

In order to ensure that the goals and objectives of the National Children's Strategy are met a plan was set out which involves cooperation between government departments, statutory and voluntary agencies and the research community. As part of the implementation a National Children's Advisory Council was set up together with the National Children's Office in 2002. This office has the leading role in the implementation of the Strategy. Its functions are to advise the Minister on all aspects of children's lives, including the development of child well being indicators, to advise the Minister on better coordination and delivery of services, to undertake and advise on research and to advise on the development of mechanisms to consult with children. In respect of the latter the National Children's Office has promoted the setting up of Comhairle na nOg at local level and the national Dail na nOg³ (National Children's Office 2003). In 2003 the National Children's Office prepared a National Play Policy, which was published in 2004 and continued monitoring the Youth Homelessness Strategy.

In June 2002 legislation was passed to enable the setting up of the office of an Ombudsman for Children. This was established and the Ombudsman took up office in March 2004.

The Irish Constitution and the reluctance of the state to interfere in family life have circumscribed policy developments. Policies have resulted from attempts to balance the rights of parents, the rights of children and the rights of the state. However, until the early 1990s, the focus was firmly on the rights of parents. The full implementation of the Childcare Act 1991 has laid the foundation for policy to focus far more clearly on the rights and needs of children. Constitutional change is needed now to underpin the legislation. Its emphasis on prevention, on partnership between parents, the state and other social service agencies, and cooperation and coordination between all agencies involved with children, provides a framework for policy development. However, it is only a framework. Despite the proactive orientation of the Childcare Act, much childcare and protection work remains reactive and partnership with families operates at a low level (Buckley 1997: 120).

³ Dail na nOg is the children's parliament which meets annually with children's representatives elected through local Comhairle na nOg which are established and organised by City/County Development Boards (see Department of Health and Children 2004).

Since the beginning of the 21st century there has been considerable movement in the commitment by workers and government to listen to children, involve them and their families in the decision-making process and strive towards a children's rights perspective. The challenge now is for adequate resources to be made available on a continuous basis in order that the full potential of the frameworks and policies developed can be realised. Policy must now be proactive rather than reactive and driven by a real political commitment to enhancing the position of children in Ireland. The government has given a commitment to undertake a longitudinal study of children in Ireland. However, it is imperative that such a study should be instituted as soon as possible in order that the true impact of the childcare policies that exist can be measured against the real, lived lives of Irish children.

Current issues in family policy

Definition of the family

The definition of the family within the Constitution remains a contentious issue within family policy because of the increasing variety of family forms and also because of the different and inconsistent treatment of cohabiting and married families within the tax and welfare codes. The family has already been defined in broader terms within the Irish legal framework where unmarried families and families based on marriage have been equalised.⁴ In order to begin to broaden and inform the debate on the issue of cohabitation the Law Reform Commission recently published a consultation paper on the rights and duties of cohabitees (LRC 2004). The Consultation Paper deals with the rights and duties of cohabitees in relation to property rights, succession, maintenance, social welfare, pensions, taxation, health care and domestic violence (LRC 2004). It proposed that measures dealing with these issues in the case of married partners should equally apply to cohabitees.

The reforms proposed would apply to 'qualified cohabitees' defined as persons who live together in a 'marriage-like' relationship for a continuous period of three years or, where there is a child from the relationship, for two years. This definition includes relationships between same-sex or opposite sex couples, neither of whom are married to each other or to any other person. The Commission argues that the exclusion of any person who is not married is necessitated by Article 41 of the Constitution, which deals with the provisions in respect of the family. The Commission proposes that 'qualified cohabitees' should be given the right to apply to Court for certain rights and financial reliefs following the termination of the cohabiting relationship. The Commission made some specific provisional recommendations in relations to property, succession, maintenance, extensions of the definition of cohabitation in social welfare, to include those in same-sex relationships and recognition of cohabitation within the tax code. It also considered that cohabitees should be given greater recognition in the context of health care situations and decision making and changes in relation to the Domestic Violence Act 1996 which would give greater protection to cohabitees.

The proposals made by the Law Reform Commission met with strong criticism from the Irish Bishops. While they recognised that cohabiting families in difficulty were legitimate welfare subjects, it argued strongly against any recognition of *de facto* unions and in particular same-sex couples. The Catholic Archbishop of Armagh speaking at a conference organised by the Catholic Bishops to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the UN Year of the Family, on 'Supporting Marriage and Family Life' (3rd May 2004) stated:

'some recent initiatives propose the institutional recognition of 'de facto' unions and even their equivalence to families which have their origin in a marriage commitment. It is important to draw attention to the damage that such recognition and equivalence would represent for the identify of marriage as traditionally understood.'

The recommendations of the Law Reform Commission are likely to stimulate ongoing discussion before any changes in the legislation are introduced because of the challenge they make to traditional views on the definition of the family in their attempt to equalise the rights of married and non-married families. For example the

⁴ The definition of the family has been expanded in pieces of legislation such as the Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act 1997; Domestic Violence Act 1996, Parental Leave Act 1998, Employment Equality Act 1998, Mental Health Act 2001 and the Residential Tenancies Act 2004

submission of Treoir (Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children) to the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution (2005) argues that the broad protection afforded to family life in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights should be incorporated within the Irish Constitution.

Family support—government's 'Families First' approach to family policy

Since the publication of a report of the Family Commission (1998) the focus of much family policy has been on the provision of services aimed at supporting families at a material, emotional and relationship level. The Family Support Agency is a statutory body set up in 2003, its main functions being to provide a family mediation service, to support, promote and develop the provision of marriage and relationship counselling and family support services, promote and disseminate information on issues concerning marriage, relationship education, parenting and family responsibilities and develop the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme.

There are over 80 Family Resource Centres, which receive financial support from the Family Support Agency. This programme aims to combat disadvantage and improve the functioning of the family unit. The centres provide such services as counselling and information for lone parents, young mothers and socially excluded families. They aim to enhance the self-esteem and potential of people by working closely with them within their communities, with particular emphasis on creating successful partnerships between voluntary and statutory agencies.

The Family Support Agency Strategic Plan for the next three years was published in May 2004. The strategy is based on delivering direct and indirect support services for families and contributing to the effectiveness of family policy and services through research. In 2004 the Minister made 7.62 million Euros available for the support of family organisations, which is seven times the allocation in 1997.

Supporting fathers

The absence of men from family support services and the need to make services more accessible and acceptable to fathers has become an area of growing concern within family policy. The Irish Constitution makes no specific mention of fathers. Since the family is defined as based on marriage, unmarried fathers therefore have no Constitutional rights to children born outside marriage. They have no automatic right to guardianship of their children although they have the right to apply to the Court to be made a guardian and can apply for custody. However, in this case it would be unusual for an unmarried father to have custody of his child. In cases of divorce and separation the courts must be satisfied that appropriate arrangements are made for the welfare of the children before granting a separation or divorce order. Data is not available to indicate how many children are the subjects of joint custody orders and how many fathers merely have access arrangements. However, a number of vocal groups representing non-resident fathers are active in trying to raise issues concerning the rights of fathers to be involved in the active parenting of their children.

The predominant focus of services for families is on mothers rather than fathers. Fathers tend to be avoided by professionals and possibly vice versa and there is uncertainty among professionals on how to approach fathers (McKeown 2001:45). There is growing recognition that services need to be developed to support fathers as part of a broader strategy of promoting the well being of children and families, including the well being of men and women. Groups on parenting skills are being developed and aimed particularly at fathers.

A recent study (McKeown et al. 2003) on family well being in Irish families showed that the family type was much less important in relation to happiness and well being than the way in which family members related to each other and coped with each other's personalities. The study showed that the diversity of families in Ireland is not undermining the well being of parents or children, thus suggesting that there is a need for a more inclusive concept of the family which would focus on the set of relationships that link parents to each other and to their children, even where the parents are not living in the same household. Non-resident fathers continue to have a significant influence on the well being of their children, as do their grandparents. These findings have implications for family policy by highlighting the need for measures that develop and support relationship skills.

Furthermore, interventions to support families also need to acknowledge the influence of parents' psychological traits and how these influence the happiness of all family members.

Future development of family policy

Over the past six years, family policy has become a far more explicit area of public policy as demonstrated by a number of important structural changes. In May 2003, in preparation for the 10th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, the Minister for Social and Family Affairs initiated a series of consultations or 'Family Fora' to hear the views of family members together with family organisations, those working with families and public representatives about their needs and concerns. In setting up the Fora the Minister stated:

"this process is about taking the 'pulse of the nation' on family matters. My task will then be to get the diagnosis right and come up with the remedies in terms of Government policies, programmes and structures that will strengthen family and family life on an ongoing basis"

(Department of Social and Family Affairs: Government Press Release September 2003
www.welfare.ie/press/pro3/index03.html)

Discussions focused on the impact of current social and economic developments affecting families, the effectiveness of government policies and programmes in responding to these developments and what forum participants saw as priorities for strengthening family well being. Other areas of concern were centred on the nature of structural change of the family, family processes and relationships together with the circumstances in which families in Ireland now live. The policy area discussion focused on the values and models that should inform policy, how family policy should be organised and what its priorities should be, together with the role of the State and how far public policies should facilitate Government intervention in the family.

The report of the Fora was published in March 2004 (Daly 2004). The values considered to be important in order to form the basis of family policy were:

- Respect: respect for unpaid work carried out within the home by family members. Participants expressed the view that such work was no longer valued by society and that current policies give little support or encouragement for people who choose to work full time in the home.
- Choice: families should have real choice in the area of family and employment. Increased support for work/life balance policies.
- Balance: people want to reclaim an independent place for the family and that family has the right to be the central concern of policy rather than being considered merely as an economic unit.
- Equality: measures to address gaps between men and women in relation to family roles, equal opportunities for all families irrespective of ethnic, religious, cultural and economic background with equal access to services.
- Diversity: the need to embrace on equal terms family in its diverse forms. There is a need for an inclusive definition of family which recognises and gives value to all types and forms of family.
- Prevention and support for families in difficulties.

The Report also addressed possible approaches to the development and implementation of family policy. It emphasised that:

"Family policy is transversal in nature. That is, family crosses policy domains and is not sectoral. Hence rather than being confined to one department of domain or policy a concern about the family should inform the work of all government departments"

(Daly 2004:59)

One of the main conclusions of the Fora was that support and assistance from the State should be made available to all families at critical points, such as the birth of the first child, but that there should also be specialist services for families with additional needs. Furthermore, families should be consulted and be actively involved in policy formation.

The recommendations arising from the Fora covered a number of areas:

- Support services for parents in their parenting role;
- Increased support for fathers in undertaking their caring role within the family;
- Increased support for lone parent families;
- Help for children affected by family breakdown;
- The need for a strong political will to support and promote work/life balance for working parents;
- The need to value the work undertaken by women working full time in the home;
- Policies supporting families with relationship difficulties;
- Policies on the family as carer.

Many of the developments in family policy to date have been the result of an economic agenda; the need for increased participation of women in the work force to alleviate the labour shortages in a period of strong economic growth and to encourage lone mothers into the workforce to alleviate costs to the exchequer; in compliance with EU policies relating to equality. However, it is clear that families speaking at the Fora wished to redirect the focus towards families as units providing stable caring environments. As one participant put it

"when was the last time we heard the government refer to Ireland as a society and not an economy?"
(Daly 2004:56)

The public Fora and the subsequent publication are to form the basis of a Family Policy Strategy, which the Minister intends to publish during 2004. In a recent press release the Minister stated

"this Government's commitment to families will come later this year the 10th Anniversary of the UN International Year of the Family when I intend to publish an integrated strategy for the support of families and family life"
(Department of Social and Family Affairs, Press Release 31st May 2004)

The publication of such a strategy should mark a significant development for family policy in Ireland by placing it high on the political agenda.

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GIOVANNI B. SGRITTA

Italy

Introduction

In Italy, the period between the mid-1990s and the first years of the new millennium was one of both stability and change. Stability and continuity marked the dynamics of family and generational relationships; at the same time, there were far-reaching and interesting legislative innovations in the field of family policies, a sector that had remained static and widely neglected for a long time.

Over the last five years, in fact, there has been a continuation of those demographic trends that, in Italy as well as in other Western countries, had already emerged in embryonic form from the second half of the 1960s onwards: that is, a continuous drop in fertility levels, a natural rate of increase of the population that has been negative for some years now, longer life expectancy, and—more recently—increasing immigration flows from abroad, both legal and illegal. These changes in the demographic picture have been accompanied by the following:

- an equally profound revolution in the age structure of the population, with an increase in the number of the elderly and a decrease in the number of young people;
- a significant increase in the number of families, as well as a decrease in their average size;
- a significant shift in the timing of couple formation;
- a decline in marriages;
- a slight but gradual increase in family instability (separations and divorces).

Partly in response to these changes, and partly for reasons related to the political scenario and specific choices made by the government, the period between 1996 and 2000/2001 was also characterised by a new and, in many ways, both original and surprising attention paid to the family, at least as far as social policies were concerned. During these years, the sheer number of laws passed in this area constitutes an important reversal of the trend of the preceding half century, one marked by general inattention and historic delay with regard to family policies. The new laws also acknowledge the role of families in the care and maintenance of their members, both young and old, and of the responsibilities that women have to bear on their shoulders. As evidence of this substantial change, we can draw attention to the measures of economic assistance for (traditionally less well-off) families with children, the law on parental leave, the children's law and the comprehensive reorganisation of the system of services and social assistance.

A structural view: the 2001 census

Turning to structural changes, the recent publication of the results of the latest population and housing census offers us the opportunity to draw a detailed picture of the demographic and family situation of the country in the past decade.¹ From 1991 to 2001 the resident population remained almost unchanged: 56.7 million versus 56.9. If we consider the contribution of immigration, this means demographic growth was practically zero. During this time, however, the family panorama changed a great deal. In 2001 there were over 21.8 million households in Italy, with an average number of members equal to 2.59. In a single decade the number of households has increased by about two million units while their size has progressively decreased (2.8 in 1991).

At the date of the last census almost the whole population lived in families; only a minimal part (0.7%) lived, for various reasons, in different types of institutions (schools, residential care homes, nursing homes, pri-

¹ The results of the 2001 census can be consulted on the website of the National Institute of Statistics: <http://dawinci.istat.it/daWinci/jsp/MD/dawinciMD.jsp>

sons, religious institutions, etc.). In the course of the decade other important changes marked the structure of Italian families; on the whole, the picture shown by the census is that of a family whose size is getting smaller and smaller but also weaker, more unstable and more fragmented. In particular, there has been a great increase in one-person households. These were little more than 20% in 1991 and have now grown by 5% (24.89%) but with marked differences between different areas of the country: over 28% in the North and under 20% in the southern regions. Worthy of note are also the reduction in the proportion of couples with children, the increase of those without children, the increase of recomposed families (which today are over 5% of the total) with peaks of 7% in the North) and the progressive restriction of the quota of large and extended families. At the end of 2001, couples with children made up 57.5% of the total of family units, those without children 29.4% and single parent families 13% (the great majority of these are made up of mothers and children). Needless to say, all these parameters show variations, marked in some cases, between the different areas of the country. The North being quite similar to the countries of Central Europe and the South, (the *Mezzogiorno*), in spite of the changes that have taken place in recent years, still retains more traditional characteristics.

Family instability has also grown considerably in the course of the past decade, due to an increase in separations and divorces. In 2001 there were over 2.5 million people in Italy who had been through a marriage –break up that was either definitive (if divorced) or at risk of being so (if separated legally or not). With respect to the total number of separated and divorced people, the proportion of under-45s in the same condition amounts to 42%, a clear sign that the phenomenon of matrimonial instability has particularly involved the younger demographic cohorts.

An interesting aspect, which we will return to more fully in the following pages, regards the phenomenon of the 'long' family that is the prolonged stay of young adults in their families of origin. Information from the 2001 census confirms that in the past decade this phenomenon, far from decreasing, has increased even more. In the 20–24 age group, young people who continue to live with their parents are the great majority, no less than 85%. In the next age group (25–29) the proportion decreases but still remains quite high at 70.3%. More than a quarter (26.2%) of young adults aged 30–34 still live at home with their parents and almost 10% remain until the age of 45 even though they have long since finished studying and have (presumably) found a job. Interesting in many ways is also the fact that, differently from other aspects of family life and structure, the prolonged residence of young adults in their families of origin does not show great differences between the various areas of the country. The phenomenon is more widespread in the South than in North and Central Italy, especially in the central age groups (25–34) but the differences are actually quite small, in the order of 3–5%. This shows, without a shadow of a doubt, that we are faced with a complex and generalized phenomenon that escapes the characteristics that widely distinguish the demographic, economic and cultural structure of the Italian regions.

Thus, the causes of the phenomenon cannot be blamed either on the autonomous choices of the families or on the specific structural characteristics of the territorial context in which they live. The reasons are rather of a general, institutional order that have a profound impact on the nature of relationships between the family, the State and the market; namely, the policies of income maintenance, social services, housing policies, the education system, organization of the job market and the economic support of families with children. In other words, young people's long stay in their parents' home, with all that entails (the function of education as a parking place, later entry to the job market, delay in the formation of families, the decline in births, demographic aging, the extension of the network of family relationships, social exclusion and poverty) is in fact just an adaptive response of the families to the circumstances in which they are forced to operate.

Family relationships: gender and generations

From the point of view of family relationships, Italy is still halfway between tradition and modernisation. Some of the elements that characterise the formation of new families, structure of households, stability of marital relations, women's role and the situation of new generations are definitely of a traditional type. However, in other aspects, Italian families show behaviour patterns and attitudes that hint at a gradual process of convergence and similarity to the typical family patterns of other European and Western countries. Moreover, there are still marked territorial differences between the regions of the North and the great urban centres, that are more deve-

loped economically and more orientated towards consumption and modernisation, and the South and rural areas that show more traditional characteristics.

As a rule, in Italy the family is firmly at centre stage. The use of private services to assist with housework and care does not show any particular signs of change as compared to the past. Care of the house, children and the elderly continue to be almost exclusively women's responsibility. In any case, it is a fact that the Italian welfare *régime* has as a rule privileged services 'in cash' (transfers), while services aimed at the family have always played a residual role. Differences with respect to other European countries emerge clearly, although indirectly, from a recent Eurobarometer survey. To the question of "Who has to bear the burden of looking after dependent old people?" more than 60% of those interviewed in Greece, Spain and Portugal, and over 48% of Italians replied that this responsibility was the children's duty, as compared with the European average of 37%. Only 2% of all Italians think that elderly parents should be looked after in an old people's home (as opposed to the European average of 12.6%). No less interesting are the replies to another survey question, aimed at discovering in which areas public policies should bear the burden of citizens' needs. Only 61.7% and 59.8% of the Italian sample replied that the responsibilities of the government and local authorities should be extended, respectively, to the care and assistance of old people and to looking after children. The corresponding percentages are far higher in other European countries (Malpas 1999).

In 2000, only 8.8% of Italian families availed themselves of at least one of the following paid private services: home help, a babysitter, and care for the elderly and infirm. The most widespread service contracted was concerned housework, which 6.9% of all families used, while only a very limited proportion of families employed a babysitter (around 5% of those with a child up to age 15) or a person to assist an older adult (4.2% of the families in which at least one family member was over 64). In all cases, the use of paid domestic help is more frequent in the North than in the South, as well as in the large urban centres and among the wealthier families.²

As is well known, family obligations in Italy have traditionally played an important role in the satisfaction of basic needs. Making up for the lack of an adequate structure offering assistance and services paid for by the public purse was, and still is, the duty of the extended family and the kinship network. Thanks to this widespread network of informal support, millions of people have been able to take advantage of unpaid help that is often essential to maintain a minimum level of well-being. This help is provided in the form of care (looking after elderly people and children, doing housework, mediating with welfare institutions, settling bureaucratic matters and providing companionship), simple nursing, financial help, and help with work and studies. The research data we have at our disposal on this subject span a period of 15 years, from 1983 to 1998. During this period, the percentage of caregivers increased from 20.8% to 22.5% of the population, even though the share of beneficiary families decreased (from 23.3% to 14.8%). As was to be expected, it is mainly women who take on the leading role in the informal help network (24.5% as opposed to 20.3% of men)—independently of age, social status and location. Not only are higher proportions of women involved, but they also devote more of their time to this activity.

The highest quota of caregivers is concentrated in the age group between 55 and 64 years; this is also the group in which, between 1983 and 1998, there was the greatest increase in people engaged in giving help. It goes without saying that this age group is basically made up of those generations who are engaged simultaneously on two different fronts: caring for their children, who in Italy tend to stay at home even beyond the age of 30, and caring for their parents, who once past the age of 80 enter a phase of the lifecycle in which the need for care and assistance increases. An interesting fact emerges from the surveys: During the period under consideration, help given to the oldest members of the population showed a marked decrease, while in 1983, 30.7% of families with at least one elderly member and without children received help at least once, in 1998 this percentage fell to 16%.³

On the whole, these data show that the network of solidarity surrounding Italian families is still relatively strong and widespread. However, one does notice incipient signs of change: indications that appear mainly in the

² This data comes from the Multiscope Family Survey *Aspetti della vita quotidiana*, anno 2000. See Istat 2001: 251.

³ This data is taken from the following surveys: *Indagine sulle strutture ed i comportamenti familiari* (1983) and the Multiscope Family Survey *Soggetti sociali e condizione dell'infanzia* (1998). See Istat, 2000: 457–469.

reduction of the quota of families who receive help, in the increase of the average age of caregivers and in a strong selection of the flow of assistance that tends to be directed towards families with children in which the woman works. It may be premature to draw conclusions from these embryonic trends. However, one may hypothesise that the proverbial solidarity strength of Italian families is showing signs of distress and is having difficulty in adapting to the challenges caused by demographic changes and the socio-economic scenario.

The growing needs generated by an aging population and the inclusion of women in the job market, as well as the prolonging of the time that young people remain at home with their parents, are certainly strong factors of change: on the one hand, imposing an increase in policies and public services aimed at families, and on the other, stimulating families to find new solutions and new forms of adaptation in organising their relationships and their time.

A significant aspect of the changes that have taken place recently in the structure of family networks is related to the extent of help from relatives. If one considers help as a whole—informal and formal, provided by the kinship network and by outside services—between 1983 and 1998, the number of families having an elderly member over 65 who received help at least once grew by nearly 10%; and that of families with an elderly member over 80 by almost 14%. Most of this growth is due to a process of substitution of the informal network by utilising help provided by private individuals and the public sector. The case is different with regard to families with children, for whom the importance of services outside the informal network is negligible. This shows that, in the meantime, family support networks have reduced their range of intervention. To a certain extent, they still survive within the restricted context of the nuclear family. Families depend almost solely on the informal help network but tend to contract care and assistance for elderly people, for whom it is apparent that the use of external help and services provided by the public authorities and/or paid personnel has increased enormously.

Families with special needs

When the family has to tackle problems of assistance and personal care of one of the members of the household, this scenario becomes particularly complex and more articulated. What is peculiar to these families is the intensity and the frequency with which their needs must be met. According to a recent survey (Istat 1998), in 1998 in Italy the families in this situation; that is, with a member in need of personal care such as eating, getting up, dressing, bathing or using toilets, were about 3,100,000 (amounting to 15% of the total number of families). In 79.8% of the cases this member was an elderly person or a person who was entering the third age (over 64 years). The informal network activated around these families provided more than 36% of the total amount of informal help.

Both the intensity and frequency of informal help, however, change in relation to the gravity of the situation and the structure of the living arrangement. For one thing, the more serious the need, the greater the proportion of families that received help (36.6% when at least one member of the family is in serious difficulties versus 24.4% when at least one component has no grave problems); furthermore, the 'socially weak' families, i.e., those composed of a single aged person and the one-parent families, receive the higher percentage of informal help from the family network: respectively, 51% of the elderly who live alone and 26% of the single parent families. Considering the type of help received, it is interesting to note that in the case of one-person families they consist mainly of help with domestic chores (51.9%, but 71% if there are serious problems), companionship, accompanying and hospitality (35.6% and 45%, respectively), help in dealing with the practical business of life (31.9% and 43.2%), and in assistance concerning the accomplishment of personal daily necessities (27.5 and 74.3%).

Another interesting result of the survey is that the closer the relationship between the helper and the receiver, the more frequent and intense is the intervention of the informal network. Children and their families of course play a pivotal role in all the activities of assistance (of the parents) except the monetary aspect; for instance, in care and assistance they are involved in 51% of cases whereas the kinship network is involved in 41.6% of cases. Considerable however is also the role of other informal carers, not belonging to the kinship network like friends, neighbours and last but not least family associations and the voluntary solidarity is also considerable, and, absorb altogether around 33% of the total informal family help. Both in the *inside-the-family* system

of informal help and in the *outside-the-family*, the common characteristic is that the demand for assistance is not 'externalised'; i.e., the solutions are asked for in the private sphere and not addressed to the public sector; moreover, even when the request goes beyond the immediate entourage of the family, it is frequently directed to the private market. In conclusion, these results confirm that the family in Italy is still largely an autonomous system of social solidarity.⁴

Changes in family formation: parents and their (young adult) children

Changes in the demographic picture and the structure of family relationships are, at the same time, both a cause and an effect of the changes that have taken place in the relationship between the generations. In fact, in the course of the last few decades, together with the decline in births and the aging of the population, there have also been important changes involving the process of both family formation and structure. The postponement of the age at which people marry and have their first child is followed—in quick succession—by the reduction of the average size of the family, the decrease in the number of families with children, increased family instability, the fragmentation of family typologies and the appearance of the 'long family', i.e., *genus italicum* in which the adult children tend to stay with their parents until a pathologically late age.

In this scenario relationships between the older and younger generations have undergone radical changes. For one thing, there is the prospect of the increased economic and care responsibilities that today's meagre demographic generations will have to bear when they become adult and elderly tomorrow. Furthermore, the traditional rules that once governed generational relationships within the family have become uncertain, i.e., less clear and more difficult to put into practice. In many cases, these rules produce tensions that give rise to downright perverse effects. In any case, a certain form of adaptation takes place spontaneously in the family sphere with the appearance of criteria and formulae of secondary redistribution that partially oppose and compensate for the arrangements made and decisions taken in other spheres (e.g. the State or the market).

In this case, too, the Italian situation is very different from that of other countries. A recent secondary analysis of data from the 1994 European Community Household Panel Survey revealed that, compared to 75% of young Danes who had left their families of origin between the ages of 21 and 25, only 7% of their Italian contemporaries had taken this step. Furthermore, 28% of women between 21 and 25 were already mothers in Sweden and the United Kingdom, as opposed to only 12% in Italy. Finally, in the United Kingdom, half of the young people had joined the job market by age 19, while in Italy and Spain, entry to the job market tended to happen five years later, so that in these countries half of all young people were still without a job after age 24 (Iacovou & Berthoud 2001: 2).

Separation from the family of origin, the birth of the first child and entry into the job market are three canonical moments that mark the end of young people's dependence and the assumption of the responsibilities and autonomy connected with adulthood. Each of these moments can either help or hinder the accomplishment of that transition. As many studies and a great deal of research have widely confirmed, each of these passages has undergone a gradual prolongation in Italy, so that reaching adulthood has been put off to a more and more advanced age and young people continue to live increasingly longer and in greater numbers in their parents' home.

A survey by the National Institute of Statistics in 1998 makes an important contribution to clarifying the causes that bring about these results. The impression one gets from the survey is that, besides objective scarcities and material obstacles (continuation of studies, lack of a job, difficulty in finding suitable housing, etc.), there are also factors and elements of a different nature that encourage young people to remain with their parents. These can be summarised in terms of an 'adjustment' considered convenient by both parents and children to conditions imposed on them from the outside. The main reason given by young people (whether they are male or female makes no difference) who continue to live at home, is simply that it suits them: "*It suits me, I have my freedom*", reply 48.1% of the interviewees. The 'objective' obstacles that young people give to justify their status

⁴ Data and comments considered in this paragraph are largely taken from Buratta & Cialesi 2002 and Sabbadini 2002.

(continuing their studies, lack of work and of a place to live) occupy a very important place, but this is not what matters. In the 18–19 year-old age group, the answers that indicated objective obstacles to leaving home have a frequency of 79.9%; in the 20–24-year-old age group a rate of 69%; while those who mentioned 'discretionary' and subjective reasons make up 57% and 65.4%, respectively. The exact opposite happens in the age groups 25–29 and 30–34, where the reasons that would hinder or not encourage leaving home are above all subjective: 69.8% in the 25–29 year-old age group and as high as 75.3% in the 30–34 year-old age group. Thus, where the first are higher, the second are lower—and vice-versa (Istat 1998).

With regard to parents, the scant data available seems to indicate that they do not put a lot of pressure on their children to go their own way and face the choices and responsibilities of independent living. Often the question does not even arise. Asked whether having their children stay on at home was a problem, only 8% answered in the affirmative: for 38%, it is "*a normal phenomenon*"; and for 54%, even "*a pleasure*". Furthermore, to the question of what were the main reasons for why their son/daughter did *not* want to go and live on his/her own, a good 43% of the parents declared, without mincing words, that "*they would have to give up their home comforts*". In addition, apart from the list of the usual objective ills (lack of work, cost of housing, etc.), there were also those who candidly admitted that their son/daughter "*did not want to be independent*" (17%), "*is not used to making sacrifices or giving things up*" (7%) or "*taking on responsibilities*" (7%), or "*doesn't want to upset us*" (3%). More than half of the parents interviewed are likewise convinced that their children will miss life in the family when they leave.

Another curious fact comes from the answers to two specific items on the relative advantages and disadvantages, both for parents and for their children, of the latter leaving home. The range of replies offers a real sentimental *cahier de doléances*: 55% reply that there would be no advantage, apart from fewer expenses (21%) and less work (17%). Only 12% of the replies indicated that the parents would somehow benefit in terms of greater freedom and privacy (5%). At any rate, this is nothing compared to the disadvantages that the 'loss' of the son/daughter would involve in affective terms (50%), worries (24%), loneliness and sadness (34%). Only 20% of the replies indicate that no disadvantage (for the parents) would result. Is this just objectivity or is it excessive paternalism? It is difficult to say. In any case, according to the parents, their son/daughter would not gain much either if he/she chose to leave home and become independent: 26% of the replies admitted that he/she would gain in freedom of choice and decision, 27% in freedom of movement, 20% in a greater sense of responsibility. However, there are also those who place these 'gains' in the column of disadvantages, and only 12% of the replies indicate that leaving the parental home would not result in any disadvantage at all for their son/daughter (Bonifazi et al. 1999).

It seems, after all, that parents and children—in the circumstances dictated by the rules of the economic, political and social game that they have to play—find personal reasons that, from time to time and depending on circumstances and opportunities, can facilitate and render more advantageous the range of choices consistent with the given situation. The fact is that, in this way, a perverse mechanism is set into motion. Each of the institutional actors who take part in the *mise en scène* of the transition to adulthood contribute, though unintentionally, to producing an unwanted result:

- Young people postpone the formation of a family and procreation *sine die* bringing about demographic outcomes that, in the long run, cannot be sustained by society as a whole.
- The family, like it or not, offers a safe and—according to the means available—comfortable shelter for children who decide to stay on at home.
- The education system permits an excessive waste of resources, does not manage to contain the actual duration of education within limits and does not promote effective links with the labour market—the latter, because it does not create enough and/or suitable opportunities of employment for young people.
- Finally, politics and the welfare system do not do enough to resolve these problems and, by not offering adequate support to families with children and to young people, end up aggravating the solidarity function of the family system abnormally, overburdening the parents and clipping young people's wings in their transition to adulthood (Livi Bacci 1997).

The economic situation of families

The Report on the State of the Nation prepared for 1999 by the National Institute of Statistics dedicates a whole chapter to the poverty trend over the past 20 years. The percentage of poor families increased progressively in the 1980s, reaching the highest level between 1987 and 1988 (over 14%). In the following decade, the incidence of poverty went down slightly: in 1998, 2,558,000 families—amounting to 11.8% of the total number of families and to 7,418,000 individuals—were poor (Istat 2000: 427). In 2000, according to the results of the survey on the consumption and income of Italian families, the poverty rate rose again, reaching 12.3%: 2,707,000 families or 7,948,000 individuals (13.9% of the entire population) (Istat 2001b). A more recent survey, relative to the situation in 2002, seems to show a slight decrease in the poverty levels. The percentage of families below the poverty threshold is equal to 11%, corresponding to around 2 million 456 thousand families and to a total of 7 million 140 thousand poor people (12.4% of the entire population) (Coccia & Masi 2003). In both cases, it is a question of how relative poverty is measured—which, as is well known, takes any inequality in the distribution of income (or consumer costs) more into consideration than the actual paucity of resources. In fact, if we pass from relative measurements to the absolute ones calculated on the basis of a basket of goods and services considered essential for the standard of living of an Italian family, the poverty rate is much lower. In 1998, 4.4% of families fell below the level of absolute poverty; in 2000, the percentage of families in conditions of absolute poverty went down slightly (4.3%), while in 2002 the percentage of families with an income equal to or below 80% (EUR 658.76 per month) of the standard poverty line was 5.1%.⁵

However, in spite of the see-sawing poverty levels in the past two decades, some constants are obvious, however. First, the gap between the incidence of poverty in the developed regions of the North and the more backward ones of the South grew steadily, with the exception of the last year. In 1998, more than 65% of poor families lived in the *Mezzogiorno* (Southern Italy), as compared to 32.9% of the total number of families resident in this area of the country. In 2002, however, the percent composition of poor families by geographic division was the following: 21.9% in the North, 11.8% in the Centre and 66.3% in the South of Italy, where more than one family in five (22.4%) lives in conditions of relative poverty (as against 5.0% in the North and 6.7% in the Centre) (Coccia & Masi 2003).

In the whole period under review, the families with the highest levels of poverty are the large ones made up of five or more members. In particular, family units with three or more minor children are those most exposed to the risk of poverty: in 1999, 27% on a national level and 37.2% in the *Mezzogiorno*. In 2000, the situation improved slightly, although the gap between the various regions is still wide. Families with three or more minor children in conditions of poverty are 25.5% on a national level and 33.7% in the Southern regions. The phenomenon of the growth of poverty in families with a greater number of children is not only Italian as has been recently signalled by many comparative studies and research. However, there are at least two specific characteristics in the Italian situation. The first is that, *“neither the employment of at least one of the parents, nor the higher stability of the family and the fact that the proportion of children born out of wedlock is very low— all conditions that would apparently make up a propitious circumstance with respect to other countries—protect effectively children and minors against the risk of poverty”* (Saraceno 2002: 261).

The second characteristic is that, together with the U.K., Italy is the country with the highest rate of (minor) child poverty. In its last report, the *Commissione d'indagine sull'esclusione sociale* points out that the poverty level of the child population and of families with minor children is not only higher than the national average but has also increased in years. Among families with minors, in fact, the extension of poverty grew from 14% in 1997 to 15.1% in 2000. The Commission estimates that in this last year *“the number of minors in poverty was 1,704,000, that is, 16.9% of the total number of Italian minors: a proportion that is higher than the poverty rate for the adult population and slightly more than that of the over-64s (16.7%). To be poor are especially families with two and, above all, three minor children: 16.4% and 25.5%, respectively in 2000. These poor families are mostly concentrated in the*

⁵ Information on absolute poverty is not available for 2002 and has therefore been substituted by a poverty line equal to 80% of the standard one.

Southern regions, where 27.4% of all minors are in poverty with respect to 7.4% in the North and 11.3% in the Centre" (Saraceno 2002: 261–262).

Although the official stand of the Commission lends special relevance to these conclusions, the point has been widely debated and documented in the last years (Saporiti & Sgritta 1990, Saraceno 1990, Sgritta 1993). According to a study by the Bank of Italy, in the course of time child poverty has increased while that of the elderly over 65 has dropped by over 9%, falling from over 20% in 1980 to 11.1% in 1993. Between 1980 and 1993, poverty among children increased by 7% (from 24.5% to 31.5%) (Cannari & Franco 1997). In 1998, 25.8% of all children under 18 residing in the Southern regions were poor, compared to 8.8% of children living in the Centre, and 7.5% in the North. The respective percentages for the over-65 age group were as follows: 22.5% in the South, 7.6% in the Centre, and 6.4% in the North (Istat 1999). Thus, in the whole country, the incidence of poverty among minors is higher than among all the other age groups. The poverty of children is in direct proportion to their family's standard of living, and the latter depends, to a great extent, on the overall distribution of wealth in the population. The more unequal the distribution of income, the greater is the difference of income among families. As children represent a cost to families, consequently families with more children have a lower standard of living than families with fewer children or without children, unless these differences are counterbalanced or more than compensated for by an effective redistribution policy.

As many studies and analyses have documented, this is unfortunately not the case. In Italy, the composition of social expenditure by function denotes a specific generosity towards the elderly that inevitably takes away resources from other population groups. In fact, high levels of pension expenditure are matched by extremely low levels (among the lowest in Europe) both in funds earmarked for families and children and for unemployment, housing and socially excluded persons. This is not all. Children are not only discriminated against with respect to other groups of the population in Italy, public policies have also been largely ineffective in reducing poverty and inequality by means of social and economic relief aimed at families with children. Thus, in the great majority of countries, the effectiveness of social transfers and the redistribute force of the system of direct taxation is generally high, but in Italy, these measures leave families with children worse off, because income tax exceeds overall social and economic benefits (Ditch et al. 1996: 54).

Family policies: a new course of action?

It is precisely within this scenario that the new course of action in family policy mentioned at the beginning of this report must be interpreted. During the period 1996–1999, revived interest in family matters on the part of political and social forces is a sign that old and delicate balances have been shattered. If no effective measures are undertaken to support families and the more fragile social categories, there will be a real risk of endangering some of the most significant social achievements of the post-war period in the sphere of civil rights, women's liberation, and the condition of children and the elderly. In order to overcome the innumerable difficulties faced by families, women and the younger generation, action has had to be taken on many fronts. What has been especially needed is an improvement in measures related to the following:

- enabling women to reconcile work at home with work in the market place;
- providing childcare;
- equalising the economic circumstances of couples with children and those without children;
- increased flexibility of working hours and different types of family leave;
- expanding care facilities for the elderly;
- expanding tax-exemption levels;
- income maintenance programmes for young people.

In all these areas, the seriousness of the problems was such that politicians and the government finally understood that these measures were both urgent and indispensable.

In a document published by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers at the end of the past legislature, the then-Minister for Social Affairs summed up the work done in this field as follows: *"In the period between 1996–1999, family policies were planned as a great battle of culture and values arising from our awareness of the*

need ... of an inversion of trend with respect to the sterile familialism that has distinguished the last 50 years, during which the Italian family has been left alone to bear the burden of all the social and economic changes" (Turco 2000: 5). Moreover, "the family should be placed at the centre of public policies, from those regarding employment to those for housing and the services precisely because it produces functions of great social value, bringing society fundamental collective advantages, beginning from the new generations and their education, which should be of concern to the whole community" (Turco 2000: 5).

It would be impossible to review exhaustively and in detail all the bills introduced by the government that were submitted for approval by Parliament or became law. Just the mere list of the main laws and government bills is enough, however, to get an idea of the innovations introduced in this period. The first area in which government policies were put into action concerned monetary transfers to families. Although the context was one characterised by the need to resolve the problem of balancing public accounts, the government increased both tax deductions and allowances for the family unit. As of 1 January 1999, a family allowance equal to EUR 103.29 per month plus one extra month's bonus per year was granted to family units with three or more minor children and an annual income below a certain level (EUR 18,592). Starting from the same date, a maternity allowance equal to EUR 103.29 for a period of five months commencing from the date of birth was established for women without other social-security benefits. From 1 July 2000, the allowance was raised to EUR 154.94 (Act No. 448/1998); from 1 January 2001, it was raised again (EUR 258.23) and extended to foreign citizens and to foster and adoptive mothers (Act No. 388/2000). With legislative decree No. 446 of 15 December 1997, tax deductions for employees and self-employed workers with dependents also increased; the amount of deductions decreases as the total income of the worker goes up.

As to the effectiveness of these measures, a recent analysis shows that 84.3% of family allowances and 70.5% of maternity allowances were granted to the southern regions. In 2000, 64.2% of the family with at least three children living in these regions benefited from the family allowance; in the Central region, the proportion was 23.7% and 16.2% in the North. In the same year, 56.5% of children born in the Southern, as against 24.1% and 12.3% in the Centre and in the North, respectively, obtained maternity allowance (Lelleri & Marzano 2002). The Report of the Commission on Social Exclusion bears witness to the re-distributive effectiveness of the reformed family allowance. In fact, between 1998 and 2000 the incidence of poverty among families with three or more children, i.e., the beneficiaries of the allowance, decreased by around 1%, that is in counter tendency with respect to the overall increase of poverty among the families with minor children; nevertheless, as the former president of the Commission has recently noted, the family allowance, to the extent that families with fewer than three children are not entitled to this benefit, should still be considered a very partial measure (Saraceno 2002: 266).

Another new feature introduced in family policy is related to parental leave; the importance of this matter is connected with the need to guarantee a better quality of life for those families in which both parents work and face difficulties in reconciling time at work with time dedicated to the care of the family and children. The recognition of the right to take leave from work for family reasons has been extended to both male and female workers. According to the government bill, leave can be taken until the child reaches the age of eight; but it also covers cases of illness of the child or serious events affecting the family unit that require the constant presence of one of the parents. This regulation applies exclusively to companies with more than 250 employees, which also receive incentives to introduce particular forms of flexibility regarding work time and organisation.

Housing policy has always been a very weak element of policies aimed at families, a weakness that has produced a great number of negative effects with regard to both the formation of new families and the mobility of citizens. A government bill approved by one of the two Chambers of Parliament provides for the payment of economic benefits to young couples who intend to form a family, to unmarried, separated, divorced or widowed parents with dependent children and to married couples at the birth of a child or in cases of adoption. To receive these benefits, the applicants must not be over 32 years of age, not be owners of a second home and not exceed a certain income threshold (Bill No. 3142/1998).

Finally, in this brief review of the measures approved during the past legislature, we must mention Act No. 328/2000. It profoundly reforms the order of the welfare state as far as the system of assistance and social services entrusted to the regions, provinces and councils is concerned, and also comprises 'third-sector' organi-

sations. Besides, the law provides for the establishment of a National Fund for social-policy measures, and establishes management models for social services aimed at individuals and families.

In October 2001, however, while many regions and municipalities were preparing for an application of law 328/2000, the Parliament approved a modification of the Constitution that partly arrested the implementation of the law. The modifications introduced in the Constitution, in fact, attribute to the regions full legislative autonomy in matter of social policy, reserving to the State only the power to settle *"the basic levels of performances concerning civic and social rights, that should be guaranteed throughout the entire country"* (art. 117, Titolo V, *Le regioni, le province, i comuni*). In short, the regions have acquired the power to legislate in this matter beyond a general normative framework, except for the basic levels of performances and delivery services.

Another important event which intervened in the last two years was the change of the parliamentary majority that almost without interruption had ruled the country in the previous decades. In its electoral programme the right-centre government that took power after the political election of June 2001 promised to pay new attention to the family. Until now, however, the reforms realised in this field are rather marginal and limit themselves mostly to re-proposing the measures introduced by the preceding governments. Eventually, in February 2003 the Minister of Labour and Social Policies published a blueprint on welfare (*Libro bianco sul Welfare*) (www.welfare.gov.it). The White Paper emphasises the aim of *"a social policy that recognises the family as an active subject and a primary actor in the organisation of the welfare system"* and advances proposals of reform on which, however, it would be premature to express an opinion regarding their possible impact on the quality of life of families in the years to come.

By the end of 2003, the Government had approved three of the multiple and often indeterminate measures mentioned in the White Paper. A Government decree with the force of law, dated 16th May, 2003, set up a financing Fund for employers who organize day nurseries and micro day nurseries in the work place for infants and small children (aged between 3 months and 3 years), the children of their employees and, where possible, for the children of the residents of the neighbourhood. The funding granted—to a maximum of EUR 125 000 for the day nurseries and 75 thousand for the micro day nurseries—is subject to repayment, for 50% of the sum advanced, at a rate of interest which is not less than 0.5% per annum. Another government decree (no. 269 of 30.9.2003) which was subsequently passed by Parliament on 24th November 2003 (Law No. 326) introduced an allowance equal to EUR 1,000 for each second or subsequent child by order of birth born in the period 1 December 2003–31 December 2004. The same allowance is also granted to children who are adopted during the same period. The right to this allowance is granted to mothers who are Italian or EU citizens resident in Italy at the time of the child's birth or adoption. This measure, which the Government hopes will encourage the birth rate to increase, has been allocated a total funding of EUR 308 million.

In fact, in Italy the gap between the (ideal) number of children desired and the (actual) number of children born is quite large at all fertile ages. However, we may express some doubts at this point about the effectiveness of this measure. According to a recent sample survey carried out by the National Institute of Statistics, what is after all only a negligible quota (14%) of the mothers who do not want to have other children declare that the reason for this choice is essentially an economic one. More often other reasons are put forward, in particular the advanced age of the mother, which is mainly due to the late formation of families. Between 1989–90 and 2000–2001 the proportion of young people under the age of 25 who are already parents dropped from 4.7% to 1.8% while that of young people aged between 25–34 fell from 51.6% to 30.3%.

In recent decades, moreover, important changes have taken place in the mother's role. At the beginning of the 1980s only 18.9% of mothers had a high-school diploma; ten years later it was 30.8% and in 2002, 53.3%. During the same period mothers with a job outside the home increased: they were just 45% in 1980 and they rose to 53% in 2002; but if one considers the women who had their first child in the period July 2000–June 2001, a good 67.3% had a job. Career demands, the uncertainty of being able to count on the help of relations and friends, the need to keep some of their time for themselves are often mentioned by mothers as being much more pressing reasons than economic ones for not wanting to have another child (Istat 2003: 286–293), not to mention the lack of services designed for young children. In any case, we are inevitably in the field of conjecture: to evaluate the impact of the measures introduced by the government it will be necessary to wait at least until the end of 2004.

Another measure has been added to these with the financial law of 2003. This is the transfer to the Regions of a Fund of EUR 161 million, to help young couples to buy their first home. This measure has been the object of severe criticism from opposition parties since only married couples are eligible to receive the contribution, according to Art. 29 of the Constitution, thus excluding *de facto* families.

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MONIQUE BORSENBERGER

Luxembourg

Demographic evolution

Over the course of the last ten years, Luxembourg has seen its population grow from 384,400 inhabitants in 1991 to 438,300 inhabitants in 2003. This demographic growth is largely explained by Luxembourg's familiar pattern of continual and sustained immigration. Throughout the decade 1990-2000, the number of immigrants was on average more than 10% per year (compared to the European average of 2.3%).

The proportion of foreigners in the population has also increased as a result, from 29.4% in 1991 to 38.1% in 2003¹. This group of foreigners is mainly composed of nationals from the European Union, principally Portuguese. However, the proportion of non-European nationals has also increased significantly, rising from 9.2% of the foreign population in 1991, to 24.6% in 2003. In addition, the foreign population in Luxembourg is relatively young, and the birth to death ratio has been largely positive (in favour of births) and in 2001, it overtook the native replacement rate for the first time.

The fertility rate indicator has not stopped increasing, going from 1.5 in 1980 to 1.62 in 1990 and 1.78 in 2000, decreasing finally to 1.63 in 2002. In 1980, in Luxembourg, women of Luxembourg nationality and women of foreign nationality shared a fertility-rate indicator of around 1.6. This indicator grew much more quickly for the foreign nationals, reaching 1.90 in 2000, compared to only 1.70 for Luxembourg women. Since then there has been a drop in both of these populations, with the 2002 indicator standing at 1.61 for Luxembourg women and 1.68 for women of foreign nationality.

Like other European countries, Luxembourg is faced with an ageing population, due to a drop in the birth rate and an increase in life expectancy. There is an increase in the actual number of old people, although their relative weight in the population as a whole is only slowly increasing. Thus, the number of people over the age of 65 has increased from 42,800 in 1970 to 61,100 in 2000, which is a growth of 42.8% (but this only represents 12.6% of the total population in 1970 and 14% in 2000.) Regarding the number of people over the age of 80, their proportion of the population has increased from 1.7% in 1970 to 3% in 2000 (although their actual number has increased from 5,900 to 13,000, an increase of 120%).

Family relationship

Family relationships have been in a state of flux for the past fifteen years. This has resulted in changed family patterns. Living arrangements have become more individualised, and there is now a greater tendency among families to break up.

Marriage, divorce, birth outside marriage: changing patterns of behaviour

The number of marriages has decreased over the course of the last ten years, particularly amongst single people. The indicator of male first marriages² fell from 0.653 in 1980 to 0.595 in 1990 and 0.466 in 2002. The indicator of female first marriages followed the same pattern, going from 0.661 in 1980 to 0.653 in 1990 and

¹ This proportion of foreigners (38.1% of the resident population) places Luxembourg first in Europe, followed by Liechtenstein (34% in 2002) and Switzerland (20% in 2002) (source: http://www.statec.lu/html_fr/statistiques—20 Dec 2004)

² Indicator of male first marriages: the probability of first marriage for a person who conforms to the rate of marriage for a given year throughout his/her life. The indicator refers to a fictitious cohort. It is obtained by adding the rates of first marriage by sex and age observed in a year.

0.504 in 2002. On the other hand, the number of divorces continues to grow. The divorce rate indicator³, which was 0.27 in 1980, reached 0.36 in 1990 and 0.51 in 2003. As a corollary to the drop in the number of marriages, the number of births outside marriage has continued to increase. From 12.9% in 1990, it reached 23.2% in 2002 (it was 6% in 1980).

Family dynamics in household composition

The share of family households⁴ dropped from 77.4% to 69% between 1986 and 1999, whereas that of non-family households rose from 22.6% to 31% over the same period. Married couples without children, married couples with children and extended inter-generational households have all lost shares in household distribution, while single person households have been on the rise.

Basically, there has been a decline in the proportion of married couples with child(ren) among the under-30s and the 30–39-year-old age group. The proportion of married couples without children is also decreasing in the above two age groups. This development is more pronounced among those under 30, 28% in 1986 versus a mere 10.4% in 1999.

These falls mirror a tendency among the under-30s and the 30–39-year-olds to marry later and have their first child later; i.e., the number of singles has exploded in these two age groups. In 1985, only 19.6% of those under 30 were unmarried singles, as opposed to 51.4% in 1999. This trend feeds through to those aged 30–39, just under 5% belonged to the category of singles in 1986, compared with almost 25% in 1999.

In the same timeframe, the proportion of cohabiting couples without children has leapt from 6.8% to 13.5% among the younger generation and has slightly risen among those aged 30–39 (from 2.9% to 4.6%). However, in general terms, cohabitation remains a marginal living arrangement and concerned only 5% of households in 1999 versus 3.5% in 1986.

The proportion of single parent families has gone up slightly, i.e., from 5.9% to 7.2%. This is mainly due to rising numbers of lone parents in the 40–49 age group, where their proportion rose from 7.1% in 1986 to 13.5% in 1999. This expansion has to be seen within the context of rising divorce figures. The divorce indicator has been close to 50% since 1997. Moreover, divorcées with children were the top contenders for the status of single parent family in 1999, whereas in 1985 these had been widow(er)s. The share of unmarried single parent families remains below 1%.

The number of extended inter-generational families was cut in half, with their proportion dropping from 7% to 3.6% within the period under review. The most conspicuous changes took place in households of the 40+ generation. Fewer of them now live with one or more elderly parents. In 1986, 10% of these households belonged to the category of extended inter-generational households, as opposed to only 3.5% in 1999. In the 50–64 age group, this proportion also dropped from 11.3% to 7.7%.

These figures illustrate the individualisation of living arrangements and in particular the growing autonomy of older persons. In 1999, people aged 65+ mostly lived as couples, the majority of them without a child (32.7% to 38.2%) and some with a child (3.7% to 5.7%). The category of extended inter-generational households went down from 4.3% to 2.4% among family households. The category of 'other non-family households' has almost disappeared within this generation, i.e., 0.2% in 1999 as opposed to 3.2% in 1986.

³ Divorce rate indicator: the probability of divorce for a married person who throughout his/her marriage conforms to the rate of divorce for a given year. The indicator refers to a fictitious marriage cohort. It is obtained by adding together the rates of divorce for different marriage durations.

⁴ For definitions, see box on household typology.

Types of households

Households have been subdivided into two main categories:

family households, i.e., households comprising couples or at least one parent plus child, and non-family households, i.e., all other households.

Both household types have been further subdivided according to generations, i.e., the age of the head of the household.

Households with children include all such households no matter whether these children are dependent or not.

The 'extended intergenerational' household sub-category favours lineage and includes households where the person of reference lives with a father and/or mother (father-in-law/mother-in-law) and/or an uncle and/or aunt and where children may be part of such a living arrangement.

The 'other extended' household sub-category includes households where the person of reference lives with collateral relatives.

Source: Kuepie (2002)

Table 1: Household distribution by type of household and age of the person of reference (1986 and 1999)

1986	Under 30 years	30–39 years	40–49 years	50–64 years	Over 65 years	Total
Family households						
Married couple without child	28.4	13.4	7.4	26.3	32.7	21.3
Unmarried couple without child	6.8	2.9	1.9	0.9	0.7	2.1
Married with child(ren)	31.2	63.9	60.5	33.5	3.7	38.7
Unmarried couple with child(ren)	3.5	2.4	2.3	0.1	0.2	1.4
Lone parent with child(ren)	4.4	4.9	7.1	7.5	4.5	5.9
Extended intergenerational	1.9	4.1	10.0	11.3	4.3	7.0
Other extended household	1.9	0.6	0.6	1.5	0.7	1.0
Non-family households						
Unmarried single	19.6	4.7	5.3	6.0	6.9	7.3
Widowed, divorced, other single	1.7	3.1	4.5	11.7	43.2	14.0
Other non-family household	0.7	0.2	0.5	1.2	3.2	1.2
Total households	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1999	Under 30 years	30–39 years	40–49 years	50–64 years	Over 65 years	Total
Family households						
Married couple without child	10.4	9.7	5.1	26.9	38.2	19.4
Unmarried couple without child	13.5	4.6	1.4	2.4	1.1	3.5
Married couple with child(ren)	13.1	46.3	59.0	33.2	5.7	33.0
Unmarried couple with child(ren)	5.7	1.8	1.8	1.0	0.1	1.6
Lone parent with child(ren)	4.2	5.3	13.5	8.2	3.9	7.2
Extended intergenerational	0.4	2.0	3.5	7.7	2.4	3.6
Other extended household	0.2	1.5	0.3	0.7	0.2	0.6
Non-family households						
Unmarried single	51.4	24.8	8.0	6.0	5.3	15.1
Widowed, divorced, other single	0.0	3.4	6.6	13.4	42.0	15.1
Other non-family household	1.2	0.7	0.8	0.6	0.2	0.8
Total households	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: PSELL I, PSELL II

Intergenerational solidarity

While family nuclearisation implies the absence of solidarity, we have observed, on the contrary, that family solidarity appears to be relatively dense. Thus, the results of a study (Borsenberger 2003) on solidarity between adults aged 45–64 and their old parents show that residential autonomy between adults and parents is the most common way of life. However, if we do not observe the oldest form of solidarity, i.e., co-residence, other forms of solidarity can be explored. Structural solidarity (residential proximity indicator) is extremely high. 70% of individuals reside no further than 15km away from their parents when they live in Luxembourg. Associative solidarity (frequent contact) is also very high and includes the majority of individuals as 95% of them have contact with their parents and 70% have weekly contact with the parent who is living in Luxembourg. Finally, functional solidarity (giving help) is common for a large majority of people. 60% of them helped their parents at least once a year during the last year. These forms of solidarity, which appear relatively strong, could be interpreted as a sign of the survival of an enlarged family which is multi-located.

A second study (Borsenberger & Kupie 2003) on solidarity practices between parents and adult children, without age distinction, leads to the same conclusions: 60% of the individuals have weekly contact with their parents and more than 50% help them. In spite of an observed household atomisation, solidarity practices are

very high. In addition, we have observed that people who are living without a partner are more established in these practices. 70% have at least one weekly contact with their parents and 65% help them. To live alone in a one-person household, not yet being married or being divorced is not negatively correlated with one or the other form of solidarity. Finally, if more and more individuals are living alone, they seem to compensate this residential loneliness with close ties to their parents.

Legislative changes affecting family relationships

Recognition of cohabitation

In his annual state-of-the-nation address, the Prime Minister recalled, on 3 May 2001, the main lines of government policy action, and started with a reflection on social life, pleading „for more humanity in inter-personal relations“. It will become necessary to introduce a number of changes and legislative adjustments to respond to the development in people's living arrangements.

The recognition of domestic unions by same-sex and heterosexual couples, which was announced by the new Christian/Liberal coalition government after the parliamentary elections of 1999, has been under discussion since then and produced a fair amount of paperwork in 2000 and 2001. Originally scheduled to take place in autumn 2001, the policy-orientation debate in the Chamber of Deputies was postponed until 2002.

Currently, unemployment benefits or the minimum guaranteed income are means-tested based on household income. This will result in reduced benefit levels being granted to an individual if this individual is cohabiting with people who do have an income. In terms of tax law, social law, or rights of succession, however, domestic unions are not recognised. Unmarried couples are thus excluded from aggregated taxation, co-insurance (entitlements), and direct line of succession. Those who advocate the recognition of domestic unions want to remove this inconsistency and see recognition as a means of enabling cohabiting couples to enjoy the aforementioned rights and entitlements.

The Minister of Justice (PCS⁵), who is responsible for drafting the respective bill, reaffirmed that it was not a question of creating a second kind of civil marriage. The debate is between the proponents of a minimalist approach – i.e., legal recognition of domestic unions with special rights and privileges different from those of married couples – and the proponents of a maximalist approach – i.e., according the same rights and privileges to married and unmarried couples.

The Greens, the PSOL⁶ and the gay rights movements are calling for the creation of a legal framework that goes beyond civil and social law and includes other rights and privileges. These include the right to visit a hospitalised partner, the right of adoption, the right of residence for a partner coming from a non-EU country and protection in matters of tenancy agreements.

Domestic violence and abuse

A law on domestic violence was passed on 8 September 2003⁷. This fairly wide-ranging measure dealt with domestic violence between those who were married or living together and also covered those older and younger⁸ members of the family living under the same roof. Thus domestic violence does not only take into account violence against women and children, but also covers violence against the elderly or the disabled. The effect of this law is to treat domestic violence as a public concern, and no longer as a private matter within the

⁵ PCS = Christian Social Party

⁶ PSOL = Socialist Party

⁷ Government bill n°4801 of May 2001 on domestic violence modified (1) the law of 31 May 1999 on the police and the police complaints authority, (2) the penal code, (3) the criminal code teaching, (4) the new code of civil procedure and (5) the civil code.

⁸ Regarding the offspring of the spouse or partner, the law only covered children under the age of 18 or those who were disabled.

family. The law requires the perpetrator of domestic violence to be expelled from the home for a ten-day period, a measure ordered by the prosecution on the basis of information put forward by the police. During this period, an order can be passed banning the person from the home. On the other hand, the person could be given back the keys to their home after the ten-day period.

There is still no specific legislation concerning domestic violence. Up until now, acts of violence could come under the general framework of the penal code or specific laws that do not take aggravated circumstances (those which make the crime worse) into account for cases of domestic violence. Women who were victims of domestic violence found themselves confronted with a certain number of problems, the most important being the need to leave their home and find a place of refuge, which proved difficult if they were not financially independent. Furthermore, the person who left their home must prove she was the victim of violence. Without proof, she could be accused of having violated the obligations inherent in the marriage contract, given that the law requires spouses to cohabit. We also have to bear in mind that Luxembourg's Civil Code makes a clear distinction between married and cohabiting couples. Marriage affords additional protection to a spouse who may have recourse to urgent or special measures (such as asking for measures of protection).

Debate on the reform of the divorce system

In May 2003, a law proposal aimed at the reform of the divorce system and, in particular, suppression of divorce for reasons of misconduct was introduced. Until now, divorce can be granted for one of three reasons: divorce for a specific reason (also called divorce for reasons of misconduct), divorce because of actual separation and divorce by mutual consent. The increase in the number of divorces over the last few years has been matched by the proportional increase of divorces by mutual consent. In 1998, this proportion was 65% of all divorces, but divorce for reasons of misconduct was still around 30%.

The reform of the divorce laws, announced in 2001⁹, aims at calming down relationships between divorcing couples, and, in particular, of reducing the psychological damage within families with children, who will no longer be faced with legal battles between their parents. The length of the divorce proceedings will, therefore, also be reduced. This reform will modify the alimony system, making it more equal, as it is more often the women who suffer financially as a result of divorce. Financial aid has, until now, been seen as helping to feed the family. The reform's new objective would be to compensate, to a certain extent, for the divorcing couple's disparity in income. This could be done by taking into account the length of the marriage, and the amount of time already dedicated to bringing up children, or the time that the children would need in the future. This last aspect is still under discussion.

Family policy and social policy

Yearly average equivalent disposable income

In 2003, the yearly average disposable income for individuals was EUR 28,458. Individuals who belong to a household composed of one man under 65 years or a couple without children and aged less than 65 years have the highest equivalent disposable income. In the next level we find individuals who belong to other households without children, households with a couple without children but with one adult aged at least 65 years and couples with one child. On the other hand, individuals belonging to a household composed of a lone woman aged 65 years or more, a single parent family, a couple with three children or more or other types of households without children have an equivalent disposable income which is clearly below the average. Those who belong to a household composed of a lone man aged 65 years or more, a lone woman aged less than 65 years or a couple with two children are just below the average.

⁹ The annual declaration by the government on the social, economic and financial state of the country; known as Annual Declaration by the Government on the State of the Nation, 3 May 2001.

Table 2 clearly shows that as soon as a child belongs to the household, the equivalent disposable income of individuals sinks below the average with the exception of a couple with one child.

Table 2: Yearly average equivalent disposable income per type of household

Type of household	Disposable income, in EUR
Lone man less than 65 years	34,827
Lone man 65 years or more	27,003
Lone woman less than 65 years	27,316
Lone woman 65 years or more	24,865
Couple without children less than 65 years	33,392
Couple without children, at least one person 65 years or more	29,114
Other households without children	30,375
Single parent family	24,545
Couple with one child	30,759
Couple with two children	26,790
Couple with three children or more	25,194
Other households with children	24,607
Total	28,458

Source PSELL-3/2003, CEPS/INSTEAD

Note: OECD equivalent modified scale

Tax reform

The most important reform in 2001 was the tax reform. Its first stage, concerning the taxation of individuals, took effect on 1 January 2001. The second stage took effect on 1 January 2002.

The Prime Minister announced this tax reform and its objectives in his government policy statement¹⁰ of August 1999: "The active welfare state has to be effective also in areas where, *a priori*, we would not expect it, namely in tax policies. Low-income earners do not pay taxes, or pay hardly any taxes, in Luxembourg. Nothing will change in this respect. The bottom tax rate of 6% will remain the lowest in Europe. Social justice and higher taxes for low-income earners are not compatible. This is why a combination of reduced taxes and higher family benefits will result in improving the situation of families with children."

The major aspects of the 2001 reform are as follows:

- Tax-exempt earnings are raised from EUR 6,693 to EUR 9,667. This move will be tantamount to a tax exemption of the social minimum¹¹.
- The second (6%) and the top (46%) taxation brackets are abolished.
- A uniform 2-point reduction in marginal income-tax rates is adopted over the 2000 rates.
- The maximum marginal income-tax rates are reduced from 46% to 42%.
- There is now a uniform design governing the size of all tax brackets.

Scheduled for 2002, the second stage of the reform includes a uniform additional 4-point reduction per taxation bracket. Thus the bottom marginal income-tax rate will drop from 14% to 10%. The government introduced yet another reduction by 2 points of the bottom marginal income-tax rate (from 10% to 8%), thus creating a new income bracket as compared to the 2000 brackets. The maximum marginal income-tax rate has been reduced from 42% to 38%.

¹⁰ Following parliamentary elections in June 1999, a new coalition government was formed. It comprises the Christian Social Party (PCS) and the Democratic Party (PD). It is the first of its kind after years of coalition governments between the Christian Social Party and the Socialist Party (PSOL).

¹¹ Minimum guaranteed income.

This tax reform will place Luxembourg at the head of the European Union in terms of the lowest rate of taxation on modest incomes, as well as in terms of the lowest rate of taxation on highest incomes.

This reduction in the tax rates coincides with proposals to raise family benefits by EUR 24.7 per month, beginning in January 2002. This increase will help improve the situation of families with children, who usually pay fewer taxes than those without children and who, because of this, have so far not enjoyed any increase in their disposable income in the wake of tax cuts.

Table 3: Summary of the Luxembourg tax reform (2001–2002), in Euros

Tax-exempted income	2000	2001	2002 version 2000	2002 version 2001
One person	6,693	9,667	9,667	9,750
Two persons or one person and one child	13,386	19,335	19,335	19,400
Income brackets	Variable	1,710	1,710	1,650
Top bracket	over 65,443	over 33,614	over 33,614	over 34,500
Minimum rate of taxation	6%	14%	10%	8%
Maximum rate of taxation	46%	42%	38%	38%

Source: Ministry of Finance (2002)

An income for severely disabled people

The year 2003 was the European Year of the Disabled, and also saw the passing of a law on income for severely disabled people. The introduction of this income aimed at making disabled people financially independent by assuring them of an individual income, irrespective of whether or not they were working, and of giving them financial status and integrating them into society.

Previously, income awarded to the disabled was paid via social security benefits (supplementary allowance, family allowances not subject to age restrictions, orphan's benefit not subject to age restrictions), or via social insurance benefits such as the RMG (Minimum Guaranteed Income). However, a certain number of people did not fulfil any of the conditions under which they could claim benefits (age restrictions, level of family income) and found themselves financially dependent on their families.

The income of disabled people working in business can be reduced, whilst people who work in a training centre for the disabled are limited to a career development allowance of EUR 250 a month (in 2002). For disabled people who do not fulfil any of the conditions for receiving state benefits, this allowance represents their only income.

The law¹² regarding the income of disabled people provides financial compensation for every disabled person of working age (aged over 18) who has a job, whether or not they work for an ordinary company or in a special training centre. This remuneration is calculated according to the hourly minimum wage.

Disabled people who are unfit or unable to work receive an income which is equivalent to the RMG (Guaranteed Minimum Income), regardless of the level of family income or of the legal maintenance obligation to care for their children. The State also makes provision for increasing its financial contribution towards the training centres set up for the disabled, as well as creating extra jobs in the years to come. In addition, the government is also making it a priority to increase the number of places available through the housing organization for disabled adults, and to expand day-care services for disabled adults and children.

Finally, the Advisory Board for the Disabled (Conseil Supérieur des Personnes Handicapées) has been put on a legal footing, so that it can become an official government consultative body.

¹² Government bill n° 4827 concerning the income situation of disabled people, introduced in July 2001.

Government initiative for taking extended parental leave

The law of 12 February 1999, concerning the setting up of a national work action plan, introduced parental leave.¹³ This measure was to be evaluated in 2003, so that the government could decide whether they would extend it or, if change was necessary, how to modify it.

By the end of 1993, the evaluation of parental leave had still not been carried out. However, a government bill had been introduced to extend this measure by increasing the time period for requesting parental leave (by the salaried person to the employer) by two months, so that the employer could more easily replace the absent person. Thus, the legislative body responded to the difficulties faced by the employers, but did not reduce the period of leave as the employers had wished.

Presented initially at its launch as an employment measure, it seems as if parental leave has not had a great effect on the employment market (in terms of creating jobs by the replacement of absent earners.) In addition, it seems to have affected equal opportunities even less, an intermediate report at the end of 2002 showing that only 12% of those taking parental leave between 1999 and 2001 were men.

The creation of a Mammerent

A wide-ranging debate was held around the *Rentendesch*, the 'roundtable' for pensions. Bringing together political parties, trade unions, bosses and government, this roundtable took place from mid-March to mid-July 2001. It followed on from the actuarial and financial evaluation of the general pension insurance scheme carried out by the International Labour Organisation and which was presented to the government and their social partners in February 2001. The conclusions of the roundtable were incorporated into the law of the 28 June 2002.

Amongst the short-term measures brought in, we note the introduction of an education package¹⁴ that aims to recognise the work done by parents in educating their children, and to take this into account when looking at pensions. Firstly, the benefit of two years' worth of 'baby years'¹⁵, which are taken into account when calculating the pension, is extended to children born before 1987. The minimum taken into account for calculating the baby years was taken as being an amount corresponding to 1.5 times the minimum wage, i.e., EUR 2,049.15. The minimum amount is determined by the child, so that if an individual is bringing up several very young children, the amount is multiplied by their number. If the previous income was greater than the minimum amount, then the baby years are calculated according to this earlier income.

¹³ The law on parental leave allowed a degree of balance between family and professional life, with a guarantee of re-employment. It came into force on 1 March 1999 and applied to all children born after 31 December 1998, (or to those children whose adoption proceedings had started after that date). The law entitled each parent to a period of leave (6 months full time, or 12 months part time). The right to parental leave is an individual right for each earning parent, be he/she salaried, a civil servant, an apprentice or self-employed. It must, however, be claimed from the employer (in the case of a salaried person), or the National Benefit Office (in the case of self-employment). The right to parental leave (for salaried persons) also comprises a guarantee of re-employment. One of the two parents must take parental leave directly after the period of maternity leave or adoption. The other parent can take the second period of parental leave (full or part time) before the child reaches the age of 5. If the first parental leave is not taken within this period, it is forfeited. Single mothers and fathers can take their parental leave any time until the child is 5. The two parents can take their part-time parental leave at the same time, (but not full-time leave). Each parent on parental leave is entitled to a monthly allowance of EUR 1,692.66 during a full-time six-month leave, or EUR 846.33 during a part-time 12-month leave. The allowance is paid regardless of resources and for the full period of leave. It is non-taxable. Social security contributions are limited to payments for health-care insurance and for national insurance (compulsory state-administered insurance). Pension contributions are paid for by the State.

¹⁴ These measures were adopted on government advice on the 7 December 2001 and will take effect from 1 July 2002.

¹⁵ The State takes responsibility for a 24-month period for the one of the two parents who looks after the child under the age of 4 (born after the 31 December 1987), as long as the parent has worked for 12 months out of the 36 months preceding the birth or adoption of the child.

Secondly, the education package of EUR 80.76 per month per child¹⁶ is awarded at the age of 60, (or when an individual first receives a pension), to those people who have dedicated themselves to the raising their children, on the condition that this person and their partner did not receive the benefit for the baby years.

The individualisation of pension rights was not discussed during the round table discussions, but has been the subject of discussion by working parties since 2003.

Debate on young people in distress

The care and protection system for young people is currently under discussion. There is a significant number of requests to place children and adolescents into care institutions. "More and more families appear to be overwhelmed by their responsibilities in bringing up their children, and, more and more frequently, the children and young people placed into care show very serious psychological difficulties more and more frequently."¹⁷ The Ministry claimed that children and young people ended up in boarding schools because of two main factors, namely for psychological reasons and for keeping them under control. The Ministry therefore suggested setting up specific additional care organizations and refuges, and developing a support structure within the wider framework of the young people and their families.

In addition, the Special Committee on *Youth in Distress*, (set up in 2000), handed in its report to the Chamber of Deputies in October 2003 after three years' work. This report should also be equally useful as a basis for the work of the Ministry of Justice, which is preparing a reform of the Youth Protection law.

Two working groups have been created to analyse the problems of young people in distress. On the one hand, a special Parliamentary Commission, created in 2000, presented its report to the Parliament in October 2003. This report constituted the basis of a parliamentary debate in November 2003. On the other hand, an interministerial group (Justice and Family Ministries) was created in 2000 and presented its report in 2002. Following the conclusions of these reports, the actual structure of the system ought to be kept and at the same time adapted with the help of appropriate measures. A criminal law – one of the most important questions in this debate – should not be introduced. A law project¹⁸, based on these reports was laid before Parliament in June 2004.

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¹⁶ Amounts as of 1 August 2003.

¹⁷ Excerpt taken from the contribution made by the Ministry of Family Support and Youth towards the debate on the state of the nation – budgetary advice 2004 – Parliamentary document n°5187 of 24 July 2004.

¹⁸ Projet de loi n°5351 portant modification de la loi modifiée du 10 août 1992 relative à la protection de la jeunesse (9 June 2004).

HANS-JOACHIM SCHULZE

The Netherlands

Introduction

The period that is of central interest here, 2001 to 2003, must be seen within the context of a decision taken in 1990s. In 1996 the Dutch Cabinet summarised its family-related activities in a booklet entitled 'Notitie gezin' [A note on family]. Moreover, it was decided that the Netherlands' Family Council should present a report on the family every two years; the first appeared in 2001, the second in 2003.¹ In this monitoring report themes and results from these two family reports will be discussed, along with some additional aspects specific to The Netherlands.

The definition of the 'family'

An official definition of 'family' was included in the document 'Notitie Gezin' of the Dutch Cabinet. According to this definition, family is defined as a social unit where one or more children are being cared for and/or brought up. This definition of family is extraordinary in several respects. The relationship between the respective caretaker and the child is not specified (filiation, adoption, foster care) and caring is what binds one child or more children and any adult together as a family. As a consequence, a child that is brought up in an institution makes those who take care of him or her a family. From this perspective, the difference between a particular parent-child-bond and an organised way of child rearing (e.g. if there are no longer parents and a child is not adopted or if the respective parents are defined as incapable of adequate child rearing) is blurred if care over a longer period can be observed (bringing up). Besides the fact that the definition omits the specificity of the focal parent-child relationship, one can assume that, given the cultural closeness of motherhood and childhood, the definition has an implicit gender bias that makes it difficult to bring together men and child rearing.

The French sociologist Durkheim defines family as a combination of partnership and parenthood (Tyrell & Schulze 2000). The official definition does not refer to partnership at all, although most families in The Netherlands consist of a combination of partnership (marriage or cohabitation) and parenthood. Where we see mothers or fathers taking care of their child alone, we know that in the majority of cases this is due to the fact that the partnership has been terminated by divorce or separation, but partnership of both parents is continued.² Moreover, the intention to focus on child rearing as the main domain of family functioning makes it necessary to integrate partnership into a concept of family. Empirical research in The Netherlands has shown that conflicts between partners lead to a high probability of child maltreatment (see Keuning et al. 2002).

The restrictive official family definition of the Dutch Cabinet indicates a considerable change, as the constitutive element of the family is not marriage but parenthood. In official statistics marriage is still the main criterion for defining the existence of a family. But of course the situation of two married partners without children clearly differs in several respects (e.g. income, labour market participation) from two adult partners who have children. If these two groups are clustered in statistical tables, a distorted picture will result.

The omission of a reference to relatives in the cited definition on the one hand and to the life course of a given parent or a child on the other, offers no perspectives to imbed family in a broader context and to define

¹ The first Dutch family report based on the decision of the Cabinet was published in 2001 under the title „Gezin: beeld en werkelijkheid“ [Family: Image and reality]. Nederlandse Gezinsraad: Den Haag. The second report appeared in 2003 under the title „Tussen partners. Gezamenlijke keuzen tijdens de levensloop“ [Between partners. Shared choices during the life course], Erna Hooghiemstra and Marina Pool (Editors), Nederlandse Gezinsraad: Den Haag.

² The continuity of parenthood is underlined by the new law on divorce which was introduced on 1 January 1998. From that time on both ex-partners as a rule continue to be parents to their children. Exceptions must be based on judgement. This law obviously is not inspired by the 'note on family' (notitie gezin) issued by the Dutch Government in 1996 (see above).

family policy in a more comprehensive way, e.g. based on three generations. This is a problem when we consider the fact that in The Netherlands, as in many other European Union (EU) countries, the fertility level dropped a long time ago under the replacement level (1980: 1.62; 1990: 1.62; 2000: 1.72; see Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs 2003: 180) with consequences for the welfare state in general and in particular for intergenerational relationships (Dykstra 2004). In addition, it is clear that the reconciliation of family life and paid work needs to be planned paying close attention to the different phases in the life of adults.

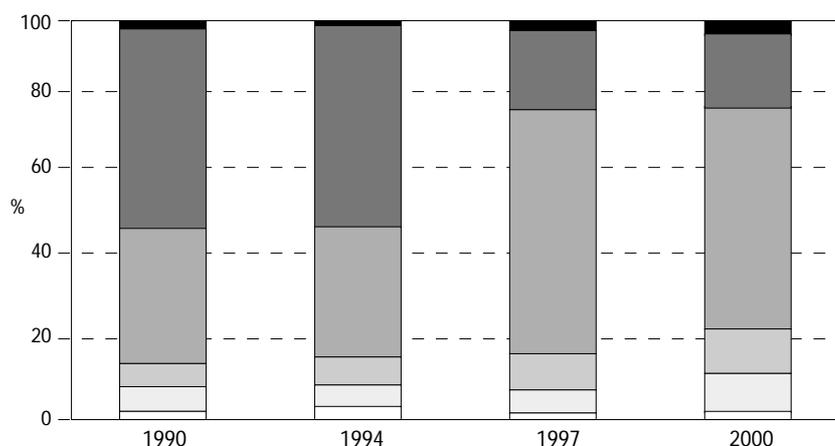
To sum up, the chosen family definition offers only few perspectives for family policy. Still the fact that family reports are to be carried out is a way that may keep family on the political agenda³ and make it possible to inform the public about a central societal issue.

Preferred forms of private life in the 1990s

During the past decades we can observe that after the 'golden age of marriage and the family' private life no longer was almost monopolistically organised as family life with a husband as the breadwinner and a wife as the homemaker (Kuijsten 2002).

This trend which holds true for many Western countries is also to be found in The Netherlands. The Netherlands Interdisciplinary Institute for Demography (NIDI) has repeatedly carried out research on the preferred form of private life in representative samples of the Dutch population. Based on the MOAB-enquête ('Meningen en Opvattingen van de bevolking over Aspecten van het Bevolkingsvraagstuk'⁴) in 2000 and earlier the following results can be reported (Liefbroer 2002; see Figure 1):

Figure 1: Preferences for Different Forms of Private Life 1990-2000 (%).



Legend: From top to bottom 1) other 2) marriage after leaving the family of orientation

3) living together first, then marriage 4) cohabitation 5) living apart together 6) no permanent relationship.

Source: Liefbroer (2002).

³ The highest political representation of family matters consists of a secretary of state who, apart from other tasks, has family as her/his major objective.

⁴ 'Opinions en orientaties of the population over aspects concerning the theme of population'.

Within the last 10 years, and especially between 1994 and 1997 there has been a significant change. Before this demarcation line we observe that about 50% of the population wanted to marry directly after leaving the family of birth. From 1997 on a majority wanted to start with unmarried cohabitation before eventually deciding to marry. Moreover, in the given period of time, the percentage of people who preferred to have a relationship but no co-residence ('living apart together') has risen considerably. These remarkable changes should not make us overlook the fact those who do not want to live together for a longer period of time at all or who want a private form of life that is different from a pair relationship, is a minority. This means that more than three out of four people want to marry but many of them want to cohabit before they exchange rings. If we look at divorce, we have to take into account that there was a rise in the number of divorces from 12% in the 1970s to an anticipated 25% or 30% that are assumed to take place today. With respect to preferences, there is no parallel to the rising divorce rate that took place. During the 1990s, the negative opinion regarding divorce has increased. In 1990 33% of the population evaluated divorce negatively and in 2000 the corresponding percentage was 39%. What we observe here is a *discrepancy* between the number of divorces and the attitude people have towards divorce.

Family formation

Forty percent of all interviewees of a representative sample were of the opinion that you can *"only feel happy in the modern world if you have children of your own"*. There is almost no difference between women and men, the actual family status does not really matter and the same holds for income. Of relevance are the age and the partnership status of the respondents (Beets 2002). Only 20% of all women with a high level of education agreed with this; for women with a low educational level this figure is 60% who agree. These preferences correlate with fertility data. Childlessness is to be found more often among women who have reached a high level of education. The community orientation of children (*"In my opinion it is a duty with respect to the community to have children"*) is only to be found among 10% of all respondents.

The question arises of when people want to fulfil their aim to have one child or more. Most women agree that the age bracket between 25 and 29 is the best to have a first child. Women who have had their first child after the age of 30 are of the opinion that the preferred age is 30 years of age or over (see Table 1).

Table 1: Opinion of Mothers Regarding the Best Age for Giving Birth to the First Child (Total Table = 100%)

Age of mother when giving birth to her first child	The 'best' age for a woman to give birth to her first child			N = 225 (=100%)
	<25 years	25–29 years	30+ years	
<25 years	12	20	1	33
25–29 years	3	44	4	51
30+ years	1	8	7	16
Total	16	73	12	100

Source: Beets 2002

If the ideal age and the real age are compared in more detail (by using one year periods), it may be observed that 17% of the women show a discrepancy between ideal and real age. The factors that correlate strongly with the ideal age for giving birth to the first child are the level of education and the age of the mother when she gave birth to her first child. Evaluation of the timing of the first birth leads to the result that more than four out of five women and men are satisfied with the timing of the first birth (see Table 2).

Table 2: Evaluation of the Point in Time when the First Child was Born (%)

Age of mother when giving birth to her first child	"Evaluated from the perspective after the birth it would have been better if the first child		The time of the birth of the first child was (almost) correct	N (=100%)
	... was born before."	... was born later."		
< 25 years	3	22	75	119
25–29 years	10	3	88	217
30+ years	29	0	71	86
Total	12	8	81	422
Women in this group	10	9	81	226

Source: Beets 2002

Seen from another perspective, one can say that 20% of all women who have given birth to one or more children are not satisfied with the timing of the first child. Apart from personal reasons, it seems clear that here lies a task for family policy, i.e., to facilitate the birth of a first child at an earlier phase in the life of women. The reason is not 'only' the convenience of women but clearly the fact that a late birth is associated with high costs for the budget of the state and growing health risks—as was recently stated in a letter by the Dutch Minister for Social Affairs which he wrote to Parliament (Spits 2004). The initiative of the minister can be summed up by the term *'defensive family policy'*.

Dutch policy now seems aware of the high age of mothers giving birth to the first or subsequent children. What about the average age of first fathers? As partnership age differences are constant over time (Klein & Kop 2002) higher average age at first motherhood should be correlated with that of first fatherhood. Historical research reveals that between 1812 and 1922, the average age of men who became a father for the first time oscillated between 34 and 36 years of age. Observations were taken up again in 1940 and continued to the middle of the 1990s. This period has the form of a V if the father's average age is presented in the vertical and the chronological time in the horizontal axis (Poppel & Mandemakers 2002). Around 1940 first fathers on average were about 34 years old. Until the beginning of the 1970s the average age decreases and reaches a low at the age of 30 and from that time on the average male who becomes a father for the first time is 34 again. At the beginning of the period less than 0.5% of the first fathers were 50 years or older; this percentage has risen to just under 1% in the mid-1990s.

Child rearing and parental childcare

The central theme in this section is the division of childcare in two parent families.

An overall assessment of child rearing

There is no definitive answer to the question concerning the quality of child rearing by one or two parents. This has to do with the preconditions necessary to give a well-founded answer. Unlike any observation of the economic situation, there is no permanent observation of the quality of family functioning which would make it possible to develop reliable and valid indicators which serve for intertemporal comparison. The first representative research in The Netherlands in the field of child rearing in the family was published in 1996 (Rispen et al.) and has not been repeated since. The report came to the conclusion that in the majority of families, the quality of child rearing is acceptable to good. Depending on the chosen criteria, there was a minority of families, 10-15%, where support for parents and children was seen as necessary. As this research was not repeated, it is impossible to present a comprehensive picture of the present quality of child rearing in the family in The Netherlands.

Within the public debate we are repeatedly confronted with groups of people who are regarded as risk groups. We shall present the risk groups and point to the effects of these groups on the development of the children that grow up in them. Two main themes emerged. The first refers to types of families which are

structurally different from the two-parent family with a woman and a man living together as (married) partners and their children. The second refers to family types that differ from the reference type by nationality, income or process bound risks such as psychological, physical and social problems or strong tensions in partnership and parenthood.

First of all we shall give an overview of different risk groups. From a total of about 2,400,000 families in The Netherlands, there are about 5,000 parents of the same sex and about 20,000 are non-biological parents. In 80,000 families parental (neglect, physical, sexual and/or psychological) abuse is being reported and it is estimated that about 50 children per year die as a consequence of maltreatment. About 100,000 parents are addicts, there are about 100,000 step-parents, about 150,000 families who do not have Dutch nationality, about 120,000 families with a long-standing low income and about 250,000 one-parent families (Nederlandse Gezinsraad 2001: chapter 3.2).

The presentation of risk groups can be divided into two clusters. One cluster refers to family types that diverge structurally from the two parent family with a (married) wife and husband and their own child or children. Another cluster refers to personal deficiencies of the parents (addiction, depression) or culture and poverty. In those cases where risks are linked to process variables of the family, one may assume that the risks probably will damage children in their emotional, cognitive and social development.

The process characteristics that are seen as a risk for the quality of child development can be summarised under the heading of all different forms of child maltreatment (neglect, harsh treatment, degradation, sexual abuse and conflict within the partnership). The above-mentioned process characteristics in particular have to be seen as a negative condition for child development and as a possible cause for long lasting and severe problems for children and adolescents. This means that structurally intact families are no guarantee for high child rearing quality. The finding that structural characteristics of families are less important for the development of children than process characteristics is supported by international research results (Golombok 2000).

The central position of processes within the family for the well-being of the single member of the family can be explained by the buffer function of the family. With a positive stream of internal processes the family can protect its members against adversities which are common to all members (e.g. poverty) and (re-)establish trust and readiness to take action in case of problems which pertain to a single member (e.g. problems in school or at work). Where the required 'proximal processes' (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci 1994; Schulze 2000), i.e. concrete interactions of a given child with other persons, materials or symbols, do not occur or occur too rarely, members of the family are deprived of positive experiences within the family and there is a great chance that problematic experiences both outside and inside the family will be reinforced within the family.

The prevailing observation that families which belong to risk groups in the field of child rearing are characterised by risks defined by process oriented characteristics, is supported by the following estimates. The highest risks for children to become deviant or incapable of acting in an accepted way, is in the cluster of families where abuse is observed: 30–50% of all children from these families show intolerable or unfavourable behaviour. In the second place are children with parents who are addicts, 25–33% of them show deviant (in a broad sense) behaviour. The negative effects of long-standing poverty can be observed in 5–15% of the respective offspring. In non-Dutch families the respective percentages are 4–8% and for one-parent families 1–2% (Nederlandse Gezinsraad 2001).

Another way of estimating the quality of parental child rearing is very often by looking at deviant adolescents. One of the dominant themes in the mass media is criminal behaviour of adolescents and especially those with a non-Dutch background. For example, we can select a virtual inner city district in one of the big Dutch cities where 10,000 adolescents live; 6,000 would have Dutch nationality and 4,000 would have non-Dutch nationality. It would not be uncommon to observe that 240 non-Dutch adolescents and 60 Dutch adolescents in this inner city district would have contact with the police. If we relate that to the two populations of the district, we see that the risk percentage for non-Dutch adolescents is 6% and the respective percentage for Dutch adolescents is 1%. In general, this shows that, by far, most Dutch and non-Dutch parents have well-adjusted children. Moreover, the proportions of police contacts (80% for non-Dutch adolescents and 20% for Dutch adolescents) are misleading. This does not mean that there are no risk groups which need more and earlier attention according to the Convention on the Rights of Children.

Parental division of care for children

Although women have enhanced their contribution to paid work outside the home, the analysis of time series concludes that parents on average have spent more time caring for their children in recent years (Van den Broek et al. 2001, Gauthier et al. 2002). In 1985 women spent about seven hours and men about 2.5 hours caring for their children. In 2000 the amount of time had risen to eight hours for mothers and four hours for fathers. We have to take into account that the given data from time budget research relate to primary activities. As we know from this kind of research, care for children is often a secondary activity and other jobs have priority (Hooghiemstra et al. 2002).

In the vast majority of families mothers fulfil most care tasks. But there are families in which these jobs are more evenly distributed. In two-parent families where women have a higher education and/or a higher income, men have a higher share in childcare (Van Dijk 1994). The higher share cannot only be attributed to the fact that men spend more time in this area of activities, but also to the fact that higher educated women and/or women with a high income spend less time taking care of their children (Breedveld 2000). Moreover, women and men distribute their care work more evenly the more they have friends and acquaintances with more modern values (Van Dijk 1994).

The authorities not only want to stimulate young mothers to continue paid work, but they also want to give fathers more opportunity of taking care of their children. Parental care in The Netherlands concerns the right of mothers and fathers to take unpaid parental leave. In 2001 only 25% of the employees really made use of this opportunity (Portegijs et al. 2002). Unpaid parental leave is taken up by mothers in 42% of all cases and by men in 12% of all cases. Two reasons contribute to this uneven distribution; collective agreements in 'female' sectors of the labour market support the use of parental leave schemes and the reduction of paid work by fathers would have a more negative impact on the shared household budget than the reduction of paid work by mothers (Schulze & Tyrell 2002).

Paid work

One of the most salient changes that have taken place during recent decades in the labour market refers to the participation of women in paid work. In 2001 more than half of all women had a paid job of 12 hours or more per week (as defined by Statistics Netherlands). Some 10 years ago women in the workforce were in a minority at 39%. Time budget research confirms the considerable growth in women's participation in paid work. If we apply the definition of Statistics Netherlands then we can see that men spent more hours than women in paid work in recent years. The difference between men and women has even increased. In 2000 men on average spent 38.6 hours per week in paid work whereas women on average spent 27.5 hours. The Netherlands has a female culture of part-time paid work that is unknown in other European countries.

Although paid work has become a normal part of adult life for women in The Netherlands, there are considerable differences with respect to the time spent in paid labour in different phases of the life course. This becomes clear if we compare different cohorts: 72% of all women in the age bracket between 25 to under 35 are active in the labour market; In the age bracket between 35 and under 45 women have a paid job in 64% of all cases and for women between the ages of 45 and under 55 this figure is 55%. Women in the age bracket between 55 and 65 do paid work in 20% of all cases.

Conspicuous changes in participation in paid work become clear when women have children. In the preceding phase of their lives most women do paid work (if one takes into account every job, independently of the amount of hours per week, the percentage is 82%). After giving birth to the first child participation drops by 10%. Two thirds of all women who continue to do paid work after having given birth to their first child reduce the weekly amount of time they spend doing it. During recent years the percentage of women that left the labour market after becoming a mother decreased considerably. The percentage of women continuing paid work after motherhood is correlated with the level of education. The higher the educational level, the more women continue to stay in the labour force after motherhood, and this on top of the fact that participation in paid labour is positively correlated with educational level before motherhood. Within the last few years, a

growing differentiation between women has taken place if we take into account their educational level and participation in paid labour before and after motherhood (see Knijn & van Wel 2001).

During the past few years those partnerships where husband and wife participated in paid labour have become numerous (Reemers 2003). In 1995 41% of all pairs in the age bracket between 15 and 64 were part of the labour force, be it full time or part time. In 2002 the percentage rose to 55%. In the period between 1995 and 2002 the percentage of households belonging to the type where one of the partners is the only breadwinner and the other is the home holder dropped from 39% to 30%. In 2002 many couples preferred to combine a full-time job with a part-time job. This type is chosen by 36%. In only 5% of all cases do both partners have a part time job, but this percentage is growing slowly. If we relate type of job with type of household, we find that two full-time jobs are to be found by preference among partners without children. Where partners have children, the largest category prefers to have one and a half jobs (44%) but with 36% the breadwinner and home holder model is still going strong. The amount of work that is of relevance here in order to differentiate between participation and non-participation in paid labour concerns 11 hours or more per week.

Household work

Since 1975 the Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau has been carrying out research in time budgets of men and women (Breedveld & Van den Broek 2001). The results show that women spend less and less time on household chores. In 1997 women spent 25.5 hours on average doing household tasks. In 2000 the average fell to 21 hours. The reduction can be attributed mainly to tasks such as shopping, cooking and washing (Keuzenkamp & Oudhof 2000).

With respect to men we observe a growing number of hours per week spent on household jobs. In 1975 the average amounted to seven hours a week and in 2000 the corresponding average was 10 hours. The difference in hours that are invested in household tasks by women and men is being reduced slowly. However, the lion's share of household chores is still being done by women.

The average data make differences that exist within different categories of women invisible. There is a great difference between women with and without young children. Women with young children invest more time in household jobs than women without children. A lot of women who become mothers for the first time reduce the amount of paid work in order to be able to fulfil more household tasks and to care for their child.

The growing participation of women in paid work has been accompanied by changes with respect to the division of labour within the household. According to a recent poll (Gezinsmonitor), in 52% of all families members say that the division of labour at home is not taken for granted any longer. Even so people do not talk a lot about the allocation of household work. In 97% of all families partners say that they do only talk a little about the division of household chores and the majority does not feel the need to talk more on this subject. If partners discuss household matters, they talk about specific matters and not about the general division of labour. Relevant themes are 'who is doing the washing?' and 'who fills in the tax form?' Such questions can lead to conflicts in 91% of all partnerships.

The allocation of eight tasks (washing, cooking, cleaning, shopping, administration, gardening, taxation, minor repairs) reveals that some tasks that are done primarily by women (washing, cooking, cleaning, shopping, administration). Men have only one domain where they do more (repairs). Shopping is the activity where both partners cooperate the most and filling in the tax form is the task where the largest percentage 'done by others' appears and presumably those pairs make use of the professional services of an accountant.

Inter-temporal comparison reveals that changes have taken place in recent decades. With respect to the indicators mentioned, one can say that in 40% of all households men and women do the same amount of tasks which does not mean that they invest the same amount of time. In 12% of all families men do most household tasks and this is a result that we would not have found some 50 years ago. This does not detract from the fact that in most households the majority of household work is done by women. Since many women have part time jobs the skewed distribution of household labour is widely accepted within the partnership.

Extra familial childcare

Three themes are to be found in this section. The first part deals with the provision of childcare. The second presents the results of a project that deals with the consequences of flexible childcare for the children. The third part presents the public discussion that encompasses policy, parental opinion and the place of social science.

Childcare provisions

In order to enhance the participation of women in paid work the authorities have stimulated provisions for extra familial childcare. In 1989 there were 18,000 places for children up to four years (the age at which most children enter school) and in 2001 there were 102,000 places (Berg-le Clercq et al. 2002). At the same time the number of employees in this sector rose from 4,546 in 1989 to 43,611. The percentage of children participating in extra familial childcare was 4.6% in 1989 and is 22.5% in 2001.

The attitudes of the Dutch population with respect to the use of extra familial childcare and with respect to the working mother have become milder than in former times. In 1985 43% of interviewees had objections to extra familial childcare and in 1997 objections were down to 25% (for the flexibility of childcare and its consequences for children see below).

A lot of Dutch parents not only make use of centre-based childcare, they also take their children to play groups, to families with several children and a care taker who is prepared for this task and to relatives, friends and informal care takers; they often make use of several forms of care in a given period of the life of the child. Higher educated women, women with a relatively high number of working hours in paid work and mothers working in a sector of the labour market with more facilities for childcare have a tendency to opt for centre care. Women with a lower educational level and fewer hours paid work have a tendency to make use of informal extra familial day care for their children. If informal care is being used, parents and parents-in-law and paid informal care are the favourite choices (Knijn and van Wel 2001).

Flexibility in day care⁵

Aims and characteristics of the research project

In recent years, parents using the services of centre day care have urged childcare centres to extend their flexible childcare facilities, in order to enable them to optimally combine work and family demands. This has challenged the childcare field to find the right balance between parental needs, child needs, and professional caregiver needs without reducing the quality of care standards. This research project was started in response to concerns in the childcare field about possible detrimental effects of flexible childcare on individual children. We wanted to understand how children experience non-standard childcare hours. Our first aim was to obtain an insight into the degree to which Dutch parents use flexible child-care facilities. Our second aim was to develop and test an index for flexible childcare as well as an index that would describe the child's daily experiences of stability in centre care. When children have more flexible childcare, this may have some impact on their daily experiences of stability in care. We expected daily stability in care patterns to be a crucial factor in how children adjust to flexible childcare. Our third aim was to explore the associations of flexible childcare with daily stability in care, with the child's adjustment and with caregivers' positive behaviour towards the child.

Flexibility

There is a degree of flexibility with respect to the amount of hours children attended day care. Most children participating in our study attended the day-care centre for five or six half days per week. Only a few children

⁵ The text in this paragraph is a selection of quotes from the summary of the dissertation of Clasien de Schipper (2003). Some results of the study are summarised in De Schipper et al. 2003.

attended the centre more than seven half-days (14% in the survey and 2% in the observational study). Recent findings of the NICHD Early Childcare Research Network (2002) indicate higher levels of problem behaviour prior to school entry when children spend more hours in non-maternal care. The effects of flexible childcare may be more negative if children were to attend the day-care centre for a greater number of hours per week.

Main results

Although we found some negative effects of flexible childcare with respect to non-compliance of children, overall some flexible childcare in itself appears not to be a decisive factor in relation to adverse effects on childcare quality and a child's adjustment to day care. Rather, the organization of (flexible) childcare makes a difference to the child's process of adapting to the day-care setting. A child who experiences less stability and continuity in (flexible) day care, in particular less caregiver availability, as well as more changes in teaching staff, and several parallel care arrangements, is less likely to have positive experiences in a day-care setting.

We found, rather unexpectedly, that more daily stability in care was related to lower quality of care for toddlers and preschool children. In particular, more caregiver detachment and more flatness of affect were related to higher daily stability in caregivers, peers and programme structure. This result was not in accordance with previous research on caregiver stability and quality of caregiver-child relationships (Barnas & Cummings 1994, Howes & Hamilton 1992, Raikes 1993). It may be that caregivers are aware of this instability in care and compensate by being more positively oriented towards these children. Another explanation is that when there is more daily caregiver stability, caregivers probably know each other better and may be more oriented towards each other and less towards the children in the group, compared to caregivers who work with a larger number of different colleagues. It may be the deliberate policy of a day-care centre to prefer more instability in staffing and grouping patterns in order to combine groups in activities and to extend the child's interactions with other children and other caregivers outside his or her own care group. This choice for a so-called 'open door' policy might especially motivate caregivers to involve children in activities and to stimulate their development. Further research into the relationship between caregiver stability, caregiver involvement and quality of caregiver behaviour is needed to discover whether this result was sample specific, and to explore alternative hypotheses to the present finding.

Independently of the project presented (De Schipper 2003), it is important also to present some results about inter-temporal and comparative research on the quality of day care for children in The Netherlands. Based on results of different projects, Fukking & Van IJzendoorn (2004) conclude that Dutch day care, assessed in an international perspective was better than average in 1996 and on an average level in comparison to results in 2002. In other words, the quality of day care in The Netherlands is decreasing. This observation refers to the quality of processes that children experience. The position of Dutch day care seems relatively strong in the field of infrastructure and personal care and relatively weak with respect to stimulation of cognitive and language development. As the basis for an international assessment is not yet ideal, the authors would welcome the introduction of a permanent standardised national monitoring system.

Public discussion concerning advantages and disadvantages of childcare

During spring 2002 when political discussions around new political leaders, movements and parties commanded most of the attention of the media and the public, a different topic became front page news, i.e., childcare and the question of whether it is a risky affair for the development of children.

Carlo Schuengel (2002) observed and commented on the debate. His lucid article is the source of the following information. In her inaugural speech at the Catholic University of Nijmegen at the beginning of 2002, developmental psychologist Marianne Riksen-Wallraven (2002) spelled out the possible negative consequences for very young children of going to childcare centres. Her warning was based on results of her own research and also research done by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) in the USA, which were not yet published at the point in time when the warning was given (see Belsky 2001, see the published results in, e.g. Allhusen et al. 2002, Fearon & Belsky 2004). The NICHD research project is the most

elaborate research in the field and includes more than 1000 families in different towns and in different social classes. Besides the positive consequences of participation of children in childcare centres, it was found that irrespective of type or quality of childcare the number of hours that young children spend in an institution predicts the number of behaviour problems that are observed by the professional staff in the centres.

Some scientists commenting on the warning had doubts about its basis. One of the main arguments against the warning was that it refers only to a small subgroup, i.e., children who attend childcare more than 30 hours per week; these children on average had four points more on the score for problematic behaviour than those children who attend the centre about 10 hours per week. The question arises whether this difference is of relevance. This is not only a question of statistical significance but it is also a question of relevance, i.e., of the number of children to whom the observations apply. Based on several assumptions, one can say that 13% of those children who use day care many hours a week stand a chance of scoring in the clinical range and 33% have the chance to score in the sub-clinical range whereas those children who visit day care to a lesser extent have only a 7% chance of getting a clinical score and 13% have the chance of ending up in the sub-clinical range.

If one compares the effect size of the given research with effect sizes in health research, it becomes obvious that the given results matter. As there is no objective norm that draws a universal and valid distinction between unimportant and relevant effects, it is crucial to check the arguments for one position or the other. With respect to this, one can cite arguments which refer to biological data. Riksen-Wallraven (2002) points to research that children in day care show a different level of stress-related hormones in their blood during a typical day than children who stay at home. Up until now it is not yet clear whether or not this is the result of causal mechanisms but it is an observation that makes it plausible that participation in childcare not only pertains to behaviour (which is often devaluated in its objectivity) but also to biological parameters.

As the biological aspect has to be included in *future* research, the question arises, how can a warning against childcare for very young children be issued *now* and does a scientist restrict her- or himself to the publication of facts or not? Riksen-Wallraven's step from results to a value-loaded warning can be seen as a task that is compatible with the idea of empirical-analytical science, i.e., to stimulate a theoretical and a public debate which seems to be immobile. Moreover, it makes sense to consider ideology critique in order to destroy false assumptions and beliefs. Riksen-Wallraven can be seen as someone who wants to strengthen the arguments of parents who:

- Doubt that children are endless in their flexibility and can adapt to whatever circumstances in their early life without experiencing risks;
- Are under pressure to (continue to) do paid work in a tight labour market;
- Bring up for discussion the position of children, as it seems that their perspectives are not always taken into account in modern society.

It is perceived as important that the role of the scientific specialist does not stop when the results are presented in numbers and coefficients. Social science also has the task of strengthening the role of parents and children within a societal and political environment that very often is indolent to requests which pertain to the quality of the development of the next generation (Kaufmann 2002).

Family policy

Knijn & Hooghiemstra (2004) wrote an essay in which they describe three fields for family policy in The Netherlands. These three aspects will be presented partly here and some arguments will be added to finalise this report.

Fertility

Although the level of family policy measures is relatively small, the level of fertility in The Netherlands is rather high (total fertility rate is 1.72 in 2000; see Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs 2003). However, one cannot overlook the fact that the fertility is below replacement level. Official ignorance of this

fact is deemed to be short-sighted as the population is getting older and the more this process continues the less it can be changed. This has consequences for all systems of social security and also for the care and cure system. As those with a higher education remain more and more childless or have only few children, children are born to those who have a lower income. International comparison shows that the difference in purchasing power between people with and without children in The Netherlands is greater than in all other countries of the European Union (Europese Unie 2000) and so the process of polarisation between those with and those without children may continue (Schulze & Tyrell 2002). Moreover, we may assume that the fertility level will be reduced where family and marriage are highly valued, women are considered to be the exclusive caretaker and home holder and provisions to combine paid work and family tasks are scarce (Engelhardt & Prskawetz 2004, Künzler 2002).

Productivity

The growth in participation in paid work by women has been considerable during recent years. After years of a policy that stimulates part-time work for women in order to give them the chance to continue to be the main provider of care and to do most of the household chores, the question arises whether this policy has had a negative result. It seems that the combination of care and work is possible, but this does not seem to be the case for family life and professional work. As parents in The Netherlands prefer to do their tasks of care (of children and relatives) on their own, the Dutch authorities have developed measures that allow for this combination. The background of these measures is a defensive one as the authorities did not want women to leave the labour market completely (Hooghiemstra et al. 2002). If observations from other countries can be transferred to The Netherlands it seems plausible to assume that the reconciliation of family roles and professional roles can only be realised if there is a 'critical mass' in the population demanding change of policies for a sufficiently long period of time. The present system of individualised responsibility for building up claims to the social welfare system and the institutionalisation of part-time work have presumably restricted the productivity of the population. It seems about time to establish a family policy that allows for the effective use of the existing productive human capital and gives parents the guarantee that their children are being cared for at a high qualitative level.

Care

The network of relatives is the strongest source of care. Parents have invested more time in their care for children in recent years. Old parents receive a lot of attention from their adult children. The fact that Dutch parents are reluctant to make use of day care may be just as well attributed to cultural orientations as to family policy. In this situation it must be observed that the political parties seem to want to reduce the legal standards that apply for day-care provisions. If this plan is to be realised we will either see parents refrain from using the provisions, or the level of day care will develop negatively. Very probably the consequences for the development of human capital would not be positive. If we add this observation to the fact that Dutch women have only 10 weeks of maternal leave and no job guarantee—whereby the health of the child and the mother is exposed to risks that in principle can easily be removed (Ruhm 2000)—then we must assume that the political system in The Netherlands is 'indolent' (Künzler 2002: 277) with respect to the needs of (potential) mothers, (potential) fathers and children.

Summarising the facts that fertility is not yet perceived as an important theme on the political agenda, that reconciliation between paid work and family life is below the requested level that allows for the effective use and reproduction of human capital and that extra familial care provision must at least maintain or improve its standards, we must conclude that there is a great demand for an active family policy. According to a speech of the Secretary of State who is in charge of family policy (on 15 May 2004 during the opening of a symposium at the 10th anniversary of the Year of the Family organised by the Netherlands Family Council) the Dutch Cabinet is going to present a plan for an integral family policy in 2004. It will be observed with great attention, as it is clearly a challenging task.

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Portugal

Introduction

From the point of view of family change and family policies, Portugal represents an interesting and challenging profile. Looked at overall, and considering the last few decades, it undoubtedly belongs to the Southern European pattern characterised by a strong ideological commitment to the family, demographic trends which began later than in Northern countries and from a lower base, more family-centred living arrangements and a low or 'rudimentary' profile as far as family policy is concerned. Looked at more closely, with a particular focus on the 1990s, Portugal may be depicted as a country moving at its own pace and with developments that are strongly embedded in its social history and national culture and institutions. The impact of the 1974 revolution, which ended almost 50 years of a right wing dictatorship, bringing in clear-cut changes in values, legislation and State responsibility for families, strong recognition of women's work, persistent cleavages between secular and religious tendencies, and the new logic of partnership between the State and non-profit institutions, are some of the specific features of the Portuguese national context which may be emphasized. They have contributed to developments in family patterns and policy which imply some dissimilarities of outcome in relation to other Southern European countries, such as the prevalence of dual-earner (full-time working) couples, fairly high divorce rates, emphasis on provision for childcare facilities and links between family policy and policy for gender equality. Rather than divergence, however, it might be more correct to make an argument of diversity. Within the 'Continental' welfare state model, Portugal reflects a specific pathway which is difficult to place in the existing categories and seems to fall somewhere between the 'Latin Rim' model and Gauthier's Continental 'pro-family/pro-natalist' model (Gauthier 1996).

Taking family change in Portuguese society as its departure point, this report will seek to provide a summarized review of the trends and issues involved in family change and family policy in Portugal since the late 1990s. It will be divided into two sections. The first part describes the main changes and trends affecting family life in Portugal during the last decade. The second seeks to identify the main developments in family policy over the last few years and to draw attention to some of the challenges raised for the State and public policy in general by these changes.

Family change

Demographic trends and family patterns have been changing significantly since the 1970s. The last decade did not bring any major changes but, rather, further development of previous trends. Using a differentiated approach to analyse family life, we can underline four main areas of change.

Change in family formation and dissolution

In common with the rest of Europe, statistics show a pattern of later and less popular marriage, more marriages preceded by cohabitation and extra-marital childbearing, rising rates of divorce and remarriage and low levels of fertility (Almeida et al. 2000, INE 2003, Carrilho & Patrício 2004). Compared to previous decades, the 1990s reveal a more pronounced development in some of these indicators: the marriage rate declined from 7.3 in 1991 to 5.7 in 2001 (still slightly higher than the European Union (EU) average of 5.1), women's mean age at first marriage rose from 24.4 to 26.1, Catholic marriages dropped from 72% to 63% and the percentage of births outside marriage and of cohabiting couples, albeit lower than in Northern European countries, increased strongly: births outside marriage now represent a quarter of all live births (only 10% in 1981 and 16% in 1991) and cohabiting couples almost doubled (from 3.9% in 1991 to 6.9% of the total number of couples in 2001). Together with the changes that have taken place in the life of couples, divorce has also increased steadily over

the last decade: the divorce rate rose from 1.1 in 1991 to 1.3 in 1996, 1.5 in 1998, 1.8 in 2001 and 2.7 in 2002, thus bringing it closer to that of Northern European countries than to that of its neighbours in Southern Europe.

There has been less change over the last decade where fertility is concerned. Fertility rates fell rapidly to low levels in the 1970s and 1980s but remained more or less stable over the last decade, levelling out at about 1.5 (1.56 in 1991, 1.44 in 1996, 1.48 in 1998, 1.56 in 2000, 1.47 in 2002). As in other countries, the ideal number of children for Portuguese women is two to three but 'under-attainment' is frequent. Three main reasons are given by the women themselves for not attaining their preferred number of children: difficult living conditions (related to housing, living standards, long dependency of children, educational expenses), reconciliation problems, and the health or age (too old) of the mother (Cunha 2004). As in France or the UK, under-attainment tends to be linked to a large proportion of one-child families rather than to childlessness.

Change in household and family structures

Some of the most interesting developments have been taking place in family and household composition. In the 1970s and early 1980s, average household size was still high (3.7 in 1970 and 3.4 in 1981) and very large families with more than five persons were frequent (16% in 1970 and 11% in 1981). Average family size has since declined, down to 2.8 in 2001, and very large families are a rarity (only 3% in 2001). This decrease is due to the fall in fertility and families with many children but also to a decline in complex family households (Aboim 2003, Wall & Aboim 2003).

Changes in living arrangements during the 1990s followed four main trends. The proportion of one-person households increased to 17% (up from 14%) and this upward trend was based on an increase at both ends of the age range: young people leaving home and elderly people living on their own (Guerreiro 2003). However, such households are still far less numerous than married couples with children (41% in 2001) and, when seen in a comparative perspective, they are well below the proportions currently found in Northern European countries. Couples with children also featured a slight downward trend, and couples without children an upward trend but, overall, it is important to highlight that the family form comprising couples with children still represents the predominant household pattern.

A third trend is related to an increase in lone parent families (7% of all households in 2001). Up to the 1990s, the increase in lone parent families with dependent children was due more to the effects of divorce and separation than to births out of wedlock. However, in the 1990s, lone parent households of never-married single mothers increased much more than those of divorced women (Wall 2003). Of all lone parent families with dependent children in 2001, over a quarter (26%) were never-married single women (almost double the proportion in 1991), 58% were divorced or separated and 17% were widows. Another significant feature of lone parents is that a very high proportion, in particular of single never-married parents, live in complex family households, usually with their parents (39% of all lone parents; 59% of single lone parents, in 2001).

The fourth and last development is related to the downward trend in complex family households (Vasconcelos 2003). Contrary to popular myth, these extended or multiple family households were never a predominant family form in the past (in 1960 they represented 15% of all households and evidence from the past shows considerable variation, with proportions varying from very low percentages to higher ones that rarely go beyond 20%). Also, in terms of ideal norms, and with the exception of peasant stem families, neo-local residence has always been the desired norm for newly formed couples (Wall 1998a). During the last decade, the percentage of complex family households dropped to 10%, a much lower number than in the past but nevertheless a fairly high one when placed in the European context. A survey carried out in 1999 on couples with children who married in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s showed that intergenerational support in case of need is the most important underlying factor for co-residence with other relatives (Wall 2004a). When support flows towards the younger generation, lack of housing and economic problems, which hinder access to independent housing, are the major motives for co-residence. However, the need for newly formed couples to share their living arrangements with relatives dropped sharply during the late 1980s and 1990s (from about one third to one fifth of all couples). When support flows in the direction of the older generation, two main reasons are

cited: support in sickness, on the one hand, and support in cases of solitude or isolation, on the other. The importance of this last situation, in which adult or elderly relatives are taken in to avoid loneliness, indicates a more family-oriented culture where living alone may be perceived as deprivation rather than as a positive symbol of the individual's autonomy.

In summary, the increase in economic welfare in Portuguese society has been leading to greater residential independence of young couples and families with children. Fewer couples start out their family life by living in their parents' household. However, a very high proportion of lone parents with dependent children continue to live with other relatives. Thus, although we may still expect some decline in household complexity due to improved living and housing conditions and also to a gradual emphasis on the importance of individual autonomy, other factors point to the continued importance of complexity in response not only to intergenerational support in old age and in solitude, but also as a consequence of a rise in lone parenthood.

Change in the division of labour

The division of labour within the family and the behaviour of families in relation to the labour market have changed significantly over the last decades in Portugal. Of particular importance has been the increased labour force participation of women, especially of married women and those with young children, and the rise in women's educational attainment. The proportion of economically active women aged 15–64 rose from 18% in 1960 to 53% in 1991 and this trend continued during the late 1990s (62% in 1998 and 65% in 2001).

The overall growth in female employment is related to profound changes in the activity rates of different age groups. Expansion of female employment in the 1960s was based on the increased activity rates of women in younger age groups and single women. Marriage and, in particular, the birth of the first child were, until the 1970s, major barriers to continued economic activity. This difference gradually decreased in the following decades, partly due to changes in social values and legislation introduced after the revolution, and partly to the economic advantages of female labour and the growth of employment in certain economic sectors as well as the rapid development of female educational levels (Almeida et al. 2000). By 2001, the activity rates of women in the childbearing age groups between 25 and 44 had greatly increased and become similar: 83% of women aged 25–34 and 80% of those aged 35–44 were professionally active in 2001. In this context, it is also important to underline that the majority of women (84%) work full time. This means that, compared to some European countries where part-time work for women is more dominant, female economic activity implies much longer hours spent in paid work.

The counterpoint of increased employment among women has been a decline in the traditional household form of a male breadwinner and a female homemaker and a growth of households where both partners are employed (Eurostat 2002). Dual participation continued to increase between 1992 and 2000 and now represents around two-thirds of couples both with children (74%) and without (65%). It is also important to underline that the dual-earner full-time worker pattern is the dominant form. In families with children, 66% of couples were made up of two full-time workers, only 7% had the 'one and a half' model—where he works full time and she part time—and about one quarter contained a single earner model. This situation contrasts strongly with countries where the single earner model is still the prevalent model for families with children (Germany, Luxembourg, Greece, Spain, Italy, Ireland) or those, such as the UK and the Netherlands, where the one and a half model is the prevalent form (Eurostat 2002). It is much more similar to the family division of paid labour in Belgium and France, where 41% and 45% respectively of couples with children are made up of two full-time working partners.

These changes have had a considerable impact on the reconciliation of work and family life in Portuguese families. There has been a fundamental shift from a strong family care model, in which young children below school age were cared for predominantly by stay-at-home mothers or grandmothers, towards a pluralistic model of care arrangements (Wall 2002a, Torres 2004). A recent survey showed that the majority of children born in the 1970s and aged between one and two were looked after by their mothers (44%) or by relatives (34%), whereas only 27% of children born in the 1990s were looked after by their mothers at home or by close relatives (37%); the other children aged between one and two were either in a crèche (18%), with a paid

nanny (13%), or with a domestic employee (2%) (Wall 2002a). Reduced care within the family and delegation of care to formal care institutions for the three to six age group has increased even more rapidly during the last decade: in the mid-1980s, only 29% of children aged three to five were in preschool education but this percentage rose to 55% in the mid-1990s, to 65% in 1998 and to 76% in 2001 (Wall 2004b).

Some tensions and problems of reconciliation are associated with this process of change. In-depth studies have revealed three main problems (Wall et al. 2001b, 2001c, Wall & São José 2004). Families who rely strongly on grandparents feel that this is a positive care solution for very small children but one, which sometimes creates negative feelings of dependency as well as conflicting views on the education of children. A second problem is related to an insufficient number of low-cost non-profit and public institutions with long opening hours. Many families have no family support network to help care for children.¹ If they are high-income families, informal and formal care may be brought in and friends may substitute for family networks; low-income families, on the other hand, are usually more dependent on low-cost formal care facilities. In Portugal this means having access to public sector or to third sector publicly-subsidized institutions where families pay according to their means. However, in spite of expansion during the last decade, the public preschool sector sometimes has early closing hours² and the large third sector (which includes preschools and primary schools, long opening hours and after-school clubs) is not always sufficient and may have waiting lists. In practice, this means that some families cannot manage to find low-cost formal support for an extensive, all-day delegation of childcare. Some of them make a gigantic economic effort to pay for private profit-making childcare, while others leave young children unsupervised after preschool/primary school hours or in the care of an older child. Lone parents with low economic means, immigrant families, and poor families with atypical/long working hours in the unqualified services sector and no family network are the families where the risk of child negligence is highest.

A third problem is related to the overburdening of women. The movement of women into the labour force has not resulted in an equivalent movement of men into the sharing of home-based unpaid domestic and caring work. Recent research shows that men are participating slightly more in domestic work, especially in tasks such as shopping and helping to care for young children and also in routine household tasks (the 1999 survey on couples with children showed that in about one third of all couples with dependent children, men were participating regularly or always in at least one of the routine household tasks such as cleaning, cooking or doing the laundry) (Aboim & Wall 2002). However, the disparity between men and women in terms of hours of paid and unpaid work is still great (Perista 2002). The 1999 time survey indicates that men do more hours of paid work than women (roughly one hour more, as men on average work nine hours and women eight hours) but women do more hours of unpaid work (roughly two and a half hours more, since men on average do one hour and a half hours of unpaid work and women four hours). Taking into consideration both paid and unpaid work, the survey indicates that the female working day in the employed population is roughly one and a half hours longer than that of the male. Finally, from a comparative perspective, recent evidence indicates that the current division of domestic and care work reported in Portugal is amongst the most traditional in Europe. For example, the percentage of Portuguese men who reported that their daily activities include looking after children or sick/frail adults without pay is the lowest in Europe (7%, compared to EU-15 average of 18%; 31% for Portuguese women, compared to EU-15 average of 33%) (European Commission 2003).

¹ European comparative reports always portray kinship support networks in Portugal as extensive and strong, meaning that family networks systematically take on responsibilities and tasks for the welfare of the individual—caring tasks, monetary transfers and so on—which may be neglected by other welfare delivery institutions. However, evidence shows that many Portuguese families with children have no support or a low level of support over the course of married life and that extended kinship does not play a significant role in support networks; assistance flows mainly from parents and sometimes from brothers and sisters (Wall et al. 2001a). Informal support networks were also found to be unevenly distributed in Portuguese society: needy families with low educational levels and a less favourable class position have the lowest levels of support over the course of married life.

² The Ministry of Education is responsible for the 'educational component' whereas responsibility for the "social component" (canteens, after school activities, etc.) is jointly held by the local authorities and the Ministry of Work and Social Security. As a result, this latter component has developed slowly and irregularly in the public sector institutions.

Organization of care for frail or sick elderly persons has not followed the same trend as childcare. Levels of institutionalisation of the elderly population are very low and individuals strongly support the idea that sick/frail elderly people should be looked after by their family and be cared for at home (Vasconcelos 1998). Evidence shows that caring is very much concentrated within private households and within the family system (with care provided mostly by partners and children, but with growing support from formal services). Compared to Northern countries, only a fairly low proportion of Portugal's very elderly population over 80 live alone (26%, compared to 45% for the EU-15), 4% live in a collective household (average 10% for the EU-15) and most of them either live with a partner (30%) or with their children or other relatives/friends (40%, compared to a mean value of 19% for the EU-15) (European Commission 2000). With the growing number of elderly people who need care, there has been an increasing demand for domiciliary care services and day care centres. Provision comes mainly from private profit-making and private non-profit institutions: in the latter, domiciliary services are usually available a few hours per day to provide personal care services, cleaning and meals on wheels. Recent research shows that some individual caregivers, who are mostly women, come under great strain. The burden is heaviest when caregivers have to juggle work and care responsibilities for a highly dependent elderly person and in situations where the main caregiver is alone, rather than integrated in a kinship support network (Wall et al. 2001c).

Change in family values

To understand family values in Portugal, we must look at two main trends. First, the considerable changes which have occurred in fertility, marriage, and divorce since the 1960s are outward signs of dramatic shifts in the values and attitudes of individuals over the last forty years: from refusal to generalized acceptance of divorce, from religious marriage to more secular views of couple formation, from ignorance to knowledge and approval of family planning, from commitment to a gender-segregated, authoritarian family model to a 'symmetrical' organization where both partners work outside the home and share responsibilities as well as authority (Almeida & Guerreiro 1993, Almeida & Wall 2001, Vasconcelos 1998, Torres 1996, Wall 1998a, Aboim & Wall 2002). As a result of these rapid changes, age is one of the most important predictors of attitudes towards the family. 40% of individuals over 55, but only 18% of those in the age group 25 to 34, think that marriage is indissoluble (partners should never divorce), and 42% of those over 55, but only 21% of the 25 to 34-year-olds, think that the man should be the main decision maker in the family (Vasconcelos 1998).

Secondly, comparing family values as recorded by social surveys with corresponding values in other European countries reveals that the Portuguese remain very much 'on the average' in their view of family. It is interesting to note, however, that traditionalism varies considerably with different aspects of family life: as we shall see, the Portuguese are not at all traditionalist with regard to women's work and sharing responsibilities outside the home, while they are fairly traditionalist in their support for the institution of marriage, for the importance of children as life's greatest joy and for the mother's caring role, and very traditionalist on issues such as abortion.

As in other European countries, opinion polls consistently report that respondents view family life as important. In the 1999 European Values Study, 84% of respondents (average for all EU countries: 87%) reported that the family was 'very important' in life (Halman 2001). With regard to marriage and partnership, surveys indicate that the Portuguese remain fairly traditional. Only one quarter of the population consider marriage as an old-fashioned institution, and most men (63%) and women (65%) perceive marriage as a life-long commitment (marriage viewed as a life project for two persons is the second most important perception of marriage, with 48% of men and 57% of women agreeing with this view). In relation to the most important factors in a successful marriage, faithfulness, mutual esteem, and understanding, but especially the first two factors, are considered to be very important by a majority of Portuguese respondents, while 'talking when there are problems' or a 'satisfactory sexual relationship' are seen as very important by lower proportions of respondents. The first three factors are also considered as very important by a majority of respondents in EU countries, whereas the last two factors are considered as less relevant by the Portuguese respondents ('very important' by 56% and 41% of Portuguese respondents compared to an average of 76% and 62% of respondents for all EU countries).

Results from recent surveys therefore seem to point to the fact that support for the marriage institution is strong in Portugal, as well as showing—within a general pattern of commitment to marriage viewed as a private, exclusive, and life-long refuge for marital partners—a comparatively low emphasis on the intimate values of partnership (Aboim & Wall 2002).

Opinions on gender roles and in particular towards working women have shifted sharply. Surveys show a general agreement that women should go out to work. Women's work outside the home is perceived not only as an instrument of individual independence but also as an important source of income for the family (Almeida & Wall 1995). In the 1999 European Values Study, 79% of Portuguese men and women agree that 'having a job is the ideal way for a woman to be independent' (the average for all EU countries is 76%), and another 90% think that 'both husband and wife should contribute to household expenses' (average for all EU countries: 75%) (Almeida 2003). Maternity seems to interfere slightly with this attitude towards working women. Although the Portuguese are more likely than persons in other countries to believe that women first of all want a home and children (52% agree; average 53% for all EU countries), they are less likely to agree that working women can have as good a relationship with their children as mothers staying at home (67%; average for all EU countries 74%, 84% for Sweden), and they are more likely to believe that children suffer if their mothers work (73% believe this, compared to an average of 57% for all EU countries, and only 38% in Sweden). This seems to indicate a fairly strong tension in Portuguese society between work and motherhood, a fact which must be analysed in the light of men and women's long working hours and the high proportion of working mothers with small children.

Views on gender roles inside the family have also changed, but not so sharply. The 1999 European Values Study shows that the Portuguese, and especially Portuguese women, are less likely to believe that fathers are capable of educating their children as well as mothers (Almeida 2003), and the 1999 national survey on couples with children (with wives aged 25–49) shows that while a high proportion agrees that ideally all domestic tasks should be divided equally between the couple (70%), 30% think that the wife should do everything alone or with some help from her husband (Aboim & Wall 2002). Egalitarian views on the division of household work have thus steadily, if slowly increased, but the gap between attitudes and practices is great. The number of people who say that household chores should be shared is increasing faster than the number of people who actually share the work.

Abortion remains a divisive issue in Portuguese society. Surveys repeatedly indicate that the majority of the Portuguese do not favour abortion, with only a minority agreeing with abortion in certain circumstances such as pregnancy out of wedlock (40%, the average for all European countries is 53%), the couples not wanting more children (36%, the average for all European countries is 50%), or women not wanting more children (36%). Opinions have, however, been changing over recent decades: in the 1990 European Values Study only 20% of the Portuguese favoured abortion in a case of pregnancy out of wedlock, a proportion which doubled in the 1999 survey.

Family values are firmly rooted in the social structure and vary consistently with educational level, social class, level of urbanization, age, gender, marital status, and more general ideological patterns such as religious involvement and political sympathies. Analysis has underlined the importance of social factors, such as the position of individuals/families in social and educational structures, and generational factors in determining the strongest variations in family values. In general, the most liberal and less conventional family values tend to flourish among younger people in the 15–34 year old age group and among individuals with medium to high levels of education. However, as the proportion of the population with medium/high education is still extremely low (even within the younger age groups), the weight of less traditionalist values, within the total population, is never very great. Religious involvement and political preferences seem to play some role, but more so for some indicators (for example, practising Catholics are strongly supportive of the marriage institution and do not favour abortion) and less so for other areas of the spectrum of family values. People living in the major cities, but especially in Lisbon, are less traditional than those living in other parts of the country. Unmarried, cohabiting couples and single or divorced persons also tend to be less traditional than married persons: they are more sceptical towards the marriage institution and have more egalitarian views.

Poverty and immigration

As a final comment, it is important in this section to mention two other trends that have strongly affected family life in Portugal during the last decade. The first is poverty and the socio-economic situation of families. In Portugal, the share of the population at risk of poverty is very high (21% in 1999, compared to 15% EU-15 average) (Eurostat 2003a) and the persistent risk of poverty, in other words the share of the population in a low-income category for an extended period of time, is the highest in Europe (14%). The incidence of poverty risk is consistent with the patterns found across all member states. The risk of poverty is comparatively greater for children and for older people living alone, in particular for older women, for lone parents and immigrant families, for those living in jobless and one-earner households, and for those with precarious or low-skilled/low-wage jobs.

During the last few years there has been some variation in the socio-economic situation of families. In the late 1990s the general economic situation was more favourable to families: GDP growth was higher than in the preceding years, the unemployment rate dropped, from 7.3 in 1996 down to 4.1 in 2001, and there was an expansion in social spending. Over the last three years the economic climate has become more unfavourable to families: economic growth has declined, private consumption has fallen sharply, unemployment has been gradually on the increase (5.1 in 2002, 6.3 in 2003, 6.4 in the first quarter of 2004) and social spending has been cut in various ways as a result of budgetary restrictions.

The second and last trend is related to immigration. Portugal has a long tradition in emigration but has recently become a country of immigration (Baganha 1997). In the 1980s and 1990s labour migration inflows were mainly from the former African colonies, in particular from the Cape Verde islands, but during the last decade there was an increase not only in numbers but also in geographical diversity. Alongside the continued inflow of African immigrants, labour migrants over the last few years have arrived mainly from Brazil and from Eastern Europe, mostly from the Ukraine and Moldova, but also from other countries such as China, Russia or India. Most of these immigrants are young, economically active adults who want to settle and to bring in or to form a family in the receiving country. However, in terms of family life, the risk of poverty and social exclusion is high: risk factors are related to labour market segregation leading to low wages and long or atypical working hours in low-qualified jobs, residential segregation (especially in the African communities) and illegal residence. In-depth studies have shown that the lives of children and the reconciliation of work and care for young children in many of these families are particularly difficult (Wall & São José 2004).

Family Policy

To understand the development of family policies over the last few years and how they have responded to the changes experienced by families, we must look at two main periods:

- the years from 1996 to 2001, and
- the last two years (2002–2003).

Compared to the 1980s and early 1990s, both periods feature a more explicit family policy, in the sense that policy included actions and programmes deliberately designed to achieve specific objectives regarding family units or individuals in their family roles. However, the basic framework of public response to challenges posed by family change, as well as the general debate concerning policy goals and family/demographic issues, has been different. To examine these developments, we will focus briefly on the most significant changes within three fields of state intervention:

- the economic protection of the family,
- the regulation of marriage and relationships,
- the reconciliation of work and family life.

More detailed information on policy measures and public debate concerning family issues during these years may be found in previous reports and research on Portugal (Wall 1998, 2001, 2002b, 2004b, 2004c, Almeida & Wall 2001)

1996–2001

A socialist government promising a renewed interest in social policy objectives and a strong commitment to supporting families, especially socially excluded families, was elected at the end of 1995. In spite of economic constraints and a context dominated by the overriding objective of meeting the Maastricht criteria on monetary union, the economic climate in the late 1990s was more favourable than in the preceding years. In the context of a general strengthening of social policies, family policy underlined four main perspectives during this period: improving the safety-net for families and redistribution, developing links between family policy and policy for equality, promoting the reconciliation of the work and family life, and defining new public responses to recent changes in family life and living arrangements.

In relation to the *economic protection of families*, there were two major changes. The first introduced more selectivity in the main cash benefit for families by defining benefit rates, which vary according to three (and later four) levels of income. Monthly amounts of benefit were increased for the first, second and third income levels; nevertheless, except for very low-income families (first level) who received a more substantial increase, allowances continued to represent small contributions to total family income. Different rates of benefit for families with many children, with higher benefits for third and subsequent children, were also introduced for all income levels (previously, only low-income families were entitled to this).

Assessment of the development of family benefits during the 1990s shows that, at constant prices, they increased by 15% between 1991 and 2000 (36% for EU-15; Eurostat 2003b) and that total expenditure for the main cash benefit for families, after remaining more or less stable in the early and mid-1990s, went up at constant prices from 59,434³ in 1998 to 68,353 in 2000 (Wall 2004c). However, as a percentage of GDP the cost of family benefits during the 1990s did not change: it continued to represent about 0.5% of GDP, one of the lowest levels in Europe (together with Spain and Italy) where the average value for the EU-15 was 1.4% in 2000 (Eurostat 2003b).

The second major change was the introduction of income support in Portugal. The 'Guaranteed Minimum Income', a non-contributory benefit accompanied by a social integration programme (monitored by Local Follow-up Commissions), was created in 1996 for legally resident individuals lacking the resources to satisfy their basic needs. Adults over age 18, or below age 18 if they had dependent children, became entitled to the benefit if their economic resources, or those of their household, were below the amounts defined as income support. Income support entitled an adult to the equivalent of the non-contributory social pension (100 in 1996) and the second adult to the same amount. Other adults were entitled to 70% of this amount and children to 50%. The 1999 report on the implementation of income support showed that one quarter of the households on income support contained elderly persons with very low incomes and that, among the remaining households, a large proportion included adults that were either unemployed or employed in precarious and low-skilled jobs. The introduction of income support led to a vigorous debate in Portuguese society; there were strong criticisms regarding fraudulent claims and doubts were expressed in relation to the possibility of achieving the social inclusion of those on benefit (in particular of minority groups such as gypsies).

Changes regarding the *regulation of marriage and relationships* also led to a vigorous debate on the legal protection of cohabiting couples (heterosexual and same-sex unions) as well as on the issue of abortion. New legislation extended the rights of cohabiting couples (to adoption, to joint taxation) and strengthened the rights of surviving partners. Same-sex unions were initially set aside from this discussion but became a hotly debated issue after the approval of the above-mentioned law in 1999. New law proposals by the young socialists and other left-wing parties eventually led to the approval, by a narrow margin, of a new law on the legal protection of same-sex unions. It established rights, which are similar to those, established for heterosexual cohabiting partners but excluded the right to adoption.

The easing of divorce regulations was another change introduced in the late 1990s. Married couples no longer have to be married for at least three years before applying for divorce and divorce by mutual consent, for couples with or without children, may be performed by the civil authorities.

³ thousands of contos (one conto = 1,000 Escudos)

Finally, abortion and contraception were also major issues throughout these years but there were only minor changes to the existing 1984 law (extension of the delay for abortion to 24 weeks in cases of malformation of the foetus). Other proposed changes, including the introduction of the availability of abortion on demand up to ten weeks of pregnancy, led to a referendum in 1998 in which liberalisation was rejected by a majority of voters. In the aftermath of the referendum, a discussion on the need for new policy measures was introduced, mainly by the right and centre-right parties. Concern was expressed in relation to the problems of access to family planning and the development of sex education in order to prevent undesired pregnancies and to protect young people from contracting AIDS. It led to the passing of a law on Sexual Education in schools and Access to Family planning.

In contrast to abortion, the *reconciliation of work and family life* gained considerable ground during these years. Explicit recognition of governmental responsibility for this area was emphasized not only through government programmes which established specific goals concerning leave arrangements and service provision but also through an amendment to the Constitution (in 1997) which introduced, in article 59 related to the rights of workers, the right to a social organization of work allowing for personal fulfilment and for the reconciliation of work and family life.

Developments in this area followed four main lines: the increased protection of women in the workplace, before and after giving birth; a movement towards better leave arrangements for working parents with children at home; a concern to develop and improve care facilities; the promotion of gender equality in leave arrangements and in the workloads of couples. Policy measures taken during the late 1990s structured a reconciliation model as follows:

- Leave arrangements: paid maternity/paternity leave of 120 days (fully-paid) which may be taken by either parent after the six weeks taken by the mother; five days fully-paid leave for fathers (to be taken during the first month after the child's birth), two weeks of fully-paid daddy leave (to be taken after the 120 days), unpaid parental leave of three months (full-time) or six months (part-time), the right to a daily reduction of two hours work during the first year of a child's life (either parent is entitled), the right to miss 30 days work (partially compensated) to care for a sick child below age ten, the right to miss two weeks of work (unpaid) to care for a child over age ten or a sick adult relative.
- Development of childcare facilities: although the increase in the number of crèches was also an objective,⁴ measures relating to childcare were more centred on service provision for the three to six age group. The new legislation defined preschool education as optional but also underlined the State's duty to make the supply of preschool education universal (see Wall 1998b). Strategies for the development of provision passed from an initial model based on the idea of State ownership of a 'public network' to a pluralistic model characterised by institutional differentiation and a shift towards a private/public mix. In the latter, three main sectors are responsible for provision: the public sector (establishments belonging to local authorities and to the national government), the private non-profit sector which is strongly subsidized by the government, and the private profit-making sector (the private sector network, including both profit and non-profit nurseries, covers slightly over half of all provision). The initial goal was to bring the coverage rate up from 55% in 1995 to 90% of five year olds, 75% of four year olds and 60% of three year olds by the year 2000; this goal was eventually reached in 2002 (coverage rate of 77%).

2002–2003

General elections in March 2002 led to the formation of a new government on the basis of a coalition between the PSD (centre right-wing party) and the CDS, the main conservative party. Against a background of growing economic difficulties and restrictions on social spending, family policy during the last two years underlined new

⁴ Estimates for 1999 point to a coverage rate of about 16% but there are strong variations by region, with Porto, the second largest city, having a low rate of 8%, Lisbon an average rate of 16% and some other regions, such as Evora and Portalegre, having higher coverage rates of 23% and 30%. Policy goals set out in the 2001 national Plan for the Promotion of Social Inclusion aimed to increase the number of children below age three in crèches to 100,000 users by the year 2006.

policy perspectives and objectives. Rather than focus on the strengthening of social protection and on the need for policy to take into account changing and diverse family forms, governmental concern has endorsed a negative outlook on current changes in the family. Governmental actors and agencies have highlighted the negative consequences of family break-up, the problems of a declining birth rate, the growing impact of parental incompetence which leads to the institutionalisation of too many children, the disadvantages of lone parenthood versus the advantages of the nuclear family made up of first-marriage couples with children and the devaluation of household work and home life. Redistribution and the reconciliation of work and family life are still important underlying concerns but they are now strongly linked to a policy approach emphasizing the preservation of the family (and a preference for a certain model of the family) as its main concern. Family policy in this context has thus shifted its focus towards three other, rather different, major objectives:

- a commitment to a pro-natalist policy which advocates systematic support for large families with three or more children;
- a pro-life perspective which endorses a non-liberal approach to abortion and proposes policy measures to support pregnant women and vulnerable mothers with young children;
- a family-building perspective which underlines the importance of policy goals such as the expansion of family counselling and mediation services, in order to strengthen family bonds/skills and to prevent marital dissolution, as well as the development of part-time work to facilitate work/life balance for women who

In relation to the *economic protection of families* there were important changes in the main family benefit. Conditions of entitlement became less restrictive on the one hand, with entitlement linked to legal 'residence' instead of employment and social contributions as in the past, and more restrictive on the other, with family allowances available only for lower income families and not for all families. The new benefit system seeks to emphasize two main policy principles: support for low-income families and support for large families. Benefit rates introduced in August 2003 exclude higher income families and vary according to five levels of family income and also according to the age of the child, as previously (higher benefits for children below 12 months). Support for large families was introduced through new rules for calculating family level of income, which are more generous for families with more children (see Wall 2004b). An annual extra month of benefit was also introduced for families in the first level of income.

The changes produced a more significant increase in benefits for very low-income families: for example, a family with two children over 12 months, where each partner earns the national minimum wage⁵ receives EUR 25 instead of EUR 20 (second level of income). However, taking into account the strong compensatory aim of policy changes—to concentrate substantial support on low-income families—the outcome is disappointing, as family benefits continue to represent a negligible share of total income. Large families, on the other hand, have lost the differentiation of benefit according to birth order,⁶ but they have kept the possibility of entitlement to cash benefits when they have higher levels of income. In other words, with the new rules for calculating family level of income, even fairly high-income families with three or more children are entitled to family benefits. Apart from this advantage, however, financial support for large families has remained almost the same. In fact, the elimination of birth order differentiation practically cancels the impact introduced by the overall increase in benefit rates, so that a low-income family in the second level of income and with three or four children over age one receives almost the same amount of benefit as before. Overall, however, it is a policy and a governmental discourse that shows systematic support for large families. There has been no debate or reaction concerning the above-mentioned changes.

Assessment of the impact of the new family benefit in terms of total expenditure and as a percentage of GDP will only be possible at the end of 2004. However, comparative analysis of expenditure during the first three months of 2003 and of 2004 indicates that there has been a reduction of 2.6% in total expenditure.

⁵ EUR 356.6 in 2003

⁶ The difference in the cash benefit used to be quite substantial: for example, at the second income level, third and subsequent children over age one received EUR 30 instead of EUR 20 in 2002.

With regard to the *regulation of marriage and relationships* there have been no changes. However, the increase in the divorce rate has been a topic for some public debate, with governmental parties and agencies expressing concern in relation to this development in family life in Portugal. One of the strongest appeals against this trend was expressed by the Observatory for Family Matters (Ministry for Social Security and Labour). In an official statement the Observatory regarded this trend as harmful for the stability of the family and considered that public policies easing divorce regulations are often the catalysts of the problem.

Another issue taken up over the last two years and hotly debated was abortion. The debate was triggered by criminal proceedings in the region of Aveiro against seven women who carried out illegal abortions. The 'Aveiro' trial, involving the women, their partners and medical staff (17 persons in all) began in December 2003 and reintroduced a vigorous discussion, in parliament and in society, on whether legislation on abortion, still considered a crime, should be changed. In October 2003 a new campaign was started by sectors of society, which are in favour of a change in legislation, and a petition was handed in to parliament asking for a new referendum on abortion. The coalition government has stressed that there was a referendum in 1998 and that there will be no changes in legislation on abortion during the present legislature (2002–2006).

Within the current policy framework of a family building and a pro-natalist perspective, the issue of the *reconciliation of work and family life* has been quite high on the policy agenda. Government actors and agencies have stressed the importance of measures in this field and have focused strongly on the need to improve the choices of women, in particular through access to more part-time work, to more protection during pregnancy and childbearing, to longer leave to care for young children and to part-time pension schemes to care for the very elderly. Policy objectives have thus stressed the State's responsibility in promoting the work/life balance in a more family friendly way, especially through leave arrangements and the protection of women workers, rather than the development of formal care provision.

From the point of view of the protection of women workers and leave arrangements, the package introduced during the 1990s has been maintained and there have been a few developments. For example, there has been an increase in protection against dismissal from 98 to 120 days after giving birth, the five days paternity leave has become obligatory, parents are entitled to a four-hour leave per term to go to their children's school, and large families' right to miss work for 15 days (unpaid) to care for sick children over age 10 has been increased by one day for every second child and subsequent children. In relation to part-time work, the new Labour Law and the regulations which are still under discussion propose an extension to the right to part-time work during the unpaid parental leave from six to 12 months; the Government has also announced its intention to promote part-time work within the civil service. Extension of maternity leave, from 120 to 135 days, has also been promised for 2006 but for the moment the solution has been to extend leave by giving parents an option between four months of fully-paid leave or five months at 80%.

In the area of service provision, governmental programmes have mainly drawn attention to the need for new types of services, such as family counselling services ('Family Support centres'), 'pro-life' services to support single pregnant mothers (Centres for Supporting Life) and services to assess institutions that take in children at risk, handicapped persons and elderly persons.⁷ The development of service provisions to help families care for children and elderly persons was not highlighted in the government's initial programme (see Wall 2002b) but new objectives concerning coverage rates for services have now been set out in the National Plan for Inclusion 2003–2005 in December 2003. In relation to childcare services, the goal is to establish a coverage rate of 33%

⁷ The latter emerged in the context of the debate surrounding the issue of child abuse, largely triggered off by the Casa Pia case. Casa Pia is a long-standing non-profit institution which takes in children at risk. Reports of sexual abuse of children inside the home and the involvement of children in paedophile networks led to the arrest of Casa Pia employees as well as other persons, some of whom are well-known public figures. Among other issues raised by this case, the question of child abuse and negligence has featured permanently in the forefront of public debate. In this context, attention has also been drawn to the fact that there are large numbers of children living in institutions and that many might have been adopted or been fostered. Governmental agencies and actors have stressed the right of children to "family life" and changes to the law on adoption have facilitated the process of adoption by scaling back the rights of biological parents and accelerating the procedures leading up to adoption.

for children below age three and a coverage rate of 90% for children between ages three and six by the year 2010. In relation to services for elderly persons, the aim is to duplicate the number of persons receiving domiciliary services and to create new incentives for families who take in elderly persons.

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Spain

Introduction

During the last six years, developments on family issues in Spain have shown, on the one hand, an evolution which is coherent with the main trends observed in previous years and, on the other hand, emerging new elements of change in social practices and perceptions. Family structures in Spain continue their rapid convergence towards the European average. The number of persons per household has decreased, reaching 2.9 by the end of 2001, according to census data. Household structure has followed the same pattern as in other EU countries: increasing proportions of one-person households (over 20% in 2001) and a sharp decline in the proportion of extended families. The most significant recent development in Spain is the fact that young people are staying with their parents longer than they used to and longer than in other countries in Europe, with the exception of Italy. This largely explains the increasingly high average size of households, while the elderly have gained considerable autonomy, both in economic and personal terms, and continue living by themselves well after the age of eighty.

The three main new issues that have emerged as relevant in public debate on the family in recent years are immigration, social policy and domestic violence. After having been an emigration country for decades and even centuries, the migratory balance started reversing in 1975, first with the return of previous emigrants and, since 1985, with an increasing flow of incoming immigrants, mainly from Morocco and South America. As of January 2003, the foreign population was estimated at 2.6 million (6.3% of the population). Immigration is mainly concentrated in big cities like Madrid and Barcelona, but also in agricultural areas. About half of the foreign workers are women working as carers of small children or elderly people, a phenomenon that partly compensates for meagre social policies. The other already visible effect of immigration on the family is through fertility, which has increased moderately in Spain since 1999, even if it is still among the lowest in Europe (1.26 in 2003). The number of marriages with a person from another country has also increased in the last few years in 2002 it represented 8.5% of all marriages.

In recent years family problems and policies have become an important issue on the political agenda. The main political parties have explicitly presented programmes related to the family and political leaders have repeatedly stressed its importance. The main reason for this is the growing concern about Spain's extremely low fertility and its feared consequences for population aging, which is now considered to be a social problem which should be addressed by specific policies. But in spite of this alleged interest, few resources have in fact been allocated to family policies in the last six years. Spain remains the country with the lowest proportion of social expenditure for family support in the EU 15.

Domestic and gender violence have recently acquired great prominence. Women's organisations, political parties and the media are paying much more attention to this problem than ever before, and the idea that this is not a private matter is clearly influencing public opinion and politicians to a high degree. The steady increase in the number of women killed by their partners (from 32 in 1997 to 70 in 2003) has created great public concern. There have been a number of legislative proposals to give this matter an 'integral' response with a mix of repressive measures, protection to threatened women and preventive actions, especially in the field of education. A new bill was recently (June 2004) presented to parliament by the new government and will be discussed in autumn. Some of the Autonomous Regions (*comunidades autónomas*) have already adopted laws on the issue.

Gender relations

The main variable explaining the evolution of gender relations is the increase of women in the labour market. Global activity rates show a slow but consolidating upward trend. In 1990 the figure was 34.1, in 2003 this figure was 43.3 (Labour Force Surveys). Activity rates by age show a rather different picture as the younger gene-

rations of women account for most of the increase in female activity. For example, the group of women aged 30–34 had in 1990 a labour market participation of 55.2, which increased in 2003 to 72.9, whereas for those women over 50 years of age the increase is very small or even negative.

According to Eurostat (2002), the proportion of working mothers with children below 15 years old has experienced in Spain the highest increase in Europe between 1992 and 2000 from 31.9% to 43.7% (with the exception of Holland where the figures are 47.6% to 67.3%). Working mothers nowadays represent the norm in Spain if those who do not live in a partnership and those who are unemployed are taken into consideration. In spite of the rapid change towards the involvement of women in paid work, Spain is still the EU country with the lowest proportion of dual earner families with dependent children, the average being 59%.

Marital status and the number of children have a direct influence on women's activity. Those who are separated and divorced have a very high activity rate, 72.8% in 2003, close to the figure for men (77.8%). Married women are slowly increasing their labour market participation (42.8% in 2003) way behind the figure for married men (68.1%). Being married or single makes no difference for the economic activity of the latter; but it does for women.

Table 1. Activity rate by marital status and by sex in Spain in 2003, in percent

	Both sexes	Women	Men
TOTAL	55.38	43.9	67.55
Single	65.02	59.05	69.90
Married	55.42	42.79	68.06
Widowed	8.57	7.28	15.09
Separated or divorced	74.55	72.78	77.85

Source: Instituto de la Mujer, data from Labour Force Survey 2003

Divorce and separation rates are low compared to other European countries but they are steadily increasing (from 89,000 to 115,000 between 1997 and 2002), while the increase in the number of marriages has slowed down (from 200,000 to 209,000). Since the existing divorce law was passed in 1981, divorce and separation is socially accepted even by the Catholic Church which is much more reluctant towards about. The new government that came into power after the 2004 elections has announced changes in the law to speed up the divorce procedure and eliminate the compulsory previous separation, a measure imposed by the Catholic Church to give the spouses time to reconsider the final decision to divorce. In practice this has cost time and money for couples who had already made a clear decision and there is now consensus on the need to make divorce easier. It is on the political agenda and the government has announced changes in the family law that will include among other issues the possibility for homosexual couples to get married. If this sounds surprising, considering dominant traditional social practices, it responds to an overall tolerance towards different ways of life in Spain, as different surveys and studies have reported. Attitudes towards homosexuality reflect a high degree of acceptance, only surpassed by Holland or Denmark and far removed from the ideas of other Southern European countries. According to a 1998 Eurobarometer, 42% of the Spaniards believe that homosexuals should have the right to marry, 50% that they should at least have the same rights as married couples and 68% that they should have the right to inherit from their partner (Malpas 1999: 33–37).

In parallel to the decrease in the number of marriages has been the significant increase in the number of children born out of wedlock. In 1991 they only represented one in ten births; by the year 2002 the figure had more than doubled (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2003), a new phenomenon partly related to immigration and partly to the increase in cohabitation.

Changes in traditional gender roles in the family have only slightly kept pace with changes in women's activity, as is the case in many other countries. According to time budget surveys regarding the sharing of domestic tasks and family care from 1993 until 2001, women spend more than double the time of men on them, even if they have reduced by 36 minutes the overall time they dedicate to domestic chores, while men have increased

their time to 40 minutes. However, the majority of the population (67.6%) thinks that the dual earner family, where both men and women work and share family tasks and housework, is the ideal type of family, as opposed to the traditional male breadwinner family, only considered as an ideal model by 15%. (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas 2004)

Table 2. Change in the Amount of Time Dedicated to Domestic Tasks by Activity and by Sex from 1993 to 2001

	1993	1996	2001	1993	1996	2001
	Women	Women	Women	Men	Men	Men
TOTAL	7h 58m	7h 35m	7h 22m	2h 30m	3h 5m	3h 0m
Domestic tasks	4h 46m	4h 24m	3h 58m	0h 28m	0h 37m	0h 44m
Housekeeping	0h 29m	0h 28m	0h 27m	0h 43m	0h 49m	0h 55m
Family care	1h 42m	1h 40m	1h 51m	0h 43m	0h 53m	0h 51m
Shopping	0h 47m	0h 50m	0h 53m	0h 21m	0h 26m	0h 26m
Services	0h 17m	0h 14m	0h 13m	0h 16m	0h 20m	0h 14m

Source: Instituto de la Mujer surveys regarding time distribution between men and women.

The latest report on the situation of the young in Spain (Informe de la Juventud en España 2000) shows that young people are still reproducing the traditional model, in assigning domestic tasks to women, especially when they are married, although there is a high proportion of women wishing to have a full-time job while single and a part-time job when they live with a partner. A similar trend is observed in education. Even if girls outnumber boys in the educational system as a whole and get better results, the choice of studies still reproduces traditional differences: boys are going into technological studies to a greater extent than girls who tend to prefer humanities or social sciences.

Violence of men against women in the family has become a political and social issue with great visibility in the media. This is partly related to the seemingly paradoxical fact that, as women have gained autonomy and influence they seem to have increased their vulnerability, and partly due to the attention that women's organisations, political parties and the media are paying to the subject. The main concern is about women who die at the hands of their current or former partners. Statistics from different sources¹ show an increase in the number of deaths, but data before 2000 were not collected in a rigorous and systematic way. In 2003, according to the most reliable figures between around 70 women were killed by violence in the home.

There is no very clear pattern of extreme violence towards women. Age, social class, education and ethnic or cultural background are very diverse. In half of the cases the woman had decided to separate or had already done so. Opposition to subordination might explain more than the socio-economic characteristics of women and their killers.

Concern about the number of women killed as a result of gender violence has highlighted other forms of violence which had remained to a considerable extent concealed. At the same time, women who suffer from violence increasingly report it. In 1999, there were 29,400 accusations due to spouse abuse, a figure which doubled in 2003.

New legislation has been passed to regulate the protection of domestic violence victims (Ley 27/2003 de 31 de Julio). These measures are to be provided at the state, regional and local levels. The law aims at speeding up proceedings when an aggressor is reported in order to avoid situations in which he can meet the victim before the courts of law have passed sentence, meetings which have proved to be extremely dangerous. An Observatory of Domestic Violence has been created to supervise the application of the law as well as to elaborate statistics that provide more accurate empirical evidence. The government now in power has already proposed a law that addresses gender violence in the family as a complex phenomenon requiring action from different approaches (legal, social, economic, educational) in order to get to the root of the problem.

¹ Women's organisations, Instituto de la Mujer (Women's Policy Office) and Reina Sofía Centre for the Study of Violence.

Generational relationships

The relationships between generations are undergoing rapid change. If twenty or thirty years ago the main issue was generational conflict between children and parents, focus is now on the delayed departure of the former to create their own families, the help provided by grandparents to the younger generations and the increasing difficulties families face when their elderly parents are themselves in need of help. The Spanish population is currently slightly older than the European average: 16.7% are over 65 years old (IMSERSO 2002: 55), but according to Eurostat projections after 2020 the population will be younger, probably until 2040, in spite of low fertility. The explanation for this is the delayed baby boom that took place during the period 1955–1975 and assures a low dependency rate for several decades.

Recent evidence (Jurado Guerrero 2002) shows that trends in family formation as observed in previous research in the early 1990s (Fernández Cordon 1997) have not substantially changed. A majority of young people continue living with their parents after age 25 and many of them after 30. The standard explanation for the postponement of residential independence has to do with jobs and housing. Unemployment, especially youth unemployment, was very high until the early 1990s. Since then it has fallen dramatically, even if it is still high compared to the EU average. In 2002 it even increased slightly. In addition, Spain has the highest proportion of temporary jobs (one in three), most of them undertaken by young people. Housing continues to be a big problem for the transition of young people to adulthood. Prices of new houses have continued to climb, especially in medium and large cities. For example, in Madrid an increase of more than 10% was recorded between 2001 and 2002. Between 1996 and 2002 prices increased by two thirds. This might explain why in spite of better work opportunities for the young, residential independence continues to be a problematic issue. Nonetheless, other factors have been pointed out by researchers (Tobin 2001) like the increase in the number of people in higher education, a period during which they continue to live with their parents, and the tolerant attitudes of Spanish parents towards their cohabiting adult children in terms of personal independence. Data from a national survey carried out in 1999 by the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* records that a majority of the population aged between 15 and 29 (90%) who lives with their parents says that decisions regarding their situation are always openly discussed in the family and in more than half of the cases commonly agreed upon. Young Spanish people (98%) consider family and friends to be the two most important things in life, after good health,

According to another survey on the situation of young people in Spain (Instituto de la Juventud 2001), more than half of the people aged 15–29 years who live with their parents would like to leave their family of origin and live independently. A very large majority in the older group (aged 25–29) express this desire. Among young people aged between 15 and 29 living with their parents, only 23% may be considered economically independent, 80% of them lack the monthly EUR 1,000 considered necessary to be able to live alone. The amount is quite realistic as those who are already autonomous have an average income of EUR 900. According to the latest Report on the situation of young people in Spain (*Informe de la Juventud en España, 2000*) recent trends show a reduction in the proportion of young people with complete economic independence, an increase in the proportion living in semi-autonomy, i.e., receiving financial assistance from their parents; and finally, a stabilization of those who are completely dependent on their parents, the majority in this category being women. The transition from dependence to full autonomy is becoming increasingly a two step process with a period of residential or financial assistance from the parents in between the two phases.

The evolution of the situation of the elderly has in many senses been the opposite. Senior citizens have clearly gained autonomy in recent years. Pensions increased by 14% in real terms between 1990–1999 and a great majority of the population over 65 years of age is covered by the state system (98.9%). 14.5% of the elderly live below the poverty line², a figure which is lower in comparison to all other age groups, especially the younger age group from 16 to 29 for which it is 22%. Economic autonomy, as well as increasing health and physical well-being is the key to residential autonomy. A great majority of the elderly, eight out of ten live by themselves in their own home, which most of them own. There are significant gender differences. Three out of four elderly men live with their spouses, a figure that drops to 46% in the case of elderly women who more often

² Defined as 60% of the median of average per capita income.

than men live alone (17.5% compared to 6.6%) (IMSERSO 2002). This is partly explained by women's higher life expectancy and partly by their higher degree of personal autonomy that makes it easier for them to live on their own.

The youthful elderly, increasingly autonomous, instead of being a burden on their children, are playing a key role, which is just beginning to be acknowledged, by helping their daughters when they are in the labour market in domestic tasks and particularly by taking care of their grandchildren. Mothers of today represent the first generation of women in which a majority is economically active, even when the children are small. For many women involvement in the labour market would not be possible if they could not count on the help and solidarity of the older generation.

According to data from a survey on the reconciliation of work and family life (Tobío, Fernández Cordón and Agulló 1998), the help of the family network in domestic tasks is important for two thirds of Spanish working mothers. It is especially important for young working mothers (below 30 years of age), for those working in low-skilled jobs and for lone mothers. The maternal grandmother is the essential person providing help to two thirds of the interviewees for whom the help of the extended family is important.

Most Spanish working mothers (77%) have a close relative living in the same town, in 56% of the cases their own mother. In 44% of the cases it is their father, 43% their mother-in-law and in 37% of the cases it is their father-in-law. Half of the working mothers live in the same neighbourhood as their mother, though seldom in the same home (11%). The exception is lone mothers who often live with their own mothers³. Among mothers married or living in partnerships, the proportion of those living with a grandmother is very small (3%), whereas among lone mothers⁴ the rate is considerably higher, 29%, but there are big differences according to marital status. More than half (60%) of single lone mothers live with a grandmother, normally their own mother, whereas among widows this is only 10%. These differences are partly related to age. Often single lone mothers are young and very young women who have always lived with their family of origin continue living with them after the birth of the child. On the other hand, widows are older and normally they have lived in a nuclear family for many years before the husband dies.

Table 3. Family nucleus by type, Spain 1991, in percent

	Married/ Partnership	Lone Mother Single	Lone Mother Divorced	Lone Mother Widow	Lone Mother All	TOTAL
One nucleus household	85.9	27.9	63.8	75.7	59.3	83.9
Nucleus with others	14.1	72.1	36.2	24.3	40.7	16.1
Nucleus-without grandmother	11.0	12.4	9.9	14.3	11.6	11.0
Nucleus -with grandmother	3.2	59.7	26.3	10.1	29.1	5.1
All	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Fernández Cordón and Tobío 1998: 67

(Data related to mothers with at least one child below 18 years of age. Census of Population)

Help from grandmothers is clearly related to proximity. Three out of four working mothers with their own mother living in the same home, building or street are helped by them in taking care of the children. The percentage drops to 51% for those living in the same neighbourhood and to 38% for those living in the same town but in a different neighbourhood.

³ Data from lone motherhood come from a recent report based on a special analysis of the Spanish Census of Population of 1991 (Fernández Cordón and Tobío 1998)

⁴ The rate of lone parent families in Spain is small (8.6%) compared to other European countries like Sweden (22.3%), Denmark (22.0%) or the Netherlands (18.1%) (Fernández Cordón and Tobío 1998).

Table 4. Working grandmothers who help take care of the children according to place of residence, in percent

	Same home	Same building	Same street	Same neighbourhood	Same town
Grandmothers who help take care of their grandchildren	79.2	56.7	72.7	51.3	37.6
Grandmothers who do not help take care of grandchildren	20.8	43.3	27.3	48.7	62.4
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

Chi square = 50.579, significance = .000.

(Data refer to interviewees with a mother living in the same town, N=673) (%)

Source: Tobío, Fernández Cordón and Agulló 1998.

Most of the help provided by grandparents has to do with taking care of grandchildren. In almost half of the cases (46%) the maternal grandmother takes care of preschool children (when they live in the same town and when working mothers have at least one child under the age of six). In 38% of the cases maternal grandmothers take care of the children when they come back home after school, either in their own home or in their daughters' home. Often (25%) they prepare meals for their children and grandchildren or they take the children to school and collect them in the afternoon (19%). The help of the preceding generation seems to follow a double logic of consanguinity and gender: On the one hand, consanguineous relatives help more, thus explaining why mothers help more than mothers-in-law. On the other hand, women help more than men, which explains why mothers help more than fathers and mothers-in-law more than fathers-in-law. In addition to help provided by grandparents in everyday tasks, they are the ones who can be counted on in extraordinary occasions like children's illnesses or school holidays.

According to this survey, a majority of working mothers (27%) consider that the help of their own mother is their main resource in order to help them make family responsibilities and employment compatible, followed by the help of their husband/partner (25%), living near to their job (14%) and the help of other members of the family (10%).

Intense intergenerational help provided by grandparents is a new phenomenon though based on the strength of traditional family links. It is related to the rapid increase in female activity, particularly of the young generation of mothers which takes place in a context of very limited social policies to help reconcile family and employment. It can be interpreted as a case of change in the relationship between generations produced by changes in gender relationships. Current working mothers are developing a wide range of strategies, most of them based on informal and private resources. The main resource they can count on is the help of the preceding generation of women, who in spite of their differences with the younger generations, give fundamental practical help by taking care of their grandchildren when the mothers work. In many cases they are a necessary condition for working mothers to keep their jobs.

Informal family care is still the norm for the elderly who cannot take care of themselves. The social profile of the carers is very specific: 84% of them are women, 50% between 45–64 years of age, 62% with a low educational level (primary education or less), 75% inactive. Among men, 45% are retired and among women 60% of them are housewives (Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales 1995: 217–219). In most cases the help provided is permanent (75%). In other cases it can be for certain periods (13%) or in shifts with other members of the family. In 85% of the cases care is provided every day. Only 15% of the carers interviewed said that they received economic compensation from the elderly above the basic expenses that such care implies.

Opinions and attitudes regarding who should take care of the aged population are contradictory, probably as a reflection of the period of transition that Spain is experiencing nowadays. Nine out of ten carers consider it is a moral obligation for them to perform the work they are doing, but, on the other hand, five out of ten think that the state should be doing what they are doing now. When they are asked about the kind of help the state should provide, 61% mentions a salary for the carer, 14% help in the home, 5% promote the voluntary sector for these tasks and 4% reduce the number of working hours (Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales 1995:

246–247). Another survey carried out in the region of Andalusia in 1999 shows that 14% of women carers had left their jobs in order to take care of a member of their family (this includes carers of the chronically sick, small children, elderly and disabled (García Calvente and Mateo Rodríguez 1999: 42, 55–56).

The offer of complementary services such as help in the home, day centres, carers' 'breathe' services, tele-assistance, etc. are just beginning to appear. There are no statistics for these services but there is a wide variety of private-public-voluntary institutions developing initiatives in this area.

There is some awareness and concern at the national government level, as well as in the regions and local institutions, about the increasing demand for care for the elderly and the decreasing numbers of women available as carers. There are plans to increase the offer of places in collective residences, as well as some debate about the private-public mix. But the dominant perspective seems to be to help families so that they can continue to take care of the elderly at home. For example, the leitmotiv of the Regional Plan for the Elderly of Madrid is *Aging at home*, which is supposed to be made possible by different types of community services (Consejería de Sanidad y Servicios Sociales 1999).

In Spain, intergenerational solidarity has been and still is a substitute for limited social policies for young children and old people. Beyond the nuclear family, the role of grandparents as carers of their grandchildren and of middle-aged women of their elderly parents is responding to new needs related to women involvement in paid work and to the aging. However, in a European perspective, Spanish female activity is still low (though rapidly increasing). Thus it is doubtful that intense intergenerational solidarity, of which middle-aged women have been the main actors, will remain constant in the years to come.

The socio-economic situation of families

The economic situation of families has worsened slightly as the long announced economic recovery has not taken place. The Spanish economy is now on a downward swing, unemployment rose again in 2002 and since then has been fluctuating around 11%. The employment rate is low compared to the EU average and for the last three years the pace of job creation has also slowed down.

The number of households with economic difficulties has increased. Data for 2003 show that 55.7% of them have difficulties in getting to the end of the month, while those households which cannot make any savings has reached 64.8% (this figure was 63% in 2002) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2004a). In addition, prices have been increasing well above the inflation rate for a few years now (17% in 2003, for instance).

A significant proportion of Spanish families cannot afford expenses like adequate heating (41.6%), or renovating domestic equipment and furniture (39.7%) or going on vacation at least a week per year (37.4%). In addition, 16% have housing problems related to noise (22.9%), insufficient space (16.2%) insufficient natural light (11.7%), damp (13.9%) or pollution (9.7%). Almost half of the population reports not having any problem with their housing. Most households have a colour TV (99.2%), telephone (96.7%), at least one car (73.1%) and a microwave oven (64.4%) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2004b: 330–331). According to data from a recent survey (Encuesta de Hogares sobre Equipamiento y Uso de Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicación) the number of households with Internet connection reached 25% in 2003, with great differences among the regions: more than 30% in Catalonia, Madrid or the Basque Country, less than 15% in Extremadura or Castilla-La Mancha. The proportion of people who have used a computer in the last three months is 42.7%.

Access to housing is one of the main problems for Spanish families. Rented dwellings are scarce (11.4%) and expensive, and buying a house or apartment (which is the norm as 82% of households own the place where they live) has progressively become out of reach for young people who also experience difficulties in obtaining a steady and sufficiently well-paid job. The number of families still paying a mortgage has increased considerably. In 2001, according to census data, three million housing units had not been totally paid off by their owners, 25% more than in 1991.

Family policies

Recent developments in the field of family policies in Spain show that this country has entered a new era of explicit family policy. This was already the case of the former conservative government through its Family Programme (Plan Integral de Protección de la Familia) adopted in 2001 but also of the main opposition Party (Socialist Party), now in power, which presented its own Programme for the Family. One may say now that, whatever the political future, there will be an explicit family policy in Spain.

The proposal by the Socialist Party begins by explicitly using the plural 'families' in the title *Policies for the Welfare of the Families* instead of using the term 'family policy'. This stresses the fact that all forms of families are treated on an equal basis: traditional married couples, lone parent families, cohabiting couples irrespective of the sex of the partners. The types of family policies stressed are: offering resources to families to deal with their responsibilities, measures to counter the effects of the demographic situation, measures to reconcile work and the family and others aiming at reducing inequalities between different forms of families in a broad sense.

Among the many specific proposals, some deal with adapting legislation to new family realities: allowing equal treatment for homosexual couples, including the possibility of marriage, increasing autonomy of lone parents, counting all members of a family to be considered as a 'large family' (i.e., including the elderly dependents). Concerning the economic support to families, one of the leading proposals is to introduce more equity in the fiscal system by considering fiscal benefits as a reduction of tax due and not, as they are now, a reduction of taxable earnings. Another proposal is to raise the maximum age for childcare allowance from 18 to 25 years of age (25 is now the maximum age). To help reconcile the work versus family problem, two measures are proposed involving the father: a 'daddy's leave' (paid and exclusive) of four weeks to be taken during the child's first nine months and an extra one year parental leave exclusively for the parent not taking advantage of the present three year parental leave. The proposed new parental leave will be unpaid, as is currently the case, and thus probably not very effective. According to this programme, old age dependency will be addressed by increasing home care services to cover 60% of all the dependent population and 100% of the handicapped. The number of elderly care centres will be increased up to a minimum of 80% of the EU average.

Economic support to families in Spain is based mainly on fiscal benefits completed with a means-tested childcare allowance for families with earnings below the minimum for declaration to income tax. Childcare allowance was revised in 2002 to cope with inflation and it now amounts to EUR 3,012 per year. The income threshold for receiving this allowance is at present EUR 7,954.07 per year.

After an important reform of the fiscal system in 1998, a new income tax reform was adopted in 2002 and implemented in 2003. The reform has introduced many changes related to the family, especially concerning families with children. Among them a financial compensation to mothers during the three years following the birth and not limited by the level of income, together with an increase in the reduction for childcare beginning with the second child instead of the third as before. Due to the importance of all these changes and to make comparison with the previous situation easier, we have drawn up a table comparing the situation before and after the reform for all items concerning the family.

Table 5. Changes in reductions of taxable income for family circumstances in Spain in 2002

TYPE OF REDUCTION		New system (EUR)	Law 40/1998 (EUR)
Personal minimum reduction		3,400	3,305.57
Reduction for children	First child (aged up to 25)	1,400	1,202.02
	Second child (aged up to 25)	1,500	1,202.02
	Third child (aged up to 25)	2,200	1,803.03
	Fourth child and over (aged up to 25)	2,300	1,803.03
	For each child below age three	1,200	300
Old age dependency	Subject or ascendants aged over 65	1,200	299.32
	Subject or ascendants aged over 75, for caring expenses	1,000	-
Work outside the house	Allowance, in the form of a monthly down payment for mothers or fathers with children below age three	1,200	-
School material	For children between three and 15 years of age	-	150
Handicap of subject or ascendants or descendants (between 33% and 65% handicap)	General reduction	2,000	1,803.03
	Reduction for handicap of active workers	2,800	1,690
Handicap of subject or ascendants or descendants (between 33% and 65% handicap plus reduced mobility)	General reduction	2,000	1,803.03
	Reduction for handicap of active workers	6,200	2,817
	Reduction for caring expenses	2,000	-
Handicap of subject or ascendants or descendants (between 65% and 100% handicap)	General reduction	5,000	3,606.07
	Reduction for handicap of active workers	6,200	3,944
	Reduction for caring expenses	2,000	-

Source: Based on data from *Nota Informativa de la Dirección General de Tributos, del Ministerio de Hacienda, sobre la Reforma del Impuesto sobre la Renta de las Personas Físicas y de Otros Impuestos Indirectos, del 21 de junio de 2001, pp.3-7.*

Among the above changes, the most relevant and the most widely publicized is the special non means-tested fiscal benefit to mothers working outside the house. Women with children below the age of three, working (employed or self-employed) are eligible for this allowance. The father may only get it in case of the death of the mother or if he has legal and exclusive custody of the child. The amount may reach a maximum of EUR 1,200⁵ per year for each child below three in the care of the mother. The most peculiar feature of this new family policy measure is that the reduction of income tax may be paid in advance by a monthly bank transfer of EUR 100 or it may be claimed at the end of the year when the income tax declaration is submitted. The restriction of employment met with severe criticism and the new government has announced that it will be extended to all mothers of small children, regardless of their economic activity.

Autonomous Regions have concentrated their new fiscal competence on the economic support of the family. The Autonomous Regions have only recently been able to legislate on the fiscal system and to a very limited extent. A 1996 law transferred part of the income tax earnings and a certain legislative capacity in this matter to the regions. This system was ratified and expanded by a new law passed in December 2001, applicable now to all regions. Under the new system, regions receive 33% of the income tax and are able to fix, within limits, the tax rates for their share and also to establish fiscal benefit based on personal or family situations. This is how the regions have been able to implement some measures of support for families. One of the first regions to do so was the Region of Madrid, establishing a one time income tax reduction (EUR 280 in 2002) for each birth or adoption, recently extended to the case of family child sheltering. The Region of Galicia has also implemented a similar benefit (EUR 240 in 2002) but applicable in the year of the birth and the two

⁵ Limited by the amount contributed to Social Security System from the birth of the child up to his/her third birthday.

following years. Large families of this region are also entitled to an income tax reduction between EUR 200 and EUR 380, according to the number of children. Families that are not obliged to make a tax declaration, because of their low income, are entitled to a direct allowance of EUR 300 for each child below three years of age. Other regions have legislated or announced fiscal benefits to families, all of them means tested, in general on the occasion of birth or adoption or for children below three, probably because there is already a State system of childcare benefits based on the order of birth. Diversity is the rule in the intervention of the regions as no coordination at State level exists. Each region defines its own priorities and its own technical and ideological preferences.

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EVA BERNHARDT

Sweden

Family relationships

Family forms

About one in five of all persons between the ages of 16 and 84 years of age in Sweden are single, that is, they do not live with a partner and/or with children. This proportion has remained somewhat stable in the last two decades. Thus, non-family living is a fairly common experience, especially at the beginning and at the end of this age span. Due to the fact that women are usually younger than their partners, combined with the fact that men have higher mortality rates and that non-partnered elderly parents are not expected to move in with their adult children, we find the highest percentage single among women in the age group 75–84 years, about two-thirds. Among men in the same age group only about one-third are single, and the proportion is declining.

At the other end of the age span, we find substantially increasing proportions single among men in the age group 16–44 years. For women, the increases are less spectacular, probably because women are more likely to continue to live with their children after separation or divorce, and will therefore be classified as 'families'. In the prime family building years, between 25% and 44.26% of the men were single in 1998, but only 11% of the women. Single men, not living with partners or with children, may well be parents, but not co-residing with their biological children. On the other hand, among those cohabiting with children (regardless of whether they are married or not) a growing proportion is living with the children of their partner from a previous relationship. This is particularly common among men. Thus, non-standard parenting, that is having non-co-residential (own) children or co-residing with children of their current partner, has become increasingly common among Swedish men.

Since the early 1990s there has been a clear tendency for young people to continue living with their parents for a longer time than before; in this period the proportion of 20–24 year-olds who are still living with their parents has risen from 30% to 35%. Nevertheless, most young people in Sweden leave their parental home in a relatively narrow age range between 18 and 23 years, girls generally earlier than the boys. Nest-leaving age seems to be lower in Sweden than in most other European countries. Recent studies have shown that young persons from broken homes have a significantly lower average age when leaving home, compared to those in intact families. Therefore, the relatively high rate of disruption of Swedish co-residential couples (married or cohabiting) may have contributed to the low median age of leaving the parental home in Sweden.

The higher education system in Sweden expanded strongly in the 1990s, and continues to do so. Swedish university students are generally not directly economically dependent on their parents, since they can get subsidized governmental loans to support themselves during the time of study (many also have part-time work). Nevertheless, the rising costs of being a student, combined with the shortage of student housing, especially in the metropolitan areas, has no doubt contributed to a particularly late age of leaving home among university students.

The long-term trend towards smaller families may have shortened the period that a couple has children living at home, that is the childbearing and child rearing phase of the life. On the other hand, the current trend towards later ages of nest leaving may have counteracted this to some extent. It is not clear whether the length of time from the birth of the first child to the time when the last child leaves the parental home has become that much shorter. What is certain is that this family-building phase occurs later and later during the life of an individual. This also means that parents, having responsibility for children living at home, are older and older. Active parenting years generally fall in the age span from the late 20s to the early 50s.

The Scandinavian countries have the highest levels of cohabitation in Europe, and the first co-residential relationship is almost always a cohabiting union. In Sweden, less than 5% start their partnered life by getting

married. Childbearing in cohabiting unions is quite a common phenomenon, resulting in a situation where about half of all births are out of wedlock. Among first births in Sweden it is even higher: two-thirds are non-marital, but 84% of those are born to cohabiting parents. The median age at first birth is lower than the median age at first marriage. Judging from official statistics, most people do get married eventually, although less so over time: the proportion that never married has slowly been increasing over the years. In 2001, 17% of 50-year old women and 25% (one in four) of 50-year old men had never married. This can be compared to 7% and 17% respectively, who were never married 25 years earlier. However, most of these never-married 50-year olds were either cohabiting at the time, or had been doing so earlier in their life. Survey data indicate that only a few percent had never partnered before their early 40s. However, marriage is increasingly postponed to later stages in the life span (higher ages and later unions). Many couples marry between the first and the second child, and several studies show that pregnancy and childbirth still tend to trigger a change in marital status.

Survey data show that young adults in Sweden overwhelmingly approve of childbearing and child rearing within cohabiting unions. Nevertheless, a majority of those currently living with a partner expect to marry within the next five years. Sending a signal to others that the relationship is a serious commitment seems to be the most important aspect of getting married. Thus, there is no indication that marriage will disappear as a social institution, even if the motivations for marriage may have changed.

The question of homosexual marriages has been in the forefront of media interest for quite some time. Sweden has had a law about registered partnerships for homosexual couples since 1995. Since then about 3,000 such partnerships have been registered (compared with an annual number of newly contracted marriages of about 40,000). Recently, a proposal to introduce gender-neutral marriages (meaning that same-sex couples can be wed according to the same marriage law as heterosexual couples) has been discussed by the judicial committee in parliament. Several of the political parties support this idea, while the Christian democrats oppose it (and the two biggest parties, the social-democrats and the conservatives have not made up their mind yet). One possible outcome of this is that Sweden will introduce the same system as already exists in many other countries, namely civil registration of marriages, leaving it to each individual couple to decide whether they want to have it confirmed by a religious ceremony. It would then be up to each religious congregation to decide whether they accept homosexual marriages or not.

Demographic situation

By April 30, 2004, Sweden had a population of close to nine million inhabitants. Population growth in the first quarter of 2004 was greater than any recorded since the mid-1990s. The main reason for the growth was a considerable immigration surplus, in combination with an excess of births over deaths, in contrast to the situation that was recorded for the five years between 1997 and 2001, when Sweden experienced negative natural growth. The birth deficit received fairly modest attention from the media, the government and other social actors. The reason for this lack of keen interest might have been the fact that Sweden has not yet experienced a population decrease, as net migration has so far been large enough to offset the deficit of births.

Although fertility decreased dramatically in the 1990s, and was as low as 1.5 children per woman in 1999, the fertility level is not exceptionally low in Sweden by European standards. It is, however, lower than in neighbouring Scandinavian countries. What is characteristic for Swedish fertility, more than in any other European country, are the pronounced fluctuations that seem to move parallel to business trends. The effect seems to be particularly strong for first and third births, while second births have been much less affected. It has been argued that fertility behaviour in Sweden is more sensitive to fluctuations in employment and economic conditions than is the case in most other countries. The reason for this seems to be Swedish family policy, in particular the construction of parental leave, where benefit levels are directly related to the income of the parent in the year preceding the birth (currently 80%). In recent years, when there has been an upswing in the economy, fertility has risen (total fertility rate (TFR) in 2003 was 1.72 children per woman).

Despite an increase in recent years, the fertility level is still far from the assumed future rate of 1.85 in the current population forecast. Recent analyses of the Eurobarometer data from 2001 show that the personal ideal family size among Swedish women aged 20 to 34 is among the highest in the European Union (EU)-15

group of countries (2.4). Together with France and Denmark, Sweden has the lowest proportion which sees no child or one child as the ideal, while almost two out of five see a family with more than two children as the most desirable. So, even if personal ideals may be declining over time, Sweden has a fairly long way to go before reaching a sub-replacement level of ideal family size, unlike the situation especially in German-speaking countries.

As is the case in many other European countries, Sweden has for quite some time experienced a trend toward childbearing at a later age. The median age for the first birth is currently 28.6 years for women and 31.1 for men. Even if most young people express a positive attitude towards having children (only a few percent of young men and women in a recent survey said that they definitely did not plan to have children) becoming a parent (ideally of two children), is no longer the strong norm that it was in previous generations. Above all, young people are not in a hurry to start a family. Having the right partner is definitely important for both men and women, while a completed education takes first place among women and an adequate income to support a family takes first priority among men. The latter probably reflects the pervasiveness of the breadwinner role for men, even in a country like Sweden that has come a long way towards equality between men and women.

Generally, higher education for women implies that they have fewer children and that they are more likely to remain childless. However, a recent Swedish study (*Hur många barn får jag när jag blir stor? Barnafödande ur ett livsperspektiv*, Stockholm: Statistiska centralbyrån) looking into the effect of a later start at childbearing gives another picture of the relationship between the educational level and the average number of children. Women with a university education have a 50% higher propensity to have a third child than a woman with the lowest level of education, who in turn is the most likely to stop childbearing after the first child. The negative relationship generally found between level of education and number of children therefore depends mostly on the fact that women with higher education start childbearing later in life.

The proportion of women who never have any children has been slowly increasing in recent decades. While only about 11% of the women born in the mid-1940s remained childless, this has increased to about 14% for those born in the late 1950s. Still, these are relatively low figures. The latest population forecast for Sweden assumes a rise to about 17% childless at the end of the childbearing period, which is still a lot lower than the current rates in many other European countries. Both the level of childlessness and the proportion of women having only one child are relatively low in Sweden, and there is nothing to indicate a dramatic increase in the near future.

The new population forecast of May 2003 from Statistics Sweden (*Sveriges framtida befolkning: Befolkningsframskrivning för åren 2003-2050*, Stockholm: Statistiska centralbyrån) indicates that the Swedish population will reach 10.6 millions in 2050. This forecast is based on the assumption of an annual immigration surplus of 23,000 and a TFR of 1.85 children per woman. Life expectancy is expected to increase to 86.2 years for women and 83.6 years for men, indicating a diminishing gender gap. For the first time, Statistics Sweden has calculated the expected future distribution of the population according to country of birth. The results show that almost the whole population growth up to 2020 is due to increases in the foreign-born population and their children (the second generation). In 2020 this population group is expected to comprise about 20% of the total population.

Increasing life expectancy and larger birth cohorts entering retirement age in coming years, especially from 2005 onwards, means a sharp increase in the (old age) dependency burden in Sweden, as in all Western countries. It has been suggested that one way of solving this problem is to accept more labour force migration to Sweden. Currently, only about 5,000 labour migrants enter Sweden each year. Since the 1980s refugees and family reunification (relatives of earlier migrants, or Swedish-born children of earlier migrants, who bring brides and grooms to Sweden from their parents' country of birth) dominate the migration stream.

A detailed study from Statistics Sweden (*Arbetskraftsinvandring – en lösning på försörjningsbördan?* Stockholm: Statistiska centralbyrån) of what the level of labour force migration needs to be in the future to counteract the net loss of people of working age (more people leaving than entering the labour market), shows that between 50,000 and 80,000 labour force migrants need to enter Sweden each year in the period 2010 to 2030. Even if the recent inclusion of new member states in the EU may mean more labour migration to Sweden than has normally been the case in past decades, such a high level is judged as quite unlikely for practical and political reasons. It therefore seems necessary to combine more labour force migration with higher labour force partici-

pation rates (that more people work until age 65 or even longer) and higher birth rates (even if the latter do not affect labour supply for another 25 years). Sweden probably has less possibility than most other EU countries to increase labour force participation rates at higher ages, since these rates are already the highest in Europe. In 2002 more than four out of five 55–59-year olds were in the labour force, and 57% of those in the age group 60–64 years (compared to 60 and 27% respectively for the EU average).

A recent government report (*Kan vi räkna med de äldre?* Stockholm: Finansdepartementet) regarding the future demographic challenge posed by the increasing dependency burden, warns that it is necessary to take measures very soon to maintain, and if possible increase, the total labour supply, both for those above 55 years of age and those in the younger age groups. The demographically favourable situation that prevailed during those decades when the Swedish welfare state was being constructed has now come to an end.

Gender relationships

Compared internationally, Sweden has possibly come the furthest in the world, when it comes to gender equality. Considerable progress can be reported in recent decades in terms of female representation on political bodies. For example, in the election for the EU parliament, which took place in June 2004, 11 out of the 19 candidates elected were women, which increased the female representation in the Swedish delegation to the EU parliament (probably contrary to the trend in most other EU countries). On the other hand, there seem to have been some setbacks with regard to gender equality in the labour market during the 1990s and in the early 21st century. The gender gap in pay did not decrease during the decade, while gender segregation, in terms of what kind of jobs men and women hold did decrease. There are also positive developments when it comes to relationships within the family. Greater gender equality in the home has been achieved through the sharing of household and childcare tasks. More and more men take an active responsibility for home and children. Men take parental leave, they deliver and collect children from the day-care centre, they cook and they clean, which has improved the possibilities for women to develop their careers. Swedish men are clearly encouraged to develop a primary-care relationship with their children at an early age. This leads to what has been called 'hands on fatherhood', fathers are actively involved in childcare and child rearing, and do not just fulfil their provider role by bringing home the pay check.

Swedish men are active fathers, even if their use of the benefits of the parental leave system is still fairly limited (the details of the parental leave system are elaborated under the section Family Policies below). According to a recent governmental report, 17.5% of the total number of days claimed during one calendar year are used by fathers (*Föräldrapenning, pappornas uttag av dagar: fakta och analys*, Stockholm: Socialdepartementet). There also seems to be a polarization since as many as one in four fathers did not take a single day during the child's first four years of life, while longer parental leaves by fathers are becoming more common—one in four takes at least two months.

About one third of all children in Sweden experience a parental divorce or separation. Almost all Swedish parents have joint legal custody after separation or divorce, even if in most cases the child(ren) live mostly, or exclusively, with the mother. In Sweden, the children's right of access to both their parents is considered very important, as is the active parenting role of fathers. Therefore, men's limited use of parental insurance is of great concern to the government and other actors on the social policy scene. This concern about the male-female relationship in their parenting role arises out of the long-standing emphasis on gender equality in Swedish public policy and social debate. The Swedish labour organization, recently proposed that the 12 months of leave be divided so that one-third has to be used by each parent, i.e., four months for the mother and four months for the father, while the remaining four months could be used according to the wishes of the individual parents.

The results of a new time use survey were published in April 2003 (*Tid för vardagsliv*, Stockholm: Statistiska centralbyrån). Total work time, i.e., the sum of unpaid and paid work, was found to be roughly the same for men and for women, but this is a similarity concealing many differences. Men's work is mostly paid work, while women divide their time more or less equally between paid work and unpaid work. Men work daytime and workdays, and have a clearer distinction between work and leisure time. Women's work is more evenly spread over the day's 24 hours and over the week. Their leisure time is also more fragmented than men's, and is often

combined with or interrupted by household work. Women devote about twice as much time to household work than men do. The most gender-typed household task is laundry.

In evaluating gender relationships in Sweden, it has to be pointed out that Sweden still has quite a gender-segregated labour market. This is partly related to the fact that many tasks that in other societies are taken care of at home (usually by a full-time—or possibly part-time—housewife) in Sweden fall within the public sector (including publicly financed, but privately run institutions and activities). An example of this is childcare: the overwhelming majority of those employed at the public (or private) day-care centres are women. The generous parental leave system may also have had some negative effects on women's career possibilities, as there are studies indicating that many employers hesitate to give women career-track jobs, because they anticipate that they will be absent from work for extended periods of time (when they are at home on parental leave taking care of their newborn children).

A recent governmental report on gender segregation in the Swedish labour market (*Den könsuppdelade arbetsmarknaden*. Stockholm: Näringsdepartementet) argues that women's integration into the workforce has taken place in three distinct phases during the twentieth century. Women's formal right to access to paid work, regardless of civil status or family situation, was already established in the early 1940s, thanks to a 1939 law forbidding employers to fire women who married or had children. In reality, it was not until the late 1960s that what the author of the report calls 'primary integration' of women into paid market work can be said to have taken place. With regard to 'secondary integration', meaning that women and men face the same working conditions, career possibilities, job choices, etc., progress has been made during the 1990s, but much still remains to be done.

The degree of gender segregation in the labour market decreased during the 1990s. This seems to have been the result primarily of a process where women have increasingly entered previously male-dominated areas of the labour market. The reverse, men entering previously female-dominated areas, has taken place to a much lesser extent. During that decade young women were more eager than young men to continue education, in particular beyond secondary education. They have also, on average, higher grades. This has contributed to strengthening their relative position with regard to higher education, which in turn has facilitated their choice of non-traditional educational and occupational trajectories. The author of the report argues that nowadays economically active women, especially those in the younger age groups, do not find it as natural as previous generations of women to step down, cut back (by working part time), or accept less qualified work just because they have (or plan to have) children.

It is interesting to note that gender segregation in the labour market was reduced during the 1990s, despite the fact that the recession, especially in the early half of the decade, unemployment rates and general economic insecurity could have been expected to counteract such a trend, rather than facilitating it. This is the same period that witnessed declining rates of childbearing, which was actually a reversal of the trend during the 1980s when birth rates and female labour force participation increased simultaneously. This is interpreted to indicate that women's participation in the labour force nowadays, in the Swedish context, should be regarded as a pre-condition of, and not as a hindrance to, family formation and childbearing. Young women today make their choices of educational and occupational careers depending on their own individual interests and talents, and are much less influenced by future family formation and childbearing plans than was previously the case. Their options have therefore widened considerably, and they no longer accept that children and family are regarded as obstacles to future employment careers. They are also likely to expect their partners to share responsibility for home and children on a more or less equal basis. To stimulate (or at least not to counteract) future childbearing it is important to further reduce the gender segregation in the labour market (and the related gender-specific roles in the family sphere).

Generational relationships

Most Swedish children up to the age of 17 years (72% in 2002) live with both their biological parents. About 23% live with their mother (and possibly a stepfather) while 5% live with their father (and possibly a stepmother). Younger children live to a greater extent with both biological parents, with the percentage decreasing as

the child gets older. The proportion of 16 and 17 year olds who have experienced the divorce or separation of their parents is 25%, while almost 5% had never lived with both their biological parents.

In 2002 for almost nine out of 10 children between 1 and 17 years old, the parents had joint legal custody, while in the overwhelming majority of single custody cases it is the mother who has the custody. Parents who have been married continue to have joint custody after divorce, unless one of the parents files for single custody. The same rules apply for cohabiting parents, with the exception that they do not automatically get joint custody after the birth of the child but have to register joint custody with the authorities. Joint custody does not necessarily mean that the child lives half the time with the mother and half the time with the father; in the case where the parents no longer live together. Among children with non-co-residential parents, 17% divide their time equally between the parents. This represents a dramatic increase from 4% in the early 1990s. Fewer children experienced a separation or divorce between their parents in 2001 compared to the years before 1998. This declining trend seems to be due to fewer separations between cohabiting parents, even though break-ups are about twice as common among cohabiting parents compared to married parents.

The custody law assumes that it is best for the children if the parents have joint custody, even if they do not live together. Most likely, this is normally the case, but there are also situations when single custody is to be preferred. The Ombudsman for children has pointed to the problematic situations which can arise when the courts regularly decide on joint custody, even in those cases where one parent claims single custody because of abuse (of the adult partner or of the children). The Ombudsman for children (Barnombudsmannen) has recently suggested a number of changes in rules and regulations in order to strengthen the rights of the child(ren) in such problematic situations.

Despite the fact that the Swedish welfare state is built on a highly individualized social security system, family ties continue to be of importance, especially for care of the elderly. Due to the continuing financial constraints on the Swedish welfare state, there has been a reversal of the trend, starting in the 1960s, of substituting family care with public care. Both home help services and institutional care for the elderly have been cut back substantially, resulting in a situation where families provide a growing proportion of care for ailing elderly adults. The important role of spouses and offspring (in particular daughters) in the care of the elderly, although seldom officially recognized, has been documented in several recent studies.

Socio-economic situation of families

Figures from the income distribution survey for 2001 conducted by Statistics Sweden show that the average income level of Swedish households was slightly below the EU average. On the other hand, Sweden, together with Denmark, has the smallest spread of household income in the population (the lowest Gini coefficient) among the EU countries. Nevertheless, trends in economic standards during the 1990s have been particularly negative for families with children. The most negative development has been for one-parent families with children, a category whose situation used to be—and probably still is—less vulnerable in Sweden than in many other countries. But the economic downturn in the 1990s, with, for Sweden, unusually high levels of unemployment, has hit this group more than others: the lowest disposable income in 2001 was found among single parents and among those over 75 years of age living alone.

The recession and increased unemployment in Sweden in the first half of the 1990s resulted in distinct declines in average household income, as well as broader income gaps. The latter was a continuation of a trend that had begun in the 1980s. The improvement in average income after 1995 did not break the trend; in fact, it was in the late 1990s that income gaps widened the most markedly. The negative trend with regard to employment during the 1990s was no doubt one of the most important factors behind the fact that, during this period, income fell in relative terms mostly for single adults (mostly women) with children and for couples (married or cohabiting) with many children (meaning three or more). In terms of age groups, income deteriorated most for young people. Young households and single adults with children were also the ones reporting the most difficulties in making ends meet or having cash left over to cope with unforeseen expenditures. Overall, however, financial vulnerability seems to have risen in every age group, except the very oldest. The problem was most pronounced in metropolitan areas.

However, disposable income in Sweden increased again in the early years of the 21st century. In 2001 the biggest increase was observed among young couples without children (8%), while young people (18–29 years old) living alone only increased their economic standard by 0.8%. They are also the only group with lower living standards in 2001 than in 1991. Families with children surpassed their 1991 level in 2000. The lowest disposable incomes in 2001 were found among those over 75 years old living alone and among single parents. Co-residential couples 30–49 years old without children at home had about twice the median income of those two groups.

The economic standard of children depends on the income levels of their parents together with public subsidies such as child allowance. Children up to the age of 17 years of age live in families where, on average, about 20% of the total income is acquired from such subsidies. Children in one-parent families and children in two-parent families where only one parent is employed, have the lowest economic standard (about 27% of these children belong to 'poor' families). About 43% of children under 17 years of age living in two-parent families have both parents working (or studying) full time, while 28% live in families with a father working full time and a mother working part time.

Swedish children generally have a higher living standard than children in most other countries, and definitely higher than was the case among Swedish children a few generations ago. This was the conclusion of a study on the welfare of children and adolescents, based on interviews with children between 10 and 18 years of age. (*Barns och ungdomars välfärd*, Stockholm: Socialdepartementet). In material terms, they are very well-off: 90% have their own room, about 50% their own TV set, and over 40% their own mobile phone. A majority reports no difficulties with their schoolwork, and most of them have good relationships with their parents. On the negative side, almost 25% report that they have a headache every week, about one-third have sleeping problems, 20% have stomach ache and 42% report that they suffer from stress. Thus psychosomatic problems do not seem to be uncommon. Another related problem, which has attracted attention in the Swedish media, is the growing prevalence of overweight among Swedish children: in a recent study one out of five four year olds were found to be overweight.

Sweden has a well-established system of childcare facilities. As of 1995, municipalities were made legally accountable for the provision of places for all children of working or student parents. Responsibility for activities has been transferred from the social service to the school system. During the 1990s, average expenditure per child in preschool care was cut by about 14%. This was the result of the combined forces of unchanged resources and an increasing number of children in day care. One result of this has been a marked increase in the number of children per group and per staff member in childcare facilities, both in preschool care and in leisure-time centres for school children—but particularly for the latter.

Likewise, total expenditure on schools, calculated per pupil, declined during the 1990s, as did teacher density per 100 pupils. For both childcare facilities and schools, there has been a noticeable increase in such facilities outside the public sector: Schools run by non-public bodies were given access to municipal grants in 1992, and from 1992 to 1998 the number of such schools trebled. The trend to establish independent schools has continued. Today, the Swedish school system is being hotly debated. One of the more worrisome trends in the last decade or so is the decline in the proportion of pupils who achieve full marks and qualify for secondary education.

Family policies

Family policies and gender equality policies are not two separate entities in Sweden, but are closely interwoven and constructed to mutually support each other. Swedish family policy, as well as social insurance policies and labour market policies, is based on the principles of universality and individual rights, which means that a person is entitled to rights and benefits as an individual, regardless of, for example, family status or (legal) civil status. Therefore, child and family benefits accrue to parents regardless of whether they are married or cohabiting (or not even living together). Both parents are entitled to use the benefits of the parental insurance system. The parental leave system (transformed from a maternal leave system thirty years ago, i.e., already in 1974) is probably the most important aspect of Swedish family policy, which also includes child and family benefits and high quality day care.

Currently, the parental leave system stipulates that parents receive parental cash benefits for a total of 480 days per child, which corresponds to about 16 months, most of which is at 80% of the parent's qualifying income. Two months are exclusively for the mother, and two months for the father, which, if not used, cannot be transferred to the other parent. The 'daddy' month was introduced in 1995, and was extended by one more month in 2002. The remaining months, which are not earmarked, can be claimed either by the mother or the father. The most important part of the parental leave system is not that it is generous—which it is—but that it is flexible. It is not necessary to use all leave time at the beginning, even if most parents use the overwhelming part of their total number of days in the child's first year of life. Indeed parental leave days can be used up until the child's eighth birthday. There are handbooks giving advice to parents how to get the most out of the parental leave system (and parents are well aware of this). This flexibility of the parental leave system, in combination with the right to return to one's job, i.e., full job security up to 18 months after the birth of the child, plus the availability of part-time jobs, makes the combination of work and parenthood in Sweden easier than in most other countries in the world. This is also one of the basic tenets of Swedish policy for gender equality.

During the 1990s, there was a trend towards less generous provision and decreased coverage for both social security and family support. There were important changes both in qualification criteria and replacement levels: that is, who is entitled to support and how much. For example, the levels of replacement in health insurance as well as unemployment insurance were lowered several times during this period. Also, those forms of support aimed more directly at families with children underwent many changes, e.g. the replacement levels in the very generous Swedish system for parental leave were adjusted in the same way as for the health insurance. There were also changes in the child allowance and in the housing allowance, to which people 30 years of age and over without children ceased to be entitled, along with lower allowances. One of the reasons behind the deteriorating economic situation for households with more than two children is no doubt that this is a household category whose economic situation depends heavily on the housing allowance.

Social assistance expenditure increased markedly during the 1990s, and this expansion was so extensive that it touched virtually every population group. However, two groups stand out in particular, namely young and immigrant households, which, no doubt, is a reflection of the deteriorating economic situation of these two groups. Generally—as with family support, health insurance and unemployment insurance—there has been a trend in social assistance towards a less generous approach and tougher criteria.

This is also one of the important reasons behind the extensive system of childcare centres (both public and private) all over Sweden—the provision of childcare should enable parents to combine parenthood with employment or studies. Essentially the purpose of childcare centres is not only to create conditions, which are beneficial for children, but childcare is also meant to help parents. It is important to understand that the Swedish welfare state is based on a dual breadwinner model. The majority of families with children in Sweden have two incomes, i.e., both parents are employed. Therefore, benefits that encourage work and make work possible for parents, such as the availability of childcare, tend to be more important than the level of, for example, child allowances.

On January 1, 2002, a new regulation setting a ceiling on the fee parents have to pay for their children's day care came into force ('maxtaxa'). At the same time, children of unemployed parents or parents on parental leave were given a guarantee that they could continue spending 15 hours a week at their day-care centre, in order not to lose contact with their playmates. These changes led to more children in day care, but did not affect the average size of children's groups or the average number of personnel. The average duration, i.e., the number of hours per week that the children spend at their day-care centre, has decreased, mostly because of more children of unemployed parents or parents on parental leave, whose time at the day-care centre is limited to three hours a day.

The construction of parental insurance in Sweden has also been debated in the last couple of years. The Swedish concern about gender equality in general, and the male-female relationship in their parental role in particular, has led to a debate about how the months covered by parental insurance should be divided between mothers and fathers. The most radical idea has been that it should be divided equally—that is, six months for the mother and six months for the father; other people have suggested that a better idea would be one third each for the respective parents, and the remaining four months according to the wishes of the parents. The

family minister of the current Social Democratic government, apparently with the support of the majority of the party, argues that dividing the parental leave days equally between the parents would have negative consequences for the children. The reasoning behind this argument is that, since so many fathers do not use all those days that are currently earmarked for them, the children will have less time at home being cared for by one of its parents.

Another aspect of parental insurance that has been hotly debated recently is a possible increase in the ceiling (Swedish parents get 80% of their previous salary, up to a certain maximum ceiling). The ceiling implies that those with relatively high salaries (meaning more men than women) do not get 80% of their previous salary if they stay home with the child. Thus this rule counteracts a more gender equal division of parental insurance. The government promised before the elections in September 2002 that the ceiling would be raised. However, after the elections the government said that current state finances did not allow this increase, and no such change was included in the 2004 budget.

A researcher at the Institute for Future Studies (Sara Thalberg, *Barnafödandets politik*, Stockholm: Institutet för framtidsstudier) has analysed how the political parties in Sweden argue over issues of family support and whether low fertility is considered a political problem or not, and if so why. The period 1997–2003 was studied and it was concluded that there does not seem to be any clear difference in position between the left wing or the right wing regarding fertility. The Social Democratic party is the party that has most explicitly presented low fertility as a problem, but also the Christian Democrats have taken an active part in this issue. The Liberal and Conservative Parties, on the other hand, do not appear to worry much about future demographic developments. Much of the discourse indicates that there is a connection towards the attitude to the birth rate, on the one hand, and labour force immigration, on the other, as the two latter parties are more in favour of labour force migration while the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats show the most negative attitude towards immigration.

Regarding causes and measures, however, there appears to be a divergence between the political blocs. For the Social Democrats, the and the Green Party, childbearing is to a large extent connected to work force participation, and the decline in fertility during the 1990s is explained by employment insecurity and the economic recession. The issue is also presented as an issue of gender equality. For the right wing parties, low fertility is mainly explained by the policies of the Social Democrats, the ruling party during this period. To increase fertility, these parties advocate increased freedom of choice and more time for families by means of allowances for parents who stay at home with the children, together with subsidised household services.

CERIDWEN ROBERTS

United Kingdom

This period has been one of unprecedented expansion of public policy interest and intervention in family life in Britain and concomitant public expenditure on initiatives and programmes to support families in a variety of ways. The Labour government came into power in 1997 with a clear manifesto commitment to support families with children as well as hold families more responsible for the behaviour and care of their members.

Without doubt, this political commitment was in large part a response to both the changing nature of family life over the preceding decade and also the impetus given to a more interventionist and explicit family policy by the highlighting of family concerns through the UN International Year of the Family 1994. Growing public disquiet about the consequences of family break-up, the problems of parenting in a more complex society and the anti-social and delinquent behaviour of a small but visible minority of young people also contributed to a sense of 'crisis' as did the increasing strain parents and employers alike found themselves experiencing as more British families tried to manage family and working life with little institutional support.

This report reviews how family relations have changed and examines the impact of these changes. It looks then at the socio-economic position of different family types, before considering the government's response to some of these issues and recent family policies.

Family Relations

Changing household structures

One of the major changes over the last few years has been the growth of households to 24.4 million in Great Britain in 2002 caused chiefly by the growth in one person households. This reflects both the ageing population with more people living longer and many experiencing longer periods of widowhood. But it also reflects the increased numbers of people living alone after divorce or separation as well as a growing tendency for some young people to live alone prior to couple or family formation. This is particularly likely to be men. In 2000, solo men under 65 comprised 10% of households and the trend is predicted to continue with 14% in 2021.

Consequently, couple headed households have declined to 58% of all households and single person households increased to 29% by 2002. Large households [over 5 people] have halved, falling to 7% in 2002. Households with dependent children are a declining proportion of all households—only 29% in 2002—but over the life course raising children will still be experienced by a majority of people. (Social Trends, 2003)

Marriage and partnership

Throughout this period, there has been constant scrutiny of the falling marriage rate and popular discussion of the 'end of marriage'. It is clear that the marriage rate has been falling steadily over the last twenty years both as a result of people delaying or eschewing marriage completely or as a result of people divorcing. Britain, like the rest of Europe has seen the increasing popularity of cohabitation such that for the majority of young people their initial resident couple relationship is a cohabitation. This may precede marriage with the same partner or may end in separation. Longitudinal data suggest that only about one in ten of these 'nubile cohabitations' continues as such, though this is likely to be an increasing proportion. Attitudinal data reveal that cohabitation is increasingly seen as more acceptable whether as the 'final stage of courtship' before a marriage or as an alternative to it. (Barlow et al., 2001)

Cohabiting men and women are predominately young—the peak age is mid to late 20's though there is also a sizeable group of older post marital cohabitants. All the evidence suggests that the proportion of people cohabiting will continue to grow as will the length of cohabitations. It is also projected that the proportions of people raising children in cohabiting relationships will also rise as will the proportion of older people in coha-

biting couples. These developments have implications for the legal status and protection of people in these relationships with respect to property and finances on dissolution and death which are currently very topical and some of which are being tackled through legislation. (Haskey, 2001)

As well as an overall decline in marriages and later age of first marriage, we have seen two other changes. Firstly, there has been a rise in the proportion of marriages which are second or subsequent marriages for one or both parties. In 2000, for example, there were 180,000 first marriages out of a total of 306,600. And, secondly, there has been an increase in secular marriages over the last fifteen years. By 1998, 61% were civil marriages and the widening of legally approved secular premises for marriages has encouraged and underpinned this trend.

Divorce and separation

Over the same period we have seen continuing high levels of divorce and, although the peak figure of 180,000 in 1993 has not been surpassed after a fall in the mid 1990s, the rate has begun to rise slightly in 2001. People are slightly older now when they divorce reflecting the later age of marriage but marriages are ending earlier and often this means that very young children see their parents separate.

What is much harder to establish is the proportion of cohabitations which dissolve and the numbers of children affected as figures are not routinely collected for this.

Research suggests that cohabiting is less stable than marriage, and that these relationships are even more likely to break up. (Clarke & Wright, 1997). But comparison is not straightforward as some cohabitations are entered into with very different degrees of commitment and value sets than most marriages. (Smart & Stevens, 2000)

Post separation families

Concern about the impact of divorce and the breakdown of relationships on children continues to be a feature of public discourse though there is more acceptance of it and a willingness to work with it than there was a decade ago. The number of British children (aged 16 or under) whose parents divorced reached a peak of 176,000 in 1993, and since then numbers have fallen. In 2001 146,914 children in England and Wales experienced parental divorce and the majority were under 10. In part though, this fall also reflects the growth of cohabitation and the numbers of children affected by parental separation in this family type is harder to know. Research suggests these parents are three and four times more likely to separate than their married counterparts (Clarke & Wright, 1997) and recent analysis of family change over the period 1999-2001 confirms the higher incidence of relationship break-up among cohabitants. (Marsh & Perry, 2003)

A further consequence of such high rates of divorce and relationship failure has been the growth in the number of stepfamilies. In 2000/01 stepfamilies accounted for 8 per cent of families with dependent children and they were most likely to be made up of a divorced or separated mother and her children (88%) as the vast majority of children live mainly with their mothers (Social Trends, 2003).

A recent piece of research examined the perspectives of 467 children aged between 5 and 16 living in these 'reconstituted' families. These researchers highlighted how many children had felt anxious or unhappy during the separation of their parents, and that many had little understanding of what was happening to them at that time. Furthermore, some children had experienced upheaval as well as problems with adjustment when they became part of new families. The authors also noted evidence of poor communication between parents (especially some fathers) and children, which they felt made the whole process more even more distressing (Dunn & Deater-Deckard, 2001).

Finally the policy and research spotlight has increasingly been thrown on the role of fathers in separated families and the extent to which non resident fathers had contact with their children. Research evidence on the latter is difficult. Early studies suggested more than a third lose contact within two years but recent research suggest between 15-28 % (ONS 2004) or 9% (Attwood et al., 2003). Where contact is taking place it is often frequent. The ONS survey reports that 17% of fathers had some form of contact everyday with 8% seeing their

child daily; 49 % at least weekly and 69% monthly. Between a half and two-thirds had overnight stays at least once a month (Hunt & Roberts, 2004).

Family formation and fertility

Childbearing is happening later in life and more women of childbearing age are remaining childless. By 2000 women's average at first birth was 27.1 and fathers' was 31.7. However, as Britain also has the highest level of teenage pregnancies in Europe with an average live birth rate of 29 per 1000 girls aged 15 -19, we are also seeing a divergence between a minority of very young parents and more highly educated and professional parents embarking on parenthood in their mid thirties. This delay in childbearing is one factor which has contributed to both the growth of fertility treatment and also the rise in childlessness, such that it is estimated that over a fifth of the current cohort of women of childbearing age will be childless, many, but not all, through choice. The rise in IVF treatment, as well as the increasing age of new mothers has also led to more multiple births (Social Trends, 2003)

Another feature of current childbearing is the increasing incidence of babies born outside marriage. In 2001 most children were born to a married couple but around 40% were born outside marriage. This mirrors the rise in cohabitation, but also reflects a small minority of women having a baby without a live-in and /or current partner. Recent results from the new Millennium Cohort Study of babies born in 2000/1 have revealed the marked differences in relationship status of new mothers of among ethnic groups. Young Asians are most likely to be married, with black mothers having the highest incidence of solo living and white mothers the highest incidence of cohabiting (Kiernan & Smith, 2003).

The changing nature of the extended family

The overall aging of the population has had some important changes for the extended family too with increasing numbers of three, four and even five generation families. It is true that there are very few three-generation households in the UK - an estimated 1% of all households in spring, 2001 (Social Trends, 2002). And Asian families are more likely to live in a three generation household than other groups. (Social Trends, 2003) However, research shows that links between the generations remain important, even when families do not actually share the same home. National data shows that grandparents live quite close to at least some of their grandchildren- 64% lived within half an hour (Clarke & Roberts, 2003).

A study which compared data from the International Social Survey Programme in 1986, 1995 and 2001, found that although individuals now have most regular contact with their immediate family, they still keep in regular touch with wider family members though the three generation links are the most important (Park & Roberts, 2002).

Three in five grandparents in a recent national survey reported seeing at least one set of grandchildren on a weekly basis. Furthermore, when asked whom they would turn to, most people would still in the first instance go to a member of their family rather than a friend if they were ill, 'depressed' or had financial problems (Park & Roberts, 2002). In fact, other evidence shows that many individuals provide regular, long-term care for an older family member (Wittenberg et. al., 1998) while grandparents are still an important source of childcare for working parents. Among those with grandchildren under 15, 60% looked after them some of the day and 54% babysat (Clarke & Roberts, 2003). A small minority do more than this as a recent Home Office report highlighted, as they are bringing up their grandchildren full-time, usually as the result of a family crisis (Richards, 2001).

Grandparents have also been shown to play an important role in children's lives, even after their parents have separated or divorced, and some researchers have suggested that regular contact with maternal grandmothers can help a child to adjust to a new family situation (Dunn & Deater-Deckhard, 2001).

Yet, it should not be assumed that all family members are happy about providing this support. Recent research found that grandparents who carried out occasional childminding saw this as part of their role. But those who had become full-time carers, in place of their own children, had usually not expected to take on these responsibilities, and many struggled emotionally, practically and financially (Richards, 2001). And, the International

Social Survey Data suggests that a substantial minority of grandparents do feel over-burdened at times, especially the 'young' grandmothers (women aged under 54) who are more likely to be employed as well as providing care for other family members, such as their own elderly parents (Park & Roberts, 2002).

Finally, a new term, 'boomerang children' has been used to describe adults who return to live in the parental home after a period away. One estimate suggests that over a quarter (27%) of young adults return to live with their parents at least once, and that one in ten returns home four times before leaving for good. The main reason given for returning was money problems, but 17% said that they simply missed the family home (Family Policy Annual Digest, 2002). But clearly the process of transition from dependent child to fully independent young adult has become more protracted as more enter financially stressful higher education, entry to securer labour market positions becomes more difficult and for most entering the housing market in their early 20s is prohibitively expensive.

The dynamics of family life

Family life in Britain has been subject to considerable scrutiny and change over the last decade or so as the roles of men and women have changed, paid work has become more important and families are combining work and caring at both ends of the age spectrum. Parenting has been identified as an area where some parents need help and public support and the whole balance of responsibility between the family and the state has been under scrutiny.

Working parents

The 1990s saw a steady increase in the proportions of women working in a paid job so that by 2002, 73 % of women of working age were economically active, a rise from 67% in 1984. More men were active at 84%, but this was a decline from 89% in 1984. One of the largest increases over this period has been in the proportion of mothers of young children in employment. A small majority of mothers with a child under 5 (54%) was economically active in 2002 and this figure rises as the youngest child gets older so that 79% of women with a child 11-15 was engaged in the labour market. (Social Trends, 2003)

However, this apparent evidence of a shift in gender relations towards equal opportunities for women should be treated with some caution for a number of reasons. First, this change has not taken place across all groups. For example, women of Bangladeshi/Pakistani origin have much lower rates of employment, especially those with few qualifications (Social Trends, 2003). And, most women who continue working and return to work after childbirth are in 'couple' families. Married mothers are more likely to be working than cohabiting mothers who in turn are more likely to be in employment than lone mothers in Britain. Some of this difference is explained by the different ages of these groups and their children with both lone mothers and their children likely to be younger. But some of the difference is also attributable to their different human capital mix of education, skills and work experience. Finally, some of it also explainable by the presence of a partner as many of the mothers in couple families are working part time with full time working partners. So the mix of income and benefits they are in receipt of are very different. The recent government sponsored Families and Children Study looks at this in considerable detail (Marsh & Perry, 2003).

Secondly, the full/part time divide in women's employment is a crucial variable in explaining the labour market position of men versus women and between partnered and unpartnered women in Britain and underlying the clear differences in patterns of employment between mothers and childless women. Overall of the 6.2 million people working part time in 2002, 5.1 million were women (Social Trends, 2003). Some of these part time workers work less than 16 hours a week though recently mothers' hours have been increasing. By 2001, 56 % of mothers worked more than 16 hours compared with 42% in 1998 (O'Brien & Shemilt, 2003).

Recent research has looked in detail at the hours of work of mothers and fathers and shown the extent to which they work atypical hours, often in an attempt to 'juggle' caring and work between them so that they manage childcare but also as an employment consequence of the move to a 7/24 society. This study shows very clearly the way in which significant numbers of families with young children have a parent working at times

when children would be at home such as in the evening, early mornings and week ends all of which raises questions about the effect of this type of family shift work on family life (La Valle et al., 2002; Dex, 2003).

Central to this expansion in mothers' employment has been the growth in childcare places over this period, in large part as part of the government's National Childcare Strategy though also a market response to demand. Over 100,000 new places have been created for pre-school children since 1998 (NAO, 2004) and in total there are now 1.4 million registered childcare places in England as of March 2004 (Ofsted, 2004). However, it is still a minority of parents who use formal childcare. Family care by the other parent or a grandparent and also siblings is often preferred as are informal arrangements and this is not always because of cost though the availability and cost of formal care is an important barrier to use (Kasparova et al., 2003). The Daycare Trust recently highlighted how the cost and shortage of childcare restricts employment options for many women, and especially those from minority ethnic backgrounds, lone mothers, the less well qualified and mothers of disabled children (Raising Expectations, 2002). There is, moreover, concern that the supply of places is not secure. The National Audit Office has recently reported that for every two places which open one closes and the funding base of this expansion is not permanently established (NAO, 2004).

Finally, the growth of women's employment has not been accompanied by a commensurate increase in men's involvement in domestic work. In part this is because in many couple families women are still secondary wage earners working part time and primary domestic workers. This is less likely to be so in couples where both work full time especially before the arrival of children and the evidence suggests a more egalitarian division of labour exists at home. But there is no doubt that much of the increased discussion about work/life balance has been fuelled by the concern of both men and women that they are working longer hours at work and shouldering domestic work and caring on top of this.

A concern with parenting

The 1990 saw a dramatic increase interest in parents and parenting. Initially this focussed both on the costs to the public purse of growing numbers of lone parent families, especially those where the non-resident father neither paid adequate levels of child support nor actively parented his children, and concern about anti-social and delinquent behaviour of a small but visible minority of young people, many of whom were growing up in communities where adult men were largely absent. While concern about child support has largely subsided as a public issue, though there are still criticisms that the system is slow, rigid, does not recognise that parental obligation is complex, and importantly, has failed to lift lone parent families out of poverty (Barnes et al., 1998; Davis et al., 1998), concern about anti-social behaviour continues.

It focuses on the extent to which parents should be held responsible for the misbehaviour of their teenage children. A major research study, carried out by the Youth Justice Board into the prevention of offending by young people, identified family conflict or breakdown as well as a family history of problem behaviour as significant risk factors associated with young people becoming involved in crime (Beinart et al., 2002). Legislative initiatives to deal with this have been a feature of the last seven years.

There has also been recognition of the more general difficulties associated with post-separation parenting. The issue of the role of the non-resident parent, overwhelmingly the father, has been much discussed as, for a small minority (10%) of separating families, managing post separation contact requires the intervention of the courts (ONS, 2004) and there is considerable dissatisfaction for some mothers and fathers about this. Some fathers argue that they are awarded limited contact and little is done to enforce court orders when mothers flout them, while dissatisfied mothers often feel that contact is awarded even when there is a history or danger of domestic violence. Several years of consultation has ensued and the Government now proposes little change in the law but more active intervention to inform parents and children, increasing the powers of the court to refer parents who disobey contact orders for counselling or psychiatric intervention and the creation of a network of child contact centres to provide safe and neutral venues for meetings.

General information about the changing nature of parenting and the stress and strains modern parents feel has become much more common over this period, reflecting the greater salience attached to 'supporting parents'. The National Family and Parenting Institute publishes survey information about parents' worries.

And, among others things, these have shown that the majority of parents are concerned about their children, are especially anxious about teenagers becoming involved in alcohol and drug abuse and want more information about coping with 11-18 year olds, who, they felt, were the most problematic group (NFPI, 2001a).

Another survey, which focused on the specific anxieties of minority ethnic parents, found that their children's behaviour was also a major concern. In addition, financial difficulties and school standards were particular worries for Black parents (NFPI, 2001b). More recently, a survey revealed that though most parents judged being a parent positively they were also likely to think that they have a harder task than their parents did with lone and step-parents more likely to say this (Lever Faberge, 2004).

Another key theme in the 'parenting' debate has been the role parents should play in their children's education. Government ministers have been keen to remind all parents about their obligation to *educate* their children and their duty to ensure that their children are not violent or abusive to other pupils or teaching staff (Family Policy Annual Digest, 2002). Therefore there has been considerable emphasis on ensuring children attend school by tackling truancy levels, trying to reduce school exclusions and also unauthorised absences [such as holidays in school terms]. Parents are being not only urged to co-operate with schools on this but sanctioned when children are persistently absent or misbehave. The Government survey of families with children has shown that as many as one in ten children has had a parent contacted by school as a result of the child's behavioural problems or exclusion from school (Barnes et al., 2004)

However, there have been criticisms of this approach, arguing that the government has focused too heavily on school exclusions and truancy. Instead it is claimed that many persistent 'non-attenders' come from families where basic skill levels are low, and little value is placed on education. Therefore, attention should be given to changing this culture and encouraging parents to become more involved, before serious behavioural problems develop (Success in Something, 2002).

Finally, throughout this period there has been growing concern about the state's own role as a 'corporate' parent for those children who are taken into the care of local authorities either because their family temporarily cannot look after them or because it is deemed unfit and the child is subject to a child protection order. While the numbers are not great and their stay is temporary for the majority, instances of serious child abuse leading to the death of vulnerable young children as well as the very poor education, employment and life outcomes most children in care experience has provoked public, professional and political interest in this group. In September 2003 the government published a green paper '*Every Child Matters*' reviewing this whole issue in the wider context of all its services for children.

The Socio-Economic Position of Families

Inequalities

A number of social and economic changes over the past 20 years have resulted in an increase in the number of 'low income' families in the UK, and the growth of inequality. In particular, the decline of traditional industries hit some regions especially hard and meant that male unemployment in these areas grew along with the number of 'workless' households. But the growth of low paid, often part time and female service sector or routine assembly line jobs has not replaced the male manufacturing wages families lost.

At the same time, the distribution of earnings has widened because more value is now placed on those with education and skills, relative to those without. Furthermore, changing family structures, especially an increase in the number of lone parent families, has meant that more households are now 'work poor' and in receipt of social protection benefits (Family Policy Studies Centre, 2000b).

As a result, while the average household income per head of the population adjusted for inflation doubled between 1971 and the early 2000s, the distribution of this income became more unequal during the 1980s, stabilised in the early 1990s, and more recently has shown signs of a further small increase in inequality. Growth

in self-employment income and unemployment was associated with this growth in inequality (Social Trends, 2002; IPPR 2004). As a consequence 18% of the British population are living in 'low income' households (defined as below 60% of the median equalised disposable income) (Social Trends, 2002).

Furthermore, wealth statistics show even more inequality. The most wealthy 1% of individuals in the UK owning 22% of the total marketable wealth, while half of the population owned only 6% of this total wealth between them (Social Trends, 2003). In addition, although the amount of household disposable income has continued to grow, the proportion derived from wages and salaries fell from 59% to 54%, as the proportion from social protection benefits went up. It is clear that most of these benefits are paid to older people, but benefits are still the only income for a significant proportion of families (Social Trends, 2002). But some types of family are more at risk of poverty.

Families with dependent children

In the UK, families with children are disproportionately in the lower quintiles of income distribution, and it has been estimated that around a third of all British children are growing up in households with less than half the national mean income (Social Trends, 2002). This means that nearly 4 million children were living in low income households in 2001-2002 (Social Trends, 2003). In fact, using statistics from the mid-1990s and relative measures of poverty, some analysts have claimed that the UK has the third worst rate of child poverty in the industrialised world (Family Policy Studies Centre, 2000b).

It is true that there are now more 'dual earner' or 'work rich' couple families, and some of these parents claim that they both have to work in order to achieve a 'satisfactory' standard of living. But the majority of poor children are part of 'workless' families, where no adult is in employment. Half of the children in workless lone parent families and two thirds in workless couple families were in low income households and this rose to three quarters of children when housing costs are taken into account.

There has, perhaps, been most public concern about the number of poor lone parent families. Lone parents are the family type at greatest risk of poverty with nearly half (45%) of poor children living in a one parent family, while over half (63%) of all lone parents live in poverty (Family Policy Annual Digest, 2002). They are also more at risk of experiencing associated disadvantages. For example, they are less likely than 'couple' families to own their own home, and more likely to live in overcrowded conditions (Social Trends, 2002). In addition, the British Crime Survey in 2001 indicates that they are most at risk of being burgled, mainly because they live on council estates or in other 'low income' housing (Social Trends, 2002). Furthermore, data concerning household expenditure shows that the average weekly spending by lone parent families is less than half of the amount spent by two-parent households, and even lower than some pensioner couples (Social Trends, 2002). It seems that although they are more likely to spend a greater proportion of their income on food than higher income families, the actual amount is far less in real terms.

Income poverty is associated with all sorts of other deprivations and disadvantages in health and education. Research has highlighted the relationship between family poverty, food poverty and poor outcomes for children and shown how mothers often go without food for the sake of their child's health. Even so their children are inevitably also affected by poor nutrition. In particular, pregnant women on low incomes are more likely to have low birth weight babies, and poor children are at greater risk of ill health (Dowler et al., 2001).

A major government survey of families with children has documented in considerable detail the income and benefits these families receive as well as their socio-economic characteristic, employment status, housing, health and receipt of services as well as use of childcare (Barnes et al., 2004). The chapter on material deprivation shows very clearly the consequences of poverty for British families and children and echoes an earlier survey of parents which had shown that many could not provide holidays, activities and other items they considered to be 'necessities'. In fact, 18% of children in this study lacked two or more of these items, and were described by the researchers as 'necessity deprived' (Howarth et al., 1999).

Black and minority ethnic families

Analysis of data from the Family Resources Survey suggests that individuals of Bangladeshi/Pakistani origin are by far the poorest in Britain, with 60% living in households with less than half the average income (Berthoud, 1998; Social Trends, 2003). Furthermore, children from this background are much more likely to live in these 'low income' families than White children. In 1997/98 three quarters of Bangladeshi/Pakistani children were part of households with less than half-average income, compared with one in three White children (Family Policy Studies Centre, 2000b). Most of these children are members of 'workless' families. Employment rates for this ethnic group are the lowest in the UK, and in spring 2001 adults with this background, as well as Black adults, had an unemployment rate which was three times higher than for Whites (Social Trends, 2002).

Although children of Bangladeshi/Pakistani origin are more likely than White children to grow up in a two-parent family, just under one half of Black families with dependent children are headed by a lone parent, with all of the disadvantages described above (Social Trends, 2002). And although there is little official data, a report has highlighted how refugee and asylum seeking children and families face a particularly acute risk of poverty (End Child Poverty, 2002).

Family Policies

Machinery of policy making

In the UK, historically, no one government department has ever held overall responsibility for the family or family policy. Instead, a number of departments have carried some responsibility for policies which, directly or indirectly, affect family life. However since 1997, the 'New Labour' government, which came into office with a manifesto to increase the support for families has been very much more proactive in its family policy. This has emphasised a more coordinated approach, with the specific aim of producing solutions to some of the problems and concerns described in this report. Furthermore, this government has gone further than any other in developing 'explicit' family policies, especially on parenting, and financial and childcare support for low paid parents to make work 'worthwhile'.

Initially, in September 1997 the *Ministerial Group on the Family* was set up. Chaired by the Home Secretary, it launched the first consultation document on the family produced by any British government, *Supporting Families*, in November 1998. This set out an approach to family policy, as well as a programme aimed at supporting family life, and it was generally well received. The document also encapsulated the problems in developing a holistic family policy as its various chapters reflected the initiatives and responsibilities of several government departments.

Since that time the machinery of family policy making has undergone many changes as responsibility eventually passed in 2003 from the Home Office where it was felt there had been a disproportionate emphasis on failing families to the Department for Education and Skills. The DfES had acquired policy responsibility and consequently enormous budgets for programme expenditure in the area of early years' education and the major early years' initiative for disadvantaged children, *Sure Start*, as well as its more traditional interests in young people, schools and education. The new Children and Families Directorate was set up with Margaret Hodge as Minister with primary responsibility for children's services, childcare and provision for under-fives, family policy (including parental support and family law). Ms Hodge also had responsibility for the new reform agenda for children's services which the Government set out in the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (2003).

The wish to join-up policy making and implementation across departmental boundaries has been given substance in the variety of cross cutting cabinet committees which have been set up. The most senior is the Cabinet committee – The Ministerial Group on Children, Young People and Families chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. There is also, as of 2004, a Ministerial Sub-Committee on the Delivery of Services for Children, Young People and Families charged to coordinate the delivery of services for these groups chaired by the Secretary of State for the Department for Education and Skills (DFEE) and also the Active Communities and Family Issues Committee Cabinet sub-committee chaired by the Home Secretary. Membership is widespread so responsibility for policy formulation and overseeing of implementation is spread across many ministries.

The government also established the *National Family and Parenting Institute* in November 1999 as an independent charity, though almost all its initial funding came from the government. Its purpose was to provide information to parents, run media campaigns, encourage research and, more generally, promote 'good' parenting. Finally these institutions were mirrored in Parliament by several parliamentary groupings most recently, the *Associate Parliamentary Group for Parents and Families* launched in March 2002.

The policy issues

Almost every aspect of family life has been put under policy scrutiny but what has clearly emerged over time is that the Government's definition of family policy is essentially about the successful rearing of children, i.e. 'investing in the future'. Family policy formally does not embrace the care of frail elderly or sick adults. This is the domain of policies towards social care. There have been two key documents. *Supporting Families*, published in 1998, outlined the government's progress after one year in office and set out the agenda for action. *Every Child Matters* published in 2003 was essentially about the reform of children's services, which historically have focussed on deprived children or children and families at risk. However, this document covers all aspects of children's services and the whole children's workforce and proposes various major changes and initiatives affecting all 11 million children (*Every Child Matters*, 2003).

Supporting families identified five main domains of family policy; a generalised area of support for all parents with particular input at key stages especially in the early years; financial support for families; helping families balance work and home; strengthening marriage and better support for serious family problems. Since 1998 the debate has moved on and there has been much more action in some of these areas than others. Overall though this has been an unprecedented period of policy formulation, initiatives and programmes so much so that it is difficult to summarise them. Perhaps two of the most important areas affecting most families and those particularly vulnerable have been respectively the initiatives to help working families and those needing to work with more childcare facilities and subsidies for childcare and the associated campaign to end child poverty.

Tackling child poverty and social exclusion

From the beginning the government focussed on providing better financial support for low income families (*Supporting Families*, 1998). Initially it increased child benefit, established the Working Families Tax Credit (building on the Conservative Government's Family Credit) and began a campaign to tackle poverty in lone parent families by encouraging lone parents into paid work and reforming child support (monies paid by non-resident parents). But it also took a broader look at social exclusion, establishing the Social Exclusion Unit at the centre of the government with a remit to cover all departments. In September 1999, the government published its first annual report on poverty, *Opportunity for all – tackling poverty and social exclusion*. This document set out an 'anti-poverty' strategy and a number of indicators which could be used to judge its own performance in this area. It also made it clear that the top priority was (as it apparently remains) the complete elimination of child poverty within 20 years.

The promotion of employment is seen as the best route out of poverty for those who are able to work. A number of initiatives have been introduced to achieve this goal, and in particular, from October 1998 *New Deals* were made available for five groups of the unemployed, including lone parents receiving social protection benefits. These parents are now offered 'active' support in finding and securing work, as well as training and childcare through practical help and advice.

In addition, *Supporting Children through the Tax and Benefit System*, published in 1999, and *Budget 2000*, provided more detail about financial support for all parents and children, especially 'low income' families. The aim of this was to 'make work pay,' and lift working parents out of poverty. So *Working Families' Tax Credit*, was paid through the pay packet or to the non-working partner in cash, and the increases in universal *Child Benefit*, and the new *Children's Tax Credit*, introduced in April 2001 were recognition of the costs borne by families raising children.

However, from April 2003, a new, more integrated *Child Tax Credit* was introduced and paid to the main carer, replacing all existing income-related child elements of unemployment and low pay benefits. This creates one system of support for parents who are in low paid jobs or not working, and is intended to make the transition from welfare benefits to employment easier (and so encourage more parents on benefits to look for work). A new *Working Tax Credit*, introduced at the same time, is similarly designed to address poor incentives to work, and raise the income of the lowest paid.

The *Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000*, changed the very contentious child support system for the children of separated parents. The new scheme allows more child maintenance from the non-resident parent, usually the father to be disregarded, slightly raising the total income of the parent with care. Previously all maintenance was set against social security support which led to the argument that the father's contributions were just going to the Treasury when the mother claimed income support. Furthermore, this reform simplified the calculation of the non-resident parent's contribution and aimed to make the system quicker and more efficient with tougher sanctions for those parents who fail to meet their financial obligations. Yet, implementation has been far from easy or complete and by 2004 there were increasing reports of dissatisfaction with delays and lack of enforcement and the consequent hardship some lone families were experiencing.

It is clear that there have been successes. There are, as of 2003, 500,000 fewer children living in households below average income (Every Child Matters, 2003) but critics say that it is not certain that the government's approach will deal with the 'hard' cases of poverty in this period. However, research from the Institute of Fiscal Studies has shown very clearly the enormous increase in child –contingent support from £10 billion in 1975 to £22 billion per year in 2003. Means tested child –contingent support has expanded and there has been a corresponding reduction in universal child benefit as a proportion of income for children. There has been a return to the use of the tax system as the main delivery vehicle although monies are not now channelled through the tax payer as they were before (Adam & Brewer, 2004)

Making changes to the tax and benefits system, although clearly important, was only part of the government's approach to ending child and family poverty. They recognised that some individuals and families experience a combination of linked problems including low income, poor housing, bad health and family breakdown - becoming 'trapped' in a spiral of disadvantage. The remit of the *Social Exclusion Unit* was to produce 'joined up' solutions to these problems. Scotland had its own programme set out in the *Scottish Social Exclusion Strategy*, Wales had the *Building an Inclusive Wales* plan and Northern Ireland had the *New Targeting Social Need Initiative*. Most of the work of these units focussed on specific, locally based projects which aim to reduce teenage pregnancy, support vulnerable young people and, more generally, improve opportunities in the most deprived communities, especially for children. Some of their reports have been seminal in challenging former policy approaches often with well evidenced arguments [www.socialexclusion.gov.uk]

In addition, in July 1998, the government embarked on a major initiative aimed at disadvantaged families which has become a flagship programme of the administration's family policy for two reasons. It has grown to be an enormous and diverse programme of family support and it embodies the concept of 'early intervention' as the cornerstone of the policy. Heavily influenced by the USA programme "Head Start" although significantly different from it, the *Sure Start* cross-governmental programme was introduced as part of the strategy for tackling social exclusion. An initial £452 million was made available to establish programmes across England and Wales, with the aim of working with the most disadvantaged parents and pre-school children to improve their health, social and emotional development, and their ability to learn. Since then subsequent spending reviews have increased the monies substantially and by the end of 2004 there were about 500 schemes running in disadvantaged communities. *Sure Start Scotland* was launched in 2000 with the similar emphasis of improving the life chances of the under fives. There is also an enormous research programme evaluating the effect of this sustained intervention. Details of the national evaluation are available on its website [www.ness.bbk.ac.uk]

While the under fives were the target of *Sure Start*, initiatives to tackle 5-13 year olds 'at risk' of social exclusion were also introduced. One of these was the *Children's Fund* established in 2000 to be used to support a wide range of voluntary and statutory services in England and to help children and families experiencing

the consequences of poverty. Local consortia could bid for funds to support initiatives and programmes they wanted to meet their needs. So again a diverse range of support has been funded to tackle disadvantage.

The various initiatives the government have put in place, initially in a piecemeal fashion, are now being pulled together into a ten year strategy for children and families.

Supporting working parents

The government's strategy of encouraging poor parents to take employment as the route out of poverty clearly meant that the shortage of affordable childcare had to be addressed from the beginning of the administration. In 1998 a Green Paper, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge*, set out a national strategy to increase the supply of affordable childcare. This document promised a guaranteed nursery school place for all four year olds, doubling the number of places for three year olds, more after-school provision and an improvement in the quality of this care through training and regulation. By 2003-2004 there was universal part time education for every three and four year old and over a million new childcare places had been created through a Neighbourhood Nurseries programme.

Working parents on low and average incomes were given financial help to meet the costs of formal childcare initially, through the *Childcare Tax Credit* but this was subsequently available for a wider range of providers, including carers who come to the family home.

Various pieces of legislation have been passed to help all parents better reconcile family and work commitments. The European Union's *Working Time Directive* was enacted in Britain in October 1998. Although many exemptions were allowed it did at least signal that employees should not work more than an average of 48 hours each week. The *Parental Leave Directive*, implemented in December 1999 began to improve parents' right to time off when they had a child or when they adopted a child. It also protected them from dismissal if they had to take time off for urgent family reasons.

In spring 2003, the *Employment Act, 2001*, gave all mothers improved rights to maternity leave including an increase in Statutory Maternity Pay, and for the first time ever fathers were eligible for two weeks of paid paternity leave, though capped at a low wage level. From April 2003 parents are able to make a written request for flexible working hours, and employers are obliged to explain why it cannot be accepted. The employee can appeal against this decision, and take the dispute to a tribunal if necessary. This 'right' was held up as evidence of the government's aim to improve the rights of parents to work more flexibly but was seen as a very weak measure by parents and employee representatives alike. The campaign to increase both the amount of paid leave and the level of pay continues.

Improving parenting

A major theme of the Government's family policy from the beginning has been the wish to both help parents in their parenting and also make them more accountable for the behaviour of their children. This is particularly the case at school where underachievement and high levels of truancy and exclusion from school for bad behaviour had been identified as a problem to be tackled, and on the streets where there was widespread concern about juvenile crime and social disorder.

A key initiative here was the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*. Here the focus was on parents experiencing difficulty in controlling their children and led to a whole raft of measures such as the introduction of parenting orders [involving compulsory parenting classes for the parents of persistent offenders], anti-social behaviour orders, curfews and the setting up youth offending teams in areas experiencing problems with the aim of dealing more holistically with young offenders and their families, ideally before children have to appear in court for bad behaviour. In addition to this there has been a completely new emphasis on '*supporting parents*' more generally.

The issue of school truancy has had a very high profile over the past few years, and in April 2002 the government announced an investment of £66 million to deal with this problem, along with bad behaviour in school. Teams of welfare officers are now to patrol truancy 'hotspots' and directly challenge children who are

absent without authorisation. There have been several high profile cases of parents being taken to court and sent to jail for failing to ensure that their children attend school. In addition concern about the growing incidence of parents abusing teachers caused the government in July 2002 to launch a new campaign warning parents that their own abusive behaviour towards teaching staff would no longer be tolerated, and threatening prosecution and even imprisonment for persistent offenders.

Child abuse has been a major concern over this period too. While considerable attention has focussed on the small but worrying number of cases among children in public care the issue was broadened out to include the issue of 'hitting' children. While public physical chastisement of children, for example in school, has been banned for some time the more delicate issue of whether parents could 'smack' their children became a public issue in January 2000 when the Department of Health published, *Protecting Children: Supporting Parents*, a consultation document on the physical punishment of children. The results were published in November 2001, with apparently most members of the English public expressing the view that the 'moderate' physical punishment of children by their parents is acceptable, and should continue. The government therefore decided (to the dismay of many voluntary organisations that represent children's interests) that it would maintain the status quo and not ban smacking.

Linked to this perhaps is the recognition that changing parents' parenting practices is a long drawn out matter and better provision of help and advice is a necessary prerequisite. To this end, the period has been characterised by a considerable increase in government support for parenting education, advice and information through a variety of outlets, some statutory such as through the work of health visitors but many through the work of the voluntary sector. The government supported the National Family and Parenting Institute and also gave considerable funds to support the work of a national free-phone helpline for parents, Parentline, as well as a host of other more specialist voluntary groups working with parents.

Throughout this period although the failings of some families and the need to support parents more has been recognised the primary role the family as a key unit of initial child rearing has been emphasised. This, coupled with the exposure of child abuse among children in public care has fuelled the wish to reorganise how 'looked after' children are cared for. Adoption of many of these children has been seen as the way forward and concern has been expressed about the long periods many children stay in unsuitable or temporary care. The *Adoption and Children Act* of 2002 was part of a strategy to speed up and 'modernise' the adoption system in England and Wales, and encourage local authorities to place more children in public care with adoptive parents. However, this has proved contentious, with demands from birth families for greater involvement and a general recognition that these highly vulnerable children need more care and resources than are available to date.

Supporting marriage and partnerships

Perhaps more controversial has been the continuing debate, sometimes implicitly rather than actually present in public discourse, about whether marriage is the best basis for stable relationships, especially for bringing up children, or whether other kinds of relationship, such as cohabitation can provide an equally valid basis for family life. *Supporting Families* in 1997 raised these issues and the government found itself on the defensive when it appeared to sanction married relationships more than less traditional family structures. At the same time it challenged traditional views by abolishing the Married Couples Tax Allowance in April 2000 as part of the welfare reform programme. Traditionalists argued this further undermined marriage and the Conservatives argued they would restore it. But the notion that tax allowances are an incentive to marry has little empirical support though they are seen as an important symbol.

In 2000, a proposed White Paper highlighting marriage as the key to creating strong families, backed by church groups, some family organisations and with some cross-party support was dropped after some Labour Party MPs objected to this emphasis, claiming that it was unhelpful to the many families who do not conform to the ideal. At the same time the campaign for unmarried couples to be allowed to register their relationship as a civil partnership and therefore gain rights of inheritance, property and next of kin status began provoking heated discussions.

The 2002 Adoption and Children's Act generated considerable discussion about whether unmarried couples (including gay partners) could have the right to make a joint adoption application but after much discussion this was eventually agreed upon. This marked the beginning of the legal status recognition of gay couples. Gay couples were one subset of all cohabiting couples and although a much smaller group, they were particularly well organised to press their case one in the sometimes heated discussions about the legal status of unmarried couples which ensued.

A major distinction was made by the government between the situation of homosexual couples unable to marry and so obtain some of the protections of marriage and heterosexual couples, the vast majority of whom were free to marry if they wished. The campaign then focussed on the issue of giving comparable legal recognition to cohabiting same sex couples as married couples and the Civil Partnership Act was passed in 2004.

However, the debate is not over. The difference between the legal status of married and unmarried parents has been further eroded by the decision in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to give unmarried fathers who jointly register the birth of their baby with its mother and whose name is on the birth certificate the same legal rights as married fathers automatically acquire. Campaigners are alive to the 'myth' of 'common law marriage', however, and it is likely that in the next few years there will be more initiatives to tackle the lack of financial and legal protection long term cohabiting couples, especially those with children, currently experience.

Pardoxically perhaps, this interest in marriage has not been accompanied publicly at least by a comparable concern, backed by public expenditure at helping people maintain and improve their relationships. A report from the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Group on Marriage and Relationship Support in 2002 detailed the costs—both personal and private—of high rates of failed relationships. The authors highlighted how many people do not know where to go to get help, and recommended that support should be targeted at key moments in family life which put relationships under strain (like the birth of the first child). They also suggested that there should be more public education to remove the stigma associated with relationship counselling (The Lord Chancellor's Department, 2002a). However, while more funding was allocated to the relationship organisations to help develop this, the expenditure here is still dwarfed by public expenditure on the consequences of relationship breakdown.

Some concluding comments

Even seven years on it is too early to assess the 'success' across the whole of the extensive range of family policies introduced by the Labour government and described in this report. What is without doubt is that the government has very successfully changed the whole nature of the debate in Britain about the role of the family and its relation to the state. There has been a massive increase in public expenditure in this area, not all of it widely noticed outside the arenas of policy most affected. Indeed, what has been striking is that this area could be seen by many as one of the main success stories in British domestic social policy but it receives less public mention than perhaps it warrants.

One problem is that real success will take time. That is the nature of much of the long term expenditure on early intervention and the more subtle initiatives to help parents. There are of course criticisms of policies ranging from the charge that this is too interventionist—a nanny state to the points that it has failed to meet some of its main targets and in effect has not gone far enough. For example

there are already claims that, although poverty rates have fallen, the government is not even on course to meet its key target which is the complete elimination of child poverty by 2019 (Brewer et al., 2002).

Furthermore, some commentators believe that, without substantial investment, access to childcare will continue to depend on where families live and, importantly, on their income and employment status. This raises serious doubts about the future success of an approach which is predicated on entry into employment as the route out of social and economic deprivation (Raising Expectations, 2002). But there is no doubt that many of the initiatives taken in the early years and child and family support will not be easily rolled back.

Overall the government is challenging the traditional British distinction between public policy and the 'private' world of the family. Support for parents either financially or practically, however, sits side by side with a much

more firm approach to parents who for whatever reason fail to help their children succeed at school and more generally. It remains to be seen how popular and effective this changing relationship will be.

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Abstracts (English)

**Abstracts of the reports on the situation of families
in the past six years prepared by the National Experts
of the European Observatory on the Social Situation,
Demography and Family in 2004.**

RUDOLF RICHTER

Austria

In Austria, the demographic situation is similar to that of most EU Member States. It is an ageing society with a low fertility rate. This has been a major matter of public concern over the past year, leading to a radical change in the pension system that is still in process. Moreover, efforts have been made to improve the situation of families.

The Austrian statistics show a decline in the number of marriages, an increase in cohabitation and an increase in extramarital births and single parents, though teenage pregnancy is not a problem in Austria. The Austrian family system has been described as a modified breadwinner system. Gender inequalities exist in several ways. A high gender discrepancy in income contributes to the fact that men hardly ever take parental leave, though Austrian law tries to encourage it. Gender inequalities are also seen in the distribution of household chores. The traditional division of labour still exists, though less so among the younger cohort.

A key problem is how to combine family and work. Austrian women find it difficult to do so, due to a lack of part-time employment and a scarcity of *crèches* for children under three, as well as after-school care. However, the services provided for children between three and school age can be rated as good.

Marital satisfaction for people in Austria is high, but the divorce rate has also risen in the last decade. Friendly divorces are legally possible. Joint custody was introduced in 2001. As marriages in Austria decline, other forms of living together become more frequent; cohabitation is the most prominent. Forms of 'living apart together' might also have risen, though they are very difficult to measure. Due to divorce and remarriage, the number of stepfamilies has increased. In addition, there are more single parents as compared to the numbers a decade ago.

Though Austria's population is ageing, generational relations are considered to be good. Mutual understanding and help prevail. However, to the extent that the so-called 'generational contract' in securing pensions is breaking apart, there is a policy discussion on generation conflict.

The major family-policy instrument in Austria is the *FLAF*, a family fund where general tax monies are earmarked for family support. This is a major instrument for redistributing money to families and financially supporting them. In 2002, the child-care benefit (*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*) was introduced. It grants a certain amount of money to every mother, regardless of employment. Financial support was also introduced for expanding pre-school childcare institutions (*Kindergartenmilliarde*). In addition, family audits for firms as well as communities were launched, thus raising the awareness of families' needs. Counselling and parental education are also encouraged.

More and more people face the fact that caring is not an issue solely concerning children. In an ageing population with growing life expectancy, the elderly will need more care. There are several policy measures to provide the necessary support. The Austrian government just introduced a leave for carers of severely ill children or terminally ill persons. Persons taking such a leave are protected from dismissal.

WILFRIED DUMON

Belgium

In the period 2000–2004, three major trends stand out in the socio-political debate on families in Belgium, namely new developments in marriage as an institution, growing concern about care for family members, and—last not least—concern about an ageing population and rather stable birth rates that remain below replacement level.

In Belgium, marriages rates tend to go down, while divorce rates tend to rise. People do not seem to be very concerned about the decline in marriage rates because they see cohabitation as an alternative to marriage. Public attention rather focused on divorce rates. In Belgium, divorce by mutual consent outnumbered divorce on ground, e.g. divorce because of fault. Lately, the major political parties explicitly expressed their firm intention to introduce no-fault divorces in Belgium. Divorce mediation has become a widespread practice, in particular mediation provided by attorneys who already play a major role in settlements by mutual consent.

The legislation taking effect as of June 2003 made marriage an option for same-sex couples. The new law did not provoke great public debates since it was accompanied by the elimination of unequal treatment between married couples and cohabiting persons. In particular the tax disadvantages for married persons have gradually been eliminated.

Care issues are the second major issue of public concern and social policy measures taken in the period 2000–2004. Two rather different developments have stimulated the social-policy debate: the changing division of labour within the family and population ageing. In Belgium, two major family models are currently discussed in public: in one model, both partners work full-time; in the other model, the male partner/husband works full-time and the female partner/wife works part-time. Each of these two models represents around 30% of all Belgian couple families. The breadwinner model is typically found in less than 25% of all Belgian couple families. For this reason, *child care* is practically a basic need for a large section of Belgian families. It should be noted that, in Belgium, children start going to (pre-)school at a relatively young age. At the age of three, almost all children are integrated in the educational system. Hence, the main issue is pre-school and out-of-school care. Care is mainly provided in crèches and by 'child-minder mothers'. In the period 2000–2004, new trends—mainly focusing on care providers—have emerged in both of these types of child care.

As regards crèches, new emphasis was put on the involvement of the market sector in the organization of child care. The regional governments of Flanders and Wallonia gave incentives to companies with the aim of increasing the number of childcare facilities. The federal government agreed to make a certain amount of the costs companies incur for care deductible from their taxes. All three governments advocated this measure in view of the needs for child care and job creation. This shows the growing interlink between family and employment policies.

In the sector of child care by so-called 'child-minder mothers', the attention also focused on the providers, and in particular on their social protection. After long debates, a special system of social protection was developed and has been operational since 2003. As most of the 'child-minder mothers' as well as the labour unions have claimed full social protection—a claim also backed by court decisions—this issue remains to be settled. However, after a long period of decline, the number of 'child-minder mothers' has started to rise once more, probably due to their new entitlement to (partial) social protection.

Care is not limited to the youngest generation, population ageing makes it an issue concerning older people as well. Care for the elderly is given high priority on the socio-political agenda. In this connection, a number of new measures were introduced in Belgium, many of them adapted from experiences abroad. They range from day care for elderly to (in)dependent insurance. All of the measures tend to reinforce the self-help capacity of the aged.

The current government, which came into power in July 2003, appointed an '(under)secretary for family affairs' and, in its governmental declaration, announced that it would hold an *Assembly on the Family*, bringing together governmental authorities, NGOs and experts. This event took place in spring 2004 and indicates a growing interest in family affairs on the part of the (federal) government.

JENS BONKE

Demark

In recent years, several different family issues have been addressed in Denmark:

Increasing the number of day-care institutions and youth clubs to meet the need of modern dual-career families for childcare has been given high priority. Furthermore, several municipalities have become more flexible in assigning daycare places in order to facilitate the integration of non-Danish speaking children and to help them become bilingual. The quality of institutional childcare is a highly debated issue in the country, as Danish children spend many hours per day in institutions. Thus, more emphasis has been placed on the qualitative elements of childcare. A grant permits one parent to stay home to take care of his or her child.

To combat social heritage, different initiatives include a governmental proposal to increase the responsibility of parents, especially in their involvement in their children's education. Learning in kindergarten was introduced to ease the children's transition to school and staff is being trained to handle these increased demands.

To improve the quality of foster care and early intervention, more attention will be paid to the family's social network. Furthermore, more stringent deadlines are being proposed to attain smoother progress. Quality and continuity in placement are also essential. The quality of foster homes should be improved by instituting mandatory foster-parent classes.

In order to prevent child sexual abuse, additional precautionary measures are being proposed with regard to children's use of the Internet. The municipalities will be put in charge of implementing these measures, given their closer contact and more immediate influence on schools, libraries, and other public institutions from where children gain access to the internet. Other measures to prevent this type of abuse include new guidelines for reporting and relaying information of assaults and more effective precautions when hiring personnel. There has also been a training project directed at all municipal caseworkers involved in placing children and young people. These courses were designed as an introduction to certain amendments to the law in that field, to reflect the increased political will to make the casework smoother when placing a child.

Another initiative is aimed at improving the conditions for care of relatives with a disability or with a serious illness of limited duration. For a period of up to six months, a close relative in good health will be granted leave from her or his workplace to be employed by the municipality for this type of care.

Maternity leave prior to giving birth is now four weeks for the mother, and leave after giving birth is 14 weeks for the mother and two weeks for the father, without any substitution between parents. Parental leave was extended to 46 weeks for the father and mother, respectively. However, the parental-leave allowance is only available for a total of 32 weeks for both spouses, whereas there are no limitations concerning maternity and paternity allowances, which cover the entire period. While public-sector employees keep their salary, most private-sector employees receive public allowances of up to 90% of their pay, i.e. equal to the level of their unemployment insurance. In the wake of prolonged maternity leave, a major debate is taking place concerning financing. Most people agree that a maternity fund should cover some of the expenses of maternity leave, but problems arise when some industries hire more women than men. To deal with this imbalance, a consensus was reached to establish a decentralized maternity fund.

SIRPA TASKINEN

Finland

Finland has been rated one of the most egalitarian countries in the world. Universal services and benefits form a safety net for all citizens, thus decreasing the individual's dependence on the family or on marital status. One of the key areas of Finnish equality and family policies has long been the reconciliation of work and family life. Society supports it by means of various family-leave arrangements, family policy measures ensuring income transfers and day-care services.

In spite of the legislation, however, there still exist some basic problems both in working life and at home. Despite a five-year project for eliminating violence against women, there are still concerns about the rate of spousal abuse. Regardless of women's high participation in the labour market, their mean annual earnings remain only about 80% that of men.

Parents with children tend to be gainfully employed more often than the average working-age population. Compared to other men, fathers with small children do more overtime. Women bear greater responsibility for children and have been the main users of the various forms of statutory childcare leave.

Although the fertility rate is relatively high, compared to most other European countries, it is slowly declining. Population ageing has raised the issue of financing pensions. There is a need to improve working conditions in order to encourage people to work longer.

The family scene has changed quite profoundly. With the growing divorce rate, the number of single-parent families has also been rising. Likewise, an increasing number of parents have decided to cohabit without getting married, even after they have had children. In 2002, legal provision was made for the registration of homosexual and lesbian couples.

Unemployment has been the main reason for families' economic difficulties. The 1990s recession brought about some cuts in benefits, and poverty has been increasing among families with children. Single-parent families face a greater risk of falling below the poverty line than do other groups. Following a prolonged stable period, child benefits were raised again in 2004.

In international comparison, Finnish children are quite healthy; and both prenatal and the infant mortality are among the lowest in the world. However, there is a growing concern for children's mental well-being. Child services have deteriorated due to the recession; e.g. net spending per child in day-care facilities has dropped. Children's primary health care and preventive services have declined in many municipalities, and there are long waiting lists for family counselling and therapy. Recovery from these cuts has been slow.

In 2001, in addition to the earlier right to day-care services, all children became entitled to free optional pre-school education at age six. From 2004 onwards, local authorities have received a government grant to arrange morning and afternoon activities for schoolchildren in the first and second grades in comprehensive schools, as well as for all special-education students.

CLAUDE MARTIN

France

Fertility

As in all other EU Member States, France was confronted during the period from 1970–1995 with a strong decrease in the fertility rate, which fell from almost 3 to 1.65 by 1994. The end of the 1990s marked a turning point. The number of births increased from 1998 up to 2001 (with a stable fertility rate of 1.8–1.9). Some newspapers even speak about a new ‘small baby boom’ in France at the end of the millennium. This fertility level (which had not been reached from the beginning of the 1980s up to that point) put France at the top ranking in the European Union, alongside Ireland. Two main arguments may explain this recovery: first, economic recovery, which in itself plays a major role in terms of household morale; and second, the importance of childcare policies, which facilitate reconciliation between work and family life—even if these policies are not developed enough to cover all existing needs.

Marriage

As far as marriage is concerned, the trend is comparable. The number of marriages decreased drastically from the end of the 1960s to the mid-1990s, falling from 380,000 in 1969 to 253,000 in 1994. This meant a decrease in the marriage rate from almost 8 marriages per thousand people to 4.4. An initial increase was first observed in 1996, mainly due to fiscal reform. However, this recovery was later confirmed in 1999, 2000 and 2001, with marriage rates of 5 in 2000, 4.9 in 2001, 4.7 in 2002 and 4.6 in 2003. Since 1999, the *pacte civil de solidarité* (PACS) has provided an alternative to marriage for cohabitating homo- or heterosexual couples. By the end of 2003, a total of 100,000 PACS had been registered (8 PACS per 100 marriages). Hence, the conservative argument that PACS could threaten marriage has not been confirmed by the facts.

Main family issues and policies

In terms of family policy, political change marked the period spanning from the Jospin government to the Raffarin government. This change has had a multifaceted impact on family issues. Because the Jospin government focused mainly on modernizing family civil law (reforming divorce and parental authority) and on promoting greater equality between men and women, the right-wing turn initially introduced a very prominent issue: insecurity, with its consequences in terms of family responsibility.

One of the latest reforms concerns promoting ‘free choice’ in terms of childcare. This type of policy, common throughout Europe, implies that government attempts to facilitate a choice for parents, mainly mothers, in their decision to remain on the labour market with institutional solutions for childcare, or to stop working to care for their child until he or she begins school (which in France starts at age three, and even at two for some 45%). Nonetheless, this policy completely sets aside other main issues that are receiving much attention in other European countries: the development of equitable public childcare solutions throughout the country; paid parental leave based on previous salary (80%, as in Sweden or Iceland), and, most of all, the big question of equal opportunities for women and men, which could lead to distinguishing between maternity, paternity and parental leave (three months for each as in Iceland, for example). Another main issue on the agenda concerns ageing and frail dependent elderly, albeit in the wake of the heat-wave crisis seen as a public-health issue more than as a family issue.

WALTER BIEN

Germany

The main discussions over the past few years have been related to the question what society will be like in 2010. One attempt to answer this question is the federal *Agenda 2010* programme. The discussion revolves around reconstructing the social system against the backdrop of the current financial and economic constraints, which explains why the pressure to reduce costs tends to determine the course of the debate. Independently of this, however, both society and the political system recognize that future societies will also consist of human beings, such that the power and strength of our future world will be related to the power and strength of the people living in it. Future society will not exclusively be related to the economic system. Hence, improving human and social capital—and hence family matters as well—is of the main themes now being discussed in Germany. Given the current economic limitations, there is a marked preference for solutions involving no additional costs. Throughout 2003, the issue of balancing work and family was frequently discussed. The following constitute three different approaches by the federal government:

Alliance for the family

The 'alliance for family' will start a long-term, long-lasting economic and family policy. It is based on the consensus that German society needs higher birth rates, the economy needs highly qualified staff and a higher female employment rate, and children require support from an early age onwards to promote their education. The alliance partners all agreed to make efforts towards creating a family-friendly labour force, employment and occupational culture offering more options in the areas of business culture, labour-force organization, working hours, human-resource development and family services. Some concrete efforts have been made in the above areas at the local level in agreements between businesses, politicians and family organizations.

Childcare

Childcare is being discussed not only under the heading of balancing work and family, but also with respect to the needs of children. This includes further efforts to promote children's wellbeing during early childhood as well as educating parents on how to be more responsible. Providing opportunities during the first six years of a child's life will strongly influence his or her later choices. Therefore, quality childcare is becoming as important as quantity, with emphasis on good, affordable care. Childcare is the place where key social skills can be learned. Child development should be optimized in relation to children's age, their capabilities and their individual needs for time.

Family competence

Parents bear the main responsibility for their children's education. To enable them to fulfil this responsibility, parents need help. One area in need of support is media competence, especially greater sensitivity for the problem of children and violence in electronic media. A new law to protect youth enacted on 1 April 2003 mandates age labelling for computer games, thus making it easier for parents to find age-appropriate games for their children. Another initiative is *Look on*, which—together with newspapers, television stations and media-related industry—will provide help for everyday situations, e.g. by a Parent-Child-Media Workshop or a media passport.

Reconstructing the social system under the present economic constraints, as well as promoting human and social capital, are both interventions taking place in complex, interwoven systems. The main difficulties occur because most solutions are discussed separately: the pension system, the health system, the labour force, the education system, fertility, migration, etc. Despite their innate complexity, all are interwoven—especially where the family is concerned. Hence, these discussions tend to be accompanied by a high degree of uncertainty, dissatisfaction and fear, which makes people feel unhappy with their elected leadership.

CHRISTOS BAGAVOS

Greece

Both family and household structures have changed over the past few years in Greece. The number of households is increasing over time, while their average size is decreasing. These developments are very closely related to the rapid increase in non-family households (particularly single-person households). As for family households, recent developments indicate a variety of changes: a net increase in couples without children and in lone-parent households, combined with a net decrease in family households. There can be no doubt that the delay in family formation, the extremely low fertility rates and the increase in the rate of marital breakdown all play a role in explaining the above trends. In fact, all indicators for divorce, marriage and new family forms show that the process of further 'modernization' in family formation has been somewhat delayed in Greece when compared to the rest of the EU. Nevertheless, family ties remain strong and will continue to be a pivotal element in Greek society.

Over the past few years, Greece has become a net immigration country. This development has had a clear demographic impact (i.e. immigration flows were the main demographic component of population increase over the 1990s), as well as an impact on family structures and needs. Despite efforts to regularize illegal immigration, migrant families continue to live with relative uncertainty regarding the legal status of their head of household. Moreover, given the impact of immigration flows on the composition of the school population, the integration of migrant children at school has become an important issue. The extremely positive results attained in school by some of them disguise the difficulties most of them face (especially because of their own as well as of their parents' inadequate knowledge of Greek).

Income inequalities as well as relative poverty have increased over the past few years. In particular, the risk of poverty remains high for certain types of families and households (i.e. elderly and farming households, households where the head works in the primary sector, has a low education level or is unemployed or retired).

Particular attention needs to be paid to the cost of children's education as borne by their families. The existence of a 'parallel' education system in Greece (private institutions for primary and secondary education, and private education functioning as a complement to secondary public education) has led to a strong increase in the cost of children's education (which is estimated at nearly 30% of the overall public budget for education). In addition, youth unemployment remains very high—even among people with a high education level—thus leading to a certain gap between expectations and reality. There can be no doubt that the discrepancy between young people's (and their parents') great expectations—primarily due to their increasing education level—and their unfavourable position on the labour market has become one of the most relevant issues facing family welfare.

Childcare remains one of the main concerns for Greek families. The number of day-care services (public, municipal and private) is considered inadequate in both number and coverage. Aside from the mother, who still constitutes the main source of childcare, kinship networks represent the most frequent solution for childcare services. Over recent years, both the debates on and the policies governing childcare services have been particularly—even exclusively—concerned with reconciling work and family. In general, any measures that could be considered family-policy initiatives have been further integrated into policies related to employment, social protection, social inclusion and equal opportunities.

VALERIE RICHARDSON

Ireland

In the past six years, Ireland has undergone rapid economic and social change, which has impacted on the structure and nature of family life. The 2002 *Census of the Population* documented the major demographic changes over the past six years, giving a picture of increasing diversification of family forms and movement towards a multicultural society. In particular, there is clear evidence of the growth in immigration, the impact of divorce legislation, increase in family breakdown, a rise in the number of lone-parent families and families with no children, and an increase in births outside marriage. Families are becoming smaller, and there is a reduction in the number of three-generation households.

Family policy has become far more explicit with the appointment of a Minister for Social and Family Affairs, the publication of *The Family Commission* (1998), the setting up of a Family Affairs Unit within the Department of Social and Family Affairs, and the establishment of a Family Support Agency. A change in the policy of non-intervention in the family has led to increasing recognition of the need for policies to support families at both a financial and social level. Successive government programmes agreed upon by the social partners have been important in developing family-policy initiatives. There has been a move away from policies aimed at regulating families to those that support them.

Despite a period of unprecedented economic growth, the benefits have not been equally distributed across the population. The Government is lagging behind in its targets for the Anti-Poverty Strategy. The individualization of the tax system began in 2000, but the result has been that dual-earner families with high incomes are the major beneficiaries of the system. Government policy to eliminate poverty has been concentrated on increasing child-benefit and basic social-welfare rates.

Policies related to balancing work and family have been developed during the past six years, with an emphasis on bringing legislation in line with EU Directives. However, there is little evidence to suggest that such measures have brought about a more equal distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women. Emphasis has been on the need to encourage women to remain in the work force in a climate of labour shortages, rather than to facilitate the integration of work and family life. Thus, much of the policy development has been based on an economic rather than a family agenda. The provision of childcare for working parents, care of the elderly and for those with disabilities, remains problematic, with the burden of care remaining with the family and particularly with women.

The issue of child abuse within both families and the statutory social-services network has been of particular concern. A National Children's Strategy has been published, together with an Ombudsman for Children being appointed and a National Children's Office being established to monitor the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The latest Government initiative during 2003 was a series of national fora to obtain the views of families and family organizations about their needs and concerns. The resulting report has laid out a possible agenda for future family policies covering support for parents in their parenting role, increased support for fathers in undertaking their caring role, increased support for lone parents, help for children affected by family breakdown, the need for increased promotion of the work/family balance, the need to value the work undertaken by women within the home, policies to support families with relationship difficulties and policies on the family as a caregiver. The Government is committed to developing a National Strategy for Family Policy during 2004.

One basic question remains to be addressed: that of the Constitutional definition of the family. This is only now coming onto the political agenda, and the debate is developing on the need to officially recognize family forms not based on marriage, so that there can be equity and equality between families within legislation and welfare provisions.

GIOVANNI B. SGRITTA

Italy

The period between the mid-1990s and the first years of the new millennium was one of both stability and change. Over the past six years, there has been both a continuation of those demographic trends that had already emerged from the second half of the 1960s onwards, as well as an equally profound revolution in the age structure of the population. The latter has brought about an increase in the number of elderly and a decrease in the number of young people; a significant increase in the number of families, as well as a decrease in their average size; a significant shift in the timing of couple formation; a decline in marriages; and, finally, a slight but gradual increase in family instability (separations and divorces). The picture shown by the last census is that of a family whose size is getting smaller and smaller but that is also weaker, more unstable and more fragmented. In particular, there has been a great increase in one-person households (from 20% in 1991 to 24.89% in 2001). Noteworthy are also the reduction in the proportion of couples with children, the growing numbers of those without children, the increase of recomposed families and the progressive restrictions on the share of large and extended families. By the end of 2001, couples with children made up 57.5% of the total family units, those without children 29.4%, and single-parent families 13%. Needless to say, all these parameters show variations—marked in some cases—depending on the different areas of the country. Family instability has also grown considerably in the course of the past decade, due to the rise in separations and divorces. An interesting aspect, moreover, regards the phenomenon of the 'long' family—i.e. the prolonged stay of young adults in their families of origin. Information from the 2001 Census confirms that, in the past decade, this phenomenon has increased even more.

In this scenario, the relations between the older and younger generations have undergone radical changes. For one thing, there is the prospect of increased economic and care responsibilities that today's meagre demographic generations will have to bear when they become adult and elderly tomorrow. Second, the traditional rules that once governed generational relations within the family have become uncertain, i.e. less clear and more difficult to put into practice. In many cases, these rules produce tensions that give rise to downright perverse effects.

Partly in response to these changes, and partly for reasons related to the political scenario and specific choices made by the government, the period between 1996 and 2000/2001 was also characterized by new and—in many ways—both original and surprising attention being paid to the family. As evidence of this substantial change, we can mention the measures of economic assistance for (traditionally less well-off) families with children, the law on parental leave, the children's law and the comprehensive reorganization of the system of services and social assistance. In this respect, Act No. 328/2000 has profoundly reformed the order of the welfare state.

The right-centre government elected in June 2001 promised to pay renewed attention to the family. Up to now, however, the reforms achieved in this field are rather marginal and mostly limited to re-proposing measures introduced by the preceding governments. Eventually, in February 2003, the Minister of Labour and Social Policies published a 'blueprint on welfare' (*Libro bianco sul Welfare*: <http://www.welfare.gov.it>). This White Paper emphasizes the aim of a social policy that recognizes the family as an active subject and a primary actor in the organization of the welfare system and advances reform proposals on which, however, it would be premature to express any opinion regarding their possible impact on the quality of family life in the years to come. By the end of 2003, the Government had approved only three of the multiple and often indeterminate measures mentioned in the White Paper: a fund for financing employers who organize day nurseries (*crèches*), and micro day nurseries in the workplace for infants and small children; an allowance equal to EUR 1,000 for each second or subsequent child, by order of birth, born in the period from 1 December 2003–31 December 2004; and a fund of EUR 161 million aimed at young couples to enable them to purchase their first home.

MONIQUE BORSENERGER

Luxembourg

The situation of families in Luxembourg underwent a number of profound changes in the past five years. In terms of demography, a trend that began some years ago has been confirmed: the number of marriages is decreasing, while that of divorces and out-of-wedlock births is increasing. In view of these developments, legislators intend to introduce the legal form of consensual union in analogy to the French *pacte civil de solidarité* and abolish guilt as ground for divorce. The two drafts should be adopted prior to Luxembourg's general elections in June 2004. Legislation on domestic violence and spousal/child abuse was adopted in 2003, which permits, *inter alia*, to bar perpetrators of such violence from entering the home for a certain period of time.

Reconciling work and family life has become a major concern for a growing number of women. In fact, women's activity rate rose from 45.7% in 1992 to 51.6% in 2002. To foster this development and reduce bottlenecks in childcare delivery, the government has adopted an active approach to extending the provision of day care, crèches and licensed childcare facilities. Entitlement to parental leave was introduced for three years in 1999 and extended in 2002. Taken up by substantially more mothers than fathers, parental leave is now the topic of a campaign launched by the *Ministry for the Promotion of Women*¹ to boost the image of fathers looking after their children.

A major tax reform was introduced in two stages in 2000 and 2001. It led to a reduction in tax rates. Also, family allowances were raised to assist families with children, while tax concessions for dependent children were reduced. These measures have helped enhance the re-distributive effects of family policy and improve the situation of families. In 2000, a law on over-indebtedness was also adopted to address the issue of a growing number of households in financial difficulties.

There was a substantial change in the situation of people with disabilities in 2003, owing to the introduction of a special subsistence income and wage schedule for workers in sheltered workshops to be applied from June 2004. This special subsistence income, which is in the amount of the guaranteed minimum income but need not be paid back, should help ensure the financial autonomy of people with a disability. Moreover, the number of places in special centres and sheltered workshops has also gone up. The National Action Plan for Employment includes proposals to reserve a certain percentage of jobs in each enterprise for workers with a disability, but since non-compliance with this plan does not carry any sanctions, it is scarcely implemented.

Measures targeted to older persons are on top of the government's policy agenda. To ensure better co-ordination, responsibility for this matter has been placed in the hands of the Family Ministry². The government co-financed the creation or upgrading of a number of residential and nursing homes. Needs development in this area will require special attention. The greatest challenge now concerns end-of-life care, be it at the patients' own home or in specially equipped centres with trained staff. A draft bill introducing unpaid care leave for nursing terminally ill, close family members is currently being discussed in parliament. Euthanasia, which was the topic of a report submitted by a special Ethics Commission of the Luxembourg Parliament in 1999, remains banned. Plans now focus on palliative medicine, and a draft bill on palliative and end-of-life care was tabled in February 2004.

Youth policy efforts of the Family Ministry involve the co-ordination of sectoral measures with other ministries and the development of an information, assistance and mediation policy. A report by a parliamentary commission entitled *Youth in distress*³ highlighted the difficulties encountered by an increasing number of today's children and adolescents and the great demand for places in youth welfare centres.

Just as many other EU Member States, Luxembourg registered a substantial rise in applications for asylum in the late 1990s, most of them by asylum-seekers coming from former Yugoslavia. The main difficulty for the Family Ministry was the provision of sufficient accommodation for these people. Luxembourg was the Member

¹ Ministère de la promotion féminine

² Ministère de la Famille, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Jeunesse

³ Jeunesse en détresse

State that admitted the greatest number of asylum-seekers in proportion to the number of inhabitants, but it was also the country that had a very low refugee recognition rate. 2000 was the first year in Luxembourg's history to see the country resort to numerous forced deportations. There is an ongoing inflow of applications for asylum, though no longer by families, as was the case in 1999, but by unmarried individuals coming from Africa and countries of the former Soviet Union. In early 2004, the government began addressing the possible need for developing an immigration policy.

HANS-JOACHIM SCHULZE

The Netherlands

Changing preferences in the ways of living one's personal life in the period between 1990 and 2000

During the past few decades, we have observed that, after the 'golden age of marriage and the family', private life is no longer almost monopolistically organized as family life with a husband/breadwinner and a wife/home-maker. Within the past decade, especially between 1994 and 1997, a major change was visible. Before this demarcation line, about 50% of the population wanted to marry immediately after leaving the parental home. From 1997 onwards, a clear majority evidently has wanted to start out living together with a partner before eventually deciding to marry. As a matter of fact, before marriage and/or birth of the first child, couples now typically share a long period of cohabitation.

The motivation to have children and the timing of children

In a representative sample, 40% of all interviewees were of the opinion that you can „only feel happy in the modern world if you have children of your own“. There is almost no difference between the opinions of women and men; nor do current family status and income really matter. What is relevant are the age, education level and partnership status of the respondents. Of the women, only 20% of those with a high education level agree; while 60% of the women with a low educational level agree. These preferences correlate with fertility data. Childlessness is to be found more often among women who have attained a high level of education. The community orientation of children („In my opinion, it is a person's duty to the community to have children“) is only to be found with 10% of all the respondents. If the ideal age for giving birth to the first child is compared with the real age using one-year periods, 17% of the women show a discrepancy between the ideal age and its real counterpart. The factors that correlate strongly with the ideal age for giving birth to the first child are education level and the age of the mother upon giving birth to her first child. The average age at first fatherhood has been rising since the 1970s, from about 30 years to 34 in 1992; this corresponds to the average measured at around 1940. The average age of women at first motherhood in 2001 was 29 years.

Family policy

Although government acknowledged in 1995 that it is important to have a family report every two years (starting in 2001), there has been no structural change in family policy. The strongest political contribution under the heading of family policy are day-care provisions for children under four: In 1989, there were 18,000 day-care places; and 102,000 places in 2001. During the same period, the number of people working in this sector rose from 4,546 to 43,611. We have to take into account, however, that in recent years the quality of day care has diminished and parents have borne a greater share of the costs. In the field of parental leave after the birth of a child, we can still observe a situation characterized by offering the poorest provisions when compared to countries in a similar situation. A relatively positive regulation to help reconcile work and parental tasks is still restricted to some segments of the labour market, with no universal solution yet in sight. A regulation enabling people to exclusively devote certain periods of time in their life to parental care is being discussed. Given the fact that the most dominant political aim since 2003 has been to reduce public spending, there has been no programmatic discussion on new family-policy measures and the establishment of an explicit family policy programme. Moreover, parents and would-be parents both seem to accept the situation as it is, and there does not seem to be any political movement as yet to set into force the winds of change.

KARIN WALL

Portugal

Demographic trends and family patterns in Portugal have been changing significantly since the 1970s. The last few years did not bring about any major changes but rather the further development of previous trends. Fertility rates have remained stable (1.5 since the early 1990s), and marriage rates and religious marriages have decreased steadily, while cohabitation and divorce have increased significantly, especially during the last decade. The changes in family formation and dissolution, population ageing and the sharp rise in the number of women working have had a strong impact on family patterns. Families are smaller; the traditional family household of couples with children is less prevalent; and there are higher proportions of the population who live alone, in lone-parent families and in reconstituted families. Women's participation in the labour market has also led to a sharp decline in the male-breadwinner model, moving towards the current pattern of dual-earner couples where both work full-time (i.e. over two thirds of all couples with at least one dependent child). Seen from an EU perspective, present-day Portugal has an average fertility rate, average marriage and divorce rates, high proportions of dual-earner couples, and changing but still more 'family-centred' living arrangements (with lower proportions of people living alone and higher proportions of couples with children and complex family households).

With regard to **family policies and key issues under discussion**, we may distinguish between two main periods. In the context of a favourable economic climate following the election of a socialist government and some expansion in social protection, family policy in the late 1990s underlined four main objectives: improving the safety net for families coupled with the vertical redistribution of wealth; developing stronger linkages between family policy and equal-opportunity policy; increasing service provision to help families reconcile work and care responsibilities; defining new public responses to challenges posed by family changes and new living arrangements. Significant policy measures and legislative changes included the following: the introduction of income support; more selectivity in family benefits; an increase in maternity leave and the introduction of paternity leave; the establishment of a 'pact' for cooperation between the State and third-sector institutions for developing service provision; new laws establishing more rights for cohabiting couples; and the easing of divorce procedures. Public debate during these years (1996–2001) focused mainly on issues related to the above-mentioned policy measures: poverty and the need for more selectivity (versus universality); the impact of income support on families and how to deal with fraudulent claims; promoting the reconciliation of work and family life, as well as more equal workloads inside families; changing the legal regulation of marriage, divorce and relationships. Some other issues, such as abortion, were also hotly debated during this period; but there were no policy changes in this area (proposed changes to the existing law led to a referendum in 1998 in which liberalization was rejected by a majority of voters).

The last two years (2002–2003) have witnessed major changes in family-policy perspectives and the ensuing political debate. Against a background of economic constraints and the formation of a new right-wing government, as well as growing governmental concern with current trends in demography and family life (especially the declining birth rate and the rising divorce rate), family policy has continued to emphasize the importance of vertical redistribution. However, it has also shifted its focus toward three other major objectives: a commitment to a pro-natalist policy implying systematic support for large families (with three or more children); an anti-abortion pro-life perspective proposing policy measures to support pregnant women and vulnerable mothers with young children; a family-building perspective underlining the importance of such policy goals as the expansion of family counselling and mediation services, in order to strengthen family bonds and prevent marital dissolution; and the development of part-time work to make it easier for women to balance work and family. Significant policy measures undertaken over the past two years include the following: setting up a new family benefit model that only provides family allowances to low-income families; establishing extra financial support for large families in all the major cash benefits; increasing the parental leave scheme for part-time workers from six to twelve months; a new law on adoption stressing children's rights to a happy family life and accelerating adoption procedures; and developing service provision to support vulnerable mothers. Although govern-

ment actors and agencies have explicitly highlighted these priorities and their concern for protecting childbearing and the 'traditional' family' (meaning *married couples with children* rather than lone parents or reconstituted families), public debate has focused more intensely on the proposed reorganization of social security and labour legislation (with the new *Labour Law*). There is also focus on two events that have been monopolizing public attention and the media: the trial on child-abuse and paedophile networks involving children from *Casa Pia* (a non-profit institution taking in children at risk) and the *Aveiro* trial involving criminal proceedings against seven women who performed illegal abortions. The issues of changing social security and workers' rights, of child abuse and of abortion (sometimes linked to the issue of a declining birth rate) have thus dominated public debate. There has been practically no debate on changes to the family-benefit model, on parental leave or on service provision to families.

JUAN ANTONIO FERNÁNDEZ CORDÓN

Spain

Over the past six years, Spain has seen a considerable upsurge in the number of immigrants. After having been an emigration country for decades, the migratory balance started reversing itself in 1975, first with the return of previous emigrants and, since 1985, with an increasing flow of incoming workers, mainly from Morocco and later from Central America. As of 1 January 2003, the foreign population in Spain was estimated at 2.6 million (6.24% of the total population). Since 1999, immigration has also been partly responsible for the moderate but persistent increase in fertility, although its level is still among the lowest in the EU (an estimated 1.26 in 2003).

The structure of Spanish families has also undergone considerable changes during the last decade. The average household size has been rapidly decreasing, reaching 2.9 by the end of 2001. Household structure has followed the same path as in other EU Member States: an increasing proportion of one-person households (over 20% in 2001) and a sharp decrease of the proportion of extended families. What is more specific about Spain's recent developments is the fact that young people are staying with their parents longer than in any other country. This explains a good part of the still-high average household size, though older people have gained considerable autonomy.

One of the most remarkable facts concerning family matters during this period has been that family problems and policies have become an important issue on the political agenda. The main political parties have explicitly presented programmes related to family, and political leaders have repeatedly stressed its importance. The main reason for this is the growing concern over Spain's very low fertility rate and fear of its consequences on population ageing. Notwithstanding ideological differences, it may be considered highly probable that explicit family policies will be adopted by some future government. The negative aspect is that, despite this alleged interest, insufficient resources have been dedicated to family policies over the past six years. Spain remains the country with the lowest proportion of social expenditures for family support among the EU-15.

Among the problems addressed, reconciling work and family has received considerable attention. Women's increasing participation in the labour force has not been followed by any real change in traditional gender roles. According to different surveys, men's participation in care activities still lags behind, preventing any equal sharing of household and care tasks. The 2002 Law of Reconciliation of Family and Work (*Ley de Reconciliación Familiar*) has been a considerable step in the social and political acknowledgement of the importance of this issue, nonetheless, few sectors and firms have enforced the new arrangements permitted by this law.

The possibility of taking parental leave exists for both parents, with special protection for their job and social-security status. Despite this, the fact that it is unpaid explains the little use made of it, especially by fathers.

In the past few years, domestic and gender violence have become an issue of great social and political relevance. Women's organizations, political parties and the media are paying more attention to this problem than ever before, and the idea that this is not merely a private matter is clearly penetrating public opinion and thus, the political will. This concern has been heightened by the steady increase in the number of women killed by their partner (32 in 1997, 70 in 2003). There have been a number of legislative proposals to provide an 'integral' response, with a mix of repressive measures, protection to threatened women and preventive actions, especially those aimed at education. Some Regions (*Comunidades autónomas*) have adopted laws on the matter. The Socialist Party (at present in the opposition) announced that, if it were to win the general elections in March 2004, the first law it would present would be aimed at stopping gender violence.

Housing has also become a prominent problem for families in Spain. Rentals are scarce and expensive. Though Spain is a nation of homeowners (85% of all households), buying a house or apartment has become progressively out of reach for young people who also experience difficulties obtaining a steady and decently-paying job. Prices have been increasing well above the inflation rate for a few years now (17% in 2003, for instance). Family formation suffers from the situation, as is shown by the fact that the proportion of singles among young people has increased: from 60% in 1991 to 85% in 2001 among 25-year-olds, and from 35% to 60% among 30-year-olds.

EVA BERNHARDT

Sweden

Socio-economic situation of families

Sweden, together with Denmark, has the narrowest gaps for household income (the lowest Gini coefficient) among the EU Member States. Nevertheless, trends in standard of living during the 1990s have had a particularly negative impact on families with children—especially on one-parent families with children. Up to now, this category has been—and probably still is—less vulnerable in Sweden than in many other countries. However, the economic downturn in the 1990s, which brought unusually high unemployment levels to Sweden, has hit this group harder than others: in 2001, the lowest level of disposable income was found among single parents (and among those over 75 living alone).

Parenting issues

About one third of all children in Sweden experience their parents' divorce or separation. Although almost all Swedish parents have joint legal custody following separation or divorce, the child(ren) tend to live, sometimes exclusively, with the mother. In Sweden, the children's right to both parents is considered very important, as is an active parenting role for fathers. Therefore, men's limited use of parental insurance is of great concern to the government and to other actors on the social-policy scene. This concern about the male-female relationship insofar as it affects parenting, comes from the long-standing emphasis on gender equality in Swedish public policy and the social debate. LO, the Swedish labour organization, recently proposed that the 12 months of parental leave be divided so that one third has to be used by each parent, i.e. four months for the mother and four for the father, while the remaining four can be used according to the wishes of the individual parents.

Situation of the elderly

Despite the fact that the Swedish welfare state is built on a highly individualized social-security system, family ties continue to be important, especially for elderly care. Due to continuing financial constraints on the Swedish welfare state, there has been a reversal of the previous trend, which started in the 1960s, of substituting family care with public care. Both home-help services and institutional care for the elderly have been cut back substantially, resulting in a situation where families provide a growing part of care for elderly relatives. The important role of spouses and offspring (particularly daughters) in caring for the elderly, though seldom officially recognized, has been documented in several recent studies.

Future family size

The annual number of births has been increasing over the past two years, exceeding the annual number of deaths. This stands in contrast to the five years between 1997 and 2001, when Sweden experienced negative natural growth. The estimated Total Fertility Rate for 2003 is 1.71, up from about 1.5 per woman at its lowest point. Although increasing, the fertility level is still far from the assumed future rate of 1.85 in the current population forecast. Recent analyses of 2001 *Eurobarometer* data show that the ideal family size (IFS) among Swedish women aged 20 to 34 is among the highest in the EU-15 group (a mean IFS of 2.4). Together with France and Denmark, Sweden has the lowest proportion viewing no child or one as ideal, while almost two out of five see a family with more than two children as the most desirable. Hence, even if personal ideals may be declining over time, Sweden has a fairly long way to go before reaching a sub-replacement level in family size ideals.

Homosexual marriages

Finally, a few words about an issue that is in the forefront of media interest right now. Sweden has had a law about registered partnerships for homosexual couples since 1995. Since then, about 3,000 such partnerships have been registered (compared to the annual number of newly contracted marriages of about 40,000). Recently, a proposal to introduce gender-neutral marriages (meaning that same-sex couples can be wed according to the same marriage law as heterosexual couples) has been discussed by the judicial committee in Parliament. Several of the political parties support this idea, while the Christian Democrats oppose it (the two biggest parties, the Social Democrats and the Conservatives, have not made up their minds yet). One possible outcome may be that Sweden will introduce the same system that already exists in many other countries, namely civil registration of marriages, leaving it to each individual couple to decide whether they want to have it confirmed by a religious ceremony. It would then be up to each religious congregation whether it accepts homosexual marriages or not.

CERIDWEN ROBERTS

United Kingdom

This period has been one of unprecedented expansion of public-policy interest and intervention in family life in Britain and concomitant public expenditure on initiatives and programmes to support families. The Labour government came into power in 1997 with a clear agenda to support families, as well as to hold families more responsible for the behaviour and care of their members.

Key aspects of family life

Both the incidence of lone parenthood and of children born outside marriage has increased. Cohabitation is now the norm before marriage and, for some, has replaced marriage as an institution for both partnership and parenthood. Childbearing is being delayed, and there is now concern that falling fertility levels may be a problem if increasing numbers of women remain childless. It is not clear what proportion of this is through choice or the growing incidence of fertility problems often associated with later conception.

At the same time, there is much more recognition of the ageing population and changing dependency ratio. Concern is growing about the financing of care for frail elderly people and the real costs of meeting longer retirements, which will exceed current capacities.

Both fathers and grandparents have become more visible. The earlier line of reasoning in the debate on fathers, which emphasized the issues of non-resident fathers, has been overlaid by a more general focus on fathers as parents and a concern to enable them to meet their caring responsibilities as well as be in paid work. National data about grandparents shows they are more heterogeneous in their life circumstances and attitudes and are not necessarily the readily available source of extra help for parents as the government has previously assumed. Both fathers and grandparents have become more vocal about their 'rights' and there is considerable dissatisfaction among some fathers' groups about their position, especially with regard to contact after separation.

The debate on marriage continues. There is some confusion about divorce reform in England and Wales once it was decided not to implement all the provisions of the Family Law Act. The 'privileged' status of marriage has been challenged by the decision to give cohabiting homosexual couples virtually the same legal rights as marriage confers on heterosexual couples. This will become law in 2004, but the legal status of cohabiting heterosexual couples is, as yet, unchanged.

Key policy issues

Policy towards families has been dominated by a focus on those with children and by a concern with reconciling work and family responsibilities. At the same time, the Labour government was concerned with the quality of parenting and increasing parents' responsibility for their children's behaviour, as well as with tackling disadvantage through early intervention and support.

A major platform of the government's strategy for families has been to encourage and facilitate parents' paid work. Getting lone-parent families into employment was an early aim and so too was supporting lower-paid dual-earner families. In both cases, increasing the availability of institutional childcare, and providing subsidies to families to pay for it, was key. The National Childcare Strategy has generated many more places and enabled more mothers of very young children to work.

The early intervention programme *Sure Start* is one of the success stories of this period. Aimed at very young children in highly disadvantaged areas, the programmes cover health issues and give parents support and advice, as well as providing opportunities for the social, emotional and educational development of children under four.

Ending child poverty within 20 years has also been a major theme. There has been a generous up-grading of the financial support given to families with children, with both a universal and means-tested element. A new

Child Tax Credit was introduced in April 2003. However, it will be very hard to achieve the eradication of child poverty without tackling inequality more generally.

Finally, the government has been particularly concerned both with that minority of children who behave in an anti-social or criminal way, and those who cannot live in their 'own' family. Legislation has been introduced that makes parents liable if their children systematically offend, and it also enables local authorities to issue curfews on young people in certain areas. Children in public care are identified as a particular risk group with poor life chances projected on all dimensions. Over the last few years, there have been major attempts to place these children in 'new' families; but adoption is not appropriate for everybody and other strategies are also being considered.

EUROPEAN OBSERVATORY ON THE SOCIAL SITUATION, DEMOGRAPHY AND FAMILY

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