

Families in a changing society

EU Project FamiliesAndSocieties final recommendations (I)

1 July 2017



Since February 2013, the International Federation for Family Development has been part of a large-scale integrating project called FamiliesAndSocieties. The project's aim is to address changing families and sustainable societies, policy contexts and diversity over the life course and across generations, and has been coordinated by Stockholm University.

What will families look like in the future? Are existing social and family policies compatible with changes in family patterns? The collaborative research project has been financed in the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme.

The project will extend the knowledge on how policies promote well-being, inclusion and sustainable societal development among families. The project's main objectives are: To investigate the diversity of family forms, relationships, and life courses in Europe; To assess the compatibility of existing policies with family changes; And to contribute to evidence-based policy-making.

Through a multidisciplinary approach, the project has combined a wide range of expertise in social sciences, law and the humanities represented in the consortium of 25 research partners

"The major trends regarding family patterns and structures over the past decades are well known in terms of delayed partnership formation, postponement of childbearing, low fertility, increasing prevalence of less committed relationships, high separation and divorce rates, increasing family diversity. However, family change is not over. New, largely unexplored forms of family life are emerging. Also, the implications of family change for children's wellbeing and the intergenerational reproduction of inequality are of major importance, yet limited research has addressed these issues."

Project coordinator Livia Sz. Oláh, Associate Professor of Demography at the Department of Sociology, Stockholm University. Interview: Insa Casens, Population Europe. 2013. [www.population-europe.eu/statement/family-change-not-over]

Extracted from 'Policy recommendations. Changing Families and sustainable societies. Policy contexts and diversity over the life course and across generations.' Laura Carlson, Livia Sz. Olah and Barbara Hobson (SU). 2017. [Available at: www.familiesandsocieties.eu.]

from 15 European countries, and 3 transnational civil society actors.

Regarding the evidence, two new databases have been developed within the project: one of the legal content of family forms available in European countries, and another on EC/EU initiatives in core family-policy areas. Together with various stakeholders, government agencies, national and local policy-makers, non-governmental organizations and additional members of the scientific community across Europe, the project has identified and will disseminate innovative and best policy practices.

The overall conceptual framework is based on three key premises: Family life courses are becoming more diverse; the interdependency of lives matters; Social contexts and policies matter. Building upon these premises the project has explored the growing complexity of family, its configurations and transitions while examining their implications for men, women and children with respect to inequalities in life chances, intergenerational relations and care arrangements. Furthermore, it has investigated how policies address family diversity, develop short- and longer-term projections and identify future policy needs.

The conceptual framework has embedded four transversal dimensions such as Gender, Culture (ethnic and cultural identities, sexual orientation), socioeconomic resources and life stages. The interactions between these transversals with the fundamental processes shape the outcomes of the diversification of family life courses for individuals and societies; (re-)produce inequalities across the life course and across generations; and shape the policy responses that are appropriate in order to promote positive objectives.

The FamiliesAndSocieties project is organized in 12 work packages (WP). The WPs have been designed to complement each other and interrelate. WP1 (management) and WP12 (dissemination) serve all WPs, providing a frame for the research activities (WPs 2-11). Important aspects of the family life course are addressed in WPs 2-4.

New family configurations, life goals and transitions being specifically addressed in WP2, the new roles of women and men in WP3, and the new role of children along with ART in WP4. WPs 5-9 address the implications of the changes in the family life course for sustainable societies. WP5 focuses on inequalities in children's life chances, WP6 on childcare arrangements, their determinants and consequences, WP7 on intergenerational links, WP8 on migrants and questions of social inclusion and exclusion, and WP9 on policies. Foresight and synthesis of research results constitute another group, the former activities included in WP10 and the latter in WP11.

Two of the research WPs are central ones and interlink with all other research WPs; these are WP2 on family

configurations and WP9 on policies. The new gender roles (WP3) interlink with WP4 (children and ART) and WP7 (intergenerational links) in addition to links with the two central WPs. WP4 also interlinks with WP7, the latter connects to WP6 as well. WP5 on children's life chances interlinks both with WP6 and WP8.

Family diversity, vulnerability and challenges

Recognizing and supporting single-parent families

At present, single-parent families ought to be of great focus, be recognized and supported as they are a growing family form and should not be an afterthought in family, economic and labour market policies. Single-parent families should be explicitly considered and addressed in all family policy discussions and decisions. For example, home-care cash allowances, which are paid to a parent who abstains from employment to take care for her child at home, can have significant consequences encouraging lower levels of female employment among single-parent families, which in turn results in higher childhood poverty. In this regard, work-life balance policies and workplace practices also need to take into account a single-parent perspective, for example, the impact of non-standard work hours when childcare is not available.

The provision of educational and skill-building opportunities and affordable quality day care become even more urgent in families with single parents. Such families should have a higher priority and subsidized access to childcare facilities. Governmental agencies should be established to facilitate child support payment from non-resident parents in case of conflicts, disagreements or delayed payments, e.g., after a divorce or separation.

Supporting large families

Similarly, policies need to take into consideration that large families have higher risks of vulnerability than average size families. Raising many children can be very expensive and time-intensive, hence different policy designs should be sought to lighten this burden through appropriate social protection regimes including formal child care and other services. State policies and employer practices ought to be co-designed to promote a sustainable work-life balance. Where employers and/or labour market policies ignore parental duties, a parent may be forced to work part time or not at all, especially in families with three or more children due to the need to co-ordinate time schemes of several family members. state support and affordable and easily accessible quality child care facilities can improve this situation.

Policies are generally needed to raise employer awareness of family issues. It is beneficial for employers to invest in their employees' well-being and in supporting them in psychological, social and economic vulnerabilities can then arise. More flexible work schedules for caregivers, their parental roles. It should be noted that

employer attitudes towards parents influence the situation of families to a great degree. The workplace culture is also a decisive factor with respect to parenting.

Empowering immigrant families

Nowadays, policymakers must consider the variety and complexity of family forms when elaborating immigration policies. Particularly, links between admission and integration policies should be strengthened. For instance, European visa policies and practices should be adjusted to facilitate family life across borders. In particular, countries should facilitate issuing temporary visas for minors that allow children in the country of origin to visit their parents. Policies should be attentive to the needs of large families regardless of ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds, and ensure that social and housing policies support all families.

Granting early and universal access to day-care, preschool, out of school care and recreation is one of the most efficient interventions to reduce disadvantages among immigrant children. Allowing immediate schooling for illegal or asylum-seeking families will give them support in learning the language and avoiding delays in their educational process. While, countries should invest more in strengthening the skills of professionals working with immigrant families, such as teachers, social workers, community- and human service workers. It is also important to raise awareness about these career options.

Generational challenges

Policies to tackle generational challenges need to consider the interdependences of lives, families, generations and age-groups.

Firstly, a holistic approach of youths and their transition to adulthood is needed in order to develop policies that directly support them in most European countries. Financial independence is fundamental to being considered an adult. However, the achievement of self-sufficiency is a process that requires state support. Greater self-sufficiency can be achieved through policies and practices that prevent early school leaving, by promoting a wider and better combination of work experience during studies, and through welfare policies that support youth directly instead of through their parents; social and tax assistance, housing, educational and vocational incentives that aim to facilitate their transition to independence.

Providing youth who lack education or employment, with a second chance to obtain qualifications later in life is also a key measure for societies to be more inclusive. Such measures also promote life-long learning.

Secondly, in order to balance the lives of adult children and older parents, law and policies in this area will have to assess the practices and the effects of private care as well as of any privatization of social services for all individuals involved; i.e. for care receivers and for caregivers. Persistent or increased

FamiliesAndSocieties Consortium

The Consortium involves 25 research partners and 3 transnational civil society actor partners:

- Age Platform Europe
- Austrian Academy of Sciences/Vienna Institute of Demography
- Babeş-Bolyai University
- Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences
- Collegio Carlo Alberto
- Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas
- Erasmus University Rotterdam
- European Large Families Confederation
- European University Institute
- German Youth Institute
- Institut National D'Etudes Demographiques
- International Federation for Family Development
- Leiden University
- London School of Economics and Political Science
- Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research
- Population Research Institute, Väestöliitto
- Stockholm University
- Tallinn University
- The University of Edinburgh
- The University of Liverpool
- The University of Oxford
- Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia
- University of Antwerp
- University of Groningen
- University of Lausanne
- University of Leuven
- University of Padova
- University of Vienna
- Warsaw School of Economics

The general coordination of the project is carried out by Stockholm University with the project coordinator assisted by a management team and Stockholm University Research Liaison Office.

Both benefit of the advice and suggestions of the Advisory Board that consists of distinguished scholars of research on the family in Europe and the USA, EU-politicians and independent experts. The scientific coordination is also supported by the Steering Committee comprising all work package co-leaders who are leading experts of the main topics of their work package.

The third level of management structure is the General Assembly, comprising a representative of each partner.



During kick-off meeting of the project in Stockholm (2013).

familiasation of care places additional stress on the balance of paid and unpaid work by women, as they are the vast majority of caregivers. Greater attention should be paid to the elderly as a source of support for others: the feeling of usefulness can have a positive impact on the health of the elderly, as well as their life satisfaction and quality of life.

The aim of a caregiving policy must be to make care an easier and more sustainable choice for older adults and their families. Family carers (as providers of instrumental support) should not be solely responsible for the care of frail individuals. Greater reliance on family caregivers can cause emotional distress and higher levels of loneliness, even depression in the person receiving care as well as the person providing care.

As adults are expected to stay longer in the labour market, reconciliation of care and work should be supported by implementing care leaves not limited to care for young children, reducing working hours and allowing for greater flexibility in work time for carers in need. Here, measures counteracting gender inequality in private care provision have to be included.

Thirdly, laws and policies need to humanize the practices of privatized/marketized care and the effects on the individuals hired, their work situation and well-being. In this environment, care workers have little protection or voice, so that policies need to strengthen their working terms and conditions. As such, workers are often migrants; additional attention should be paid to their specific policy needs (e.g., cross-border family situation, social security, residential, language issues). Policies should also address the potential mismatch between those individuals in greatest need of external care, and those who can afford to purchase such service.

Key policy recommendations

The following key policy recommendations for 'Family diversity, vulnerability and challenges' and 'Generational challenges' are highlighted for policymakers and based on main findings of the project:

- Policy makers ought to be aware of the remarkable diversity of family forms and relationships in contemporary Europe, and aim for a better understanding of the nature and mechanisms of family constellations beyond married couples with children.
- Policy measures aiming to prevent/reduce the reproduction of vulnerability in families ought to be broad, complementary and embedded into a comprehensive strategy. They should comprise services addressing the needs of particularly vulnerable children as well as reconciliation policies, educational policies and other policy measures.
- More direct supports to youth are needed in most European countries, with the state playing an active role in enabling young people in their transition to adulthood. Financial independence is fundamental. However, the achievement of self-sufficiency is a process preferably supported with a social package encompassing education, housing, job market access, family benefits and social aid.
- Law, policies and practices have to assess the effects of any privatization or transfer of care (for children, the elderly, frail individuals) back on the family as to all persons concerned, those receiving the care and the caregivers. Reconciliation of care and work should be supported by implementing care leaves not limited to young children, reducing working hours and allowing for greater flexibility in work time for adults in need.